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THE EFFECTS OF PERSONAL GRIEF ON ORGANIZATIONAL OUTCOMES: A
QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION

by

Charlotte A. Davis

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Business Administration

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December, 2012

To the memory of my parents, James and Doris Wedel, who provided me with the values and the work ethic which have allowed me to pursue and complete this doctoral degree.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Completing this dissertation has been an interesting journey for me. After having read the work of Joan Didion, entitled *The Year of Magical Thinking*, I became interested in exploring the effects of personal grief on organizationally-valued outcomes. During the time I was beginning to explore the various facets of this research issue, my father passed away in June of 2011. I could now not only explore the flow of the process of grief in my mind, but also emotionally.

I discussed this topic with Dr. Rabi S. Bhagat, my dissertation chair, and he encouraged me to undertake this in the form of a qualitative study. The richness of qualitative studies provides a detailed understanding of the processes involved. I thank Dr. Bhagat for his sustained guidance, for his patience with me, for urging me to keep my research on the forefront of my time, and for insisting that I discipline myself to complete the work. I also thank my committee, Dr. John Amis, Dr. Marla Royne Stafford, and Dr. Frances Fabian, for their willingness to provide me guidance in my journey to complete this dissertation.

I also take this opportunity to express my heartfelt appreciation to the 21 members of my church and other organizations who were kind enough to open their hearts to me and spend hours in answering my questions regarding the effects of their grief in the way they functioned and performed their work roles. I also wish to acknowledge the friends and family members who allowed me to bounce ideas off of them and provided me with support and encouragement: Julie Hancock, Mary Ellen Stanton, Jane Layton, Wanda Jennings, and Carolyn Patrick.

ABSTRACT

Davis, Charlotte A. PhD. The University of Memphis. December, 2012. The Effects of Personal Grief on Organizational Outcomes: A Qualitative Investigation. Major Professor: Rabi S. Bhagat.

Most individuals experience considerable emotional pain and grief due to the death of someone near and dear to them in their lifetimes. These painful experiences have the potential to affect individually-valued and organizationally-valued outcomes. In most organizations, employees are provided with a very limited amount of time for coping with the grieving process before they are expected to perform the normal duties and responsibilities associated with their work roles. Even though we know that the process of grief associated with the loss of a loved one can have traumatic consequences for the employee, there is little in the research literature, especially in the organizational setting, dealing with the effects of this phenomenon. In this dissertation, I explore the following: 1.) the meaning of personal grief in a sample of individuals who are employed in different organizations in a mid-south city, and 2.) the consequences of these experiences on individually-valued and organizationally-valued outcomes such as job satisfaction, job involvement, work performance, and coordination of work related duties with co-workers and supervisors. I collected data in a qualitative mode, employing in-depth interviews with these individuals, and utilizing content analysis to identify meaningful patterns. The objective was to develop insights into the processes that are involved in the way personal grief affects work outcomes. It is hoped that the findings from this study will shed additional light into the effects of extreme stressful life events on organizationally-valued outcomes.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2008, I came upon a book, *The Year of Magical Thinking*, by the best-selling author, Joan Didion (Didion, 2005). As I read the book, I began to see a picture of grief and its effects on not only personal life but also on work life. In the book, Didion describes the grief she experienced upon the sudden death of her husband, and how this grief had such a paralyzing effect on her life and her work. In addition, her daughter was ill in the hospital, which complicated her grief. She said that for several months after her loss, she was unable to continue her work, and had many difficulties just getting through her normal, everyday tasks. This book had a profound impact on me, as I was still struggling with some unresolved grief over my mother's death in 2001, having difficulty with my own everyday tasks, both at home and at work, and I began to wonder exactly how grief affects the kind of work outcomes such as job involvement, absenteeism, job performance, and organizational commitment. In my case, I know my work performance suffered during that time, and most likely other elements of my work were affected by my struggle with my grief. Therefore, I feel that it is important for us to learn more about the mechanisms that are involved in the way in which the stress of grief may impact work organizations. It is likely that at any given time, employees in the workplace will be grieving the loss of someone. As I write the last pages of the dissertation, the massacre at the movie theater in Colorado that took place in the early morning of July 20th saddened me further and caused feelings of personal grief in me as well, even though neither I nor anyone near or dear to me was involved in the incident. The phenomenon of grief is of paramount importance in the lives of human beings all over the world. It is indeed surprising that there has not been systematic investigation into

this topic in organizational and social sciences. Clinical psychologists and psychiatrists deal with personal grief in order to enable grief-stricken individuals to cope with such life-changing events and find whatever meaning they might be able to muster at that point in their lives. I have been interested in this phenomenon for a long time, but did not have the necessary training, resources, time, and institutional support to conduct research into this phenomenon.

Work stress is seen as the number one factor causing health problem for Americans (America's No. 1 Health Problem, n.d.) and western Europeans, and has been for over two decades. A report by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) states that 40% of workers feel that their job is "very or extremely stressful", 26% of workers report that they are "often or very often burned out or stressed by their work", and 29% of workers feel "quite a bit or extremely stressed at work" (NIOSH, 1999, p. 4). In their book, Bhagat, Segovis, and Nelson (2012) report that one fourth to one half of workers in industrialized countries feel both mentally and psychologically stressed as a result of their work. In addition, negative job stress, such as that from grief, can lead to absenteeism, accidents, and injuries, among other things, which can, in turn, lead to higher costs to organizations. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Centers for Disease Control, 2009) reported that almost 2.5 million people in the United States died in 2009 (the most recent year for their statistics). Grief in the workplace can effect an organization in many ways, including through the decision making processes of the grieving employees, which in turn may affect the bottom line of the organization. In one study, it was stated that

- 85% of management level decision makers indicate that their decision-making ranked from Very Poor to Fair in the weeks or months following the grief incident that affected them.
- 60% of those responding Fair, Poor or Very Poor, indicate that some of their decisions definitely had direct negative financial impact on their company.
- 90% of those in physical jobs [i.e. not white collar] indicate a much higher incidence of physical injuries due to reduced concentration in the weeks or months following the grief incident [compared to their ability to concentrate prior to the major loss].
- 50% of those reporting a higher incidence of physical injuries due to reduced concentration in the weeks or months following the grief incident, indicate that the reduced concentration may have led directly to accidents or injuries resulting in additional lost work time. (James & Friedman, 2003, p. 5)

Barski-Carrow (2010) reported that “the category of traumatic life experiences that occur at work or elsewhere are the largest category of reasons for employee absence.” (5)

Another study found that employee absenteeism and loss of productivity are also affected by the experience of grief, especially on a long-term basis, which also is reflected in the finances of the organization:

- 30 work days are lost per year by each employee experiencing grief with no support from co-workers or managers.
- 20% of employees will continue losing work days for more than a year.
- \$125,000 is the average annual cost, in lost productivity, to an organization of 400 employees. (Grief in the Workplace Support System, 2007, p. 3)

The causes of stress in the workplace are many, and often have roots in aspects of employees' lives, including the grief of employees who have experienced the loss of someone close to them. This death of someone close is usually a traumatic life experience which most employees will undergo at some point during their working lifetime (Barski-Carrow, 2010; Hazen, 2009). When this happens, most employees will experience considerable emotional upheaval, which will affect them in their work life. These traumatic life experiences are likely to affect both individually-valued and organizationally-valued outcomes.

On an individual level, this personal loss will result in the experience of bereavement, emotional pain, and grief (Balk, 2004) which will then be reflected in how employees work, as well as in their level of job satisfaction and their level of commitment to the organization (Bhagat, McQuaid, Lindholm, & Segovis, 1985). Individuals experiencing this grief will most likely be less productive for an undetermined period of time while the pain and shock of the grief experience slowly wears off (Charles-Edwards, 2000; Little, 2010; Supportive Policies, 2002), although they may work harder during this recovery period (Charles-Edwards, 2000). They will probably have lower morale and have lower levels of concentration (Barski-Carrow, 2010; Jeffreys, 2005). Often the grieving process will lead to physical symptoms which must be dealt with (Barski-Carrow, 2010; Westberg, 1997), which in turn, may lead to employees being absent from work (Barski-Carrow, 2010). They may feel like they cannot do the job anymore and may wish to leave the organization. If they do not get support from the workplace, they may also decide to leave (Begley, 1998).

A good manager realizes that “whenever an employee is hurting, the pain is felt throughout the entire department, office or shop involved” (Ramsey, 1995, p. 1). The grief experience of the employee will influence organizations in two areas: on a group level in terms of the other employees in the organization, and on an organizational level, in terms of productivity outcomes. How grieving employees cope with their loss will be noticed by their coworkers and other employees, who will observe the pain and grief, and may offer their support and help. They may try to cover for the lower productivity of the individual, by helping to do the work until the grieving employee is able to do it again. This support for grieving employees may lower their stress level and help them to cope with the stress caused by the event (Billings & Moos, 1981).

Alternatively, they may resent the time it takes for individuals to recover, feeling that they should “be over it by now” (Charles-Edwards, 2000). They may try to pretend as if nothing has happened (Barski-Carrow, 2010), or they may make no offer of support, and totally avoid the person or the subject of the cause of the grief because they do not know what to say (Bath, 2009; Hazen, 2003). The coworkers’ level of motivation and production may change in response to how they feel about the grieving employee and his loss (Ramsey, 1995). If coworkers have met the deceased person, they may be grieving themselves over the loss of the person. They may then be experiencing the same feelings and emotions as their coworker, and may react in either similar or different ways. If coworkers are trying to assist the grieving employee by covering for him or her, then their own level of productivity will not be at its maximum (Barski-Carrow, 2010).

Work organizations are also affected by the employee’s experience of grief. Organizationally valued outcomes of productivity, creativity, and innovativeness may be

affected by employees' grief and how the organization manages it. Depending on the centrality of the work role of the person in the organization, the entire company may be affected. Individuals who hold key positions in an organization have wider levels of authority than those in lesser positions, and thus everyone and everything that they influence will be affected in some way. If key employees are grieving, their decisions may be made without their normal level of concentration, which could lead to errors in judgment and mistakes being made.

In addition, if the person who died was a coworker or colleague, then all of the employees of the organization will be affected to varying degrees. Managers have to contend with the grieving employees and their change in productivity, as well as the change in the workplace and in other employees as result of the loss (Barski-Carrow, 2010). How an employee's grief is handled in the workplace will determine much of how the employee continues to feel about working for the organization. Support of employees in the workplace is crucial in helping them to return to full productivity, as well as impacting their choice to continue to work for the organization.

These individual work outcomes of job performance, job satisfaction, work and organizational commitment, absenteeism and turnover intentions have all been examined in detail in empirical studies to determine their antecedents, but the possible antecedent of grief of the employee in determining how productive employees are, their levels of satisfaction and commitment, and their absenteeism and turnover intentions, has barely been explored in managerial research. It is proposed that the relationship between the employee's experience of grief and these valued work outcomes will be moderated by the employee's level of economic well-being, the social support network of those around the

employee, including friends and family, coworkers, and supervisors, the type and use of skills the employee possesses for coping with stressors, and the level of support provided by the context of the work organization.

Although financial resources will not prevent employees from the experience of stressful life events and/or grief, these resources may assist them in dealing with the aftermath of the loss of someone close, allowing them to pay for the various expenses involved without worry about the cost (Lynch, 2010). In addition, financial resources can enable someone to move away from the home where the shared memories are too overwhelming, or perhaps redecorate a room or the whole home to remove painful reminders of the deceased.

Social support, both within and outside of the organization, is crucial in the recovery process of a grieving employee (DiGiulio, 1995). The type and amount of support will vary by employee, but social support and other interventions will assist the employee in coping with the stresses of loss (Dewe, O'Driscoll, & Cooper, 2010).

In addition, various coping skills possessed by employees will assist them in the process of dealing with the grief. Some employees will cope by throwing themselves into their work, while others will withdraw from everything they can around them.

Work organizations may also provide support for employees through a number of different types of programs designed expressly for that purpose, as well as other, less formal means of support for grieving employees, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Typology of Grief Management Interventions in the Workplace

<p style="text-align: center;">Primary Interventions</p> <p><i>Scope:</i> Preventive: Reduce the number and/or intensity of stressors surrounding grief in the workplace</p> <p><i>Target:</i> Work environments, technologies or organizational structures and functions</p> <p><i>Underlying assumption:</i> Most effective approach to stress management is to remove the stressors</p> <p><i>Examples:</i> Flexible work hours, role restructuring, management development (e.g. communication),</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Secondary Interventions</p> <p><i>Scope:</i> Preventive and/or reactive: Modify individuals' responses to grief stressors</p> <p><i>Target:</i> Individual person</p> <p><i>Underlying assumption:</i> May not be able to remove or reduce grief stressors, so best to focus on individuals' reactions to these stressors</p> <p><i>Examples:</i> Stress management training, 'wellness' programmes, employee education (grief support groups)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Tertiary Interventions</p> <p><i>Scope:</i> Reactive: Minimize the damaging consequences of grief by helping individuals cope more effectively with the outcomes of that grief</p> <p><i>Target:</i> Individual person</p> <p><i>Underlying assumption:</i> Focus is on 'treatment' of problems once they have occurred</p> <p><i>Examples:</i> Employee assistance programmes, counselling</p>
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Adapted from Dewe, P., O'Driscoll, M.P., and Cooper, C.L. (2010). *Coping with work stress: A review and critique*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

The psychological aspects of grief and bereavement have been studied for many years, but the implications of such experiences on work organizations have been given little attention. Relatively little research has been conducted on the grief experience in organizational settings, where the effects of grief will manifest in various work outcomes. Some books and articles have been written describing helpful hints for employers in acknowledging employees' grief and offering steps to help them get through it (e.g.

Charles-Edwards, 2001; Charles-Edwards, 2009; Eytsemitan, 1998; Hazen, 2008, 2009), but these writings, although useful in some circumstances, have little scientific validity, as they are only anecdotal and the methods in them are not tested. As such, there is a need for an understanding of how bereavement and grief affect both individually and organizationally valued outcomes. In this dissertation, I examine the effects and meaning of grief experienced by employees on the workplace. The objectives of this dissertation research are as follows:

1. To discuss the nature and importance of grief in a sample of men and women who have experienced the loss of someone close to them, and examine its role in organizational behavior and its effects on organizational outcomes
2. To describe how grief manifests in work life
3. To identify common themes and patterns in grief and work experience in a sample of individuals in a qualitative mode
4. To examine how these grief-work experiences relate to other research in similar areas
5. To develop recommendations for providing support for grieving employees in their workplace.

Research on grief in the workplace will benefit not only organizations, but also the communities in which bereaved employees live, work, and play, as the health, both mental and physical, of community members affects those around them at work as well as where they live (Hopwood, 2010). As a result of this study, I hope to gain a better grasp of the difficulties involved in the process of grieving, as experienced in the workplace. In this dissertation, the emphasis is on the death of a family member or

someone close to the employee. I focus on how individuals experience and cope with the grieving process in the context of the work environment. I also explore some practical solutions for organizations to aid them in assisting grieving employees.

Individuals try to construct meaning out of the events which occur in their lives (Neimeyer, 2006a). Often life seems to be in chaos, and attempting to find meaning in the chaos can assist individuals in coping with the disorder in their lives. The loss of a loved one is a chaotic event which disrupts everyday habits and expectations, and, if the loss is traumatic, may lead to physical and psychological disorders. In grief, one's identity is changed, and one's sense of self must grapple with finding a new meaning, a new identity, e.g. as a single parent, or an orphaned child, or an only child. "The loss of an intimate attachment relationship through death – even when the death is non-traumatic by objective criteria – poses profound challenges to our adaptation as living beings." (Neimeyer, 2002, p. 935). The difficulties in crafting this new identity involve making new choices about who that new person is and how that new person will act in the new reality. The new reality is a new world in which the deceased is no longer a part. Interactions with the deceased can no longer occur. Feelings and emotions which were once shared must now be experienced alone.

Death is one of the most challenging experiences which can confront a person (Walsh & McGoldrick, 1991). Adding to that challenge is society's denial of the impact of death. Death and grief are not topics that many people are comfortable with. Discussions about death, grief, bereavement, mourning, and similar constructs do not normally occur in everyday social interactions. Thus, when a death occurs, many people are unprepared to deal with it, whether in their own lives or in the lives of others around

them. People do not know what to say to someone who is grieving, and often will say the wrong thing. In the workplace, grief is barely dealt with. In a recent article in USA Today, Kluger (2012) stated that the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) allows up to 12 weeks to care for an ill family member, but organizations only give their employees three days to bury them, calling it an injustice.

Many organizations feel that grief does not belong in the workplace – employees are there to work and should leave their feelings at the door. However, Charles-Edwards (2000) tells us that dealing with the grief of employees in the workplace is very much the business of work organizations. Bereavement impacts relationships, both outside the workplace and within it. Grief of employees brings about changes in them, in their work group, and in the organization around them. Organizations must be able to manage these changes in order to progress and prosper. Although the immediate change in grieving employees is temporary, the long-term effects of their grief will spill over into areas outside the employees' office, to their colleagues and coworkers.

Additionally, employees' grief will affect their work-life balance, as they work through the grieving process. They may need more time alone or away from the office, they may have additional parenting duties, or appointments with attorneys and accountants for months after their loss, as they deal with the practicalities of the death of a loved one. Stress from grief manifests in feelings, thoughts, and behaviors (Charles-Edwards, 2005), all of which are reflected in relationships with others. Korman, Wittig-Berman, and Lang (1981) suggest that social alienation is a negative emotion which can affect one's motivation. Often grieving employees choose to isolate themselves following a loss, in order to avoid questions and comments from their colleagues. This isolation,

then may lead them to a lack of interest in their work, their work organization, or their work group, leading to anxiety and stress.

The quality of organizational support received by a grieving employee can greatly influence the productivity of other employees in the organization as well (Barski-Carrow, 2010). Organizations should examine their policies to determine if their method of handling grieving employees is adequate. Charles-Edwards (2001) suggests that organizations assess the impact of an employee's grief on the whole organization, and take steps to alleviate the stress of returning for the grieving employee. One way commonly used to do this is to inform colleagues and coworkers about the employee's grief, without invading the privacy of the grieving employee, and perhaps hold meetings with employees to allow them to talk about their own grief and how it affects them both personally and at work. Support should be provided from all levels of the organization, in order to minimize the effect of grief on the whole organization (Charles-Edwards, 2009).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I present a review of theory and research dealing with personal grief and its effects on personal outcomes such as subjective well-being and personal life satisfaction. Almost all of the relevant research involving grief in the workplace is anecdotal or practitioner-oriented, or examines this construct from a strictly psychological viewpoint. Other viewpoints, such as sociological, gender differences, age or race differences have been studied to varying degrees, but the experience of grief has been investigated from a business or managerial point of view in only a limited number of studies, and only then from a practical standpoint. There is little theoretical, empirical, or qualitative work on the grief process and its effect on work organizations; however the incidence of loss encountered by employees continues to affect various areas of organizations.

Grief

Grief is defined by the Collins English Dictionary as “deep or intense sorrow or distress, especially at the death of someone” (Grief, n.d.). It is the physical, emotional, somatic, cognitive and spiritual response to actual or threatened loss of a person, thing or place to which we are emotionally attached. One experiences grief because one has lost someone dear to whom one is deeply attached, whether through security and safety needs or through attraction and affection (Parker, 2005; Worden, 1991).

Traditional models of grief approach it by examining the stages or phases of grief, with arguments about whether these stages actually exist, how the stages are experienced, and how many stages there actually are. For example, Elizabeth Kübler-Ross (1969), in attempting to understand more about death and bereavement, introduced a model of

coping with grief and tragedy. She created this model from the experiences she had growing up, the losses she experienced during childhood and adulthood and from what she learned from the experiences of those around her during her lifetime. She understood grief as a natural process, but one that is not well understood. In her model, she described five stages that many people experience when attempting to cope with death, grief, or tragedy; these stages are denial; anger; bargaining; depression; and acceptance.

In the stage of denial, individuals often express disbelief that the loss has occurred, avoidance of feelings, and a focus on the present (Meuser & Marwit, 2001). Although they may know that the loss has occurred, it is often such a shock that they are unprepared to accept the truth of the loss. Denial helps to buffer the shock, and allows the individual time to accept the inevitable. The anger stage is shown by anger at the deceased for dying, or at God for allowing the death to occur, or at oneself for not being able to prevent the death (Bolden, 2007; Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). The anger may also manifest in feelings of resentment that someone else was not the recipient of the bad news. The anger may be rational or irrational, but often it is a defense against the loss of control.

Bargaining often occurs as an attempt to postpone the inevitable, or to try to persuade God to bring the deceased back to life, with a trade-off from the bereaved; for example, one might offer to go to church every Sunday for the rest of their life, if only God will allow the deceased to live again (Aiger, 2010; Kübler-Ross, 1969; Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). Depression may occur when the bereaved individual is unable to move forward and accept the loss (Kübler-Ross, 1969; Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). Depression often involves regret for lost opportunities, and a withdrawal from everyday

activities. The final stage, acceptance, suggests that the bereaved has moved forward and acknowledged the loss and accepts the reality of living without the deceased (Bolden, 2007; Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). Not everyone, however, experiences all of these stages, nor do people necessarily experience them in the same order (Holland & Neimeyer, 2010; Worden, 2002). However, the knowledge that such stages could exist may help grieving individuals to understand and begin to cope with their grief.

In a similar vein, bereavement has been defined by the Collins English Dictionary as “the condition of having been deprived of something or someone valued, especially through death” (Bereavement, n.d.). Bereavement involves the adaptation process of adjusting to that loss (Charles-Edwards, 2000). Attig (2004) distinguished between bereavement, which happens to someone and over which a person has no control, and grieving, in which a person actively relearns relationships to self, to other persons, and to the external world (Balk, 2004, p. 369). Bereavement is the deprivation of something or someone we cared about, “the state of being without the significant other alive” (Parker, 2005, 259), and grief is the response to that deprivation.

Wolfelt (2005) suggests that grief is a continuous response, usually involving a slow recovery. An employee will not mend quickly, but will typically need time to process the many feelings and emotions which accompany the death of someone close. Worden (2002) describes four tasks of mourning: (1) accepting the reality of the loss; (2) working through the pain of grief; (3) adjusting to an environment in which the deceased is missing; and (4) emotionally relocating the deceased and moving on with life. These four tasks, if undertaken by grieving individuals, will help them to move through their own stages of grief toward the healing process. The acceptance of the loss enables the

bereaved to move toward closure and realizing that the loss is permanent. Working through the pain can bring the mourning process to an end and allow the individual to move forward. As one adjusts to the reality that the deceased is not present, one can adopt new habits and rituals, instead of focusing on those which include the deceased, redefining and adjusting “how individuals view themselves and each other, as well as how they define the family unit” (Davies, 1997, p. 19). The emotional adjustment required to place the deceased into a new cognitive plane, will “enable the mourner to continue to live an effective life (Eyetsmitan, 1998: 474). These four tasks are summarized by Charles-Edwards (2005): “The task of bereavement is to begin to withdraw emotional energy from the relationship with the person who has died and to reinvest it in existing and new relationships with the living” (p.5).

Neimeyer (2006a) contends that although grief is an individual emotion, and each mourner will experience grief differently, there are certain similarities in the way that the typical person experiences grief, and several responses which are typical of many individuals. Like Kübler-Ross (1969), Neimeyer (2006a) also contends that most people will progress through several stages of grief. This process of experiencing grief usually includes: 1) avoidance, in which individuals feel disbelief and attempt to avoid the reality of the loss; 2) assimilation, as individuals gradually absorb the reality of their loss; and 3) accommodation, in which acceptance of the situation allows them to move forward. Reactions to the stress of grief will also be influenced by the closeness of the individual to the deceased, personality, social support, and coping styles (Pearlman, Schwalbe, & Cloitre, 2010).

To summarize, although grief is experienced differently by each individual, whether they move through stages, tasks, or processes, the grief experience of each individual will have similarities to that of others who have gone through it before them.

Grief is often the result of a Traumatic Life Experience (TLE). “A traumatic life experience is a single unexpected, emotionally and physically overwhelming and utterly unwelcome event.” (Barski-Carrow, 2010, p. 13). These events may include a death of a family member or close friend, loss of a job, divorce, death of a beloved pet, a violent mugging, rape, being diagnosed with a terminal illness, and many other events which are unforeseen and threaten a significant part of one’s life. A TLE may lead to the experience of grief, as individuals attempt to understand and work through the aftermath of such an event. In their stress scale, Holmes and Rahe (1967) ranked death of a spouse as an event of the highest magnitude measurable which may cause stress to an individual, with divorce, marital separation, death of a close family member, and major injury or illness also among the highest stressful events which may be experienced.

Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend (1974) suggest that stressful life events play a role in the development of both physical and psychological disorders. These types of disorders are often a result of the inability of an individual to process the traumatic or stressful events and to work through the aftermath of them. TLEs affect individuals in both their personal life and in their work; however, in this study, the focus will be on the effect of TLEs on employees in their work life. In a Traumatic Life Experience individuals have experienced “a major single event whose traumatic effects temporarily limit the person’s ability to act, respond and perform naturally and normally” (Barski-Carrow, 2010, p. 16), often involving a relationship with another which has been broken,

causing the person to react with the deep, intense sorrow of grief. TLEs disrupt lives and make it difficult to make decisions and conduct one's life in the usual manner. Many TLEs result in loss of someone close, leading to grief as the individuals react to that loss. As TLEs are, by definition traumatic, it can be expected that the trauma will manifest in individuals in powerful ways. No two individuals respond in the same way to events which happen to them, and responses to TLEs are no different. These responses will be discussed below.

As bereavement is concerned with the loss or deprivation of something or someone valued, this loss may be described in terms of attachment theory, which is described by Bowlby (1969, 1980). Attachment (Attachment, n.d.), is "a feeling that binds one to a person, thing, cause, ideal". In his seminal work, Bowlby (1969, 1980) suggests that grief occurs as a result of a loss of this attachment to another. Individuals become attached to others throughout life, starting in infancy, and when those others are removed from them, they may experience grief. The sense of self comes largely from attachments formed throughout one's lifetime, beginning with the family and moving through school and career friendships (Hobfoll, 2001). Attachment theory places attention on the loss relationship (Stroebe & Schut, 1999), emphasizing "both the individual's patterns of attachment and their beliefs and expectations regarding attachment" (Cleary, 1999, p. 33). The understanding of this attachment helps us to understand the grief process more thoroughly.

Hobfoll (1989) suggests that "loss of a loved one constituted social loss, potential loss of status and economic stability, loss of a way of life, as well as loss of the loved individual" (p. 518). The loss of an attachment (through death, divorce, moving, etc.)

causes stress, as the resources provided by that attachment are lost, leaving one to find new resources to fill the void. This attachment is emphasized in Holmes and Rahe (1967), who state that the loss of a spouse is the most stressful event that can occur in a person's life. Individuals have a need for security and safety; becoming attached to another, first as an infant is attached to its mother, and later as individuals form attachments to friends, colleagues, and partners, helps one to gain and maintain this security. When this attachment is broken, the security and safety is taken away, leaving nothing in its place, and the individual will experience separation anxiety (Schupp, 2003). The loss presents intense challenges to our ability to adapt, even to everyday situations (Neimeyer, 2002). In addition, the loss of attachment to a loved one necessitates a change in the life of the survivor, something that will also cause a great amount of stress (Hobfoll, 1989).

Much of the traditional research on grief has focused on Freud's "grief work", a "cognitive process of confronting a loss, of going over the events before and at the time of death, of focusing on memories and working toward detachment from the deceased" (Stroebe & Schut, 1999, p. 199). It is a process of learning to live with the loss, move beyond the pain, and detach oneself from the deceased, and "has to do with affirming, strengthening, and enlarging our connectedness to others" (Neimeyer, 2006a, p. 53). More recent research however, has refuted the grief work hypothesis and suggests that the grieving person moves more toward acceptance of the loss and, instead of becoming detached from the deceased person, finds a new place for the deceased in the new life experience that comes from being without them physically (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005; Prigerson & Maciejewski, 2008; Stroebe & Schut, 1999).

Integrating Freud's grief work with Kübler-Ross's acceptance, Stroebe and Schut (1999) present a dual process model of coping with bereavement, in which grieving persons are seen as oscillating between 1) confrontation of the loss and the emotions of the loss, grief work, withdrawal from the relationship, and the broken ties with the deceased and 2) focusing on restoring one's life through dealing with the results of grief, including adjusting to life without the deceased, attending to new interests and relationships, and not emphasizing the loss itself. In this process, acceptance of the loss as well as adjustment to life without the deceased, are identified as ways to cope with one's grief and bereavement.

Similarly, Neimeyer (2006a) states that "grieving typically involves a process of fluctuating between *feeling* and *doing*" (p. 43). This process is normal, and allows a person to put things in perspective as they move toward closure by coping with the feelings as they arise and consequently making adjustments to life without the deceased (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). Closure allows the individual to move beyond the loss while still embracing it, allowing the grieving person to both continue to grieve and take steps to move beyond the loss. Many survivors of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City have the view that sharing one's grief helps one to move beyond it: "Grief shared is grief relieved" (Dickinson, 2011, p. 10). One group of these survivors was found to have "oscillated between reliving the loss...tuning out the loss...and restoration-oriented, problem-focused processing of the loss" (Inman, Yeh, Madan-Bahel, & Nath, 2007, p. 111).

This means beginning once more to value what we have, so that we become slowly a little less preoccupied with what has been lost. This is not to devalue the

person who has died or what they meant to us, but is a matter of shifting the balance of attention towards what is still of value and makes our life worth living.

(Charles-Edwards, 2005, p. 4)

The Grief Experience

The death of someone close often inspires individuals to reflect internally on their own lives and to consider their own mortality. This introspection will, in turn, often result in major changes in the way they manage their own lives. From an organizational viewpoint, Korman, Wittig-Berman, and Lang (1981) suggest that successful managers of organizations often have feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy, often brought on by personal traumas and life changes in their mid-life years. They describe this phenomenon as “career success, personal failure” (p. 342), suggesting that even though they are considered successful in their careers, they feel as if they have failed, or that their personal life has not worked out in the way that they thought it would. When these managers experience a traumatic life event in their lives, they often will have difficulty reconciling their view of life as it should be and that of how life has worked out (Korman et al., 1981).

Managers have usually worked their way up through the ranks and have a great deal of responsibility in the workplace. They are perceived by others as being successful, in terms of finances, workplace achievement, and often their personal lives (Korman & Korman, 1980). However, when a personal loss occurs, they are often unable to handle the stress of coping with that loss, and then feel guilty about both their feelings and their inability to act as they feel a successful manager should act (Korman et al., 1981). Their internal reflections may also lead them to question how their lives have evolved into their

current position in an organization, increasing their work-life conflict, as a result of their loss.

Some types of grief may affect a person for the remainder of their life, while others, although still important, may be dealt with and then put aside more easily. The experience of grief may affect a person's whole family, and thus individuals must cope with their own grief and also the grief of the family members (Pearlman et al., 2010). In what may be classified as normal grief, "the survivor focuses on the deceased loved one, searches for reminders and is involved in separation distress over the deceased person" (Schupp, 2003, p. 15). Even if the loss was unexpected, individuals are able, over time, to cope with and move past the loss. Complicated or unresolved grief may involve no outward expressions of grief, the delay of grief expression, or, at the experience of several traumatic events in succession, the inability to cope with one or more of them in a timely manner (Schupp, 2003).

The experience of grief will be different for each person, based upon the closeness of the relationship with the deceased, the suddenness of the death, or whether there have been previous events which caused grief (which may compound the experience of grief). The magnitude of grief will influence how a person responds to the grief, in both physical and psychiatric terms (Rabkin & Struening, 1976). The degree to which the loss of someone close affects individuals also affects how well they cope with the loss. In addition, the duration of the events preceding the death (was the person ill for a long period of time) and the unpredictability of the event will also influence the bereaved person's responses.

Rabkin and Struening (1976) also suggest that the “characteristics of the stressful situation, individual biological and psychological attributes, and characteristics of the social support systems available to the individual” (p. 1018) will also influence the impact of the stressful life event, and a lack of preparedness, indicated by the unpredictability of the event, will make the event more difficult to comprehend. Although Rabkin and Struening (1976) suggest that lack of prior experience will increase the impact of a stressful event, it is possible that in the case of death of a close friend or family, this is not true, but instead will increase the individual’s negative reactions. Past experience with grief may not necessarily predict that individuals will handle their grief better than previously.

The model shown in Figure 1 presents the proposed relationships between grief and the valued work outcomes. A traumatic life event will lead to the experience of grief in four categories: emotional, physiological, mental, and behavioral. The grief experience leads to certain psychological reactions to that grief, including depleted energy, low work motivation, alienation and despair, and loss of self-esteem.

Model

The goal of this dissertation is to come up with a model that captures the process of grief and how it affects both individual and work outcomes. A tentative model has been proposed which includes the variables discussed above and their relationships to each other.

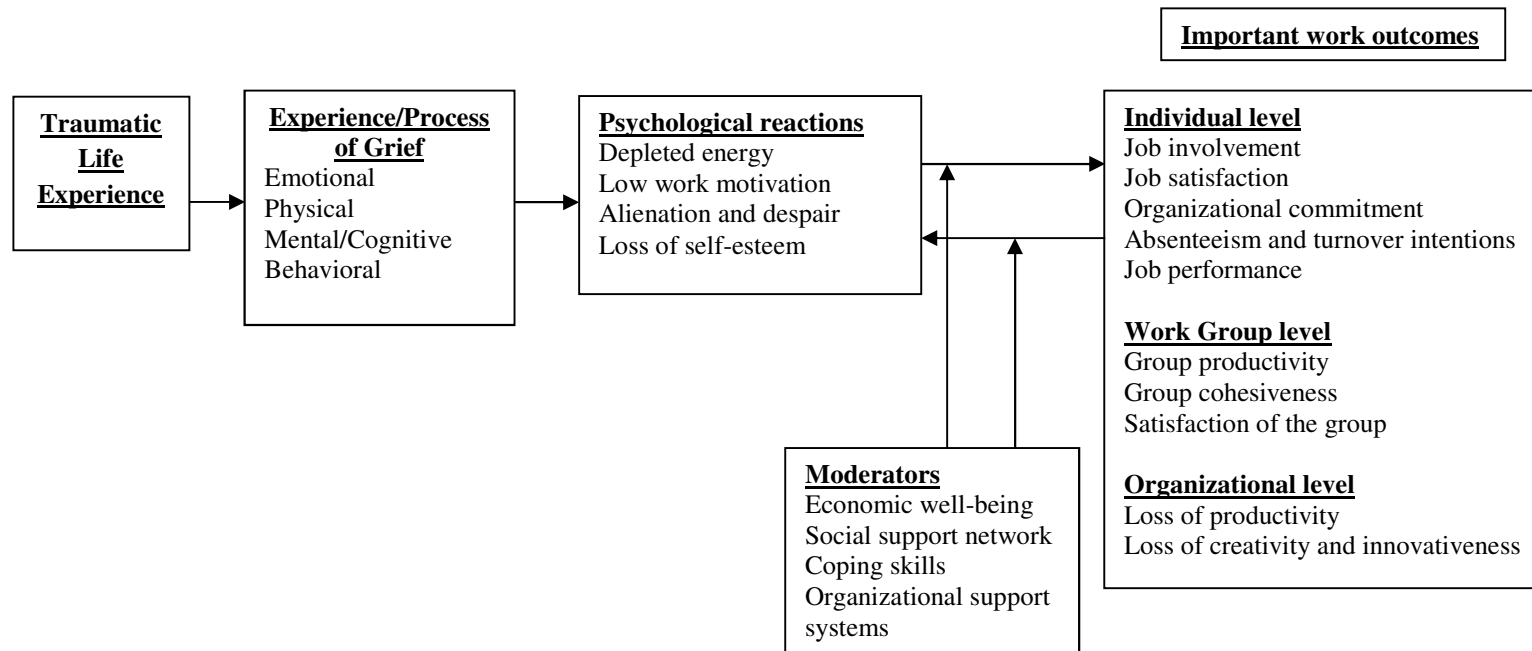


Figure 1. A research model guiding the qualitative investigation and design of interview schedule.

Types of Grief Experiences

Grief can be described as normal, complicated, traumatic, or anticipatory (Schupp, 2003). “Grief is considered normal when it has a known cause and no correlation with self-esteem” (Schupp, 2003, p. 10). Complicated grief (CG) includes “preoccupation with thoughts of the deceased, disbelief about the death, crying, being stunned by the death, and not accepting the death” (Prigerson et al., 1995, p. 66). “After a “traumatic” loss, for some people, the grief response can involve a lack of acceptance of the death, with the survivor undergoing a chronic state of mourning often referred to as CG” (Schnider, Elhai, & Gray, 2007, p. 344). Complicated grief involves a much more extended response, and much more difficulty than normal grief, in moving forward in the coping process (Boelen & Hoijtink, 2009; Neimeyer, 2006b; Schupp, 2003).

In addition, when grief is unresolved, a situation in which a person fails to “fully register the reality of the loss” (Field, 2006, p. 746), there is a compounding effect of loss, and in the case of a subsequent traumatic life event, it becomes even more difficult to recover (Worden, 1991). In an article by Billikopf (1994), one employee who had lost more than one loved one recently, stated that it was difficult to determine whose grief they were mourning. Extreme cases of intrusive images and hallucinations may also be indicative of complicated grief (Field & Filanosky, 2010).

Traumatic grief involves “intrusive, distressing preoccupation with the deceased person (e.g., yearning, longing, or searching)” (Jacobs, Mazure, & Prigerson, 2000, p. 189), and is usually associated with some traumatic event. “The focus in a traumatized individual is on the horror or violence surrounding the death, and they try to avoid any reminders of it” (Schupp, 2003, p. 15). For example, survivors of concentration camps in

Nazi Germany during WWII found it difficult to move forward from the trauma involved in the deaths of their loved ones, especially as they survived (Bhagat, personal communication, October 31, 2011; Frankl, 1959).

Anticipatory grief will often occur when someone has received a diagnosis of a terminal illness for themselves or a loved one, or when someone of advanced years becomes ill (Hottensen, 2010). This anticipation of the death reflects the “beginning of the end” (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005, p. 1), and, although it allow/prepares individuals to cope with the future death, it also presents them with a period of uncertainty, emotional distress, and despair (Gilliland & Fleming, 1998). Even though the knowledge of impending death allows time for preparation and completing unfinished business (Zeitlin, 2001), the grief still remains.

Worden (1991) discusses four general categories of normal grief which may be experienced: emotions/feelings, physical sensations, mental/cognitions, and behaviors, which are discussed next.

Emotional Effects. Significant emotional energy is expended in the process of grieving and mourning (Balk, 2004; Chen, Gill, & Prigerson, 2005; Didion, 2005; Rodger, Sherwood, O’Connor, & Leslie, 2006-2007; Worden, 1991). The loss of someone or something important, as well as the recovery from that loss, can use large reserves of emotional energy (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). Emotions may erupt sporadically, leaving individuals drained of physical energy (James, 1994; Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). In her book about surviving after the death of her husband, Didion (2005) describes grief as coming “in waves, paroxysms, sudden apprehensions that weaken the knees and blind the eyes and obliterate the dailiness of life” (p. 27).

Emotional consequences of sadness (Doughty, 2009), hopelessness (James, 1994; Lawrence, Jeglic, Matthews, & Pepper, 2005-2006), anger (Hazen, 2009; Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005), powerlessness (Demmer, 2007), guilt (Hazen, 2009; James, 1994), anxiety (Bergman, Haley, & Small, 2010; Hazen, 2003), loneliness (Parkes & Brown, 1972; van der Houwen et al., 2010), helplessness (Field, Gal-Oz, & Bonnano, 2003), numbness (Hazen, 2003), emptiness (Hazen, 2003), relief (Ellison, 2007; Pruchno, Cartwright, & Wilson-Genderson, 2009), and fear (Barr & Cacciatore, 2008) may lead to emotional pain and depression (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005).

Sadness, a feeling of sorrow, unhappiness, loss, or helplessness (Sadness, n.d.), results from the reality that the person who was loved is no longer around, and may be expressed in emotional ways such as crying (Doughty, 2009). In feeling hopeless, individuals may feel that the future holds no options for them (Lawrence et al., 2005-2006). For example, the loss of a young spouse leaves the survivor with unfulfilled dreams and plans for the future which must now be put aside or discarded completely. Often, grieving persons experience anger at God because the deceased has been taken away, anger at the deceased that the survivor has been left behind with so many responsibilities, anger at the doctors for not saving the deceased or simply anger that they do not have more time to spend with the deceased (Hazen, 2009; Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). A sense of powerlessness may emerge as a person is overwhelmed by the multitude of tasks that must be accomplished and decisions which must be made. A feeling of powerlessness may come from the feeling of depleted resources when a person feels that they cannot function anymore and they have lost control (Demmer, 2007).

A person may feel guilty about something that was said that now cannot be taken back, or something that was not done that might have prevented the death, as in the case of a suicide. James (1994) reported the feelings of a mother whose daughter committed suicide, as “stifling” (p. 436). One may also feel guilty about the relief that comes from not having to care for an ill and aging parent or spouse any more (Ellison, 2007; Epston, 1991). In addition, as in the case with the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City, guilt can occur when someone has not had a chance to have final goodbyes to their loved ones, or survived when someone did not, or just to say they are sorry (Dickinson, 2011; Thompson, 2011). Anxiety comes from the uncertainty of what will happen in the future, and the “inability to control events” (Schupp, 2003, p. 3). In one case, an employee with cancer felt anxious about the upcoming birth of her first grandchild and college graduation of her son, and the limits that her cancer placed on her life (Hottensen, 2010). This anxiety then spilled over onto her work role, compounding the effects of her illness and the treatment even more.

If bereaved individuals are left to cope with the loss of the primary or only income earner, anxiety can easily set in with worries about how the bills will be paid, and worries about the necessity of entering the workplace. They are now left alone without the companionship of the deceased person, and with the worry that something could happen to them or to another loved one.

As bereaved individuals begin to cope with the loss, they may experience loneliness (van der Houwen et al., 2010) when they return from work, for example, and there is no one there to greet them, prepare their dinner, discuss the events of the day, and hold them as they fall asleep, as reported by Oates (2011) in her memoir about losing her

husband. In the case of the loss of a spouse, individuals often feel helpless at having to cope with all of the duties and tasks that the deceased used to handle, from financial duties to household chores, and a myriad of tasks in between (Oates, 2011). If the deceased person had been experiencing a long or painful illness, there may be a feeling of relief that they are no longer suffering (Ellison, 2007; Pruchno et al., 2009), although that feeling of relief may also cause them to feel guilty that they are relieved. The whole grief experience often leaves individuals feeling numb and emotionless, at least for a period of time in the beginning (Hazen, 2003; Rodger et al., 2006-2007). Fear of death or fear of the unknown may emerge as individuals grasp the reality of their own mortality, as a result of experiencing the death of someone close to them (Barr & Cacciatore, 2008). Many of these responses may not be directly noticeable in the workplace, as employees may attempt to conceal their feelings from others (Hazen, 2008), but they will often emerge at various times during the grieving process, sometimes in negative ways.

Physiological Effects. Just as the emotions are triggered through loss and the grief process, there are multiple physical sensations that are affected by the loss and recovery of a loved one (Worden 1991). Studies have been conducted on the physical aspects of grief, which have shown that grief leads to physical pain (Kersting et al., 2009), as measured through brain studies of the physical response to grief. In addition, “morbidity and mortality rates of the bereaved person are greater than the general population” (Rodger et al., 2006-2007, p. 108), leading one to believe that there are physical outcomes of the grieving process. Frequently these physical responses are ignored until they manifest themselves in noticeable ways. In the beginning, when someone has just experienced the news that a loved one is dead, the body’s initial

physical reactions may be those of a person in shock, which may be seen as rapid heart rate, low blood pressure, shallow breathing, pale skin, dizziness, or confusion (MedlinePlus, n.d.). Throughout the grieving process, many individuals will experience other physical symptoms such as lack of energy (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005), tightness in the chest or throat (Worden, 1991), dryness of the mouth (Neimeyer, 2002; Parkes & Brown, 1972; Worden, 1991), breathlessness (Neimeyer, 2002; Worden, 1991), neurological/circulatory problems (Kowalski & Bondmass, 2008), weight loss (Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2007), chills, diarrhea, or stomach disorders, pain, and appetite, digestive or sleep disturbances (Chen et al., 2005; Neimeyer, 2002; Parkes & Brown, 1972; Stroebe et al., 2007). The immune system is often compromised, leaving one vulnerable to commonly spread illnesses (Kemeny et al., 1995).

The grieving process is one which requires a lot of emotional energy, which may leave individuals with little physical energy (Hazen, 2008; Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). Often employees will miss days of work because they simply cannot force themselves to get out of bed in the morning (Rodger et al., 2005-2006). Neimeyer (2002) reports a marked increase (40%-70%) in death of surviving spouses in the first few months of bereavement, suggesting that some physical responses to the death of a loved one may be quite serious. Especially in the elderly, studies have shown that declining health seems to be a result of grief, following the death of someone close (D'Epina, Cavalli, & Spini, 2003).

Cognitive/Mental Effects. Most adults, after the initial shock of a loss, understand that the loss cannot ever be recovered and they must move on without the loved one. However, even though they may understand it, they may still have difficulty

comprehending the magnitude of the loss. There has been a shock to their system, and their brain may not allow proper processing of certain thoughts (Schupp, 2003). In a memoir about her husband's death, Didion reported the cognitive response to the grieving process of disbelief that her husband was gone, as well as an inability to think rationally (Didion, 2005). She came to feel that avoidance of reality was just a natural and recurring event of the grieving process. This disbelief and avoidance may lead to confusion about how to accomplish tasks, preoccupation with the deceased, intrusive images and thoughts, and even hallucinations (Worden, 1991). Oates (2011) reported in her memoir, that even though the grieving person knows that the deceased is gone and cannot return, the belief that they may walk into the room at any minute, or that they are only gone on a trip and will be back tomorrow, may pervade the conscious mind of the person left behind.

When a loved one has died, a person wants to understand the event, and thus searches for meaning, both consciously and unconsciously. "Individuals and families... define themselves through the meaning they attach to memories" (Carley, 2011). These memories form the foundation of the reconstruction process, in which the bereaved person moves toward an adjusted world without the deceased (Coleman & Neimeyer, 2010, p. 805), constructing meanings which make sense of the loss and help the individual recover from the shock (Neimeyer, 2006a). "When you lose someone you love, it doesn't mean they're not with you anymore. You just have to find them in a different way" (Cypress Point Productions, 2002). Dreams may occur in which the deceased is very much alive, and the grieving individual may believe that they see the deceased alive during waking moments as well (Doran & Hansen, 2006). They may feel

the presence of the deceased in the room, giving advice or reassurance during a decision-making process.

Another outcome associated with the grieving process may be a loss in belief in God or in a “good God”. Balk (2004) suggests that the grieving person may question how a loving God could take such a good person away from them, or how a good God could allow such a thing to happen. “Spiritually a bereaved person may question the meaning of existence, lose hope, and feel adrift in the world” (Balk, 2004, p. 366). A change in religious beliefs may occur as a result of a loss (Seirmarco et al., 2012), either positive or negative. Some people experience a decrease in their religious beliefs after losing someone (James, 1994), while others find stronger faith as a result of the experience (Dickinson, 2011; Seirmarco et al., 2012). “Religion can foster resilience during bereavement both by providing a stable, shared belief system and by providing affiliation and social support” (Bonanno et al., 2002, p. 1153).

Behavioral Effects. In addition to the emotional, physical, and cognitive responses to grief, individuals may discover that they are behaving somewhat differently from their usual behaviors, as a result of their loss. They may discover that things which used to occur by habit now require conscious effort to perform, while others would never have happened prior to their loss, but now seem to take place without any realization that the individual is accomplishing them (Worden, 1991). There is a wide variety of behaviors which are associated with the grieving process. Behaviors of the grieving person could be forgetfulness, social withdrawal (Hazen, 2009), irritability (MacHale & Carey, 2002; Parkes & Brown, 1972), restless overactivity, or crying (Eyetsemitan, 1998;

Nelson, 1998). Because of a lack of concentration, the bereaved employee may seem absent-minded, forgetting appointments or the location of an important document.

Bereaved employees may remove themselves from social activities, perhaps because they do not wish to interact at all with coworkers (Charles-Edwards, 2000). They may feel that no one understands their loss and prefer to keep to themselves. In addition, “a bereaved person may remain isolated from others, find others become uncomfortable when the bereaved person is present, and may lash out unpredictably at others.” (Balk, 2004, p. 366). Conversely, they may instead participate in a flurry of activities, often intended to busy the mind so that they can take their mind off of their loss (Eyetsemitan, 1998). Some people have the physical ability to suppress immediate emotional angst, while others do not. “Activity can help get the person through the worst of the early days. On the other hand, the pressure to do anything can also be incredibly hard for the person in the grip of acute grief.” (Charles-Edwards, 2005, p. 178). They may burst into tears at the smallest provocation, or often for what seems to be nothing at all. Crying may come throughout the day or only at times of remembering the deceased. As such, the bereaved person who returns to work may be unable to work with others, especially if coworkers are unsure how to treat the bereaved employee (Handling the grieving worker, 1996). Saying the wrong thing or saying nothing at all may trigger fresh feelings of grief, anger, and other emotions which could disrupt the workplace.

Psychological Reactions to the Experience/Process of Grief

Depletion of energy. At the individual level, employees will respond to their own personal grief in various ways. According to Mead (1894), sensations, emotions, and feelings are interrelated, and often overlap. When employees are grieving, they will often

experience a myriad of psychological symptoms similar to those of a physical illness, which will deplete their physical and emotional energy. It takes an enormous amount of energy, both physical and psychological, to work through the grieving process (Rodger et al., 2006-2007). When employees are depleted, they will have difficulty giving themselves to their job, making it even harder to be productive (DiGiulio, 1995). Their job performance may suffer as a result of their inability to concentrate. “Grief touches people socially, emotionally, physically, and spiritually and can have far-reaching and unanticipated consequences” (Silverman, 2002, p. 449).

