

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

AN ANALYSIS OF MEANING, MALAISE, MATTERING AND MARGINALITY AND
THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO DISCRETIONARY EFFORT AMONG REGIONAL
UNIVERSITY STAFF EMPLOYEES

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

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Norman, Oklahoma

2004

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UNIVERSITY STAFF EMPLOYEES

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

BY

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Acknowledgments

Endeavors such as this are never completed in isolation. So many people offered their encouragement and support that I came to believe I mattered to them. Meaning was found in this project by reviewing the many comments fellow employees were so willing to share. I smiled a lot as I read them and I also shook my head over some of the incidents that had occurred in the lives of these staff members. As a supervisor and administrator, my professional life will not be the same after completing this study; my eyes have been opened to the profound effect words and actions can have on each of us.

I would especially like to thank the chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Myron Pope, who stayed with me until the end, even in trying circumstances. C. J. Vires and Shirley Simmons were invaluable in their encouragement, constructive criticism and overall support – thank you! To my colleagues and supervisors, thank you for your understanding when my focus was on my education more than on my job.

I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to my family, especially my grandmother, Melba Cottingham – I could not have done this without your love and support. And, lastly, as one chapter of my life comes to a close, a new one has opened – thank you, Jim, for your support, love and encouragement.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the perceptions of university staff concerning their job and their value to the university community and the relationship of these perceptions to their discretionary effort with respect to 1) mattering and marginality and 2) meaning and malaise (4 M's) (Karpiak, 1997). Mattering and marginality is the staff's perception of caring and interest by the administration and faculty toward them; meaning and malaise is the staff's extent of caring and interest related to their work (Karpiak, 1997). Discretionary effort measures the extent of how hard an employee believes he or she is working (Yankelovich & Immerwahr, 1983).

Two hundred fifty-seven (257) university staff employees, representing two regional institutions, responded to a survey that was designed to capture their perceptions of mattering/marginality, meaning/malaise and discretionary effort. Results of the study showed employees to have only a slight sense of perceiving to matter to their institution and they feel somewhat marginalized when their opinions are not valued. Staff members are finding meaning in their jobs and are not experiencing malaise. Respondents were also given the opportunity to respond to open-ended questions; which, in turn, provided additional information of the staff's understanding and perception of the mattering /marginality and meaning/malaise. Meaning/malaise were related to the staff's classification (front-line, backstage academic). The 4 M's were related to the employee's age and intent to stay. No relationship was found between the 4 M's and discretionary effort.

Recommendations for administrators and other practitioners included: increase the awareness of the various perceptions of the university that different groups hold; provide opportunities for staff to be involved in the decision making process, campus committees and departmental meetings; incorporate the mission and goals of the university into job descriptions and employee evaluations; and remember to express appreciation and provide recognition to those staff members outside of the spotlight. Recommendations for further research included: determining what factors may be associated with the 4 M's and what extent are the two categories – mattering/marginality, meaning/malaise related; what cultural factors affect the two categories; why do employees change jobs and move into higher education positions; and how can staff be involved in shared governance of the university.

Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Non-faculty personnel, non-exempt employees, classified staff and support personnel are “official” terms often used in formal documents and communications to define the non-instructional staff of colleges and universities. Perhaps the not-so-formal names may better describe this sector of university employees: silent partners, hidden organization and backstage employees (Deal, 1994; Deal & Jenkins, 1994; Sherberg & Cetone, 1988).

Yet, no matter the title, in a typical college or university setting, non-instructional staff may comprise between forty and fifty percent of the employees (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). Although staff are the largest employee group, they are the least studied group of employees in university settings (Barrett, Vander Putten, Peterson, & Cameron, 1995; Oudenhoven & Gibson-Harman, 1999). A few limited studies have focused on employee groups of a particular institution and have been conducted under the direction of the university’s institutional research office. Furthermore, numerous studies have focused on faculty or administrators and are not necessarily generalizable to staff because research has shown faculty, staff and administrators to have different perceptions of the same organization. (Deming, 1993; Glaser, Zamanou, & Hacker, 1987; Oudenhoven & Gibson-Harman, 1999; Tierney, 1988).

These different perceptions of the same organization appear to be in direct contrast to Deming’s (1993) position. In his view, organizations were systems and could be defined as “a network of interdependent components that work together to try to

accomplish the aim of the system” (Deming, 1993, p. 50). Although written from an industrial background, Deming’s definition can be translated easily to a higher education perspective: a university is a network of faculty, staff, administrators and students that work together to accomplish the mission of the university. The concept of Deming’s “interdependent components” is integral to understanding higher education institutions. As Deming states, “the pieces in an assembly must work together as a system” (p.16). Thus, the employees of a university must work together as a system.

In reality, there are actually two systems operating on most campuses. Mintzberg (2000) refers to the institution as a “professional bureaucracy”, and rather than one system, a university has two systems that can be viewed as “parallel administrative hierarchies, one democratic and bottom up for the professionals, and a second machine, bureaucratic and top down for the support staff” (p. 57). An illustration of the two hierarchies is especially evident in an academic department where the department chair or dean must supervise both faculty and staff. Hellawell and Hancock (2001), reporting on the responses of academic managers, noted that managers did indeed categorize subordinates. In particular, one academic manager captured the essence of the two hierarchies with the following observation:

...caricatured the general distinction as having to manage, on the one hand, academic staff who did not want to be managed at all, and, on the other hand, too many administrative staff who wanted to be directed to an excessive degree! (p. 185).

Not only have institutions been described as “professional bureaucracies” (Mintzberg, 2000), but they have also been divided into three models of governance:

bureaucratic, collegial and political (Baldrige, Curtis, Ecker, & Riley, 2000). The parallel hierarchies, or organizational dualism, are especially evident in the collegial model of governance. Although collegiality may be difficult to define, Baldrige et al. (2000) describes collegiality beginning with a “community of scholars” (p. 134) and directs the reader to Goodman’s definition in that “...the community of scholars would administer its own affairs, and bureaucratic officials would have little influence” (p. 134). Many discussions involving collegial governance imply that collegiality is generally reserved for faculty, and the observances of Hellowell and Hancock (2001) may support this conclusion:

One obvious point to make in this respect is that collegiality was, in the present writers’ experience, in reality never meant to apply to administrative staff in the UK context. We also have some limited personal experience of the possible even wider gap in North American between ‘faculty’ (i.e. academic staff) and university administrative staff who certainly did not see themselves as a part of the ‘academic community’ as far as collegiality was concerned (p. 185).

If staff, especially in the United States, do not feel a part of the university community, then what connection do they feel towards the university? What role do staff play in implementing the institutional mission? How do staff view faculty and administrators? How might these factors affect productivity? This study explored these issues along with issues related to finding meaning in one’s job and believing that one’s job matters to faculty and administration. The use of critical incident, open-ended

questions also provided additional insights with regards to believing that one's job matters to students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the perceptions of university staff concerning their job and their value to the university community and the relationship of these perceptions to their discretionary effort with respect to 1) mattering and marginality and 2) meaning and malaise (Karpiak, 1997). Mattering and marginality is the staff's perception of caring and interest by the administration and faculty toward them; meaning and malaise is the staff's extent of caring and interest related to their work (Karpiak, 1997). Discretionary effort measures the extent of how hard an employee believes he or she is working. (Yankelovich & Immerwahr, 1983).

Although the meaning, malaise, mattering and marginality (4 M's) groupings resulted from research of faculty (Karpiak, 1997), the concepts may apply to all employees. All employees, regardless of classification, may derive meaning from certain aspects of their job. Each employee of an institution may upon occasion experience malaise. All employees may experience degrees of mattering and at times feel marginalized. Therefore, the 4 M's can be studied in relation to all employees. Regardless of occupation, an employee can experience the 4 M's.

This study applied the schema derived from faculty research to staff and added an additional variable: discretionary effort (DE). How might the 4 M's be associated with discretionary effort? Blackburn et al. (1991) found that faculty members were willing to devote more time to teaching if they had found meaning in their teaching and perceived

that they mattered to their institution. Hodson (2001) summarized what appears to be a relationship between the 4 M's and DE: "research in the social sciences has convincingly demonstrated that organizations of work . . . that fail to respect their [employees] dignity as human beings generate less effort on the part of the employees" (p. 132). By studying the 4 M's in relation to DE, factors associated with perceptions held by staff can be described and implications drawn.

Research Questions

1. What is the staff's perception of the level of mattering or marginalization that they experience at the institution where they work?
2. What is the staff member's perception of level of meaning or malaise that they experience in their job?
3. How do meaning/malaise and mattering/marginality differ among the classifications of staff (front-line, backstage, academic)?
4. How do meaning/malaise and mattering/marginality differ based upon staff characteristics such as age, gender, tenure, level of education and intent to stay?
5. Are meaning/malaise and mattering/marginality associated with discretionary effort of staff?

Significance of the Study

Staff members are generally the largest employee group on a university campus, yet they are the least studied group in the university setting (Barrett et al., 1995). Those staff that have been studied often feel invisible, not valued by the organization and

believe that work activities go unrecognized (Glaser et al., 1987; Greaves & Sorenson, 1999; Sherberg & Cetone, 1988). If staff perceive that they, or the jobs being performed, do not matter to the administration and faculty, then they (staff) may not perform their duties as efficiently and productively as they could. Further, staff may not be as committed to the institution; thus, potentially compromising the level of service to constituents. As noted by Barrett et al. (1995), “non-instructional staff members’ perception of the work environment can exert a distinct influence on the levels of quality and productivity in their work” (p. 1).

This distinct influence was observed by Godwin and Markham (1996) as they examined customer service and bureaucracy as experienced and perceived by traditional aged freshman. In this study, not only were students observed and interviewed, but staff were also interviewed in order to gain a better understanding of campus bureaucracy. Staff members were generalized as those who “provide minimal help and emotional support” (p. 661). Acknowledging that there was some latitude in the way they could perform their jobs, staff members admitted to customer service levels that varied. Godwin and Markham also found customer service levels to vary depending on the situation, the attitude of the student and the attitude of the staff member.

Futhermore, an additional study noted that among non-returning freshman, “nearly 80 percent said they had had no meaningful personal contact with any campus office, faculty or staff member, or student” (Banta & Kuh, 1998). Although Banta and Kuh did not define meaningful personal contact, others have described college environmental factors such as peer cultures that promote close on-campus friendships and colleges that emphasize supportive services as having a positive effect on educational

attainment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Recognizing and facilitating the importance of a high level of commitment on the part of all employees may allow an institution to better meet the needs of the students and other constituents.