Hobfoll (1989) suggests that resources can be depleted by the environment. Grieving employees’ resources may have been depleted by the circumstances of the loss. If one’s resources are depleted, they may have difficulty in coping with the loss of a loved one. In his discussion of self-regulation, Bandura (1996) suggests that individuals monitor their performance and make regulatory adjustments based on feedback they receive. When one senses a discrepancy between this feedback and an inner feeling of performance, one will make adjustments in performance until the discrepancy is resolved. Grieving employees, however, while sensing the discrepancy, may not have enough emotional energy to adjust their performance levels, as the grief itself might deplete their psychological energy. In a similar vein, Schulz, Newsom, Fleissner, DeCamp, and Nieboer (1997) state that “To the extent that such resources are not available at the time of the loss, the family member is more likely to have poorer psychological adjustment to the loss.” (p. 271). Over time, the healing process may allow the employees to replenish their stores of energy and return to their previous levels of productivity.

In a study on workplace display rules (such as service with a smile), Goldberg and Grandey (2007) relate depletion of energy to the social expectations of the workplace, especially in customer service occupations, and submit that these workplace regulations can drain energy resources of employees who are required to use them in their jobs. Grieving employees in these occupations, who are expected to obey these display rules, may not have even the minimum resources to comply with them, and thus can be expected to perform to lower levels. An overload of demands can cause individuals to fail at self-control, in part because this overload saps the strength and energy of the person (Bakker, Demerouti, Taris, Schaufeli, & Schreurs, 2003; Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996). In a grief situation, demands on a person will often become so overwhelming that they cannot function any more (Schulz et al., 1997). Over time, a grieving person can take on so much, emotionally and physically, that they simply become drained of any energy that they had remaining. As a result, grieving employees may lose their ability to be involved with their jobs, as they have no energy to keep it in the forefront of their lives.

Furthermore, there seems to be a predictive relationship between what has been called “life stress,” “emotional stress,” and “object loss” and the onset of both psychological disturbances and physical illnesses (Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1974; Graham & Stevenson, 1963; Gunderson & Rahe, 1974; Kutash, Schlesinger & Associates, 1980, as cited in Bhagat, 1983, p. 661).

Reduced motivation. Reactions to grief that may arise in the workplace may also include lower levels of motivation, as employees may not feel like working anymore, may have reduced interest in work, (Charles-Edwards, 2000, 2009; Ramsey, 1995), and a

low desire to perform duties and responsibilities in the work role. Although over time employees recovering from the grief experience are likely to also recover their motivation levels (Shepherd, Covin, & Kuratko, 2009), it will probably take some time for them to do so. Employees who are grieving may even lose the ability to function in their capacity at work. When there is no motivation to work, the ability to work also suffers. The lack of sufficient energy will take its toll on the employee who has returned to work, such that the job itself may have become too difficult. These outcomes may manifest in the workplace as the employee may be present at work but may not actually be able to perform their work tasks. For example, presenteeism, the act of being physically at work but not focused on the work processes, is often a result of grief; grieving employees often are unable to keep their mind on their work (Wolfelt, 2005). Because of their inability to concentrate, grieving employees who are at work are often not motivated to be working while there. Employees who are grieving may also be absent from work more often, staying home because they cannot cope with their feelings and emotions enough to have the motivation to make the effort to go to work.

Employees grieve because of the loss of someone dear to them. They are likely to perceive that work has little meaning for them anymore, and thus have little motivation to perform the duties that are required for the job. “[M]otivation only became an issue – for management and organization theories as well as for the organization of work itself – when meaning either disappeared or was lost from work;” (Sievers, 1986, p. 338). In addition, “the longer people are away from work, the less likely they are to return” (Fox, 2012, p. 39). Consequently, if they do return to work, their motivation levels will likely be quite low.

Alienation and feelings of despair. Employees may also feel alienated when they return to work, especially if their coworkers, unsure what to say, say nothing to them about the death of their loved one. They may feel that no one at work cares. They may feel a need to talk about their loss, but be unable to do so because of their perception of an uncaring attitude from their coworkers (Charles-Edwards, 2005, 2009). In her book about surviving after the death of her husband, Didion (2006) stated that she no longer has the same social skills for meeting and carrying on conversations, both with friends and also with strangers. She also reported a loss of a certain amount of resilience in the face of crises, both small and large. At some point, the employees are likely to lose hope of ever being able to recover and work in a normal manner in the organization, if there is no sense of help being offered from the organization. Feelings of despair include feeling helpless, empty, overwhelmed, apathetic, and that of a loss of meaning to life (Bernard & Guarnaccia, 2002). Repressing one's feelings of pain and despair takes an enormous amount of energy and brings isolation to employees, if they have no outlet in the workplace (Eyetsemitan, 1998; Hazen, 2008). "[I]t has been observed that bereavements are a potential source of ill health, apparently in relation to the social isolation created by the loss of a spouse" (Rabkin & Struening, 1976, p. 1019). The bereaved may fear that they may never recover, and that, whatever the cause of death, a similar fate now awaits them in the near future. "I look for resolution and find none" (Didion, 2006, p. 225).

Catlin (1993) found that almost 30% of Americans reported feeling loneliness as a result of their experiences with grief precipitated by major life event changes. Rabkin and Streuning (1976) also suggest that social isolation may be a cause for both physical and psychological illness, as well as marginal social status: "Bereavements are a potential

source of ill health, apparently in relation to the social isolation created by the loss of a spouse.” (p. 1019). Social isolation often comes when a caregiver’s time is consumed by a person with a chronic illness who requires a great deal of care. They isolate themselves, partly through no fault of their own and partly because they get tired of people asking about the ill person or people ignoring the fact that someone is ill. When the ill person dies, caregivers often have no strong support group because they have not interacted with others for an extended period of time, having become socially isolated (Burton, Haley, & Small, 2006). Alternatively, when employees do return to work after a loss, they may get tired of coworkers inquiring about their health, about the loss, or about their situation, and may withdraw in order to grieve alone, choosing to become socially isolated (Bodnar & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1994). Additionally, their coworkers may not know what to say, may feel very uncomfortable with death, and in turn will just not say anything, fearing that the grieving employee will break down or will become emotional, and will instead simply avoid contact with the grieving employee.

Some organizations feel that the best thing for the employee is to continue work as usual, even in the face of a traumatic life event, failing to recognize the needs of the employee (Barski-Carrow, 2010; Frolkey, 1996). However, if the organization does not have resources to assist a grieving employee, the employee is still likely to face difficulties in returning to work. Sunoo and Solomon (1996) describe a case of a young woman whose father had died recently. She felt as if she had no support group at work, and was encouraged to keep her feelings to herself. “They expected I should leave all my personal feelings at the door before I walked into work” (Sunoo & Solomon, 1996, p. 79). She felt alienated and alone, without anyone at work that she could talk to. In this

case, the young woman ended up leaving the workplace because of the lack of support for her grief.

Loss of self-esteem. Another psychological reaction to the employee's experience of grief may be a loss of self-esteem or loss of a sense of self (Barski-Carrow, 2010; Charles-Edwards, 2009). Work is significant in defining who we are, and this sense of identity with work may be lost as bereaved employees miss days of work or do not identify with work anymore. They may feel vulnerable, both in their ability to do the work required, and with their identification with the organization. "When people sense they are vulnerable, they face a possible loss of face (dignity), place (status), and life (physically and especially psychological). They may lose what defines them as a person" (Segovis, 1990, p. 62). Haine, Ayers, Sandler, Wolchik, and Weyer (2003) report that "negative life events may reduce self-esteem, which in turn increases internalizing problems" (Haine, Ayers, Sandler, Wolchik, & Weyer, 2003, p. 633). In her book about her recovery after the loss of her husband, Didion (2006) reported feelings of self-pity which often pervaded her thoughts, often leading to self-loathing and a loss of what self-esteem remained. "Ultimately, I see living through grief as a process that involves not only coping with a range of intense and painful feelings, but of finding a new sense of self and a new place for oneself in the world" (Silverman, 2002, p. 449).

As individuals find their new sense of self, they will begin to find meaning again. Depending on the bereaved individual's relationship with the deceased, the death can lead to a lifetime of regrets for what was said or unsaid, which in turn can lead to lowered self-esteem. If a person's sense of self was tied up in their dependence on the deceased, or "when there has been an unconscious need to idealize the dead, the loss can feel

insurmountable, resulting in lowered self-esteem” (Berzoff, 2011, p. 268). “Grief is the result of losing an important guide to and element in one’s way of thinking about life” (Catlin, 1993, p. 174). Often, one’s dependence on another is in part where one’s self-esteem arises, and when that other is lost through a death, a part of one’s self is now gone as well.

Work Outcomes of the Grief Process

“The work-life theory of human resource management affirms that employees have lives into which work must fit (and not the other way around)” (Wolfelt, 2005: What’s a workplace to do? section, para. 4). When an employee experiences a traumatic life event, their personal life is disrupted, which means that their work life is disrupted also. The personal grief resulting from the traumatic life event will spill over into the workplace in terms of the worker’s “performance, productivity, safety, and communication” (Shepherd, 2006, p. 108). In addition, Bhagat et al. (1985) found that personal life stress, which can result from loss and grief, will impact an employee’s job satisfaction and commitment. The literature on work life balance suggests that a satisfying personal life can contribute to an effective working life (DiGiulio, 1995; Kossek & Ozeki, 1999; McCarthy, Darcy, & Grady, 2010; Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007). When that personal life is disrupted by the death of someone close, the effects will spill over into the employee’s work life and must be dealt with by the employee and the organization. The loss of someone close may impair the quality of life employees possess, threatening them in terms of their ability to function, both personally and in the workplace (DiGiulio, 1995).

There are few studies which actually examine the experiences of grief in the context of work organizations (see Table 2). Grief is not usually thought of in terms of the workplace. It is often thought of as a private experience, one which should be experienced with those closest to one, and then left behind when one returns to work. In an article on employee grief, Getha-Taylor (2003, p.3) stated, “One executive was overheard saying, “grief does not belong in the workplace.” In American and English cultures, grief is usually seen as “private, something others should not intrude into” (Walter, 2009, p. 403). However, grief will occur in the workplace as employees experience loss, and will have effects at three levels: the individual level, the work group level, and the organizational level.

Table 2
Studies Examining Grief in Organizations

Author(s)	Topical Area	Journal and method employed
Hazen (2003)	Societal and workplace responses to perinatal loss: Disenfranchised grief or healing connection	Human Relations – Qualitative
Byron & Peterson (2002)	The impact of a large-scale traumatic event on individual and organizational outcomes: exploring employee and company reactions to September 11, 2001	Journal of Organizational Behavior – Quantitative
Vickers (2009)	Journeys into grief: Exploring redundancy for a new understanding of workplace grief	Journal of Loss and Trauma – Qualitative
Charles-Edwards (2009)	Empowering people at work in the face of death and bereavement	Death Studies – Qualitative
DiGiulio (1995)	A more humane workplace: Responding to child welfare workers’ personal losses	Child Welfare - Quantitative

Individual Level Work Outcomes

The individual level work outcomes of job involvement, job performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, absenteeism, and turnover intentions were chosen because they are important outcomes that lead to the success of individuals in the workplace and are potentially influenced by grief.

Job Involvement. Job involvement is “the degree to which a person views the importance of a job in his or her life” (Griffin, Hogan, Lambert, Tucker-Gill, & Baker, 2010: 241), and is centered on the concept of identification with one’s job (Kanungo, 1979, 1982; Lawler & Hall, 1970; Lodahl & Kejner, 1965), especially the immediate work environment and the relationships with those with whom one works (Biswas, 2011). A person who is highly involved with his job will describe himself in terms of that job, and considers his job to be very important in his life (Brown, 1996; Griffin et al., 2010; Kanungo, 1979), considers involvement as a component of his self-image (Rabinowitz & Hall, 1977), and considers that his job meets a need in his life (Kanungo, 1979). Job involvement emphasizes “the cognitive energy individuals invest to maintain identities related to work.” (Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010, p. 618). Persons with low levels of job involvement will place something besides their job or work in the forefront of their lives (Griffin et al., 2010).

Job involvement is likely to be one of the first things that suffer when a grieving employee returns to work. Individuals who are grieving are unlikely to consider the job as the most important thing in his life, at least until they have moved well beyond the initial grieving period. The memories of the deceased person, the tasks involved in moving past the death, and the emotional toll which is taken on the grieving employee

will occupy his mind and his life for some time after the death, leaving little time for the elements of the job that formerly motivated him and consumed his life (Griffin et al., 2010). Job involvement also implies the ability of a job to satisfy of a need (Kanungo, 1979, 1982; May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004; Saks, 2006).

When grieving, employees' needs may have changed, at least in the short term, and it is likely that they will no longer feel that their job fulfills any need. Brown and Leigh (1996) suggest that the psychological climate in the organization, how employees perceive their work environment, in terms of providing a safe and meaningful workplace, will also affect job involvement, for example, whether they feel supported by the organization and whether it is a safe and secure place to work. If the organizational climate provides a safe and meaningful workplace, with assistance programs or flexible scheduling to accommodate their grief, those employees may continue to feel the same level of involvement in their job as they did prior to the grief-causing event. However, if the psychological climate of the organization does not support them in their time of grieving, they are likely to have reduced levels of job involvement.

Job Satisfaction. Job satisfaction is concerned with a person's attraction to the job, as well as the actual tasks performed, the amount of pay received, and promotion opportunities, as well as satisfaction with one's coworkers and supervisors, and the work environment (Bhagat, 1983; Schneider & Dachler, 1978). It involves examining one's expectations of the job and comparing those expectations to the reality of the job (Griffin et al., 2010). If the expectations conform to the reality, an employee is likely to have high levels of job satisfaction. Hackman and Oldham (1975) describe job satisfaction as how happy an employee is with the job. They state that

“[P]ositive personal and work outcomes (high internal motivation, high work satisfaction, high quality performance, and low absenteeism and turnover) are obtained when three "critical psychological states" are present for a given employee (experienced meaningfulness of the work, experienced responsibility for the outcomes of the work, and knowledge of the results of the work activities). All three of the psychological states must be present for the positive outcomes to be realized”. (Hackman & Oldham, 1975, p. 160)

Grief that employees experience affects how they perform their job, and how they interact with their coworkers and their supervisor. It may be that work has lost its meaning, has no attraction, and employees may not even care about the results of their work (Griffin et al., 2010; Neimeyer, 2006a). Thus, happiness and satisfaction with the job will be affected by the grief experience, as well as how employees are treated by their coworkers as they grieve. The grief experience in the workplace can produce high levels of stress, as employees attempt to work and cope with their grief. “Negative stress, on the other hand, is defined as resulting from life event changes that produce excessive and undesirable constraints and/or demands on the individual” (Bhagat et al., 1985, p. 203). These constraints and demands may overwhelm employees, leaving them dissatisfied with their situation and unsure how to make it better, which in turn, adds even more stress. In addition, if the management’s response to this grief is unsatisfactory, the employee’s overall job satisfaction may suffer. In one of the few studies of grief in the workplace, Adwan (2011) found that grief was negatively correlated with job satisfaction in a study of pediatric nurses. Bhagat et al. (1985) proposed that negative personal life stress has a significant effect on the organizational outcomes of both job satisfaction and

organizational commitment, suggesting that grief (a negative personal life stress) would affect the satisfaction employees feel toward their job as well as their commitment to the organization. In a similar vein, Griffin et al. (2010) suggest a negative relationship with job satisfaction and burnout, which has similarities to the stress of grief.

Organizational Commitment. Meyer and Allen (1991) present organizational commitment as a three faceted construct, consisting of “affective attachment to the organization, perceived costs associated with leaving the organization, and obligation to remain with the organization (p. 64). This commitment, also described as loyalty to the organization (Griffin et al., 2010), may be challenged by the difficulties of grieving employees, in that employees may have had the feeling of attachment to the organization broken by the grief and bereavement they are experiencing. In addition, if their job involvement, job performance, and job satisfaction are lessened through the grieving experience, they may perceive that the costs of leaving are not as high as previously thought, and they may not feel so committed to the organization and obligated to remain. Carson and Carson (2007) also propose that employee grief, especially if not recognized or dealt with in the organization, will decrease the employee’s commitment to the organization. Bhagat et al. (1985) explored the effects of personal life stress on organizational outcomes, including organizational commitment, and found that negative job stress (such as that caused by grief) has an unfavorable effect on organizational commitment. Griffin et al. (2010) also suggest that employees may become disillusioned with their workplace as a result of burnout (similar to grief) and become less committed to the organization.

Absenteeism and Turnover Intentions. Absenteeism and turnover are large contributors to organizational ineffectiveness (Angle & Perry 1981; Baker-McClearn, Greasley, Dale, & Griffith, 2010; Kossek & Ozeki 1999; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Williamson & Alexander, 1986). Additionally, employee absences can cost an organization over one third of its payroll Hastings (2008). Meyer and Allen (1991) and Somers (2010) suggest that a lack of commitment, which may be affected by both work-related and non-work related, may lead to both turnover and absenteeism. Grief may also lead to lower levels of commitment to one's job as well as to the work organization. Negative life stress, such as that caused by the loss of a loved one, can intensify negative feelings toward the workplace, leading to higher levels of absenteeism by grieving employees (Bhagat et al., 1985; Byron & Peterson, 2002). Little research has been conducted on the effects of grief on absenteeism and turnover intentions of employees. Absenteeism is likely to appear early in the employee grieving process, as grieving employees are likely to be absent from work during their time of grieving. The physical, emotional, and mental difficulties of simply functioning often make it too demanding to show up at work and perform the expected duties of one's job. Although many organizations offer bereavement leave in addition to sick, personal, and vacation leave, it is virtually impossible for organizations to provide enough bereavement leave for a person to "recover" from the loss of a loved one. Life event changes such as the loss of someone close can lead to employees missing days at work (Bhagat, 1983; Bhagat et al., 1985).

Employee turnover can cost an organization up to twice the salary of the person who has left the organization (Vardaman, Allen, Renn, & Moffitt, 2008). Hackman and

Oldham (1975) suggest that low turnover results “when three "critical psychological states" are present for a given employee (experienced meaningfulness of the work, experienced responsibility for the outcomes of the work, and knowledge of the results of the work activities)” (p. 160). In addition, employees who feel that they can no longer meet their organizational expectations may feel that it would be easier to leave the organization than to continue to face the difficulties there. Research has shown that “withdrawal behaviors are often driven by stress and negative emotions” (Grant & Wade-Benzoni, 2001). Rabkin and Struening (1976) propose that high levels of stress are an antecedent to many illnesses, both physical and psychological. They suggest that individuals who reported a high proportion of noticeable life events also suffered from psychiatric problems. It follows that the stress which comes from grieving will likely lead to a higher level of illness in employees, which in turn would affect absenteeism and possibly turnover. Bhagat (1983) suggests that the work outcomes discussed in the previous sections are likely to lead to turnover and other organizational consequences.

In a discussion of organizational reorganization, Begley (1998) suggested that organizational disorder and chaos may influence employees to attempt to leave the organization. Similarly, personal turmoil in the guise of grief may provide the stimulus for employees to consider leaving. Parasuraman and Alutto (1984) found that “felt stress and low organizational commitment directly contributed to voluntary termination of employment” (p. 346). When employees have experienced the loss of someone close, they may in fact become more aware of their own mortality, and decide to leave the organization to change careers and search for a career that provides more meaning for

them, as many employees did following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in the US on 9/11/01 (Grant & Wade-Benzoni, 2001).

Job Performance. When an employee experiences stress, his performance on the job diminishes (Beehr & Newman, 1978; Bhagat, 1983; Chambel & Curral, 2005; Fairbrother & Warn, 2002; Kofoworola & Alayode, 2012; Sullivan & Bhagat, 1992). The stress of bereavement is no exception. “Stress can have a negative effect on an individual’s productivity, effectiveness, and personal health” (Gaertner & Ruhe, 1991. P. 68). DiGiulio (1995) has suggested that the grief from personal loss can increase workplace stress and thus will have an effect on work performance. After the typical three to five days of bereavement leave offered by their organizations, employees usually return to work. In a study assessing life changes, Sarason, Johnson, and Siegel (1978) reported that life stress (such as that caused by bereavement) has a negative effect on both college and high school teacher performance. Using work as a way of coping with grief can have both positive and negative implications for job performance. Some employees will throw themselves into their work, using it as a method of coping with the stress of the grief and the loss they are experiencing. Others will barely be able to function or have lower productivity at work (Frazee, 1996; Murphy et al., 1999). Grieving employees who are unable to sleep may have difficulty performing even simple tasks at work, simply because they are tired, leading to poor decisions and errors (DiGiulio, 1995). “At work, they cannot keep their emotions at bay and they cannot do their job well, at least on bad days.” (Walter, 2009, p. 408). They may experience a loss of loyalty to the organization or to work in general. They may feel as if they were not treated fairly and dread coming back to work. They may feel as if failure is eminent, and

thus will set easier goals to avoid that failure (Jeffreys, 2005). Work will often lose its meaningfulness as the employee attempts to cope with grief (Barski-Carrow, 2010; Jeffreys, 2005). The work schedule may have been interrupted, and employees may feel out of their normal routine. Work provides “pattern[s] of daily occupation” (Leufstadius, Eklund, & Erlandsson, 2009, p. 21), which allow employees to interpret their work in terms of meaningfulness. When these patterns are interrupted, the significance of the work may be lost. If work has lost its meaningfulness, employees’ work productivity may not be optimal, and their work may not be up to their usual standards (Jeffreys, 2005; Ramsey, 1995).

Group Level Work Outcomes

In addition to the individual outcomes discussed above, it is proposed that employee grief will have an effect on the work group. Specifically, if employees are grieving and are not able to work to their full capacity, their work group will be affected in several ways.

Group productivity. Rees, Zax, and Herries (2003) suggest that work group productivity is enhanced by the interdependency of the group members. The productivity of the group depends on the employee’s position in the group, as well as each employee’s individual contribution to the group. Employees who have experienced the death of someone near to them will most likely have missed a few days of work for bereavement leave. When they return, their energy levels will be lower, resulting in the likelihood that they will not be able to work at their full capacity, for quite some time, until the effects of the death have lessened. Even if they have energy, their motivation to both be at the workplace and to be working will likely be lowered. Therefore, their contribution to the

group will likely be reduced for some period of time. They may inadvertently become free-riders, reaping the benefits of the group, but not fully participating. This, in turn, may add to their lowered levels of self-esteem and sense of self, as they realize they are not working well but cannot change at the present time. Coworkers may wish to assist grieving employees with work, in order to allow them time and space to grieve. However, if the grief process takes more time than workplace norms allow, colleagues may resent having to pick up the slack and cover for the grieving employee. The group interdependency will suffer as a result, which could lead to lower levels of productivity. Cross and Warr (1971) found that work groups designed according to skill level were more productive. Work groups, by definition, work together as a group, and if a grieving employee is in a work group with those of similar skills, it is likely that they would be able to cover for him during his bereavement. Putnam (2000), as cited in Vivona and Ty (2011, p. 107), stated that “Social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups” (p. 18). As such, the loss of the bonds of a workgroup, as may happen when an employee is grieving, can have an effect on the productivity of that work group.

Rees et al. (2003) also state that peer pressure should influence all group members to higher levels of productivity. However, the group members may not place peer pressure on the grieving employees, but instead may pick up the slack for them until their energy and motivation return. This, however, may also lead to lower overall group productivity, as the individual members now have added workloads. It has also been suggested that communication and cooperation are vital parts of work group productivity (Deluga, 1994). A grieving employee who has withdrawn and unmotivated will be seen

as uncooperative and uncommunicative by the other members of the group, thus leading to lower levels of productivity within the group.

Group cohesiveness. Cross and Warr (1971) proposed that work groups created based on the skills of the employees, will be more cohesive, as well as more productive and satisfied. In addition, teamwork and sharing of information is likely to lead to higher levels of productivity. de Jong, Ruyter, and Wetzels (2005) hypothesized that support from managers and other teams in the workplace, as well as communication and cooperation will increase group collectiveness. Group cohesiveness can be enhanced by the grief of one of its members, in that the members may bond together in support of the grieving member (Averill, 1968). However, in other cases, in a work group in which one member has experienced a significant loss, communication will be interrupted, as the grieving team member will likely be absent for bereavement leave, and may be less likely to participate in group social activities, at least at the beginning of the bereavement period. Although group members might cover for the bereaved employee to reach goals and continue to be more productive, this assistance may not lead to higher levels of group cohesiveness. Group members are likely to resent the bereaved employees and expect them to get over it and get back to work. Cohesiveness will also suffer if the remaining employees or managers give little support to the grieving employee. The alienation and despair that the grieving employee feels will do little to add to the cohesiveness of the group, and may instead decrease it.