In addition to the above concerns of efficiency, productivity and customer service, financial consequences of employee turnover must be considered, especially in light of budget shortfalls and bleak economic forecasts. Feeling valued as an employee can translate into organizational commitment and the lack of organizational commitment has been related to higher employee turnover (Dick & Metcalfe, 2001; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Staff turnover can cost a large university more than \$100,000 per year (Buck & Watson, 2002) and “the decision to remain with an organization is largely determined by an employee’s level of commitment to the organization” (p. 176). Not only is the loss of staff an economic issue, but “it costs an organization valuable continuity and loss of training and expertise” (Mullins, Linehan and Walsh, 2001, p. 123).

This study extends knowledge of a population that was relatively unresearched. Further, it allows administrators to analyze current management techniques and reevaluate human resource management philosophies. Through this examination and possible realignment of practice, staff may gain a sense of belonging and the institution may gain effectiveness by the increase of commitment and dedication of the staff.

Assumptions

This study assumed that staff choosing to respond to the survey would do so in an honest, forthright manner. It was also assumed that the staff member would understand their job classification and their responsibilities as outlined in their job descriptions. The

study also assumed that the staff had some knowledge of their institution's mission statement. To protect the identities of the staff and the regional universities studied, the information and analysis described is provided in the aggregate.

Limitations

The researcher recognized that by limiting the defined population to staff employees of two regional universities, generalizability may be limited. In other words, the study may reflect a bias that is a part of the institution's or region's culture. It is hoped that this research will lead to further research of staff in other areas of the country in order to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

The possibility of extraneous variables that may affect meaning/malaise, mattering/marginality and discretionary effort was another limitation to this study. Although job satisfaction, organizational commitment and culture were not the primary focus of this study, variables related to these constructs were used in the design of the survey questions. Similarly, in order to identify additional extraneous variables, respondents were given the opportunity to supply other variables that may affect the 4 M's and DE.

By reporting their own perception of their discretionary effort, staff employees may have a tendency to rate themselves higher than they actually perform (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002). However, by the very nature of the definition of discretionary effort, only the staff member can determine the level of effort they are exerting. Given the validity issue of self-reported data, questions were designed to negate this tendency. Not only were staff asked to answer questions based on a Likert-scale, the respondents

were also asked to quantify the amount they could improve their own effectiveness on the job.

It must be further noted that the researcher is an employee of one of the institutions where staff were surveyed. Because of this fact, the study was designed to survey two institutions in order to control for a potential conflict-of-interest on behalf of the participants and the researcher. However, Oudenhoven & Gibson-Harmon (1999) found employees to be pleased when the researcher, who was also their Human Resources Director, conducted focus groups. Employees saw this a means of conveying care and interest on behalf of the university.

Lastly, another possible limitation to this study was the decision not to seek student, faculty or administration input at this time. Godwin and Markham (1996) focused on student perceptions of staff and enriched their study by including staff interviews. This researcher believed that it was first important to identify the perceptions that staff held, then extend the study to explore the perceptions of other university stakeholders such as students, faculty and administration.

Definition of Terms

The terms used in the study are defined below. These definitions may be assumed throughout this study. Also included in this section is a graphical representation of the 4 M's that may be useful in understanding the relationship between the four concepts.

Meaning – the high value the staff employee places upon his or her job; characterized by high level of interest and caring (Karpiak, 1997).

Malaise – the low value the staff employee places upon his or her job; characterized by low interest and caring (Karpiak, 1997).

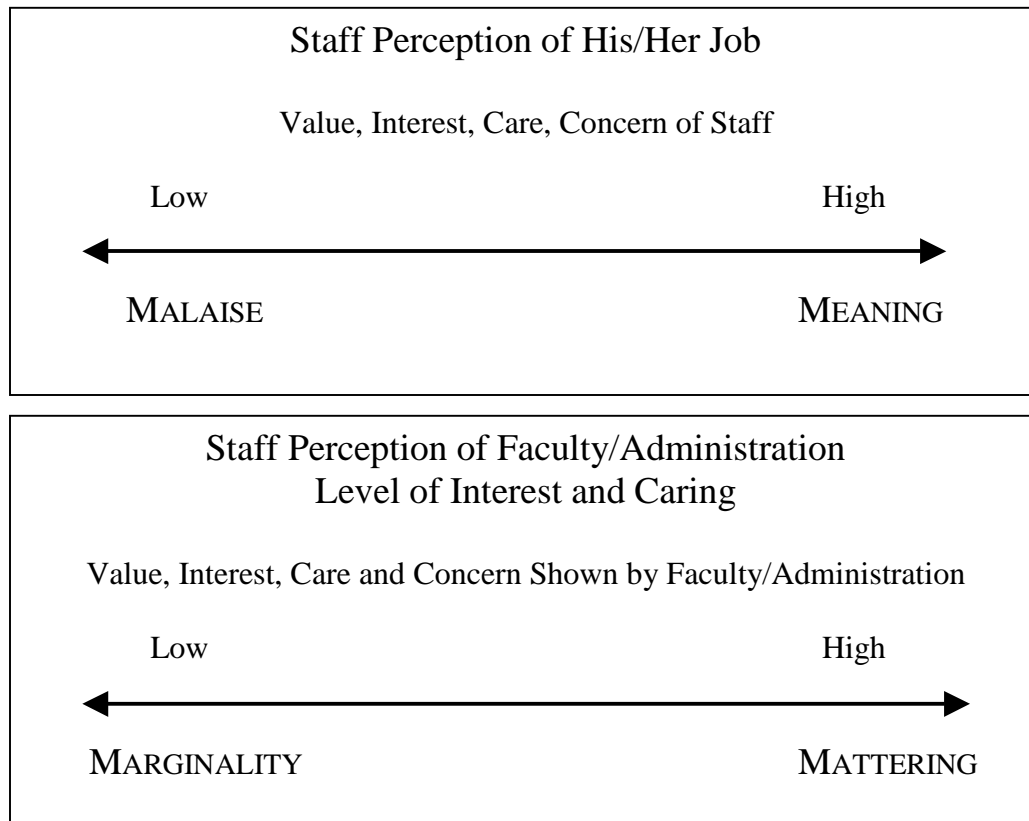
Mattering – the perception the staff has that the administrators and faculty feel that their (the staff's) job is of importance to the university; characterized by staff perception of high level of interest and caring on the part of administration and faculty (Karpiak, 1997).

Marginality – the perception the staff has that the administrators and faculty feel that their (the staff's) job is of little importance to the university; characterized by staff perception of low level of interest and caring on the part of administration and faculty (Karpiak, 1997).

Figure 1 presents a graphical representation of meaning/malaise and mattering/marginality and may be useful in understanding the relationship between meaning and malaise and the relationship between mattering and marginality. As staff members show or experience low levels of interest and care regarding their jobs, they may be experiencing a sense of malaise. At the opposite end of the continuum, an employee may exhibit a high level of interest and caring associated with their job, possibly indicating a sense of meaning the employee has found in their job. If a staff member perceives that there is little interest and caring displayed by faculty and/or administration towards the staff member's job, the employee may perceive that their job has little value to the university. Feelings of marginality may overcome the employee if they perceive their job to have low value to the university. However, if an employee perceives that their job is valuable to the university and they perceive the faculty and/or administration to be interested in their job, the employee may experience a sense of mattering.

Figure 1

Graphical Representation of the 4 M's



Discretionary Effort - “the difference between the maximum amount of effort and care an individual could bring and the minimum amount of effort required to avoid being fired or penalized; in short, the portion of one’s effort over which a job holder has the greatest control” (Yankelovich and Immerwahr, 1983, p. 1).

Staff – those employees not considered faculty or administration. Staff, on many campuses, are further divided into two or more sub-categories, such as “professional” and “support/classified”.

Front-line – contact with students, parents and other constituents (e.g. Registry or Financial Aid office employees, Recruiters, Student Activities Directors)

Backstage – little or no contact with those “outside” the university or with students (e.g. Physical plant employees, Switchboard operators) (Deal & Jenkins, 1994).

Academic – staff employees working in academic departments (e.g. Departmental secretaries).

Administration – for the purpose of this study, only those employees such as a Dean, Assistant Vice President, Vice President and President were considered administration. Others, such as Directors or Supervisors were assumed to be Professional staff..

Organization of the Study

This study was organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the significance of the study and the four concepts relevant to the study: meaning, mattering, malaise and marginality. The level of discretionary effort was identified as a potential outcome of the four concepts. Chapter 2 explores relevant literature pertaining to meaning, mattering, malaise, marginality and discretionary effort. Methodology, study design and the survey instrument are discussed in chapter 3. The findings of the study are presented in chapter 4. Chapter 5 contains the conclusions, discussions of areas for future research and recommendations for practitioners.

Summary

In conclusion, this chapter introduced and defined the concepts of meaning, malaise, mattering, marginality (4 M's) and discretionary effort (DE). This research focused on a relatively unknown population, university staff and the sub-groups within the staff classification: front-line, backstage and academic. Research questions were designed to extend knowledge related to university staff and to determine if a relationship

exists between the 4 M's and DE. The next chapter further defines the 4 M's and DE in relation to other employee concepts.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

This chapter reviews the current literature beginning with the overall concept of organizational culture and behavior. The chapter then describes the theoretical framework behind the study and moves towards a more detailed explanation of meaning, malaise, mattering and marginality in the workplace. Following the workplace section, the four concepts are further defined and related to additional concepts found in the literature such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction and co-worker/supervisor relationships. As suggested by Creswell (2003), this literature review was designed to accomplish several purposes such as sharing results of related studies, providing a framework for establishing the importance of the study and providing a benchmark for the comparison of results of this study with other findings.

Introduction

From the top post of President to the professor in the classroom to the switchboard operator, all play an important role in fulfilling the mission of the university. Two out of the three positions named above are well documented in the literature and are highly visible on the college campus. However, sparse information is available on the switchboard operator and the thousands of other employees working, as Deal and Jenkins (1994) described, outside of the spotlight. Researchers have noted the lack of literature focusing on university staff and have investigated other types of organizations outside of academe in order to provide rationale for their studies. Barrett (1995) noted the sparseness of studies focusing on “organizational or work environment perceptions” (p.

4) for staff, and in Thompson and McNamara's (1997) meta-analyses on educational job satisfaction, less than five studies could be directly linked to higher education.

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the perceptions of university staff concerning their job and their value to the university community and the relationship of these perceptions to their discretionary effort with respect to 1) mattering and marginality and 2) meaning and malaise (Karpiak, 1997). This chapter provides a foundation for the study through an exploration of the literature related to the meaning, malaise, mattering, marginality (4 M's) and discretionary effort (DE). The exploration begins with a focus on organizational culture and behavior, followed by a description of the theoretical framework. The focus then narrows to the 4 M's and DE, finishing with a section describing staff.

Organizational Culture and Behavior

To begin to understand university staff, one must first step back and look at the broad landscape of a university and all that it encompasses. The study of organizational culture provides a means to understanding the complexity of an organization, such as a college or university. Organizational culture, as described by Masland (2000) has a three-fold purpose in that it "induces purpose, commitment, and order; provides meaning and social cohesion; and clarifies and explains behavioral expectation" (p. 145). Understanding and studying the relationship and the effect a culture has on its employees provides researchers with additional approaches to studying colleges and universities, beyond that of the more traditional topics such as governance and decision-making (Masland).