Satisfaction with the work group. A positive work environment can benefit the organization as well as its employees. A positive work context, with “democratic and collaborative leadership, organic structures, and group membership from diverse

functional backgrounds” can lead to more satisfied employees (Valentine, Godkin, Fleischman, & Kidwell, 2011, p. 357). Cross and Warr (1971) posit that more cohesive work groups will be more satisfied, at least in terms of their relationships with their colleagues. Group satisfaction is also concerned with group members’ satisfaction with the task or project which the group has been assigned (Mason & Griffin, 2005). It considers the group’s work environment, working conditions, and rewards, as well as their satisfaction with working with the other group members. When a grieving employee is in a work group, the level of group satisfaction will likely be changed, depending on the grieving employee’s energy level, motivation, and self-esteem. Their satisfaction with the task or assignment may not change, but the working conditions and work environment will reflect how each member works within the group, as well as how they work together to get the job done. Employees who lack motivation, energy, and self-esteem, will reflect on the group as a whole and could lead to a negative rating of the group. Shaw, Duffy, and Stark (2000) also examined the relationship of interdependence on group satisfaction, and found that task interdependence was a predictor of group satisfaction, suggesting that employees who are grieving will affect the interdependence of the team negatively, leading to lower satisfaction of the group.

Work and Organizational Level Outcomes

Loss of productivity. Organizational productivity is a product of individual and group productivity, and as such will be reflected by the levels of productivity in both individual employees and also that of groups. As grieving individuals are likely to be less productive than they were prior to his grief, their lower productivity will most likely affect the organization negatively, depending on the employee’s position in the

organization. Likewise, the individual's productivity level will affect the productivity of the group, which will, in turn affect organizational productivity (Fleishman, 1965). The work-life balance literature offers some insight into the discussion of organizational level work outcomes of productivity, absenteeism, and turnover. When employees are grieving the loss of someone close to them, their work-life balance suddenly becomes skewed. Organizations which have flexible schedules, compressed work weeks, or other initiatives to allow employees more time with their families, have been seen in a positive light by those employees (Grover & Crooker, 1995; Lingard, Brown, Bradley, Bailey, & Townsend, 2007). These elements of some high-performance work systems inspire employees to higher levels of commitment and trust in their organization, which, in turn, lead to improved performance by employees (Lingard et al., 2007). Alternatively, organizations which do not provide grieving employees with these positive initiatives are more likely to see these employees being less productive throughout their grieving process, leading to lower levels of overall organizational productivity.

There may be some instances in which a co-worker has died, and the whole organizational unit may be touched by the death. In cases like this, the organization will be much more affected in terms of productivity. If safety measures were not in place or were abused, the surviving employees may try to hide behind organizational policy. In other cases, employees may be more likely to place blame on the deceased, instead of looking for a way to improve productivity in the future (Sinclair & Haines, 1983). In addition, individual members of the organizational unit will each be experiencing their own reactions to the loss and will be grieving in many of the different ways which have been discussed throughout this paper. Group cohesiveness may be stronger, as the

members of the work group are all experiencing the same thing together, although with dissimilar approaches.

Loss of creativity and innovativeness. Twenge and Campbell (2008) describe creativity as “a way for organizations to ensure that they remain flexible and are able to successfully handle their changing competition” (p. 869). Out-of-the-box thinking which is indicative of creativity comes in part from allowing the mind to explore new and different methods, ideas, and processes for work. Employees who are experiencing grief from a traumatic life experience are not likely to possess the creativity to explore previously unexplored realms until they have recovered sufficiently to allow their mind to function normally again. Jehn, Rispens, and Thatcher (2010) suggest that creativity, especially in work groups, is relevant for organizations, and depends to a large degree on interpersonal interactions. If an employee is experiencing social isolation as a result of bereavement, there are likely to be fewer interpersonal interactions, which may stifle the creativity of the bereaved employee, the work group, and, depending on the employment level of the grieving employee, the organization as a whole. In addition, the grieving employee is often less able to concentrate on the task at hand, robbing him or her of a portion of his or her ability to be creative. Shalley (1991) found that productivity goals, creativity goals, and personal discretion have an effect on employees’ productivity and creativity. If employees are grieving and are not able to set realistic goals, their level of creativity may be lowered. Ray (1987) suggests that there are four tools for creativity, all of which may be affected by grief. One tool, confidence in one’s own creativity, is likely to be hampered by the grief experience, as employees may have lost their self-confidence

during the grieving process (Valente, 2003). Another tool, precise observation, may also be diminished by the lack of ability to concentrate during grief (Hazen, 2009).

The ability to ask penetrating questions, a third tool, may be reduced by the distractions of the loss for a grieving employee. And absence of judgment, the fourth tool, may not be possible during the grieving process, as bereaved individuals often lack the curiosity to put judgment aside (Ray, 1987). Shalley (1991) has suggested that certain conditions are necessary for creativity: ability, intrinsic motivation, and cognitive activities. In grief, although employees may still possess the ability for creativity, their internal interest or motivation for the task probably suffers, and the cognitive processes necessary are also most likely not able to be accessed. In some cases, according to Lubin (2002), "Creativity is the process of putting one's thoughts and feelings--including the feelings of despair--into abstract expression" (p. 2). Lubin suggests that when someone is in despair, their creativity may actually help to pull them out of that despair. In that case, the contributions of the creativity of individuals in the organization may actually be able to bring new and innovative ideas to the organization instead of having them stifled by grief.

Reciprocal Relationships

In addition to the above outcomes of the grieving process and the psychological responses, it is possible that there is a reciprocal relationship between some of the variables. For example, employees who are strongly committed to the organization and highly involved with their job may feel less depleted and more motivated to perform their work. A high level of productivity in the workplace may, in fact, lessen the grief experience for them, especially if they gain high levels of satisfaction from their work

experience. If their job fulfills their needs, they are likely to be satisfied with that job, no matter what is going on with them on a personal level (Korman et al., 1981). Their level of organizational commitment may also provide them with a higher level of self-esteem, thus lessening their alienation and despair. Additionally, a cohesive work group may provide employees with higher levels of self-esteem and work motivation after the loss of someone close to them.

Possible Moderating Influences

There are several variables that are proposed to moderate the relationship between the employee's experience of grief and the valued work outcomes. I propose the following to moderate this relationship.

Economic well-being. It is proposed that the level of economic well-being of the grieving employee may influence the relationship between the psychological reactions to grief and valued work outcomes. How people cope with traumatic life events is largely determined by "the resources that are available to them and the constraints that inhibit the use of these resources" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 158). The amount of financial resources available to the grieving individual will influence their grief experience (DiGiulio, 1995; Murphy, Johnson, & Lohen, 2003). Although both wealthy and poor individuals will experience grief at the loss of a loved one, the wealthy will have better access to some resources which can assist them in coping with their losses (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). Tomarken et al. (2008) found significant correlations between levels of complicated grief and the amount of current annual income in a study of caregivers of cancer patients. The wealthy are able to afford psychological counseling, whereas those with low levels of household income are less likely to be able to pay for such assistance.

In addition, Carson and Carson (2007) suggest that loss of financial resources will have a significant effect of an employee's well-being. Money has a large influence on the stress level of individuals, and the financial loss of one person's income can be devastating (Lee, 2007). If the deceased had no savings, insurance, or other economic assets to be left to the bereaved, and the employee is left with a large financial burden, then the grieving employee will have the additional burden and stress of being the sole earner in the family. In addition, if the deceased was suffering from a long-term illness, all funds may have been depleted during the illness, leaving survivors to face severe economic hardship (Al-Gamal & Long, 2010; Egbert, Koch, Coeling, & Ayers, 2006). Conversely, if the employee's level of economic well-being after the grief-causing experience is high, then it is likely that the reaction to grief will have a smaller effect on the valued work outcomes, as the financial burden is not present. In a study on grief of parents whose children who were diagnosed with cancer, Al-Gamal and Long (2010) found a negative relationship between level of income and scores of worry and isolation. If the deceased left a significant amount of money to the grieving employee, he or she may also feel lower levels of stress regarding the ability to pay for the various expenses involved, although there may be the added stress of managing the inherited assets (Lee, 2007; Lynch, 2010). Diener (1984) has suggested that one's level of income is positively related to one's level of happiness.

Social support network. Employees who are grieving are experiencing stress, both in their personal lives, and also when they return to work. As such, they have to find a way to manage the stress induced by their bereavement. One way to do this is to access their social support networks. In his Conservation of Resources Theory, Hobfoll (1989,

2001) theorized that individuals tend to protect their resources when they are threatened. Chen, Westman, and Eden (2009) interpret Conservation of Resources Theory to say that the more resources people have, the more resources they have access to. The grieving process causes a high level of stress, which in turn depletes resources. Stress, in turn, causes individuals to expend resources in order to alleviate the stress. When resources are depleted, stress is then difficult to manage. “The need for the surviving partner to continue to participate in everyday life placed great strain upon the internal resources of the surviving partner” (Rodger et al., 2006-2007, p. 107). People have limited resources and when they are in danger, they attempt to protect them.

One method of dealing with stresses resulting from bereavement is the use of social support. “As defined by Caplan, social support systems consist of enduring interpersonal ties to a group of people who can be relied upon to provide emotional sustenance, assistance, and resources in times of need, who provide feedback, and who share standards and values” (Rabkin & Streuning, 1976, p. 1017). The search for meaning in the death of a loved one is often embedded in the social support network of the survivor. Those with a strong network of social support may be less likely to feel that they need formal counseling services to assist them with their grief (Bergman & Haley, 2009). Positive interactions with one’s friends and relatives can have a positive effect on bereavement (Vanderwerker & Prigerson, 2004). Friends and relatives can show their support in a myriad of ways to assist the grieving employee in returning to a normal life: “contextual factors (e.g., level of social support available to the mourner) can also promote or impede healthy grieving” (Neimeyer, 2006a, p. 14). Social support systems evolve over time, sometimes appearing before the death of a loved one, and sometimes

after. In one case, the husband of a cancer patient was unable to acknowledge his anger at the situation in the beginning, but over time, through his social support resources, he became more able to express his feelings and begin to support his wife (Hottensen, 2010).

A year after the shooting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and members of her staff, survivors gathered in a candlelight vigil to remember those who were lost and to support each other as they tried to understand and extract some meaning from the event and its aftermath (Nagourney, 2012; Rothfeld, Zimmerman, & Yadron, 2011). The survivors felt they were members of a community, and banded together to support each other. In the workplace, this support can come from coworkers with whom the employee has built some type of relationship. Employees often talk with their co-workers about work related problems and get feedback on how others have managed various problems. They may also talk with family members or friends outside of the work environment and gain insights about various methods of coping with stresses. Egbert et al. (2006) suggest that social resources such as assistance from professionals as well as friends and family can strengthen personal resources and reinforce an individual's feelings of self-efficacy.

Edwards (1980, as cited in Ford, 1985, pp. 5-6) described three facets of social support: informational support, structural support, and emotional support. Informational support comes from the sharing of information from individuals in a person's social network. The employee may wish to talk about the deceased person's life, how the death occurred, or simply how the bereavement process is proceeding. The support network will encourage the sharing of this information, both to gain knowledge about the employee and to allow him to share his feelings. This type of support allows the employee to feel a part of a network of communication and mutual trust. Structural

support comes from the structure of the organization and its leaders, who provide information about the rules and norms of the system. The employee's supervisor will provide some level of support by informing the employee about what resources are available for him to utilize during the bereavement process. Emotional support is derived from the relationships that one has (i.e., parents, significant other, friends, children, coworkers) and the trust that is developed over time. This type of support can lead bereaved employees to believe that they are esteemed and valued, and that those with whom they share a relationship care about them and what happens to them. However, this support must be maintained when the employee returns to work and throughout the grieving process:

“This period – beginning one to two weeks after the loss – coincides with our attempt to resume the demands of traditional roles at work and in the home, at the very time that social support by neighbors, employers, and relatives is withdrawn... The lack of ongoing rituals of support for the long period of readjustment complicates this process for many North Americans”. (Neimeyer, 2006a, p. 12)

Coping skills. “How do I cope with all that I have in my life and then have what is necessary to help others cope as well?” (Garfield, 1990, p. 191). Some people seem to recover more quickly from the death of a loved one than others. This recovery may be due in part to the coping skills that the employee possesses (Billings & Moos, 1981). Pearlin and Schooler (1978) defined coping as “any response to external life-strains that serves to prevent, avoid, or control emotional distress” (p. 3). Research on work stress and coping has been ongoing for many years, with scholars examining different facets of

work stress, psychological strain, coping styles, coping strategies, and types of support systems, and their relationship to various work outcomes, including higher productivity, lower turnover, and higher levels of organizational commitment.

Several conceptualizations of coping have been discussed in the literature. Coping implies that one can manage stress effectively. “[C]oping responses are presumed to reduce distress and/or improve one’s situation” (Menaghan, 1983, p. 114). As one way to cope, employees who are grieving the loss of a personal friend or loved one will tend to protect themselves by whatever means possible, in order to relieve some of the stress they are experiencing (Kleiber, Hutchinson, & Williams, 2002). They may not be able to function at full capacity, may reject threats to their remaining resources, and may be withdrawn, as they attempt to cope with their loss. Billings and Moos (1981) found that coping resources influenced the relationship between a negative life event and how the individual functioned. If employees possess strong resources, they will be able to function better than one who does not have many resources. Humor is one coping resource indicated to help those who are suffering (Aldwin, 1994), and is associated with lower levels of grief and depression (Lund, Utz, Caserta, & de Vries, 2008-2009).

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) proposed two types of coping: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping is concerned with “an objective, analytic process that is focused primarily on the environment” (p. 152), attempting to discover how to solve a problem or a dilemma. Emotion-focused coping is focused on reducing the stress level, managing the emotional impact, and attempting to remove oneself from the negative event. Rotondo and Kincaid (2008) suggest that problem-focused coping may work better than emotion-focused coping to manage stress

in the workplace. In a similar vein, Stroebe et al., (2005) discuss coping with grief using the dual process model of coping with bereavement, a concept developed previously. In this model, individuals vary their method of coping between two coping methods: one focuses on processing the loss of the individual, and the other focuses on restoring one's world without the deceased.

Other similar conceptualizations of coping include task oriented, emotion oriented, and avoidance oriented coping strategies (Endler & Parker, 1990), disengagement-oriented coping (Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003), active and passive coping (Brown, Nicassio, & Wallston, 1989), constructive and dysfunctional or destructive coping (London, 1997), and task-oriented coping and lifestyle coping (Lyne, Barrett, Williams, & Coaley, 2000), and palliative coping and direct action coping (Fortes-Ferreira, Piero, Gonzalez-Morales, & Martin, 2006). Schnider et al., (2007) found that avoidant emotional coping was a predictor of complicated grief, suggesting that if employees are using emotion-focused coping or avoiding the issues involved with their grief altogether, they are more likely to experience long-term consequences of their grief and be less able to overcome their loss. Other researchers have suggested that using more than one type of coping strategy can have a synergistic effect (Dewe & Cooper, 2007; Lazarus, 2000; Patry, Blanchard, & Mask, 2007; Skinner et al., 2003), and that combined coping strategies may be better overall than only one type. It has also been suggested that coping is situation-specific, and the type of coping best utilized depends upon the situation (Wong, 2002). As seen here, coping has been researched in many areas and has been seen to have multiple dimensions.

Regardless of which type of coping is used, employees will attempt to make sense of and cope with their loss (Neimeyer, 1999). “Reflection and contemplation are necessary for the surviving partner to reconcile his or her changed circumstances” (Rodger et al., 2006-2007, p. 116). In his book, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl (1959) discusses the difficulties he experienced as a prisoner in a concentration camp during WWII, and how he and other prisoners coped with the torturous experiences there. He presented the view that when everything has been taken from a person, that person copes by focusing on the inner person, which cannot be taken away. He and his fellow prisoners became more introspective and philosophical, attempting to discover the real meaning of life and of their suffering. In this case, some of the relief from their experiences came from being together with others and sharing the experiences. In the case of the September 11, 2001 attacks, many of the survivors have come together to share their grief and their experiences (Dickinson, 2011; Greenberg, 2002). In addition, memorials to the victims of both natural disasters and human-caused disasters, such as the 9/11 attacks, the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, Pearl Harbor, and many others, can help survivors to make sense of the event and “come away with a sense of understanding, peace and hope” (Dickinson, 2011, p. 11). As exemplified in the grieving process, when something we value greatly has been taken away, we learn to question our values and learn what is of true value to us. “[T]he main thrust of life following the sudden and unexpected death of a partner is how a person adapts to unsolicited change.” (Rodger et al., 2006-2007, p. 120)

Organizational Support Systems. Grief is costly to organizations: an estimated \$75 billion according to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) (Tyler,

2003). The study of stressful life events such as grief can shed light on possible intervention programs designed to reduce the effects of stress in the workplace (Bhagat, 1983). Many organizations offer little in the way of support for employees who experience grief as a result of the death of a close family member or friend (Hazen, 2008). The work organization is the place where employees spend a large portion of each day, and as such, it becomes an important part of the employee's life, as well as a part of his identity (Charles-Edwards, 2009). When the workplace provides a supporting environment for employees, they are more likely to provide the employer with their own support, loyalty, and commitment to the job. When a loss is ignored, disregarded, or rejected by the society in which the grieving person exists, grief is disenfranchised (Doka, 1989). Support from others is necessary for healing (Hazen, 2008; Livingston, 2010). If the workplace community refuses to acknowledge the relationship (e.g., unmarried couples, homosexuals) or disregards the loss due to social stigmas (e.g., AIDS), then it is difficult for the bereaved employee to heal, thus prolonging the grieving period and its interrelated behaviors and cognitions. In such cases, workers may stifle their grief, putting it aside and not acknowledging it, at least in the workplace (Eyetsemitan, 1998), which may lead to negative health consequences and more absenteeism.

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) has a strong relationship to employee performance in the workplace. POS is the belief by employees that "the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being" (Eder & Eisenberg, 2008, p. 55). As employees feel valued by the organization, they develop loyalty to the organization and have a more positive attitude toward their work, attendance, and

punctuality. Although grieving employees may be absent, late, or unable to work to their capacity, a high level of POS may stimulate them to overcome their grief in order to repay the support they perceive they are receiving from the organization.

“Helping the bereaved through professional help to place the loss in some perspective is likely to enhance concentration on the job” (Eyetsemitan, 1998, p. 477), thus assisting employees in alleviating the pain of their grief. As time passes and the grief lessens, employees will slowly recover from the effects of their grief, their energy will intermittently return, and they will gradually be able to return to their previous level of productivity (Neimeyer, 2006a). Palmer (2005) found that “compassionate treatment of grieving employees reduces turnover and increases productivity and the general health of the organization” (p. 3464). Meyer and Allen (1991) also found that organizational commitment was related with how well employees were treated by their supervisors and the overall organization. Organizations which have processes in place to assist grieving employees will gain loyalty, better motivation, and higher levels of productivity, as those employees will feel supported by their organization (Charles-Edwards, 2005). In addition, “Those who are helped to work through bereavement are more likely to be able to give support to colleagues who face major difficulties” (Charles-Edwards, 2005, pp. 156-157).

“Because of the effect a troubled employee has on productivity, which is after all the bottom line in business, many companies have responded with employee assistance programmes (EAP)” (Webster, 1998, pp. 3-4). EAPs are intended to assist employees with personal difficulties that may be affecting their work performance, including substance abuse, emotional distress, family problems, the problem of aging parents,

relationship problems at work, death or illness in the family, and other difficulties which may arise (Bhagat, Steverson, & Segovis, 2007). By utilizing these types of programs, organizations hope to provide their employees with assistance in order for them to “remain productive and satisfied despite stressful experiences in their work and non-work lives” (Bhagat et al., 2007, p. 224). An EAP can assist the grieving employee by providing mental health benefits and counselors, legal counsel, financial planning, and even funeral planning. Assistance with these issues can help employees to cope with their grief and return to the workplace with the feeling that the organization does support them, thus making them more likely to remain loyal and committed to the organization.

A recent story in the New York Times illustrates this. A young mother of a three month old boy lost her husband to a fast-moving cancer, and found herself in need of assistance, as she was now the only income earner in what had been a two-income family. Her company provided employees with an EAP, which she took advantage of, for counseling and child care (Nargi, 2012). As Shepherd (2006) stated, “If you take care of people, they’ll take care of profit” (p. 109). “Other staff may also notice and be affected by the quality of care they observe for their colleague at such a time” (Charles-Edwards, 2009, p. 428), thus affecting other employees besides just the grieving employee.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I discuss the methodology that I utilized in the study and include a description of the sample and justification for their choice. There is a detailed discussion of the use of qualitative design and how it is appropriate for this study. There is a description of the interview process and the steps involved.

Qualitative Research Design

Because the experience of grief will be different for each person, this study adopted a qualitative design. One's closeness to the deceased, how suddenly the death occurred, or whether there have been previous events that might exacerbate one's grief experience, can all make the grief experience unique to each person. Qualitative methods are thus the best choice for this research because qualitative methods allow the researcher to listen to the views of the research participants (Kvale, 1996). They "are employed when there is genuine interest in understanding the emic (or culture-specific) roots of a phenomenon" (Bhagat, Segovis, & Nelson, 2012). In addition, they are unsurpassed for research problems where the variables are unknown and need to be explored (Creswell, Hanson, Plano, & Morales, 2007). It is my goal in this dissertation to explore the nature of the reality of grief, as it is experienced in the workplace. I use a constructivist epistemology (Amis & Silk, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), in which it is assumed that each interviewee experiences his or her own reality and expresses it in his or her own way. Because grief is socially constructed, individually experienced, and highly contextualized, in-depth interviews would best inform the theoretical questions. In addition, qualitative research "provides a narrative of people's view(s) of reality and it relies on words and talk to create texts" (Gephart, 2004, p. 455). The use of interviews is

“based on the idea that an interview is a dialogue between the interviewee and the interviewer, during which it is possible for the researcher to enter into a relationship with the informant and to better understand his or her view of life and description of the phenomenon being studied” (Leufstadius, Eklund, & Erlandsson, 2009, p. 23). Interviews allow for a rich description of the human interactions which are involved in the grieving process, and allow the researcher to explore the depths of feelings of the participants, which cannot be done with other methods. This assists us in understanding the meanings of those interactions and how they contribute to organizational outcomes. Sullivan and Bhagat (1992) suggest that the relationship between organizational stress, performance, and satisfaction be examined using a qualitative design, since this may provide a richer and more vivid description of the employee’s experience of stress. Because of the similarity of context, this study uses a qualitative design as well.

Kvale (1996) suggests two metaphors for interview studies – that of the miner and that of the traveler. The miner is mining for information by digging into the meaning of the subjects’ responses to the interview questions, in order to get at the deeper unconscious implications of the answers. The traveler is on a journey which may or may not have a specific defined destination. On this journey, the traveler meets and converses with various inhabitants of the lands, asking questions, gaining their stories, and then reconstructing their stories when he arrives home, in order to share them with others. The journey leads to new knowledge of the lands and inhabitants, as well as a possible change in the traveler as well. This study both mines for information in the interview process in order to dig deeper into the meanings of the grief process for the employees, and also creates reconstructions of the travelers’ stories in order to provide a map for future

research into the phenomena discovered. Although there are categories delineated in the interview questionnaire, these categories are only guidelines for the interview. Qualitative methods permit the researcher to approach the fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis, and allows the researcher to study the selected issue in depth and detail, which contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of the qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002). “The purpose of an in-depth interview study is to understand the experience of those who are interviewed, not to predict or to control that experience.” (Seidman, 1991, p. 1)

Respondents

The respondents for this qualitative investigation are individuals who are employed in various organizations in a large city in the mid-south region of the US. They are over the age of 18, have experienced the death of someone close to them in the past two to three years or so, and were employed at the time of their loss. As this study is examining the effect of grief in the workplace, the participants all needed to be employed at the time of their loss, so that their memories of their grief experiences in the workplace could be elicited. Although each individual’s experience of grief will be different, and grieving may continue for a lifetime, the two to three year time frame is used to assist with memory recall, because as time lapses, memories fade (Ihrmark, Hansen, Eklund, & Stodberg, 2012), and studies have suggested that the impact of the grief experience has faded considerably after two to three years (Lehman, Wortman, & Williams, 1987).

The individuals were recruited through a recruitment letter placed in my church newsletter. In addition, announcements were made at church functions and fliers were posted in the church hallways and on church bulletin boards. Church members were also

asked to refer possible interviewees to me, or to provide them with my contact information if they felt that they would like to participate. The minister had recently been the leader of a grief recovery group, whose members would be potential participants as well. The minister also provided information to the members as to what the research was about and provided them with my contact information. Information was also provided to potential participants as to the purpose behind the study, and the methodology of interviewing which would be used.

I then contacted each of the individuals, either by telephone or by email, to set up an interview. I met with each participant in a location which was comfortable for them, often in a private room of the church, or in a library, and provided them with a statement of consent, explaining the purpose of the study, that their participation was voluntary, and that their confidentiality would be ensured. In addition, given the subject matter of the study, information was provided to the participants for possible counseling if the interview became too stressful, or if they needed individual counseling for their grief. Each interviewee signed one copy of the consent form for me, and was provided one copy for their records. Twenty individuals agreed to participate in the study. Twelve of the participants were known to me to some degree, as they attended the same church, and eight of the participants had never met me. They worked in a variety of types of organizations however the majority of them were employed in the educational field, both elementary and secondary schools as well as the university setting. The descriptions of these participants and their demographic characteristics can be found in Tables 3 and 4, and their type of institution is in Tables 5 and 6. Table 7 summarizes the relationships of the deceased person to the employees.