Schein's (1992) definition of organizational culture, "a pattern of shared basic assumptions" (p. 12) and Masland's (2000) observation that the study of culture may bring to light conflicting cultural views, in part, helps to describe sub-cultures that may be found in higher education institutions. Natural divisions or sub-cultures occur when different basic assumptions are held by different groups, which further explains "why different groups in the organization hold varying perceptions about institutional performance" (Tierney, 1988, p.6).

Trice and Beyer (1993) noted "the most highly organized, distinctive, and pervasive sources of subcultures in work organizations are people's occupations" (p. 178). This explanation, titled occupational sub-cultures by the authors, helps further explain the sub-cultures found in higher education. Based on occupation, any one university may have sub-cultures of faculty, staff and administration. The university also may have sub-cultures centered around broad academic disciplines, such as the School of Business, the School of Arts and Humanities, the School of Education and the School of Math & Science. Each School of Math & Science may have formed sub-cultures around the scientific disciplines such as chemistry, biology and physics. Each employee is a member of the overall campus community, yet they could also be members of several sub-cultures, each with a different perspective of the institution.

Although, staff and faculty may hold different basic assumptions about the institution, there are some common components in the overall cultural of the organization that may be shared with sub-cultures. Tierney's (1988) framework of organizational culture postulated six components essential to the college or university setting: "environment, mission, socialization, information, strategy and leadership" (p.8).

Because these six components were developed from institutional research, they may be more relevant to higher education than other frameworks that were derived from business or industry models. The socialization component had the most relevance to this study, in that, Tierney defined socialization in terms of “How do new members become socialized?” and “How is it articulated?” and “What do we need to know to survive/excel in this organization?” (p. 8). Regardless of which sub-group one belongs, there appears to be a need to socialize the members, or in other words, show them the ropes.

How staff relate to and understand the mission statement of their university is another relevant component in the study of staff. Within Tierney’s (1988) definition of mission is that of defining and articulating the mission of the university. Are staff able to define the mission statement of the their university? Do they believe they are a part of accomplishing the mission? The answer may depend on the culture of the university and how encompassing that culture is of staff.

Barrett et al. (1995) identified several aspects that contribute to organizational culture: ideas and opinions are valued, departments interact and communicate, meetings are productive, direction of organization is communicated, and feedback and recognition are readily provided. These aspects are concrete examples of Tierney’s framework. To the extent that ideas and opinions are valued and recognition is provided relates to Tierney’s (1988) strategy component (e.g. how decisions are made and who makes the decisions). Communication, interaction and productive meetings can be found in Tierney’s information component.

Communication, interaction and productive meetings provide the foundations upon which governance lies. Governance is a broad topic and may include faculty

senates, governing boards, student government and staff associations (Kezar and Eckel, 2004). And as Kezar and Eckel noted, “there is ...virtually no scholarship on how these groups interact” (p. 373). To understand governance, one must first understand the culture of the university and within that culture, the lines of authority, roles and procedures (Kezar and Eckel). The roles of personnel become extended as people are asked to serve on committees, boards and associations.

Most research on governance has centered around the role of the faculty member and Pope and Miller (2000) noted the need for strong organizational ability for faculty leaders. Organizational ability was defined, in part, as “the ability to see and understand the big picture for the institution as a whole and look beyond a specific organization or group (Pope & Miller, 2000, p. 634). In Miller’s (2003) study of community college governance, 44 (72%) colleges functioned with some type of faculty governance. And of those 44 colleges, 6 indicated that their governance unit was comprise of both faculty, staff and administration. The inclusion of the three sub-cultures (faculty, staff and administration) may exemplify the definition of organizational ability used above. The three sub-cultures, blended by the commonality of serving in a governance role, may allow for a broader interpretation of governance within the college (Miller) and a greater understanding of the campus as a whole.

Indeed, the concepts of meaning, malaise, mattering, and marginality (as defined in this study) are deeply bound within the context of organizational culture. Depending on the culture of a university, staff may feel valued and important, or they may feel unappreciated and invisible. They may believe that their job is important to the mission of the university and believe “very strongly that they were in some way associated with

the teaching experience for the student, and did not exist merely to support students administratively” (Pitman, 2000). Yet, staff may appear to remain invisible in the context of institutional culture literature, as evidenced by their omission in the following statement: “...daily rituals of interaction between faculty and administrators illustrate the relative importance of each group and the ideologies surrounding their roles” (Masland, 2000, p. 148).

To summarize, organizational culture “provide(s) members with and reflect(s) their understanding of the purpose or meaning of their organization and their work” (Peterson & Spencer, 2000, p. 171). Sub-cultures emerge in complex organizations which “will inevitably involve the internal issues of status and identity” (Schein, 1992, p. 61). Status and identity may become important to staff as they determine where they “fit” within the university (mattering) and how they reconcile their job responsibilities with other, more dominant and prestigious roles (meaning).

Theoretical Framework

The study (Karpiak, 1996) that eventually led to the 4 M’s themes was conducted in a Canadian research university with faculty members that held the rank of associate professor. Invitations to participate in the study were sent to 120 associate professors within the Faculty of Arts area and twenty professors elected to participate. Of the twenty that chose to participate, the youngest was 41 and oldest 59. Data was collected by the researcher through personal interviews with each participant and a special focus group interview with 7 of the male participants. The purpose of the study was to expand the knowledge of mid-life, mid-career faculty members. The researcher discovered that

the faculty members have a sense “that the university administration cares little for them” (p. 59).