Table 3

Participant Demographics

Name	Gender	Age range	Education Level	Marital Status	Socioeconomic Status
Barbara	Female	45-55	Grad classes	Divorced	>\$60,000
Gwen	Female	55-65	Master's degree	Divorced	\$40,000-60,000
Lauren	Female	35-45	Master's degree	Married	>\$60,000
Sue	Female	65-75	Bachelor's degree	Married	>\$60,000
Suzanne	Female	55-65	Almost Bachelor's degree	Widowed	\$20,000-40,000
Vivien	Female	45-55	Some college	Married	>\$60,000
Ginger	Female	45-55	Associates degree	Married	>\$60,000
Wanda	Female	55-65	Master's degree	Married	>\$60,000
Wanda	Female	55-65	Master's degree	Married	>\$60,000
Marti	Female	55-65	Bachelor's degree	Married	>\$60,000
Thelma	Female	65-75	Bachelor's degree	Divorced	>\$60,000
M.T.	Female	45-55	College degree	Widowed	>\$60,000
Carol	Female	45-55	College degree	Married	>\$60,000
Gayle	Female	55-65	Master's degree	Married	>\$60,000
Katy	Female	45-55	I have two master's degrees	Divorced	>\$60,000
Dee	Female	65-75	Post-graduate studies in university and speech pathology	Married	\$40,000-60,000
Barbara	Female	35-45	Master's degree	Single	>\$60,000
Julie	Female	25-35	PhD	Separated	>\$60,000
Natalie	Female	45-55	3 master's degrees	Married	>\$60,000
Maritza	Female	55-65	PhD	Married	<\$60,000

Table 4

Participant Demographics Summary

Characteristic	Category	Number
Gender	Female	20
Age range	25-35	1
	35-45	2
	45-55	7
	55-65	7
	65-75	3
Marital status	Single	1
	Married	12
	Separated	1
	Divorced	4
	Widowed	2
Education level	Some college	2
	Associate's degree	1
	Bachelor's degree	6
	Master's degree	6
	PhD	2
Socioeconomic status	Other	3
	\$20,000-40,000	1
	\$40,000-60,000	3
	>\$60,000	16

Table 5

Participants' Work Organizations

Participant	Type of organization
Barbara	Financial services
Gwen	Government
Lauren	Elementary school
Sue	Elementary school
Suzanne	Retail sales
Vivien	Medical
Ginger	Medical
Wanda	Elementary school
Wanda	Elementary school
Marti	Government
Thelma	Airlines
M.T.	Elementary school

Table 5 (continued)

Participants' Work Organizations

Participant	Type of organization
Carol	Design services
Gayle	Paper products
Katy	Elementary school
Barbara	Non-profit
Julie	University
Natalie	Secondary school
Maritza	University

Table 6

Type of Work Organization Involved

Type of institution	Number
Financial services	2
Government	2
Elementary school	6
Retail sales	1
Medical	3
Design services	1
Non-profit	1
Paper products	1
University	2
Secondary school	1
Total organizations	20

Table 7

Deceased Relationship

Deceased	Number
Parent	7
Sibling	4
Grandparent	2
Spouse	4
Son-in-law	1
Friend	1
Pet	1

The semi-structured interview questionnaire was developed after an extensive review of the grief literature and the theoretical framework influencing the research questions. Some questions were revised and additional questions were added after discussions with a committee member with expertise in qualitative studies and design. The interview schedule focuses on five categories of interest, along with demographic information. These categories are: 1) Job and organization information; 2) Description of the traumatic life experience; 3) Description of the organization and its reactions to the traumatic life experience; 4) Description of the employees' return to work; and 5) Valued work outcomes. These categories ensured that I covered the areas of interest and provided as clear a description of the grief experience as possible. They helped organize the data into categories which could be more easily managed and examined. The interview guide is provided in Appendix A.

In-depth interviews were conducted with each of these individuals, in order to gain some understanding into how some people experience grief in the workplace, how the workplace manages the bereaved employee's experience with personal grief, and how that whole grief experience influences the work organization. All interviews were

scheduled at a time and location convenient for the participants. They lasted from about 35 to 90 minutes, and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. I followed the order and format of the interview guide, however follow-up questions were often utilized in order to clarify or allow the participant to expand on the topic or to continue with any relevant points of interest. Notes were also taken during the interviews to add to the context and the richness of the spoken work, as well as to add any non-verbal cues from the subjects. A sample interview is included in Appendix B.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In this chapter I discuss the method of analysis, the results of the study, and provide a detailed discussion of the analysis and its use in qualitative research, specifically in the research in this study. Following Ryan and Bernard (2003), I treated the text of the interviews “as a window into human experience” (p. 259). I examine the experience of grief in the workplace to determine if there are any common experiences of the interviewees. I have provided tables to point out the specifics of the relationships discovered in the analysis. There are also descriptions of the common themes discovered in the data, a discussion of various differences which appear and possible reasons for them, and other information which appeared as a result of the analysis. The results of the analysis are presented in charts and tables, as well as in selected portions of the interviews which best illustrate the themes discovered.

Following the approach of Smith, Thorpe, and Lowe (1991), as the interviews were completed and transcribed, they were read completely, in order to allow some ideas to emerge. The personal notes which were taken during the interviews were also examined, in order to explore the feelings and experiences of the interviewees, which may not have actually been addressed in the verbal answers to the questions. The information in the interviews was then reflected on, and an evaluation of the content of both the questions and the participants’ answers was conducted. At this point, some concepts began to emerge from the data which were seen to be in common across two or more of the participants. I used first-order codes to identify the themes in terms of the participants’ language, which were then written down and identified as possible overarching themes (Gioia, Price, Hamilton, & Thomas, 2010). As the interviews

continued, more information was added to the database of themes, ideas, thoughts, and feelings which had previously emerged. After completion of interviewing and transcription of all of the interviews the interviews were reread and examined for these themes, and were searched for other possible themes which may have been missed. Then the common themes were examined to detect the nature of patterns emerging and some possible relationships between the constructs in the original model were developed and redefined into higher order codes (Gioia et al., 2010). The full transcript of a sample interview is provided in Appendix B. Each interview was between 35 and 90 minutes, and transcription of the interviews took about approximately one hour for every ten minutes of interview time. Therefore, it took close to 150 hours to conduct the interviews and transcribe them all verbatim. Additional time was then utilized in examining and analyzing the transcripts for information which would provide the data for this dissertation. Below is a discussion of these themes and connections.

The respondents described their workplace in various terms, from “Cold, quiet, we all sit in cubicles, the directors, not managers, but directors, all have offices around us” (Gwen R.), to “Wonderful. It’s very laid back. They try real hard not to be real corporate. It’s very personal” (Vivien W.). Thelma R. described the working environment as “My personal small area is very friendly, and rather cooperative”, and Barbara S. said, “Clean, (laughter), we’re a corporate environment, so we’re not, business formal, but business casual. Definitely conservative company, not a very demonstrative group, definitely business oriented.” The pace of the workplace varied also, being described as fast-paced and hectic to cyclical or comfortable. Most of the participants termed the

demands as stressful and busy with high expectations, and time management seemed to be the biggest constraint on them in the workplace.

In describing the situation in which someone close to them died, many of the respondents described the relationship they had had with the deceased in great detail. It was obvious that each of these individuals had been greatly affected by their loss. Wanda W. spoke about her father: “Last summer my father died. He was 92 years old. It was not a traumatic death, but he had moved into an assisted living home, and just simply lay down and died, so it was not a traumatic event. And it was a little unexpected, even though it was expected.

Several participants described a more traumatic event with their loss, for example:

My grandmother died in January of 2011. She was the person in my family to whom I was the closest. She was 93. She was on her way to dinner and a play – she lived in a retirement community – and she was getting on the bus and fell off the stairs and hit her head (Barbara S.).

The closeness of the respondent to the deceased was a large part of why they were so strongly affected, and was often described with tears, but also often with humor. When I asked them how they have grieved for their loss, a variety of answers were given. Many mentioned crying, taking care of business, writing poetry, drinking, keeping busy, remembering them on special days (e.g., holidays), or doing yoga or exercise. M.T.C. said she fell apart, and prayed and cried to help get her through it. Barbara B. said: “I had one day of a long crying jag, and since then, I, you know, I miss her.” Barbara B. was a bit proactive in her grieving as described here:

“At first, I remember, it was shock, even though I knew she was going to die. There was a sense of shock that she was gone. That lasted, um, maybe a couple of months. Then there was um, a little anger. I looked up the stages of grief, and I was following right along. I don’t remember what the third one is, but I’m sure I’m in it.”

Much of their grief was diminished by activities to help them through, such as meditation, seeking counseling, staying busy and talking with family. Barbara B. tried to stay connected with her mother: “Started crocheting, needlework again, that I’d been doing all along. She did all kinds of cool stuff like that. I’ve been trying to let my artsy side go more.” Wanda J. described her coping this way:

“I wrote a poem for her, I have a picture of her at my house, at school we planted a tree for her, and so I sit under that tree sometimes – there is a bench there with her name – and on my school wall I have a picture, several pictures of her, and she wrote me a note, that said I’m a terrific teacher or something, and that’s there.

Carol F. said: “Continuing on with what I did. I’m not a person who just curls up into a ball and is isolated. When I came back, because I’d been gone for a week, I came back and went back to work.” Dee B. had a different view on how she coped with the loss: “I developed a friendship with a friend of mine, that I don’t think a friendship would have developed if it hadn’t been that my husband died and her husband was in the process of having an affair with someone, so we both had this sadness in our life.”

Barbara S. reported: “I am really fortunate. I have a very dear friend who went with me to Maine to bury my grandmother, and we spent a week up there, going to all the places that Grammy and I used to go.”

Psychological Reactions

Depleted energy. Most of the interviewees reported no change in their energy levels, either psychological or physical; however a few of them did report lower levels of energy, especially in the first few weeks after their loss. Lauren B. remarked: “Yes. Like, trying to get into an exercise routine, or just playing around with my kids, that definitely decreased a lot.” Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005) suggest that during the grieving process, one’s body is trying to recover, and needs rest and time to rejuvenate before one returns to normal. Thelma R. stated: “Yeah, I find that I’m having to push myself to do whatever it is – if I lay in the bed, sometimes I get up early, but I find that I get up, I just lay in the bed, and lay and lay and lay, and not really want to get up. I really have to push myself to get through it.” Alternatively, work can sometimes be welcomed as a distraction from the grief (Charles-Edwards, 2009), and some participants even reported higher levels of energy, in part explained by the lower levels of stress since the deceased was gone. Ginger W. reported: “I think I have more energy – there’s not that cloud just over you, knowing that he’s in there and he’s up and down, and you never know when you’re gonna get a phone call.” The grief process may involve both lower and higher levels of energy alternatively as individuals progress through the recovery process.

M.T.C. stated:

“Oh, no (laughter) I’m still bouncing all over the place. There’s one thing that I didn’t realize had happened, but when I talked to Kathy, the school nurse, she goes, well, we all noticed that you had kind of lost your bounce. You were not as bouncy. And I go, yeah. And it feels weird – some days I just sit there like, I don’t know what I’m going to do. I was just blank. I got my bounce back now... I

couldn't wait to get into 2012, and just say, okay – this will be my first year without him in it, but, which is kind of bad, but on the other hand, I had already gone through the first Thanksgiving without, first Christmas without, all of that, so I didn't have all of that to bring into this year, and just for me, the emotional – it was like I'm in a new year, I have crossed some boundary lines. I could leave all that back there, and that for me was just the most wonderful – I felt like January I started being me again.”

And Barbara S. summed it up well when she said: “Yes, yeah. My attitude, outlook, perspective, I'm a much better place.”

Low work motivation. In some employees who are grieving, the meaning of work has disappeared, and that meaning is what motivates one to come to work (Sievers, 1986). Some of the subjects reported a lack of motivation to return to work after their loss. Sue M. said: “Well, no, my motivation to go back the first day was certainly not there, and even probably that first week it was hard to make myself go.” The loss of someone close can cause employees to rethink the purpose of their job and its place in their life (Charles-Edwards, 2009). Thelma R. stated:

“Yeah, it has. In fact, I really think after this happened, I am really thinking more seriously about retiring, because, I think the interest is gone. I don't know if that would have happened if my sister had not passed, but I do know that after I got back from her funeral, I thought, you know (laughter), there are some other things I could do with my time.”

Most of the employees in this study, however, reported that their motivation to go to work or to do their work did not change with their grief. It seemed that their work ethic

was such that they simply returned to work without thinking about allowing themselves to stay at home and grieve.

Alienation and despair. Despair can be an indicator of difficulty adjusting to bereavement and may include feelings of emptiness, apathy, a lack of enthusiasm, and a sense of pessimism about life (Bernard & Guarnaccia, 2002). Some individuals who have difficulty in coping may have feelings of despair (Puddifoot & Johnson, 1995). Most of the participants in this study stated that they had no feelings of alienation or despair in the workplace upon returning to work, but instead were met with a lot of support throughout the work organization which helped them to get through the loss. However, a few subjects did report feeling alienated or isolated upon their return to work, although no one categorized it as despair. After losing her brother subsequent to losing her parents, Lauren B. reported: “Yeah, I would say yes. Definitely. Because I didn’t know who to talk to, because it was such a – it wasn’t like, oh, he died of cancer. And people would ask, and I would be like, I don’t know how he died, and so, that makes people uncomfortable. Because then I think they go and they think, because he was young, so they think, maybe he committed suicide or maybe it was something awful, which it was, but nobody likes to talk about that.” The feelings of despair are apparent in the experience reported by Gayle T., who said:

“Oh, walking in that first day, no matter how much I believe that these are my friends, walking in that first day was very much an out-of-body experience, because I didn’t want to talk about it... And my feelings of responsibility, boy did that change – that changed a lot. I think my concerns and my fears and my discomfort came from me. It was strange – I had a very difficult time talking on

the phone... And I think I was more fearful about how uncomfortable I was going to be than how uncomfortable I was. It's like walking into a party with a lot of strange people – it's just getting through the threshold, and then once you're over the threshold, things are better.”

Loss of self-esteem. A loss of one's sense of self or self-esteem is often an effect of the grief experience, as one may have lost one's identity as a spouse, a parent, a sibling, or even a child (Barski-Carrow, 2010; Worden, 1991). Marti H. stated: “it finally dawned on me that I'm an orphan. Even if you're 60, you're still an orphan.” Lauren B., a school counselor, talked about feeling lost and not a part of the group, as she grieved over her brother: “I think I kind of, I definitely went into myself, with the adults; not with the kids, but with the adults.” The majority of subjects interviewed reported no reduction in their level of self-esteem. However more than one interviewee reported a much higher level of self-esteem after their loss. There may be a developing sense of pride in having survived and moved forward (Charles-Edwards, 2009), as M.T.C. found after her husband died:

“Yeah! I think my self-esteem has gotten better. It's like, wow! I can do this. I mean at first, I didn't know what I could do. I mean, I was terrified. Self-esteem, what is that? But after the second part of the school year, crossing over, getting into January, 2012, it, yes, it has, I just feel like, wow! I can do this! And I'm doing this! And look at all this stuff I've done. On one hand it feels silly, because, okay, this is paying bills, and keeping track of insurance, and keeping track of stocks and what-not, but if you've never done that, so yeah, it can make you feel

good, like, wow! I can do a bunch of things – I can do this, I can do that. So you do, you feel good. It's all different, but yeah.”

Wanda W. pointed out possible higher self-esteem as an advantage of inheriting money from the deceased: “A little bit, in that I have a little bit more financial security. I don't know if that's self-esteem at all, but it's there.” Similarly, in part because of the inheritance left her by her grandmother, Barbara S. stated that “I'm a different person than I was.”

Individual Level Work Outcomes

Job involvement. Employees who have high levels of job involvement identify with their jobs and care about them (Blau & Boal, 1987). Although a few subjects reported low job involvement prior to their grief experience, the majority of the participants reported that they were very involved in their jobs prior to their loss, with some saying they worked late if necessary or performed community service outside of work which reflected on their work organization. Dee B. stated: “I was involved. I understood, I enjoyed the learning experience of investments.” Carol F. showed her involvement by participating in outside activities which reflect on her job: “It's pretty much an 8-5, Monday through Friday kind of job. I do a lot in the community beyond that, like the Chamber of Commerce I belong to, and some other design organizations that support our industry.”

At times, one's understanding of life after a loss is somewhat at dissonance with how they perceived their job prior to their loss (Hollon & Chesser, 1976). Most of the participants reported no perceived change in their job involvement as an effect of their grief experience. However there were a few instances reported. Dee B. showed a change

in her level of job involvement, as she stated: “I started not caring as much.” The importance of a job in one’s life, as described by Griffin, et al. (2010), changed for Gayle T., who said: “I’ve put boundaries on it, I’ve protected myself a little more, I have a feeling that I am as important to that job, who I am, as that job is to me.” Similarly, Carol F. showed a loss of interest in her job and its importance in her life, as she said: “I probably was moving a little slower, contemplating life and death, more so than just bringing in new business and making clients happy and stuff like that.”

Job performance. In terms of their job performance, all of the participants said that they were very productive on the job prior to their grief experience. However, for many of them, their perception of their own performance changed after their loss. Gaertner and Ruhe (1981) have reported that high levels of stress can affect one’s job performance negatively, and that seems to have been the case. As described in Murphy, et al. (1999), the stress of grief can affect job performance, as described by Lauren B., who stated: “I did what I had, I did the bare minimum.”

A few interviewees reported higher levels of productivity at work after their loss, mostly because of a perceived lower level of stress as a result of the reduction in responsibilities involved with the deceased. Katy S. stated: I think I’m more productive now, because I don’t have to deal with all of that.” Shepard, Clifton, and Kruse (1996) suggest that flexibility in organizations may influence productivity in employees. Barbara S. mentioned this type of flexibility in her organization, as it allowed her to take off extra time after her grandmother’s death: “Yep – I’m much higher, and I’ve got some good accomplishments behind me since I returned.”

Job satisfaction. The expectations of the job should match the reality of the job in order for one to be satisfied with the job (Griffin, et al., 2010). Most of the interviewees in this study reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their job. This is reflected in the interview by Vivien W. before her loss:

“Very satisfied. I’ve worked a lot of jobs in my life, and truly, this is the only place that I really feel like they see the whole person, they understand that I’m also a daughter, a wife, a sister, a mother. And they know that for me to be a good employee, everything has to be okay in those other parts of my life, and they’re fine with that. I’ve actually been penalized in the past at jobs for being home with a sick child, and things like that, and we just don’t have that where I work.”

However, if the expectations do not match the reality, then one is less likely to be satisfied with the job. In this study, two interviewees reported being less than satisfied with their jobs prior to their loss. Dee B. stated: It was okay. I wasn’t all that satisfied, but I knew I could do it. It was a job. It wasn’t a career, it was a job. Additionally, when asked how satisfied she was with her job prior to her loss, Barbara S. said: “Not very. I was pretty darn sure they were going to fire me. And I was not really sure that outside of losing the paycheck, that I really cared.”

Bhagat (1983) proposed that stress may have a negative effect on job satisfaction. Upon being asked if her job satisfaction had changed after her loss, Lauren B. reflected this, when she said: “I think the rest of that school year, it did.” Wanda J. also mentioned the negative effects of her grief on her job satisfaction, before she felt that she had recovered from the shock of losing her teaching partner of five years: “Probably just for a

little while at the beginning of it, because of not having her as my partner, but I'm still satisfied with it.”

Some employees, after their loss, reported higher levels of job satisfaction after their loss. For example, Barbara S. experienced the positive results of her organization supporting her through her grieving process, and said: “Absolutely. I am grateful to be there.”

Organizational commitment. According to Meyer and Allen (1991), organizational commitment consists of a feeling of connection with the organization, along with a sense that the benefits of staying are higher than the benefits of leaving, and a sense of obligation to the organization. In this study, the majority of the participants reported being committed or very committed to their organizations. For example, Thelma R. reported being committed to both her job and her organization: “Very committed – I think I am very proud of the work that I do, and I think I tend to still be.” Katy S. said: “I'm committed to the mission of the organization. I always have been.”

Bhagat et al. (1985) suggested that negative stress can affect organizational commitment. Many of the participants reported no change in their level of organizational commitment as a result of their grief. However there were a few individuals who did report changes, both positive and negative. On the negative side, for example, Lauren B. reported that prior to her loss, she was very committed to her organization. But after the death of her brother, she said that her commitment level changed:

“It actually did, to some degree, because before, I was always part of that group that was offering support to people, and then afterwards, I kind of felt like, well, I didn't really get much support. So how, I didn't really understand the difference. I

was like, why, what's, what happened here? Why is it not even, why is there not the same support for everybody, I guess, so it did change.”

Similarly, Dee B. said: “Yeah, because I was thinking ahead. I knew I wanted to get out, so yes, my level of commitment changed. I did the daily work, but I wasn't as concerned. I don't know, I just didn't really care. I'm doing my job, I'm getting paid for it, but this is not where I'm going to be, a year from now.”

On the positive side, however, there were some participants who reported higher levels of commitment to their organization as a result of their grief experience. The most positive report came from Barbara S., who said:

“It's definitely changed. Especially, it's not just perspective, coming out of treatment and working my recovery program, but I was gone for two months, and they paid me and they held a spot for me, and my team stepped up and, my company's been very good to me. So I hear about them being, always getting top 100 most ethical what-not, we win all these awards, and I'm like, okay, who paid somebody, but no, it's real. It's real. My company, we do well by our people and I'm grateful to be there.”

Similarly, M.T.C. reported: “I can't imagine leaving them. And my family in Atlanta said, why don't you move back here, and I say, no, no, this is my perfect job.”

Absenteeism and turnover intentions. Barton (1992) suggested that the trauma of grief may lead to higher levels of employee absenteeism. Similarly, Bhagat et al. (1985) suggested that when employees experience extreme instances of job stress, such as that caused by the loss of a loved one, employee absenteeism is likely to rise. However, only a few of the interviewees in this sample reported any difference in their

absenteeism during their time of grief. Dee B. reported that she was absent more often after the loss of her husband than before, as she had to deal with circumstances surrounding her children and her house. Lauren B. stated that she was afraid she would lose her job if she took off more days than allowed, and she needed her paycheck, so she was not absent from work more than she had been previously. Most of the participants expressed the view that their work ethic indicated that they should go to work, and so they did.

In this study, most of the interviewees stated that they were not likely to leave the organization prior to their grief experience. For example, Vivien W. said: “they’re going to have to change the locks to get rid of me.” Similarly, Carol F. stated: “It would have taken a lot to get me to leave that job.” However, difficulties of a job may influence employees to consider leaving their job, as Ginger W. reported: “Well, I don’t know. I mean, I had thought about leaving, just cause, I mean, it was the stress of everything was compounding, and stuff.” Vardaman et al. (2008) suggest that the level of perceived risk associated with leaving one’s job may influence turnover.

Several studies have reported the effects of stress, such as that experienced with the loss of someone close, on employee turnover (Begley, 1998; Bhagat, 1983; Grant & Wade-Benzoni, 2001). After their grief experience, most of the interviewees reported no change in their turnover intentions, but a few did. On the negative side, Lauren B. said referred to the stresses of her job in considering whether to leave or not: “I definitely thought more of, wow, it would be great to have a break, or it would be, and like, am I in the right job, because of how emotionally demanding the job can be sometimes.” And when asked whether her likelihood of leaving had changed, Dee B. stated: “Yes, it did

change, because my whole life changed. And the job changed too.” Barbara S. had an interesting perspective on turnover intentions, as a result of how the company treated her after her loss: “Well the part that’s changed, is that I think other companies would be lucky to have me. I’m finding that I have value that’s independent of the job that I do – I take it with me. But I am not likely to leave my company. And that’s not because I’m afraid that no one else will have me, it’s because I have a different perspective.”

Group Level Work Outcomes

Group productivity. How well group members work together is likely to influence their productivity (Rees et al., 2003). Group members whose personalities mesh well enough for them to get along at work are likely to be productive on work projects. White and Locke (1981) suggest that group productivity may suffer as a result of stresses in the group, such as anger or frustration. Additionally, the stress of grief may cause group members to become frustrated with each other and thus may lower productivity. Although it was expected that see the level of productivity of the employees’ work groups would decrease during their time of grief, as a result of grieving members’ inability to fully participate in group activities, in most cases this was not the case. No one reported seeing any change in the productivity of their work group as a result of their own grief experience. Several interviewees reported changes in the sensitivity and concern of their coworkers toward them, but none of them perceived any changes in group productivity.