The theoretical framework for this study had its origins in faculty interviews conducted by Karpiak (1996) in which the concepts of meaning, malaise, marginality, and mattering (4 M's) emerged as significant themes (Karpiak, 1997). Through these interviews, some faculty members described how they found meaning in their work, and others described how they worked through times where meaning had been lost and thus experienced malaise. Unexpectedly, faculty also had feelings of marginality, and in nearly all cases, an absence of mattering.

Although somewhat similar in characteristics, the four variables should be kept separate by their particular focus. Meaning and malaise pertain to the staff member and represents the extent of caring and interest shown by that staff member to his or her work. Those employees who exhibit a high level of interest and caring about their job may be said to have found meaning in their job; whereas, those that display a low interest may be described as experiencing malaise. On the other axis is the caring and interest on the part of the administration and faculty as perceived by the staff employee, thus, represented by mattering and marginality. In other words, staff who perceive that administration and/or faculty value them and their (staff's) jobs, feel they matter; whereas staff who perceive low caring and low interest, will feel marginalized.

Comparable to the university setting of faculty, staff and administration, Glaser et al. (1987) examined government employees at varying organizational levels (line workers through top management) and suggested “organizations are generally composed of subcultures rather than one guiding mega-culture” (p. 190). Dick and Metcalfe (2001)

reported on the different sub-groups found in police organizations. As with a university and the sub-groups of faculty, staff and administration, police organizations are segmented into police officers and civilian staff. Dick and Metcalfe noted the difficulty in finding studies comparing two groups of employees, especially where one group is so dominant in the culture and the other group is considered the support group.

The theoretical framework for this study was grounded in faculty research, yet, the emergent themes of the 4 M's can be applied to the study of other employees, including university staff. Likewise, even though the pool of university staff studies is shallow, there are other types of organizations that have distinct employee sub-cultures (e.g. police, government agencies etc). The next section will further define the 4 M's and begin to distinguish how one theme (meaning/malaise) is more focused on the individual and the other theme (mattering/marginality) is focused on the perceptions held by the employee.

Meaning, Malaise, Mattering, Marginality and the Workplace

Prior to Karpiak (1997), the 4 M's had not been grouped together as one theme in the literature. However, several studies have focused on similar concepts and have conclusions emphasizing the importance of meaning and mattering in the workplace. Hodson's (2001) study of dignity in the workplace illustrates the 4 M's by defining dignity as "the ability to establish a sense of self-worth and self-respect and to appreciate the respect of others" (p.3). Hodson further states "people rely on the workplace as a primary arena for realization of meaning and creativity in their daily lives" (p. 238). Hodson's study included 108 book-length ethnographies representing various

organizations and workers from all walks of life. Through quantitative analysis, Hodson analyzed the processes used by workers to achieve dignity and the types of organizations that promote dignity.

Sears, Roebuck and Company, one of the United States' oldest retail establishments, invested significant resources to determine how best to measure employee attitudes. As a result of these efforts, employees' attitude toward the job (meaning) and attitude toward the company (mattering) were found to have a more significant impact on behavior, loyalty and customer service than other measures such as personal growth and development and empowered teams (Rucci, Kirn and Quinn, 1998). Also, as a result of these studies, the attitudes of the sales associates became an important issue. This is exemplified in the following statement:

Now that the financial turnaround had succeeded, what sales associates needed to be told was not just that the customer mattered but that *they* mattered, too – that the company could not survive without their active help and participation (Rucci, Kirn and Quinn, 1998, p. 94).

Mattering and marginality appear to be closely related to Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison and Sowa's (1986) perceived organizational support (POS). POS is defined as a development by employees of "global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being" (p. 501). McAllister and Bigley (2002) recognized POS as an individualized thought, which is comparable to the individualized perception of mattering as found in Karpiak's (1997) study.

McCarthy and Keefe (1999) conducted a survey of university staff based on Total Quality Management (TQM) initiatives. As noted by the authors, TQM has been slow to gain acceptance in higher education circles due to the reluctance to treating the university as a business. The framework for the McCarthy and Keefe study included workforce motivation, quality training, participative leadership, customer orientation and within-unit coordination. Workforce motivation may be associated with both meaning (e.g. “My work gives me a sense of pride) and DE (“My coworkers consider me to be an energetic worker). Quality training opportunities and participative leadership are related to mattering and Tierney’s (1988) cultural components of strategy and leadership. Customer orientation and with-in unit coordination may be associated with DE (e.g. “I strive to provide high quality service” and “I consistently look for ways to improve”) (McCarthy & Keefe, 1999).

Glaser’s et al. (1987) study of organizational culture added concrete examples to a complex construct that is not easily defined. Supervision, Tierney’s (1988) leadership component, was determined to be deficient. Glaser et al. further defined deficient with such examples as “top management and supervisors do not listen to or value the ideas and opinions of their employees” (p. 186). This type of deficiency leads employees to feeling unappreciated (marginalized) for their work efforts and willingness to offer suggestions. Also, employees believed interaction with other departments to be important, yet in this culture, communication was not encouraged.

Although the 4 M’s, as a group, had not been the focus of research prior to Karpiak (1997), each of the concepts or related have been studied in the workplace as a distinct measure. Hodson’s (2001) study of dignity is the most similar to the complete

concept of the 4 M's. Sears discovered the importance of employees that believed they mattered (Rucci et al., 1998) and Eisenberger's et al. (1986) POS theory is very similar to mattering. McCarthy and Keefe focused on TQM, which has a framework that includes meaning, mattering and discretionary effort. The next two sections will focus on the 4 M's and further review literature related to the concepts.