Group cohesiveness. Group cohesiveness is a function of the skill levels of the group members (Cross & Warr, 1971) and support from management (de Jong et al., 2005). When an employee is grieving, group members provide social support for their

grieving coworker, which could increase the cohesiveness of the group as a whole (Averill, 1968). A few participants in this study mentioned changes in their work group as a result of their grief. Dee B. said: “Yeah, the ones over at the other office had to do things that I, yeah, they were more cohesive, I think. M.T.C reported:

“What I did notice is that my attitude really changed, January. And so, I was more back to normal, and I wasn’t being sad as much, and my whole outlook was just very positive. I was joking, kidding around, that kind of stuff more, and all the teachers were doing that, were reciprocating. And so I think everybody felt good that I more or less, got my bounce back.”

Group satisfaction. Valentine et al. (2011) suggest that satisfied work groups may come from a positive work environment of collaboration. Mayer and Dale (2010) suggest that a lack of coordination of information among group members may lead to lower group satisfaction; employees who are grieving may not be communicating with their group members as a result of their grief. Jex and Thomas (2003) maintain that “the most immediate reaction to negative perceptions of one’s work group is a drop in job satisfaction” (Jex & Thomas, 2003, p. 161). The grief of a group member, which causes negativity in the group, could affect the level of group satisfaction. However, in this study, none of the participants reported any perceived changes in the level of satisfaction of their work group as a result of their grief experience. Lauren B. wasn’t sure how her grief affected her work group and expressed it this way: “No, I don’t, it’s like I, since I was kind of in my own little, I didn’t have that team, I don’t think I really was in touch with how it would have impacted them.” Sue M. offered an explanation for the lack of changes in her work group: “No, but see, my workplace didn’t work as a team. They

worked as individual entities in each classroom, so we needed to be congenial and we needed to share and that sort of thing, but their productivity never was dependent on me in any way, nor mine on them.”

Work and Organizational Level Work Outcomes

Loss of productivity. As individuals’ productivity normally affects the productivity of those around them, spilling over onto the productivity of the group and the organization (Fleishman, 1965), it was expected that some participants would notice a change in the overall productivity of their work organization as a result of their grief. However, no such changes were reported in this sample of individuals. Employees who are critical to the organization will affect it much more than employees at lower levels. It is possible that these particular employees were not in a position to have much effect on the organization at all, as indicated by Barbara S.: “Nah, nah, we’re like an ocean liner, and I’d be like a barnacle (laughter) – uh-uh.” Similarly, Katy S. stated: “My productivity has changed. I have no control over anybody else’s.”

Loss of creativity and innovativeness. Creativity, specifically in work groups often will affect the creativity of the organization as a whole (Jehn et al., 2010). As such, the creativity of an organization should be affected to some degree by the individuals in the organization. A climate for creativity and innovation in an organization is strongly influenced by the leaders in that organization (Isaksen & Ekvall, 2010). The effect of grief on employees may manifest itself in social isolation of employees, leading them to stifle their own creativity around other employees, as well as a lack of ability to concentrate on creating new or innovative projects. However, no differences were reported by the subjects in this study for the organizational level work outcomes

creativity and innovativeness. For these particular subjects, it seems, their grief did not flow over into the organization, but instead the employees were able to contain it or cope with it in the workplace. Gwen R. reported: “Those were not relevant factors.” Some of them felt that their own creativeness was changed by their grief experience, but that it did not affect the workplace as a whole. When asked if she saw any change in the level of creativeness or innovativeness of the organization, Lauren B. stated: “well, for my part, yeah, for my piece of it, but everybody else seemed to be kind of doing their stuff.”

Similarly, Sue M. reported:

“Not of them, maybe in me. Well, I’ve always been a very creative teacher, and I don’t like to do the same thing every year. I like to do something new and different. And that year, I just took things out that I had done in the past and I just relied a lot on kind of a replay of what I’d done before. Because I just didn’t have the creative juices to do that. That takes energy and enthusiasm, and I just didn’t have that. I think when I came back in January I was okay in terms of doing that kind of thing. I think that Christmas was personally really hanging over my head, and when I came back in January, it was kind of like, whew! Now this is a new start.”

Moderators

Economic well-being. In assessing the level of economic well-being of the interviewees, I asked them their level of household income, within a \$20,000 range, that is, with levels of below \$20,000, \$20,000-\$40,000, \$40,000-\$60,000, and over \$60,000. The majority of the subjects reported household income levels of over \$60,000, indicating that they were at least somewhat well off, with some ability to pay for

counseling if necessary. The availability of resources, especially financial resources, is likely to help individuals cope with traumatic life events (DiGiulio, 1995; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Murphy et al., 2003). There were a few interviewees who reported that the increase in income as a result of their inheritance from the deceased allowed them more freedom in what they did. Wanda W. stated: “I have a little bit more financial security. I don’t know if that’s self-esteem at all, but it’s there.” Similarly, M.T.C. said:

“Well, my income is \$40,000, but I couldn’t live the way I live without all my husband’s money.” She also stated: “You always hear that widows get this money, and they, a lot of times they buy furniture. And you go, why would they spend all that money? Yeah, there’s a good reason why they do that. They don’t have to think about the person they’ve lost, and um, this is his chair, and this is his whatever.”

Barbara S. found help with an addiction as a result of her inheritance: “Two months of treatment and \$30,000 is an awful lot for a girl. And it was money that Grammy left me, that allowed me to do that, which, yeah, I’m very grateful around that.”

Social support network. Conservation of Resources theory suggests that individuals will tend to protect themselves and their resources when under stress (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). Egbert et al. (2006) suggest that social resources such as assistance from professionals as well as friends and family can strengthen personal resources and reinforce an individual’s feelings of self-efficacy. A strong social support network can assist individuals in their ability to cope with the stresses of life, both in and out of the workplace (Rabkin & Streuning, 1976). In all of the cases in this study, the subjects had high levels of social support, from both friends and family members, and

also from coworkers. Most of them reported receiving a lot of sympathy, compassion, understanding, and time off from their organizations, their supervisors, and their coworkers. Many of their coworkers also provided them with social support in terms of providing them with food in the first few weeks after their loss, allowing them time to grieve at work, and giving them a hug, or letting them talk in order to process their grief. Many of the subjects also reported receiving flowers from the work organization. M.T.C. reported social support from her coworkers and the parents of her school students:

“They started getting food and everything to the house immediately – what do you need? I know my yard was mowed. Yeah, they came and mowed my yard – I guess a couple of my students came and mowed my yard. And one of my neighbors down the street – he’s a lawyer – came and mowed it, probably the first month or so.”

Gayle T. even reported support in the way of donations to the fund that was trying to find a cure for her son-in-law’s disease:

“Oh, yeah, I mean, there’s a PNH group, and donations were made, and in September that year, he died in July, and in September of that year, they had their first walk for PNH, and it was a memorial to Bob. And everybody here, I mean, I went away to New York for five days, and there were big collections made, I took a huge chunk of money with me.”

On the negative side, however, Wanda W. did not feel like she had any social support from her supervisor, but only from her organization: “Nothing, except sending the flowers – and sending the flowers was not only her, but she sent them on behalf of the school.” Lauren B. reported a lack of support from her coworkers:

“I guess I wish people were more comfortable talking about grief, because you either get the people that they have experienced grief or a bit of grief, so then you feel like you end up taking care of them, or then you get the people who have not experienced a loss close to them, and so they say all the dumb things.”

She also reported a lack of support from her supervisor: “I mean, she sent a beautiful card and things like that, but after I came back, no one asked how I was doing. Like, emotionally, you know, I got a hug, and that was kind of, we’re back to business.”

Coping skills. Most of the coping skills of the interviewees in this study revolved around being rather practical and just moving forward after their loss, reflecting the concept of emotion-focused coping of Lazarus and Folkman (1984). Barbara B. reflected the practical side of her coworkers, as they simply allowed her some privacy and alone time until she was ready for more active support. She stated that on her first day/week back at work:

“I just kept to myself and just kind of dug in to whatever I had going on, and I had plenty of things to keep me busy. And, I didn’t go to the lunch room a lot, and people would come by and ask how I was doing, you know, that kind of thing. I think they just were respectful of my privacy, cause they knew, know me well enough to know, I’d get out in the middle if I wanted to be in the middle.”

She also said: “I was fortunate because I’m not in a cubicle, like some of the people, and I have a door, and you know, if I felt like I was losing it or needed some time, I could shut the door, and people respected that.” Several other interviewees reported the need to just cope on their own until they were ready to share more with their coworkers as well as friends and families. Avoidance coping (Endler & Parker, 1990) was used by

Lauren B., who stated: “Now that I think about it, I think I kind of just shoved it down. I didn’t really take care of it, I just kind of put it aside, because it was, it was not helping me do my job. Because if I thought about it too much then I, I think I would be even less effective.” Ginger W. seemed to utilize emotion-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984):

“I don’t think that I tried to think about it too much, because I think just keeping busy helped a lot, as far as getting through the grief and things. I think just talking with my family, with my husband and my boys, was a great help.”

Some subjects reported feeling one way one day and differently on another day, coping differently, depending on how they felt, a dual-process coping strategy developed by Stroebe et al., (2005). Dee B. seemed to oscillate back and forth, using problem-focused coping, as she reported upon returning to work following the loss of her husband, and avoidance or emotion-focused coping at home:

“First thing I did, after I cleared off my desk, was to compose letters to friends I had around the world to tell them what had happened. I felt it was important for me to notify people. We had lived internationally, for five years, I knew people all over the world, and I needed to tell those people that my husband had died. Not for sympathy, but because I wanted them to know. So that was the first thing I did, as soon as I finished up my daily work, I started doing that. Writing letters, using the time at work to do it.”

She also stated:

“I was very stoic. I would fall apart afterwards. Like I said, I would get in the car and start crying, and finish crying by the time I got home so I could be strong for my children. So I wasn’t really grieving at work. I didn’t do that.”

Some interviewees stated that they were not sure how they were going to cope at work after their loss, and they were worried about what everyone would say to them. Thelma R. stated:

“I was timid, I didn’t know how strong I was going to be about it, and a little confused. I mean, when someone passes, the world keeps going on. And I’ve saved a voice mail – she called me when she was in the hospital, wanting to know when I was going to come see her in the hospital, and I’m probably never going to erase that voicemail.”

Similarly, Carol F. said:

“There were times when I would break down and cry, but I would usually just be sitting in my office by myself, and I would just compose myself, and get on with it. I really don’t have to talk with people on, or interact with them on a regular basis.”

Gayle T. stated: “Oh, at work, every morning in the car, I cried. I think I got lost in being a teacher.” When asked if her behavior was different than it had been before, she answered:

“Oh, yes. I have Zen moments. Seriously, in the grand scheme of things, there’s so much that’s not important. You realize by going through it, but I think you get so caught up in everything that you do, that you live in this moment, and I have this and I have that, and I have to do this and I have to do that.”

Some individuals simply were trying to survive until they could recover a little. Barbara S. reported: “I think I just tried to hold on to the earth, and make sure that I didn’t fly out into space.”

Organizational support systems. In this study, the focus was on how grieving employees were treated by their organization during their grieving process. Because employees spend much of their time at work, their work organizations become an important part of their lives (Charles-Edwards, 2009), in many cases, becoming like a second family. Many organizations value their employees and offer them support in various ways, such as perceived organizational support (POS), which is the employee’s belief that the organization cares about them (Eder & Eisenberg, 2008). Employees who believe that their organization supports them are more likely to be committed to their organizations and be loyal and productive employees (Charles-Edwards, 2005; Meyer & Allen, 1991). One support mechanism that some organizations offer to their employees is an employee assistance program (EAP), which employees may utilize in times of financial need, addiction recovery, family therapy, and grief support.

Although eight of the interviewees reported that their organization did not provide anything in the way of assisting their employees in their grief, nine of the participants reported some type of organizational support system in place to assist employees with various types of problems, either an employee assistance program (EAP) or some type of counseling referral service. After losing her teaching partner, Wanda J., an elementary school teacher, reported:

“It was the whole school that had the loss, not just me. We had a memorial service in our teachers’ lounge, with the teachers who were back, and we just did a little

group therapy. There was also a memorial service at the school for the children.

And it was a beautiful little ceremony with the children and with the whole school there – it was outside, in September.”

Barbara S. reported support from her company in terms of acknowledging the loss of her grandmother publicly, when they usually only did so for immediate family:

“One thing that my company does is they send out an email to all our IT folks saying, we want to tell you, it’s condolences to so-and-so. And they usually do it if it’s someone in the immediate family – spouse, child, or a parent. But my supervisor knew that Grammy was the person to whom I’m the closest, and she knows that my mother and I are not close. And when I saw the announcement, it said, Barbara was raised by her grandmother, or something like that. But it was important to me, for my peers to know that I had experienced a major loss.”

The time allowed by the various organizations to take off for bereavement varied widely. Most participants reported that their work organizations were very generous with their bereavement time, allowing and even encouraging their employees to “take as much time as you need”. Many reported that their supervisor told them to take all the time they needed, and not to worry about rushing back to return to work within a specific amount of time. Those who felt like the policy time was not enough mostly took extra days through their vacation or personal time. According to a Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM, 2006) report, the average leave time for bereavement is three days. Therefore, I expected to find that organizations in this study would allow three days off for bereavement leave and then expect their employees to return to work and be fully functional in a short period of time. It was surprising to discover that the majority of

these organizations allowed a very generous amount of leave, from one to two weeks in some cases.

Relationships

Originally, it was expected that certain relationships would appear in the data, which were listed in the tentative model in Section 2.7. The relationships in this study were examined to determine if they held true to the model. It was expected that the psychological reactions to the grief experience, depleted energy, low work motivation, alienation and despair, and loss of self-esteem, would affect the various valued work outcomes at the individual, group, and organizational levels. It was also expected that economic well-being, social support, coping skills, and organizational support would moderate these relationships. Additionally, it was posited that there might be some reciprocal relationships between the valued work outcomes and the psychological reactions to the grief experience. We will now examine these relationships in the interviewees in this study.

Lauren B. had depleted energy levels, both physical and psychological as a result of her grief, and reported having difficulty maintaining an exercise routine or playing with her children. She also stated that she felt alienated upon her return to work, because she didn't know who to talk to and she felt uncomfortable talking about her brother's death. In addition, she did not feel supported by her coworkers or her organization. She stated that because she did not get the support she felt she should have gotten from her organization, her level of organizational commitment was lower than before her grief experience. In order to cope with her loss, she sought out therapy, but she got frustrated with it as she did not feel that it was helping her.

M.T.C. reported an increase in self-esteem after her loss, as she discovered new skills and an ability to succeed at things she had never attempted before, because her husband had always handled them. She also found that, six months after her husband's death, that she had high levels of energy, feeling that as she crossed new boundaries, she could accomplish even more. As a result of her grief experience, she reported a higher level of commitment to her organization, and said "I can't imagine leaving them. And my family in Atlanta said, why don't you move back here, and I say, no, no, this is my perfect job." She also said she felt her work group was more cohesive, and realized that loss could happen to any of them and they made an effort to work better together. It is possible that her increased energy level and higher self-esteem may have resulted, in part, from the fact that she had such high organizational commitment, and that her work group was highly cohesive. After her loss, she had the economic resources to take care of her family's needs as well as her own, both material and psychological. She also reported high levels of social support from her coworkers and her organization as well, which assisted her in her recovery process.

Gayle T. reported feeling despair as a result of her grief experience, describing it as an empty feeling. She also reported a change in her level of job involvement, stating that "Yes. I've put boundaries on it, I've protected myself a little more, I have a feeling that I am as important to that job, who I am, as that job is to me." She also reported a lot of social support from her coworkers: "Obviously everybody picked up the pieces when I was gone." Her coworkers supported her in her mission to help to find a cure for the disease which killed her son-in-law, as they donated money for her to participate in a walk to support the foundation to find a cure.

Barbara S. had higher levels of energy, and said that her outlook and perspective had changed as a result of her grief experience. She reported that prior to her grief experience, she was not very productive at work and was mostly just getting by, but after her loss, her productivity changed for the better: “I am very productive. I have taken on initiatives that have benefitted not only my organization, but the entire enterprise. I’m all in. I’m on board.” She also reported a change in her commitment to the organization after her grief experience. She said that before her grandmother died, she was just picking up a paycheck, filling a chair, and giving lip service to things. After her grief experience, she realized the value of the organization and experienced the high level of support which it had provided to her. She was not likely to leave the organization prior to her grief experience because she didn’t think any other company would hire her. But after her grief experience, she saw a positive change in herself, which changed her perspective on the organization and showed that she had value to them, thus raising her self-esteem. It is possible that her high level of energy and self-esteem came as a result of having the organizational support which she received. She reported that the positive economic well-being in terms of the money that her grandmother left her allowed her to take steps to improve her life, both at work and away. In terms of her coping skills, one way that she coped with the loss of her grandmother was to get together with a group of her grandmother’s friends and spend time with them remembering the good things in her honor. The organization that she worked for extended a lot of support to her during her time of grieving. They allowed her time off to take care of business regarding her grandmother’s death and to address her addiction, while keeping her job open for her.

These results, as summarized in Table 8, provide some contradictory findings, in that alienation led to high turnover intentions on one employee and lower turnover intentions in another. In a similar vein, depleted energy led to lower organizational commitment in one employee, while the same reaction was indicated from an increased level of energy in another. However, it is possible that the moderating influence of social support or organizational support may be responsible for at least a portion of this difference.

Table 8
Relationships

Interviewee	Psychological reaction	Valued work outcome	Moderator
3	Depleted energy Alienation	Increased absenteeism and turnover intentions Decreased organizational commitment	Low social support Low organizational support
8	Alienation Low work motivation	Increased job satisfaction Decreased turnover intentions Increased group cohesiveness	Coping skills
13	Increased self-esteem Increased energy	Decreased turnover intentions Increased group cohesiveness	Economic well-being High social support High organizational support
15	Despair	Increased job involvement	High social support
18	Increased energy Increased self-esteem	Increased productivity Increased organizational commitment	Economic well-being High social support Coping skills High organizational support

It seems that in a few of these cases, the reciprocal relationships may hold. High levels of social support from friends, family, and coworkers may in fact influence the fact that M.T.C. felt increased levels of group cohesiveness. Her coworkers may have given her the support she needed and may have also seen that hanging together in tough times is a good way to support each other. M.T.C. also said she had high levels of organizational support, which may account for her decreased turnover intentions. In addition, Barbara S., who also had high organizational support, may have felt that that support warranted both increased productivity in the workplace and also a higher level of commitment to her organization.

In summary, in this particular sample of employees, it may be that the psychological reactions to the grieving process do indeed affect the valued work outcomes, especially when the moderators are taken into consideration. The goal of this dissertation was to come up with a model that captures the process of grief and how it affects both individual and work outcomes. After analyzing the qualitative data, a revised model is presented in Figure 2.

Revised Model

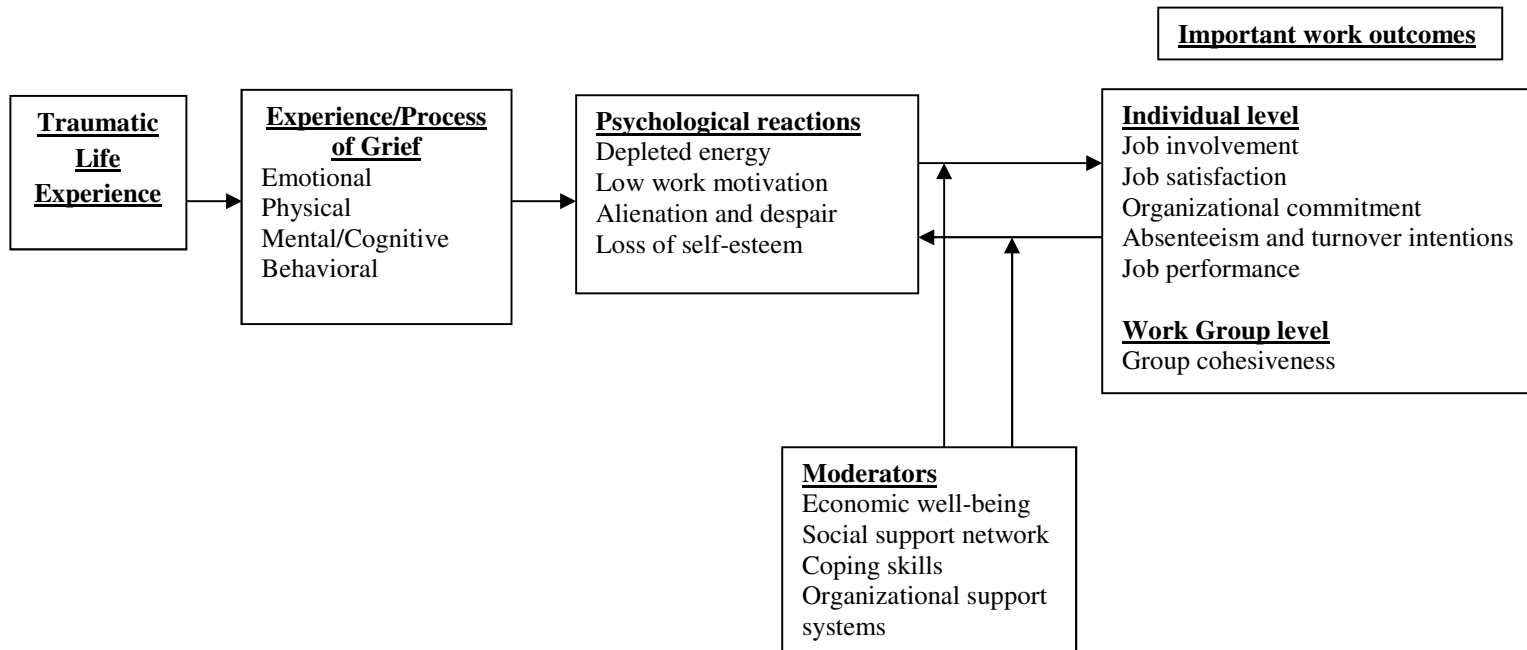


Figure 2. A revised model resulting from the qualitative investigation

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In this chapter I discuss of the results of this qualitative investigation and their theoretical and applied implications. *The Year of Magical Thinking*, by Joan Didion, a best-seller in the New York Times non-fiction list for over 26 weeks, had a profound impact on my thinking on the role of grief and its effect on the journey of people during their life span.

Effects of personal grief on organizationally-valued outcomes at three different levels, as explored in this study, lead to the following insights:

- 1) I found that the experience of personal grief does indeed affect the behavior and emotions of individuals who experience such grief, and also affects their colleagues and coworkers in their immediate work environment.
- 2) I also found that organizational support systems, from both colleagues and supervisors, are important in alleviating some of the adverse effects of the experience of personal grief.
- 3) It seems clear that effective coping skills and resources also aid the individual greatly. In addition, if the organization provides systematic employee assistance programs, then the experience of grief tends to affect work and organizational outcomes to a much lesser degree than would be otherwise be the case.

The interviews that I conducted allowed each employee to present his or her appraisal of the realities that evolved after the grieving process began. The day-to-day experiences of these individuals sketched before me during the course of these in-depth

interviews provided support for some of the widely held beliefs regarding how the process of grief affects individuals. However, some other findings relating to the role of social support were indeed surprising. It seems clear that in the present context, colleagues and coworkers appeared to be generous with their social support for the focal person.

The results of this research provide some evidence for the premise that the grief experience of employees does indeed affect work organizations in some areas. The influence of economic well-being, a good social support network, strong coping skills, and organizational support systems may go a long way in moderating the effects of grief on the workplace, as indicated in the revised model. Thus, in attempting to diminish the negative effects of employee grief on their work outcomes, organizations may need to revise their policies to provide more support for their employees, and perhaps encourage employees to provide support for each other through a more positive and caring organizational climate. In addition, instruction in coping skills could be implemented in training programs to assist employees in coping, not only with grief, but with many of the stresses of everyday life, as indicated in Bhagat et al. (1985). There is support for this premise in research on social support. For example, Egbert et al. (2006) indicate that formal resources such as might be provided through an EAP or through a professional counseling service can provide assistance to employees in coping with the stresses of illnesses or death. In a similar vein, Billings and Moos (1981) showed that coping and social support can assist in recovery from the loss of someone.

In this study, many of the subjects were employed as teachers in educational institutions, which vary in some important ways from other institutions. In most

educational institutions, teachers normally do not work during the summer months, so policies for time off from work are different from those of other types of businesses. Three of the teachers in this study lost someone close to them in the summer, and were only minimally affected by their organization's policies for time off. Additionally, in educational institutions, teachers are expected to be in their classrooms, teaching, five days a week, from 7:30 or 8:00 in the morning until 3:00 or 3:30 in the afternoon. For those teachers who lost someone close to them during the school year, they were limited by their classroom hours and had difficulties in scheduling the various tasks required after the loss of someone close. Most of the teachers who participated in this study also reported high levels of group support around their workplace, as teachers often covered a class for a colleague, or had discussions about how to handle a problem student. These types of support groups were not seen in any of the other organizations in this study, which might lead one to believe that educational institutions vary significantly in their group cohesiveness and social support within the organization.

In this study, I have investigated some of the effects of extreme life destabilizing events such as the death of someone close to the job incumbents. These events will affect employees at all levels of the organization; however, for employees who are a part of the top management team or in critical key positions, the effect is likely to be much greater.

In a recent article in the New York Times, Carey (2012) discussed grief in the context of depression, and mentions the possibility of grief being included in a list of disorders surrounding depression in the upcoming revision of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health. If this occurs, there will be implications for organizations and their treatment of grieving employees, as well as their insurance

policies provided to employees. Depression following the death of someone close is a common occurrence, and proactive organizations might do well to implement policies to help employees to cope with it within the organizational context.

A recent story in Time Magazine highlights the difficulties of dealing with the decisions involving aging parents, and the ensuing grief when they are gone (Klein, 2012). In this article, the author has to decide how to care for first his mother, and then his father as their health progressively worsens over the course of about a year. He describes his grief in making decisions which ultimately end their lives. These types of situations occur frequently, especially with baby boomers, who are still in the workplace, but whose aging parents need full-time care. Grief will continue to affect working individuals of all ages, and should be addressed by their organizations in a proactive manner. According to Tyler (2003), “HR’s quick, compassionate response to the sudden death of an employee’s loved one can boost worker morale, loyalty and – ultimately – productivity” (p. 54).

CHAPTER 6: LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This final chapter provides a discussion of the limitations of this study and their impact on managerial policies and procedures as well as on future research. It discusses some of the limitations of this study in the context of the qualitative methodology as well as the generalization of the findings to other research. As with any study, this study has several limitations.

Generalizability is an obvious limitation of this study. With any qualitative study, the sample size is small enough to render generalizability inappropriate (Miles & Huberman, 1994). However, it is hoped that enough light will be shed on the subject of grief in the workplace to assist future research studies in moving forward to provide a research context which may be generalized to other populations. In addition, it would be helpful to conduct studies in various industrial settings to see if there are industry-specific differences in grief's effects. For example, this study included several individuals from an educational setting. Educational institutions are quite different from typical business organizations in their average workday and type of employee. It would be interesting to conduct a study of teachers in various types of educational institutions to see if there are differences there. Universities are very different from elementary and secondary schools, which are also different from each other, and grief may manifest very differently in each of these settings. In addition, this particular sample was primarily female. It is probable that men will report many different answers to the interview questions than the women here did. There are other possible settings to which these insights may be applied as well.

Another limitation of this study is that all of the interviews rely on reflective observations of the subjects. Their memories of what happened, how they felt, and how

they were treated, are self-reported and thus subject to inaccuracy of recall (Paykel, 1974). In most of the cases, the deceased has been gone for over a year, thus requiring the interviewee to rely strongly on memory. In those cases in which the deceased has been gone for over two years, the memory is likely to have faded and thus the experiences may not be reported accurately by the interviewees (Ihrmark et al., 2012). In future studies, one way to counteract the self-report limitations would be to conduct the study in an organization where one would have access to the managers, coworkers, and socially significant others of the grieving employees. Obtaining information pertaining to the effects of personal grief of the focal individual from these sources constitutes multi-method based results. To the extent that they converge, the scientific validity of the results also increases. Bhagat et al. (1985) used this technique of collecting data from a confidant of the employee (who tended to be the spouse or a trusted colleague, etc.), and found convergence of findings lending more credibility of the effects of total life stress on work and organizational outcomes.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects and meaning of grief experienced by employees in the workplace, as well as how workplace policies and actions are impacted and also affect the grieving employee. In addition, a better understanding of the difficulties involved in the process of grieving, as experienced in the workplace is explored. The focus is on how individuals experience and cope with grief in the context of the workplace. Although there are no federal requirements for bereavement leave benefits, organizations may adjust their leave policy to assist grieving employees, offering more days off, flexible schedules, lower workloads, or other changes.

Compassionate leave policy offered by many organizations is only a starting point for assisting employees in overcoming the effects of their grief and returning to full productivity in the workplace.

This study contributes to an understanding of the factors that contribute to the job satisfaction of grieving employees, their level of commitment to the organization, and their turnover intentions, the work group productivity, cohesiveness, and satisfaction, and the productivity, creativity, and innovation of the organization. It also adds to our understanding of how the organization's policies and actions influence the grieving employees. "It is often under-estimated how a death at work can impact a manager from an emotional point of view. Many organizations still have not set up a supportive counseling or welfare service, which can result in the manager feeling overwhelmed, especially without the traditional front line support from HR" (Kinder & Cooper, 2009, p. 412).

Bereavement is a process that takes time, naturally and inevitably. It uses a great deal of emotional (and even physical) energy, some of which would otherwise be available for work. If bereaved staff are supported through the process as well as possible, they are less likely to be alienated from their colleagues and the organisation and generally demotivated... People managers need a 'whole-person' approach at the best of times, but certainly in times of bereavement. (Charles-Edwards, 2005. p. 175)

It is my belief that, although there are many organizations which provide excellent assistance for grieving employees, the majority of work organizations are severely lacking in their policies of bereavement for their employees. Barski-Carrow

(2010), Charles-Edwards (2009), Hazen (2008), and others have provided some specific guidelines for work organizations in how they can provide support for their employees who are returning survivors of grief. These guidelines and help books are valuable resources for managers, and should be a part of every manager's instruction manuals. However, these guidelines are not grounded in theory, and while helpful, do not do enough in advancing the study of grief in the workplace. In that light, I believe that there should be more qualitative studies aimed at bringing employee grief and bereavement into the forefront of management literature, as a process which affects organizations and which should be studied more rigorously. With more qualitative studies will come more knowledge about the process of grieving in an organizational setting, which can then be used for theory building and testing.

Thus, employers should acknowledge that although they may be difficult to deal with, these experiences will affect their employees in various ways and they should be prepared to assist their employees in coping with their grief and bereavement. Even though organizations are in business to make money, they should consider the human element of the organization as well. "The first responsibility of an employer is to the business. The health of a business, however, depends on the health of its most important resource, the employees" (Schoeneck, 2000, p. 16). However, it is the responsibility of the HR department of an organization "to assist individuals and organizations in preparing for and reacting to traumatic death so that the organization may respond to the situation with humanity and allow everyone to get on with their work" (Vivona & Ty, 2011, p. 100).

Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend (1974) suggest that more research needs to be conducted on the nature and effects of stressful life events. Korman, Wittig-Berman, and Lang (1981) researched stressful life events in professionals and managers, and although bereavement over the death of someone close was not considered, they found many of the same symptoms found in this study, suggesting that stressful, traumatic life events should not be limited to the death of someone close, but should be expanded to include other similar events.

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Appendix 1

Semi-structured interview form

Name:

Highest level of education:

Marital status:

Socioeconomic status/level of household income

Category I – Job and organization information:

1. What is your present position?
2. How long have you been in this position?
3. What are the general education and skill levels of the people with whom you work?
4. How would you describe your working environment?
5. What is its pace, demands, constraints, and resources?

Category II – Description of the traumatic life experience

6. Please describe a situation in which someone close to you died.
7. How close were you to this person?
8. Was this loss totally unexpected?
9. How long has it been since the person died?
10. How have you grieved over the person who died?
11. How did you cope with this loss, on a personal basis?
12. What types of emotions did you experience after the loss?

13. Physical health – before your loss, did you have any major health problems?
14. Have new problems arisen since your loss (e.g. problems sleeping, loss of appetite)?
15. Mental health – have you experienced any depression or similar feelings since your loss?
16. Have you felt sadness, guilt, loss of interest in everyday activities, loss of interest in your work?
17. Have you noticed that you behave differently now at work than before?
18. Is your level of energy different than before?
19. Has your motivation to go to work or to do your work changed?
20. Have you felt isolated or alienated at work?
21. Has your level of self-esteem changed?

Category III – Description of the organization and its reactions to the traumatic life experience

22. How much time did your work organization allow you to take off during this time?
23. Do you feel like this was enough time?
24. Did you inform your supervisor(s) about your loss?
25. If no, why not?
26. If yes, how did he/she react?
27. What, if anything, did he/she do to help you?
28. Did your supervisor(s) acknowledge the loss? How?

29. Did your supervisor(s) account for your grief when assigning projects and evaluating your work?
30. Did your supervisor(s) work with you to minimize the possible damaging effects of your grief on the workplace?
31. Did your supervisor(s) educate other employees about how they could respond to and help you?
32. Did you inform your co-workers about your loss?
33. If no, why not?
34. If yes, how did they react?
35. What, if anything, did your co-workers do to help you?
36. Does your organization have resources in place for grief counseling and recovery?
37. If so, what are these resources?
38. Have you ever had to utilize any of those resources?
39. If so, were they effective for you?
40. Which ones were most effective?
41. Why were they effective or not effective?

Category IV – Description of the employee’s return to work

42. What did you do that first day/week back at work?
43. How did you feel about going back to work?
44. Could you do your job as well as you usually did?
45. How did you handle your grief at work?

46. Did you feel like it was okay to grieve at work?
47. Did you feel the same way every day at work?
48. Did you feel like you needed to escape from home?
49. Did you feel like you needed to escape from work?
50. Did/do you feel like there was/is a personal or organizational time line for your “recovery”?
51. To help you cope with your grief and minimize its effects on your job, what do you feel you need/needed from your supervisor(s)?
52. What do you feel you need from your co-workers?
53. What do you feel you need from your organizational policies?
54. Were you absent from work more often after your loss than previously?

Category V –Outcomes – individual, group, and the work organization

55. How satisfied were you with your job prior to this grief experience?
56. Has your level of satisfaction changed?
57. How involved were you with your job prior to this grief experience?
58. Has your level of involvement changed?
59. How committed were you with to your organization prior to this grief experience?
60. Has your level of commitment changed?
61. How likely were you to leave your job prior to this grief experience?
62. Has this likelihood changed?

63. How productive were you on the job prior to this grief experience?
64. Has your level of productivity changed?
65. Has your workplace changed as a result of your grief?
66. How?
67. Did you notice any differences in your work group or your coworkers as a result of your grief?
68. Were they less productive?
69. Were they less cohesive?
70. Were they less satisfied with their work than before?
71. Did you notice that the organization as a whole was less productive than before your loss?
72. Did you see any change in the level of creativeness or innovativeness?

Do you have any additional thoughts on (how grief is handled/managed...) that we have not yet discussed?

Appendix 2

Sample interview

Name: M.T.C

Highest level of education: College degree

Marital status: Widowed

Socioeconomic status/level of household income: Over \$60,000. Well, my income is \$40,000, but I couldn't live the way I live without all my husband's money.

Category I – Job and organization information:

1. What is your present position?

I am a Spanish teacher.

2. How long have you been in this position?

This is my third year at this particular school.

3. What are the general education and skill levels of the people with whom you work?

Oh, they all have to have either college or a masters or above. I am part of the specialist teams, so I work with the music, art, the other language teacher that teaches Latin, so we all have, we're different from the rest of the teachers. Because we may teach and do things together, like I may do an art class in Spanish, or switch with the Latin teacher.

4. How would you describe your working environment?

Wonderful. I have a huge, wonderful bright room with sunny windows, it's not gray, I've got it all decorated the way I like it, I'm right across from the music room, which is really

neat, because sometimes I hear some really neat music, and she has a huge room with windows all across the front too. The school itself is a beautiful setting, and it's just a very nice place to work.

5. What is its pace, demands, constraints, and resources?

The pace depends on the day. Some days, I'll have only three classes, and some days I've got, maybe five classes. I have some mornings that are back to back to back, and then lunch, and then maybe an hour off, and then another back to back. And then I have some mornings that classes will start at 9:30 to 10:30, and I don't have anything until lunch, and I have maybe two after lunch, it varies.

Demands – well, you have to be there to teach the kids every day, keep track of what's going on, them, their families, anything that might be impinging on their performance in the classroom, plus when I have some time, like I do, being a specialist, I'll go see if any of the other teachers needs help, or we cooperate and work.

Constraints – none.

Resources – the books and the classroom and the projectors and the overhead, and just everything. Being with an independent school, I don't have to be going out and buying my own everything. When I want it, I get it and it is there.

Category II – Description of the traumatic life experience

6. Please describe a situation in which someone close to you died.

My husband passed away June 3rd of last year.

7. How close were you to this person?

Well, for 28 years, he was my husband.

8. Was this loss totally unexpected?

Very, very. We found out that he, he had started getting sick in October, with a wound that just kept on getting bigger and not healing. He had had, he had developed psoriasis about 16 years before, and it just kept getting worse, this past year (2010) the psoriasis started getting worse, and towards the end of 2011, this big wound developed, plus a lot of pain in the feet. And the doctors were saying, well, it's the psoriasis getting worse, and it's showing symptoms of diabetes, but they kept doing biopsies. He had a few more lesions, one right on his left leg, that looked like a shark had taken a chunk out of his leg, just a huge nasty wound. They finally were able, a biopsy in March finally showed this weird cancer. At that time we were given five to six years, with radiation and chemo, and right after they did the chemo, they started radiation, which helped some of the skin lesions, it helped that. It actually helped what was left of psoriasis. Apparently he had had this cancer already for 15 years. It's a weird cancer with psoriasis. It starts out as psoriasis, but it can, 3% of psoriasis cases can branch out to this cancer. It's very weird, and people don't know about it. Three days after his chemo, which was done at the end of May, 2011, he was hallucinating, and it just went downhill from there, totally. The cancer just exploded after that. And he had a brain tumor, so he couldn't remember, he didn't know where he was, he thought half the time he was on a submarine, or he had been on submarines, or he had been working with IBM. They had very nicely connected his office, his hospital room office, to the general workplace. I said, honey, what's outside that door? Oh, that's the office. Children from two different marriages, he thought they were little kids together at the same time.

9. How long has it been since the person died?

Almost a year, July 3rd will be a year.

10. How have you grieved over the person who died?

I started falling apart, three days after chemo, when he lost his mind. I would come to the hospital every morning. A friend would then come in the afternoon for a little bit to sit with him for a few hours, so I could run back home. And thank goodness this all happened, well, it was the end of school for me. I didn't go in the last two days of school. By then, it was just, you know how they do the awards ceremony, and everything was done. And I always leave my school ready, completely, to come in, so I was just going back and forth, and I was driving down Poplar, driving and praying and crying, and you know, what can you say, and just saying, give me strength to get through this.

11. How did you cope with this loss, on a personal basis?

Crying and bawling, I'm telling you (laughter), basically – that's what you do. And that's when you start thinking, okay, I've got to find out about insurance and all this other stuff, and where does he have all these things. And I had a big shock when I looked in the files. He was always a very meticulous person, and so, they were a disaster. And I hadn't realized that for the last few months that he had been at home, apparently, the tumor in his brain had already started affecting, so a lot of things were out of whack. What is still driving me crazy, is that somewhere, and I have turned everything upside down and inside out, he put our marriage certificate, and, what are those things, our passports, I can't find any of that. So even though all of those other things had been taken care of, this one file for this one insurance company, it's the only one that has to have a marriage certificate. And Miami doesn't know what they did with it. Misfiled it. It was very hard,

because the family didn't believe that he was so bad off, because I'd been telling them since the end of 2010, look, Kelly is not doing well. Actually yesterday, I went gardening with one of his sisters, and I was getting in the car, and she just hugged me and said, honey, I don't know how you do it on your own. And I said, how I did what? And she said, all that time you were with Kelly and we didn't believe you. Cause when we talked to him, he sounded fine. And I thought, that's just water, you just deal, you just have to have faith, whatever faith you have, whatever religion you have, you just have to have faith that God won't give you any more that day to deal with than you can deal with. You've just got to believe that. (laughter). That's the one thing that got me through. I was going to get through it.

12. What types of emotions did you experience after the loss?

Well, at first, I was just shocked. I mean, how? This man lives at the gym. He is 6'3". He is 63 years old, well, 64 by then. He lives at the gym. You can't tell how old he is by looking at him. How does this happen to someone who watches his food and exercises, and all this, and you get angry, and then you get like, okay – I don't want him to suffer, and then his mind is gone, and he's in la-la land and he doesn't have a clue. Thank God! I was so thankful that Kelly didn't know, because that to me was a big relief. Although now I couldn't ask him a lot of these questions that a wife should know ahead of time, because his mind was off in la-la land or on the submarines. But it was this big feeling of gratefulness that he didn't know, because he would have been one of these people who, if he knew he was dying and only had a few weeks, he would have been more stressed out and trying to see what all he could do, and he wasn't – he was happy as a lark, on a submarine or wherever he was. He didn't know. It was just basically anger, at first, and

then you're scared, terrified, what are you going to do? I guess, I'm trying to remember, all of this is such a jumble in my mind, it's hard to...I have just blanks where I don't really, you know, remember a lot. It's like I'm telling a story that someone else told me, kind of. I know that at the time I just felt totally terrified. I didn't know if I could make it on my own. I remember thinking, I make \$40,000 – I can't afford this house on \$40,000! My zoo of pets and animals, heck, let alone my child's university. I just didn't realize that he had so many things in trusts and in all this, that, and the other. He always teased me, oh, honey, if I die, you're just gonna be fine – oh, what does that mean? But until I started realizing what all was out there, I was scared. And then you just get this feeling – okay – I've got friends who are accountants, friends, who are lawyers, they've all said, we can help – don't panic. So I was like, okay, I can...As for everything else, I just thought, how hard can it be to pay your bills every month? When you haven't had to do anything for, we've been married for 28 years, and I'd been with him for another few years before that. I was a 22 year-old ding-bat when I met him. And I hadn't had to worry about anything financial for what, 30 years! That's a long time. I was angry and I was scared, and after that, you just get this feeling that, okay, you can deal with it. This is the way God wants it for some reason, and if I didn't have that feeling of, like I said before, God's not going to give you anything to deal with that you can't handle, and um, there's a reason for all this – I don't know what it is – but I've got to believe that there's a reason, that is what gets me through it. And before I was a teacher, I was a surgical assistant. I was an oral surgical assistant. And we did a lot of surgeries that involved a lot of bandaging and a lot of facial reconstructions and all this sort of stuff, and so I knew about bandaging. And with Kelly, that's what I was doing at home, before he even went

into the hospital in May, I was just bandaging constantly. And even in the hospital when I was there, so the nurses wouldn't have to do so much, I would say, hey, you know, I can take care of all this. Just give me all the equipment and I'll change the bandages constantly and all that. So I can't imagine someone who didn't at least know some medical background and bandaging and wound care and all of that. I remember one time, saying, God, I'm glad this is me and not somebody who doesn't know how to do this. And so that's one of the reasons I do believe that God gives you to deal with what you can, because you can. That's amazing!

13. Physical health – before your loss, did you have any major health problems?

No. I still don't.

14. Have new problems arisen since your loss (e.g. problems sleeping, loss of appetite)?

A good friend of mine who's a doctor, just after he died, she said, M.T. – you're just frazzled. And no, I hadn't been sleeping, you look frazzled. And I said, I don't know what to do, and she goes, you go to your doctor, get a checkup, I'll talk to her if you want me to. And they gave me Xanax, something, little white pills, which took the edge off of everything, which was good – I needed that. But it kind of put...it let me deal with...because by that time, I was having to deal with lawyers and accountants and all those piles of financial stuff that I didn't have any idea what to do with. And it was, and they were all wanting – come to the office, do this, do that – and I was frazzled. I mean, I was just so frazzled that I couldn't think, so these little pills were just mother's little helpers. They took the edge off, and let me think and deal with all that. I don't know if it was the pills, or just the stress of it all, I just, um, I didn't really start thinking normally

till November and by that time, and I'd been teaching school. And then one day I realized I couldn't remember what I taught at school today. I don't remember what I've taught, I know I've given, I had gotten through almost two quarters, and I thought, pills – phew! They went down the drain. That was it. And I just kind of started thinking again. And by that time I don't think I really needed them, but, yeah, those little pills came in handy (laughter).

15. Mental health – have you experienced any depression or similar feelings since your loss?

I think that was all then, that was all then. And you've got a child at home that needs to not see you crying and falling apart. So I would do all my crying and falling apart when I was driving up and down Poplar. And then after he fell apart, we cried a little bit together, but I would go over to some friends' houses and bawl, or go out and sit in the park and cry, and I just didn't want, my son would have been terrified that now I'm falling apart too. He's 16 now, he just turned 16, this April – he was 15 at the time. It's a hard age for a boy to lose his daddy, a very hard age. So I just didn't want him to see me fall apart. So that was hard. And um, you've just got to find a backbone in there somewhere, you know. When you've just been little old princess for years (laughter), it's, there's a backbone in there somewhere, you've just got to find it. I guess I did – I searched - seek and ye shall find – it was in there somewhere, I just never realized it was there. It was like, oh, wow! I can do this! So that's kind of been a reward, and like, I can do this kind of thing. Another thing to me that was difficult was not having any family here. My husband's family is huge, and after the funeral, before that, everybody, friends, family, they all realized that I wouldn't have access to money and all this to pay bills and

stuff for a few months, and so they are all wonderful people, and they sent in money and it was great, so that got me through, everything until then, I was able to get life insurance and all the other stuff. But it's as if, in their own grief, they forgot about me, and nobody remembered that I existed until about a week before Thanksgiving. And then, oh, my gosh! M.T.! And so, it was weird. And my family is in Atlanta, so I didn't really have anybody, like I said, I have a friend who's a lawyer and a friend who's an accountant, that helped a lot, but it's not like, all those files and all those things, I felt like I needed somebody there with me to say, okay, let's work on this. Let's do this. But I didn't have anybody who could spend some time with me like that, you know, and so, it's hard. I think if you do have family or people around, it would have been easier. That might be your next study – the effects of having family around (laughter).

16. Have you felt sadness, guilt, loss of interest in everyday activities, loss of interest in your work?

Guilt – you know I did feel guilt. And I still feel like I could have done more. And so, what can you do? I mean, on the one hand, maybe you should have, the last month he was home, all those wounds, I mean he would put those, finally the only thing, his feet were so swollen, that the only shoes that he could put on when he would get up, would be those Croc-type things, plastic, and after a few steps, a few minutes that he was up, I mean, he could take them and throw liquid out of them. Everything smelled awful, and half the time he was asleep, and I would stay with him for a little bit, or he was watching TV, and I was thinking I should have been up there more with him. I just felt like, I mean, at this point I was still teaching school, but I was thinking that when I was home I should have been up there more with him, or maybe I could have done more. And that's

the kind of guilt you feel – maybe you could have done more. But then on the other hand, you think, okay, you did this, you did this, and you did this, you still had a child, you couldn't just, completely, and so rationally, okay, but there's still that emotional, you could have, what more, could you have done more – exactly. And I'm so, one of the things I feel so badly about, I could kick myself about, because I know about, like I said, medical training, and you know about blood loss and all this, that, and the other, but to me, you know, all of that is still from wounds, not from a little here and a little there every day. And he was bleeding and bleeding every day, from nicks and cuts – it was just little bits, but I didn't realize. But finally when I took him into the hospital May 20th, he had started getting chest pains. And I said, that's it. We're running down to the VA right now. We're just going down. And he said, the last time we went running down, they sent me home, and so I'm going to take a shower, and whatever, and he took a shower. And then we did, and when we got to the VA, and it turns out that the reason his heart was acting up, was because of blood loss and plasma, liquid loss. He had two transfusions, one after the other. And I just feel so bad that I didn't realize that, because I was trying to deal with all of this. And also that last month of school, when you're trying to get everybody's end of the year tests for fifth and sixth grade, and trying to keep the little ones entertained, and trying to put together everything we've done throughout the year, it was just a lot. And I thought, I know this, I know this, I know about blood loss, and I didn't, and that, to me still just bothers me. And I think, maybe, if I had gotten there quicker. But again, the doctors said this was just so far gone, that nothing anybody did could have... And the doctors were just wonderful. I mean, if you're going to get a weird cancer, Memphis is one of the best places you could possibly be. We have one of the

most incredible heads of oncology here in Memphis, and they work with all the local hospitals, and the VA is no longer like it used to be. They have this fabulous unit for all of that. They work with, they were calling doctors throughout the US, there's a doctor in Canada, a couple of doctors, specialists, in Europe, that they were talking to. It's just his cancer was so weird, that everyone wanted to find out what they could do. So I know everybody tried what they could.

I just felt kind of at loose ends, like I didn't know what I was supposed to be doing. And it was summer, and summer, at loose ends for a teacher. And every summer before, I had had plans, vacation, and so summer had followed a routine, and here's this summer with all of this oddness going on, and I just felt like, yeah, okay, I ought to cook supper, or yeah, I ought to do this, and my garden just went to hell in a handbasket, and my son, thank goodness, was his usual glued to the computer, or off with his big brother, which was good, but you just feel kind of, at a loss of what to do for a while. Which is kind of where those lawyers and accountants, because they would say, okay, you need to do this, in three days you need to do this, and I just had this calendar, okay, this done by this, so I could at least see what I was doing.