Meaning and Malaise

“Workers from all walks of life struggle to achieve dignity and to gain some measure of meaning and self-realization at work.”
(Hodson, 2001, p. 4)

How does an employee find meaning in his or her job? What factors contribute to meaningfulness in one's job? What is meaning? Is morale the same as meaning? Are value and meaning interchangeable concepts? What contributes to malaise? Karpiak (1997) defined meaning as exhibiting “high interest and caring with regard to academic responsibilities” (p. 26) and malaise as “loss of meaning, stagnation, and a sense of triviality and unimportance...” (p. 31). In the latter instance, staff are more likely to focus on their individual responsibilities rather than on the university as a whole. Barrett et al. (1995) found staff more likely to comment negatively on the university, yet positively on their own job or department. That is, the staff appeared to have found meaning with their own responsibilities and work areas, yet, found little meaning or association to the university as a whole. Barrett et al. noted several factors that appear to influence or affect the level of meaning staff associate with his or her job: co-workers, supervisors, job satisfaction and morale. As outlined below, each concept may be found

elsewhere in the literature helping to further define meaning and malaise as used in this study.

Co-workers and Supervisors

Work-related relationships appear to help employees find meaning in their jobs. The relationships can be with peers, supervisors or other constituents. Wheelless and Howard (1983) found co-worker association to be a primary reason people work at higher education institutions. Hodson (2001) stated, “co-workers provide the social fabric that is often crucial for meaning at work” (p. 18). Faculty who place a high level of meaning on teaching also exhibit a higher degree of interest and concern for their colleagues (Karpiak, 1997). Relationships with co-workers are important to staff and these relationships influence the level of care and interest associated with the personal work experience (Barrett et al., 1995). Management or administration may also affect the level of interest and caring exhibited by staff. Lack of leadership and ensuing chaos can also create a sense of malaise for some workers (Hodson, 2001).

Job Satisfaction and Morale

Employee job satisfaction has been related to job characteristics that include autonomy, level of challenge and communication of policies and to individual characteristics such as age, race, education and length of service (Ganzach, 1998; Oshagbemi, 2000; Thompson & McNamara, 1997; Ting, 1997). Organizational characteristics such as relationship with supervisors and co-workers have also been related to employee job satisfaction (Ting, 1997). Midlevel administrators associate morale with perceptions of fairness and meaningful work (Johnsrud, Heck & Rosser,

2000). Morale has been found to be lower for staff than top management (Glaser et al., 1987).

To summarize, staff find meaning in diverse ways and multiple factors may contribute to meaning, including co-worker and supervisor relationships, job satisfaction and levels of morale (Barrett et al, 1995). Meaning and malaise describe perceptions of the individuals, whereas mattering and marginality describe the perceptions of the employee in relation to their place within the university. To further distinguish meaning/malaise and mattering/marginality, the next section will provide additional definitions and concepts related to mattering and marginality.

Mattering and Marginality

“To believe that the other person cares about what we want,
think, and do, or is concerned with our fate, is to matter.”
(Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981)

Mattering is the perception that the university cares about and is interested in the staff employee, including their roles and contributions to the organization. Karpiak actually (1997) found that most faculty members believed that they did not matter to the university. Similarly, Pitman (2000) found staff members who believed their “customers” did not view the staff’s role as important. As with meaning and malaise, two attributes contribute to one’s perception of mattering and/or feeling marginal: recognition and being or feeling valued (Glaser et al., 1987, Davies & Owens, 2001).

Recognition/Valued

Employees, regardless of position, have a need to be recognized and will often feel marginalized if recognition is withheld (Glaser et al., 1985, Sherberg & Cetone,

1988). Recognition may also influence the level of morale and commitment of the employee (Glaser et al., 1985).

Believing that one is valued is an important component of employee/employer relationships, and each employee should believe that they make a contribution to the organization (Greaves & Sorenson, 1999, p. 124). Benefits such as approval, respect, pay, and promotion are just a few items associated with being valued (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002).

Organizational Commitment

As Tierney (1988) noted, “People come to believe in their institution by the ways they interact and communicate with one another” (p. 16). This belief in the institution may be defined as organizational commitment (OC). Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979) defined organizational commitment as “the overall strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in an organization” (p. 226). How much an individual identifies with the institution may well be related to the perception of mattering.

Colbert and Kwon (2000), studying college and university auditors, related organizational support and organizational characteristics to OC. The study further divided organizational support and characteristics into factors such as task significance (e.g. “Faculty recognize my contribution”) which focuses on this study’s definition of mattering and skill variety which addresses meaning as used in this study. Both organizational support and organizational characteristics related positively to OC.

In short, staff may feel that they matter if they are recognized and valued. How much an individual identifies with an institution constitutes a level of commitment, which

would seem to be related to mattering and marginality. It might be expected that staff who perceived a high level of mattering may be willing to expend extra effort to improve the effectiveness of the university. The following section will define discretionary effort and review the relevant literature for concepts related to discretionary effort.

Discretionary Effort

“The organizations in which people work affect their thoughts, feelings, and actions in the workplace and away from it. Likewise, people’s thoughts, feelings, and actions affect the organizations in which they work.”