Loss of interest in work – I don't really remember that much about, I know that I did it, I mean, nobody could really say that I was doing anything wrong, but I got through it. It's like, I can kind of remember it, and I can remember bits and pieces of some classes, and I remember just a few odd bits. Like the day that the screen wouldn't come down, and one of the kids just yanked it and it fell down on top of another kid. And he's running around with the screen on his head. And I remember that, and a few bits and pieces, but, um, I know that the teachers were real sweet and supportive. I remember, um, that's one of the

things that I had forgotten about – um, the teachers and school, and some folks from church, they kept, there were casseroles and stuff being brought, so I didn't have to worry about cooking, which I don't think I could have done for a while, but they kind of kept that up throughout the summer, which was wonderful. Nobody in my workplace gave me any problems about anything. Actually, our headmaster came to, this is one thing I remember, a week or so before Kelly left the VA to go to the hospice facility in Germantown (God, I'm so glad he was there), my headmaster came and Kelly was a little bit lucid at this time, and I said, my headmaster is coming over and I'll meet him downstairs, and he wants to pray with me for a little bit. And Kelly said, why does he want to do that? And I said, maybe because I need it right now. I'll be back in a minute. But he just assured me that if I needed to take time off or anything like that, not to worry about my job. And I probably if I had been thinking more clearly, maybe I should have done that, taken a month off, or two, or maybe just that first full quarter, and gotten all my ducks in a row, but I didn't. and I know that half the time in those first two quarters, I was running out of school early, I've got a meeting with an accountant, I've got a meeting with this, that, or the other. But looking back, maybe in hindsight, but no, he was just wonderful. And knowing that I could have done that, I think, they just came in and checked on me, and made sure that everything was okay. And like I said, I'm a very, as a teacher, I'm someone who is very organized, so I don't think the students realized anything, but I don't really, other than a few bits and pieces, other than the screen falling down and, I don't know, they wanted to cook something – we did a chocolate fountain or something – well that was around Christmas, that I do remember. We did some Christmas treats and Spanish foods, that kind of thing, but by that time, it was after Thanksgiving,

and my mind was, it's amazing how I guess, stress, and talking to the school nurse, I said, Kathy, I just can't believe that I don't remember all this stuff. And I said, I've just thrown those little pills away, and I feel so much more alert. And she said, the alertness might be being off the pills, but the pills themselves wouldn't have caused, she goes, M.T., this is stress. And I didn't realize that stress could cause, I said, I've gotten through a quarter and a half. She goes... But it's amazing what your mind can do when it has to.

17. Have you noticed that you behave differently now at work than before?

I don't know. I've tried to not get upset about things, or just tried to be very calm. What has been really weird for me, at work, is, my husband was, he'd retired, so he was home. And he would go, how was your day? What did the students do? Or did anything strange happen? And he knew some of my students' names, and he would say, did so-and-so do this, or did so-and-so do that? And I didn't have that, which was really weird. What was difficult for me was, he had been in management for so long that sometimes, I had maybe a problem with another teacher, maybe a conflict, or something with one of the older students, he was someone who was really good to talk over – I've got this situation – how could we handle this kind of thing. And not having that was odd. But I can't – but there were a few times when I thought, how can I handle this, what can I do to teach it differently, to get this across to this child, who is driving me insane, his behavior is horrible, he's a bright kid. What all can I tweak around to do, which is the kind of thing, with Kelly, that I could shoot back and forth with. Because being in management for so long, a lot of those things were things he had already seen or dealt with. And a lot of the, you could apply many of the same techniques to employees in an office, as to some of the older kids in a classroom and that kind of thing. So I knew that I was under stress. I was

trying to remind myself every day to stay calm, it's going to be okay. By the time the end of January came around, I was, in the classroom, back to normal.

18. Is your level of energy different than before?

Oh, no (laughter) I'm still bouncing all over the place. There's one thing that I didn't realize had happened, but when I talked to Kathy, the school nurse, about the pills, she goes, well, we all noticed that you had kind of lost your bounce. You were not as bouncy. And I go, yeah. And it feels weird – some days I just sit there like, I don't know what I'm going to do. I was just blank. I got my bounce back now. I think if Kelly hadn't been so sick in 2010, and going through all of this in 2011, I couldn't wait to get into 2012, and just say, okay – this will be my first year without him in it, but, which is kind of bad, but on the other hand, I had already gone through the first Thanksgiving without, first Christmas without, all of that, so I didn't have all of that to bring into this year, and just for me, the emotional – it was like I'm in a new year, I have crossed some boundary lines. I could leave all that back there, and that for me was just the most wonderful – I felt like January I started being me again.

19. Has your motivation to go to work or to do your work changed?

What I've realized now is that I have my son and my work and everything is totally dependent on me, and so I've always wanted to make sure I did the best job possible, and now I'm very aware that, yeah, this is my job. It's not that I would think that I would get released or let go or anything, but being in an independent school, I don't have the worry that a city school would have. I don't have any of those worries. I teach at Woodland Presbyterian, and it's fabulous. So I don't have that kind of hanging over my head. And another thing, like I said, God gives you what you can deal with, because if I had been in

a city school where you have to write down, not just a little blurb for what your lesson plans are for the week, but a whole page with all this kind of paper work, this useless paperwork that the city, I mean, I have everything, I've got all my rubrics and I've got my entire year planned for every class, and it's all detailed and it's all there, but I don't have to write down every little thing for every single day. It's a more common sense approach to teaching. I mean, I don't see how city and county schools, their teachers can teach and do their regular paperwork with all this mountain of stuff that they have to do. If I'd had to do that, I'd have probably gone crazy. But, no, I'm very happy with my job, and I can't wait to get back. It's going to be great. Actually on the way back from this I'm going to drop by the classroom. I have not been in my classroom since I left, so I need to start going back, little by little, a few hours a week, and just get everything ready for when school starts. I'm really looking forward to this school year.

20. Have you felt isolated or alienated at work?

No, thank God. Woodland, it's like a family. And everybody was just at first, I can't remember that much, but I know that they were all there. They'd check on me and make sure I was okay, and like, if you need to get away from the kids for a few minutes or whatever, there was that kind of support always there, so I didn't feel the – I guess in some situations, your coworkers probably don't know how to deal with you. In my environment, I didn't feel that. I didn't feel that I was making somebody, you know how you feel when you are making somebody nervous, or uncomfortable because they don't know how to deal with you, I didn't experience any of that. And because I didn't experience it, because everybody knew, after the first few weeks, it was like, okay – she's okay – she's stable to teach. And there were a couple of days when I'd – the lawyer,

especially – we’ve got to have this meeting today at 1:00. I’ve got a class at 1:00. Okay, okay, I’m sorry, the lawyer just called and we’ve got to have this meeting. One day he called in the morning, we’ve got to get this done now. So they were really good about getting somebody to cover my classes. Most of the time I planned my meetings when I had only one or two classes – they were light, or some days my classes ended at 2, and so I would tell them ahead of time. But some days when it happened, they were wonderful about it. So, I didn’t feel alienated in any way, which was very supportive, very supportive.

21. Has your level of self-esteem changed?

Yeah! I think my self-esteem has gotten better. It’s like, wow! I can do this. I mean at first, I didn’t know what I could do. I mean, I was terrified. Self-esteem, what is that? But after the second part of the school year, and like I said, crossing over, getting into January, 2012, it, yes, it has, I just feel like, wow! I can do this! And I’m doing this! And look at all this stuff I’ve done. On one hand it feels silly, because, okay, this is paying bills, and keeping track of insurance, and keeping track of stocks and what-not, but if you’ve never done that, so yeah, it can make you feel good, like, wow! I can do a bunch of things – I can do this, I can do that. So you do, you feel good. It’s all different, but yeah.

Category III – Description of the organization and its reactions to the traumatic life experience

22. How much time did your work organization allow you to take off during this time?

Whatever I needed, whatever I needed. It would have just been, um, my aunt died a few years ago, and I found out that morning, and they could tell, I had a whole day to get through, before I could, I just can't leave in the middle of the day, because I had classes, and they just said, no! Go! You get out of here. Don't worry about this. And I said, I've got everything here. You just go. You don't worry about it – just go.

23. Do you feel like this was enough time?

Yes, right, and just like I said, I wasn't there the last few days of school, by that time we knew the chemo hadn't worked, and it was just, oh, I just remembered this. I did try to go in awards day, and I couldn't do it. I just remembered, I went in, and my headmaster said, M.T. – you're here. Yeah, I'm going to try to give out the awards. And I got the awards, and I walked out in the hall, and there were all the kids filing out and all the parents, and it was just like aaaaah! And I just said, I can't do it. I can't do it, I just can't do it. I was just sitting there holding all these papers, and I can't do this. And the assistant head said, M.T., just come here. Give me those things and just go! Go! Don't worry about it. And I said, oh, my gosh, there's in-service, and she goes, don't worry about it. Just go – don't worry about it. Go! If there is anything you need to know, we'll just email you. But no, they were just – I'd forgotten about that – I was thinking that at the end of the school year, did we have two days of service at the end of it? I really don't remember. I guess I didn't. But no, they were wonderfully supportive. I can't imagine going through what I did, not having a supportive work environment to be in. that would have been horrendous.

24. Did you inform your supervisor(s) about your loss?

Yes.

25. If no, why not?

26. If yes, how did he/she react?

Wonderfully. They started getting food and everything to the house immediately – what do you need? I know my yard was mowed. Yeah, they came and mowed my yard – I guess a couple of my students came and mowed my yard. And one of my neighbors down the street – he’s a lawyer – came and mowed it, probably the first month or so, and I would think, I’ve got to mow the yard. I can do this, I can do this. Yeah, I informed my supervisors.

27. What, if anything, did he/she do to help you?

28. Did your supervisor(s) acknowledge the loss? How?

29. Did your supervisor(s) account for your grief when assigning projects and evaluating your work?

I don’t know. I’m evaluated once a year, and I don’t know – I got my raise (laughter), so I don’t know. Maybe it’s different when you’re a teacher.

30. Did your supervisor(s) work with you to minimize the possible damaging effects of your grief on the workplace?

Yes, I would say yes, in that they checked up on me – do you need anything, are you doing okay, that kind of supportiveness.

31. Did your supervisor(s) educate other employees about how they could respond to and help you?

Well, everybody knew Kelly was sick, and everybody knew he passed away, and everybody knew how bad he was doing. I was on the phone all summer, it seemed like, with both our school nurses, who are fabulous, and so everybody knew what was going on.

32. Did you inform your co-workers about your loss?

33. If no, why not?

34. If yes, how did they react?

35. What, if anything, did your co-workers do to help you?

36. Does your organization have resources in place for grief counseling and recovery?

Oh yes, oh, yes. Besides the minister, there's the church counselor, and all of that, so, Woodland Presbyterian is a huge church. So they have all this for all their parishioners, but also that's available for the teachers, any time you need that.

37. If so, what are these resources?

38. Have you ever had to utilize any of those resources?

I talked to the minister, and so he was very helpful with that. I didn't go to the counselor. I felt that by the time I was ready to kind of speak, I spoke with my minister and stuff from the church, and so, there were just some days when I felt like, Matt, just come say a prayer with me, or um, besides Matt, or the minister over there, the Bible teacher and I are good friends, and so a lot of times, I would say, Judy, I need a prayer to get me through the day. And she also helps counsel the people in the church with grieving and death and that kind of stuff, and so I talked to her a lot. That was very helpful for me.

39. If so, were they effective for you?

40. Which ones were most effective?

41. Why were they effective or not effective?

Category IV – Description of the employee’s return to work

42. What did you do that first day/week back at work?

43. How did you feel about going back to work?

I don’t know. I know that I, we have a week of in-service, and I know that I walked into that room. And I had decided that day that I was going to stop taking la-la land pills, and so I didn’t take one, and I walked into that room, and I thought I was okay, and I started shaking like a leaf. And I just backed out before anyone saw me, and I was just standing there shaking, and the school nurse found me, and she goes, what is going on? And she said, you go home and you take those little things. You’re gonna be fine. And then the assistant head came up, and she said, M.T., go home. Just, tomorrow, we’re going to be doing a big seminar on ADHD and all the new findings on that. And I remember that, because it was just really interesting, and totally different. But yeah, that was weird. As for the first weeks of school, I don’t remember.

44. Could you do your job as well as you usually did?

Well, I know that, I don’t think that last year I did as good of a job at all. I mean, sure, it was okay, but I just don’t, like I said, the first couple of quarters are just, and the other two quarters, I was kind of trying to make up for maybe the first two that I don’t remember (laughter). I don’t think that last year was my best year of teaching. And sometimes I would just get sad, or I’d, um, like one time, gosh, it was at the end of the

school year, I'll usually just blare the radio on, and Turtles Happy Together came on, and I was driving down Poplar, bawling. I hadn't heard that song in a while, and it was a particular favorite song of ours. I'm really looking forward to this school year, coming up. I don't really think it was my best year teaching.

45. How did you handle your grief at work?

Well, I guess, the first couple of quarters, I was out in la-la land, and I'm sure there were some times I got teary, or got upset, and I'd call Judy or one of the other teachers. Nothing really happened in the classroom, but I know a couple of times I got sad in the morning, and lunch, but like I said, everyone was checking up on me, and said, we notice you're not as, do you want to talk about it? And I said, well, I just remembered this or that, but because my schedule, I mean I don't normally start – I have to be there at 7:30, but my classes don't normally start till 9:00 or 9:30. And a lot of times I had time to get my act together, which helped, because, I guess I was sadder, if you want to put it that way, early in the morning, and coming home. It felt like the only thing normal in my life was between 7:30 and 3:30. So the school, for me, was like a refuge. It was like lawyers, and accountants, and sadness, and what-not can't get me here – they can't follow me in the door. So the only normal part of my life was in the school. And it just felt like, (sigh) I'm safe here.

46. Did you feel like it was okay to grieve at work?

47. Did you feel the same way every day at work?

Yeah, I think I felt the same pretty much every day. Definitely better after Christmas. This year at work has been so much better. It was marked, so much better. The other teacher said, we can tell by now that you're really getting over this. Well by that time, it

was also six months later, but, it was, work was like an escape. And I know that I was sadder, I hadn't thought about this, but I was sadder in the morning, but then after school, and then with kids, there's always something going on, so that just kind of gets you going. And the other teachers, and it was definitely through Christmas, just an escape. It was normal. It was the only thing that was normal.

48. Did you feel like you needed to escape from home?

Yes. The school was my escape. The school, the work, I mean, the kids are so wacky, the stuff they come up with. And then they were all getting their "elves on the shelf" and telling me their "elves on the shelf" stories, and then what they were all going to do Halloween. And then the school, there was always something going on. And like I say, I was kind of in la-la land for part of it, there were a lot of little bits here and there, and I just know that, I just had this feeling of, from 7:30-3:30 I'm safe. Nothing can touch me – I'm safe. This is it. The only thing for me was normal, and because everything outside of that was just crazy.

49. Did you feel like you needed to escape from work?

No, work was fine. What was totally overwhelming for me was everything outside of work – lawyers and accountants, and all the forms and all the paperwork. And all that was overwhelming. And not having any family, anybody here who could kind of help me through that, was what made it so horribly overwhelming. I know that when I've had other friends that have had a spouse or a sibling or someone there with them when someone passed away, and they've had to deal with this, there's been a family member, or a really good friend, who could help them. And I didn't have that. My sister came over, and she handles a lot of financial stuff, and she said, okay, here's this pile of stuff,

here's all these financial things, and helped gather it together, but when you're having to do a lot of stuff that you don't know what to do with, it's just very stressful. So most of my stress, and everything that made me feel overwhelmed, was outside. I think that if I had not ended the school year the way I always liked to end it, because by the end of, by a couple of months before the school year ended, I've got all my stuff ready to go, more or less for next year. If I hadn't had that, I don't know how I could have done it. But if you're organized like that, and something is the same every year, you can do a lot more with it.

50. Did/do you feel like there was/is a personal or organizational time line for your "recovery"?

Yeah, I really do think that, crossing over into 2012, in my mind, that was an escape. I'm gonna get to January. And it was a big, it was very emotional – it was like, thank goodness! I'm in this new year. I'm in this new time. And I go, okay, you're really on your own now, but the absolute release of being, getting away from all of this horror of dealing with this cancer, and past, and just everything, it was just wonderful. I had just gotten away from something horrible. And so, yeah, that was kind of in my mind, yeah, a new year, it's gonna happen. I just wanted to get to that. But by then it was, I mean, I did things, and, um, that I don't even remember doing. A friend of mine has an alpaca ranch, and I keep my alpacas at her ranch. So we do a lot of things that involve working with the animals, and a lot of craft shows, and all these sort of things. I make hats and purses from the alpaca fibers and all that, and so we do a lot of shows together. And she said, M.T., you did a wonderful show last year in October – want to do it again? We were trying to get things going again. And I said, I didn't do that. And she said, yes you did. You had a

bunch of purses and hats and you sold all this stuff, and you sold and you demoed, and I said, I did not. And she said, yes you did. Here's a picture, right here. I thought, oh, my gosh. You know, I kind of remember the pattern on this hat. You know, I don't remember that. You know, it was just weird. I go, oh, yeah, okay. So I think it's definitely a time line. And something that helped me a lot, I guess around that time, October, I decided, I can't deal with all the furniture. This chair he always sat in, and this thing here, and I just said, you know, to heck with it – I'm getting some new stuff. And I did. And I said, I'm not gonna go crazy, but I hit some sales, and I said, chair – Goodwill. Sofa, Goodwill. And they came and got it, and I got a new sofa and some new little chairs, and another big chair, and it was different colors, and I rearranged, and so not coming, every day, into something that was just like, and so I just kind of did that, around October or November, and in January, I started just redoing stuff. So now, I go home, and this is mine now. It's me – it doesn't have all those reminders. And you know, the family antiques, and all these kind of things that were from his family, they're all still there, but everything's different, the furniture's different, it's mine now. So I don't have to have that. You always hear that widows get this money, and they, a lot of times they buy furniture. And you go, why would they spend all that money? Yeah, there's a good reason why they do that. They don't have to think about the person they've lost, and um, this is his chair, and this is his whatever.

51. To help you cope with your grief and minimize its effects on your job, what do you feel you need/needed from your supervisor(s)?

Exactly what they gave me, which was support, we're here, if you need to leave early, if you're stressed out, if you need to talk, if you, whatever.

52. What do you feel you need from your co-workers?

What I got. Understanding, and acceptance, and checking up on me.

53. What do you feel you need from your organizational policies?

No, no – again, being in an independent school, they have such leeway in what they can do. Actually, I just remembered that, I guess it was the first quarter, I needed to come in later than 7:30 because of meetings and stuff, I know for several weeks, because my classes didn't start until either 9 or 9:30, and they said, just be here half an hour before your class starts. And some mornings I went in at 8:30, and some mornings I went in at 9. And that gave me a little flexibility.

54. Were you absent from work more often after your loss than previously?

No. I didn't even take a day off.

Category V –Outcomes – individual, group, and organization

55. How satisfied were you with your job prior to this grief experience?

Very.

56. Has your level of satisfaction changed?

And more so now. Yeah, it's, after the way they treated me, it's like, I would do anything for that school.

57. How involved were you with your job prior to this grief experience?

Very involved.

58. Has your level of involvement changed?

Yeah, I'm more involved.

59. How committed were you with to your organization prior to this grief experience?

Very.

60. Has your level of commitment changed?

I can't imagine leaving them. And my family in Atlanta said, why don't you move back here, and I say, no, no, this is my perfect job.

61. How likely were you to leave your job prior to this grief experience?

Not too likely, I loved it. It's a great school. It's a wonderful fit for me. So it's the kind of thing, I would have left, if Kelly's job had taken him somewhere else, but of course, he had retired by this time, so...

62. Has this likelihood changed?

No.

63. How productive were you on the job prior to this grief experience?

I had always been a really good teacher, and like I said, that year, I just wasn't, it involved him being sick, and getting sicker and sicker and sicker as the months went by. He started getting sick about the time school started, maybe in August. So that whole year, that school year, I guess I was just not my best school year. It was a good year, that I was starting and I was excited about it, but he was just getting sicker. Particularly after December, he spent a week in the hospital in December, and then really getting sicker, and then in March, finding out he had cancer and all of that, I just, it was kind of hard. But up until really the end of the school year, I thought, okay, work was my escape from what was going on at home, what was going on with this disease. But when the doctors in March give you five or six years at the least, and probably more, and then in just a couple

of weeks, we were realizing, no, it's, um, so, I'm just really looking forward to this school year.

64. Has your level of productivity changed?

Much, much better – the last two quarters were great – they worked out great. I kept having all sorts of new ideas and I kept thinking, okay, I'm going to jot this down so that I could remember stuff I was going to do, and so, um, the end of the school year, I said, okay, here's what I'm going to do next year, here's the textbooks I want, here's all this neat, new stuff. So I'm looking forward to having all this neat new stuff now to take into the school year. So I think the productivity got back to normal towards the end of the school year.

65. Has your workplace changed as a result of your grief?

No, I mean it's still my classroom, still all my stuff.

66. How?

67. Did you notice any differences in your work group or your coworkers as a result of your grief?

No. what I did notice is that my attitude really changed, January. And so, I was more back to normal, and I wasn't being sad as much, and my whole outlook was just very positive. I was joking, kidding around, that kind of stuff more, and all the teachers were doing that, were reciprocating. And so I think everybody felt good that I was more or less, got my bounce back.

68. Were they less productive?

69. Were they less cohesive?

The one thing that I think has made a big impression on them, because we have talked about it, is that I jokingly told them and I'm sort of starting a bit of outlay on this, that I told them I was going to write a book, called "The Savvy Widow: What to Know Before He Goes". And, cause there's so much you need to know that most women don't – even the ones that handle the regular, pay the bills, all the other financial things that are involved, they don't really know about. So my not knowing all this stuff, and all this dealing with lawyers and accountants and what-not, and then one of the things went into probate court, and again, because we didn't realize that stuff had to be done beforehand, and um, so, it has, I know some of them (coworkers) went home and sat down and said, give us all this information, and make sure it's somewhere accessible for us. And so I think that has kind of, you know, I teach mostly with women, and some of the guy teachers have said, yeah, we've told our wives, here's all this stuff, yeah, make sure they know where it is, make sure they learn it. One of the neat things that has happened, which is a very positive effect of my husband's illness, was that, three of the young doctors, I teach their kids. Well, two of the young doctors, I teach their kids, and Dr. Boston, I teach his granddaughters. And a couple of other young doctors, at UT Medical, told me that because of what they saw, and what all happened, that they've all gone back and tried to find out as much as they could about this cancer, and different kinds of things, and attended some seminars, and so that has had a very positive impact in some young doctors, and when you're seeing a tumor, when you're seeing a little spot, and three hours later it's a big bump, it's amazing. So they have educated themselves on this, and spoken to some other people. I know that his case was brought up and they did a presentation for the, it might have been the AMA, it was the big dermatology association had this big

presentation with that, and so that's been very interesting. So I feel something good has come from it. Because when you have something as bad as psoriasis, which is common, and 3% of anybody who develops psoriasis can get this, and will get this, and it goes years before you can pick it up, so now it's something that at least they will be looking more into the possibility of. So that's...

70. Were they less satisfied with their work than before?

71. Did you notice that the organization as a whole was less productive than before your loss?

72. Did you see any change in the level of creativeness or innovativeness?

Do you have any additional thoughts on (how grief is handled/managed...) that we have not yet discussed?

I think, like I said beforehand, just, I've experienced grief from when my uncle passed away many years ago, and I was working in a regular office, and it was like, okay, you went to the funeral, and here's flowers, and okay, back to normal. And my uncle, for me, was like my dad. I mean, he and my aunt helped raise me. And so to me, this was like losing my dad. And it was like, okay, go to the funeral, it was your uncle, back to normal, and that's one time that I did, for months, feel really sad and sappy at work, and sometimes I'd just sit there in la-la land. And this was 20 years ago, but it was a lot different being in an office like that, than being in the environment that I was in, that was so supportive and wonderful. And I can't imagine, I kept thinking, if I had been working with American Express again, this was right out of college, I guess it was more like 30 years ago, when my uncle passed away, it was just, okay, here's the flowers, go to the

funeral, then come back, and that was very different from this. I think that the teaching profession, I mean, you're in these, well, you teach, and you know what it's like to have coworkers that you chit-chat with, and it's more like part of a "life" that you go into, and you know whose kids are getting married, and when this is happening, and oh, your dog passed away, and oh, when this happened, and you share more of that lifestyle than with people in an office. It's totally different. And I think that teaching is more of a lifestyle, because we do bring some of our work home with us, and we, it's totally different, the environment is different. I don't know of any school that I've taught at that the camaraderie within the teaching community, even if you have some teachers that you don't get along with all that much, it's still not, it's just totally different. It's more of a support. I can't imagine, I mean, teachers, it's what you do (laughter), I'm just going to do something to this student, I mean, is so-and-so doing the same thing in your class, you know that kind of thing, when in an office, dealing with grief is different, is very different. And also, in an office, you get your work, and boom, boom, boom, it's not like when you've got, there'll be a recess, and you will be outside with them, and then lunch, and whatever, and this kind of thing, and, can you watch my class for five minutes – I'm just going to go fall apart in the bathroom, this kind of thing, where in an office, you don't have that. And that might be interesting to see if you've got a difference between teachers and an office kind of setting. I mean I don't know what it's like – all the schools that I've taught at have been independent. But other teachers' friends who have taught at regular city or county like schools, it's the same thing. There is a school counselor you can talk to, you have more than you can do...