(Brief and Weiss, 2002, p. 280)

Within a service industry, employee effort is difficult to measure or quantify (Rucci, Kirn and Quinn, 1998, p. 94). Within higher education, one might be quick to associate effort with productivity. Philosophically however, many institutions may find it unpalatable to treat students as mere numbers given that such treatment would lead to student alienation. As noted by Godwin and Markham (1996), “bureaucratic impersonality can make clients feel poorly served or denigrated because their unique needs go unacknowledged” (p. 663).

Gutek (1995) addressed the above concerns and categorized service opportunities into two types: relationships and encounters. Relationships result from repeated contact with a particular staff member; whereas, one time contact may be defined as an encounter. Why is this distinction important? If students develop relationships with staff, they may realize a “fit” within the university that may increase the likelihood of persistence. As Banta and Kuh (1998) discovered, 80 percent of non-returning freshman stated, “they had had no meaningful personal contact with any campus office, faculty or

staff member, or students” (3rd section, paragraph 10). Borrowing from Gutek’s terminology, the students appeared to only have had encounters at the university.

How do relationships and encounters relate to discretionary effort? Discretionary effort (DE), as defined by Yankelovich and Immerwahr (1983) is “the difference between the maximum amount of effort and care an individual could bring to his or her job, and the minimum amount of effort required to avoid being fired or penalized” (p. 1). In other words, DE, as used in this study, measures the extent of how hard an employee believes he or she is working. DE may enable researchers to discover whether employees perceive they are doing just enough to get by or going beyond the call of duty.

Although they did not use the term discretionary effort, Godwin and Markham (1996) provide anecdotal notes of staff practicing DE:

Some freshman praised staff members who went out of their way to help by telling them where to go for assistance, helping them choose courses or majors, and providing personal attention. . . . Nevertheless, the majority perceived staff’s approach as impersonal. One freshman said, “They just did what they had to do...” (p. 673).

Discretionary effort may also be seen in Blackburn, Lawrence, Bieber and Trautuetter’s (1991) interpretation and application of Cognitive Motivation Theory. Their study found faculty members willing to exert more effort in some areas and less in other areas due to their assessment of the environment and their own personal goals.

In addition to identifying with an organization as a means of defining organizational commitment, employees may display discretionary effort depending on their level of organizational commitment. One of the components of organizational

commitment as identified by Mowday et al. (1979) closely resembles DE: “a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization” (p. 226). Because this definition resides with the person and his or her motive and does not depend upon another’s observation, Mowday’s definition may best define DE. Entwistle’s (2001) study supported a positive correlation with discretionary effort and organizational commitment.

Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) further divide organizational commitment into three dimensions: affective, continuance and normative. Affective commitment may produce a greater level of discretionary effort because it is important for the employee to be associated with the organization, whereas, continuance commitment is manifested in the attitude of doing just enough to get by (low discretionary effort) because the employee cannot afford to leave the organization. Normative commitment results in behavior based on a sense of obligation or guilt (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001).

Seemingly, the closest concept in organizational behavior literature to discretionary effort is organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB). OCB is defined as, “individual contributions in the workplace that go beyond role requirements and contractually rewarded job achievements” (Organ and Ryan, 1995, p. 775). To distinguish between OCB and DE, one may reasonably think of OCB as all positive, or the individual either displays OCB or not. Whereby, discretionary effort may be both positive and negative, that is, staff may exert little or no effort beyond what is required (negative) or exert a great deal of effort (positive), given the particular situation or circumstance. The next section moves beyond the 4 M’s and DE and presents a model of potential sub-groups that may be found in a higher education institution.

Staff in Higher Education Research

This study aimed to explore the perceptions of staff, but, as it has been noted previously, there are potentially several “sub-groups” of staff. Staff, for the purpose of this research, have been divided into three broad categories: front-line, backstage and academic. Bauer (2000) describes front-line staff as “the first point of contact for current students, prospective students, parents, legislative officials, and other constituents” (p. 87). Front-line staff may work in offices or areas such as Registry, Financial Aid, Student Services, Bursar, Residence Halls and Cafeterias. Backstage staff are those employees who are seldom seen, but are crucial to the operations of the institution. Physical plant employees who work behind the scenes to keep the air conditioners in operating order, janitors who clean classrooms at night, information technology staff who keep the computer network operating, library support staff who catalog and restock the shelves – these are just a few of the backstage staff working diligently to create a learning environment for the students. Academic staff must juggle their time between the needs of the students, faculty and administrators. They are the people who work in the academic offices and may help students enroll in the correct classes, assist faculty with paperwork and support administrators in daily activities.

Each staff member potentially has a unique job and unique perspective of university life. This study was designed to explore beyond the broad category of staff and to begin to distinguish the needs of the different departments and different individuals. Training and development may be more effective if the unique needs of the different

groups of employees are considered. Management styles may be varied if there is a better understanding of the motivators behind each group.

Summary

A review of the literature indicated that the concepts of the 4 M's and DE (as defined in this study) are deeply bound within the context of organizational culture. Within the organizational culture of an organization, whether it be a higher education institution or a municipality's police department, employees may or may not find meaning in their jobs and they may perceive that they do or do not matter to their organizations. Mattering/marginality and meaning/malaise have been grouped together for the purpose of this study. Other studies have focused on similar concepts such as perceived organizational support, morale, dignity, job satisfaction, co-workers and supervisors, recognition and organizational commitment.

Though the concepts of the 4 M's and DE may not be as popular and well-researched as other human resource topics named above, there appears to be a need to gain knowledge that penetrates the surface of the employment relationship and delves into the staff member as a person with emotions and needs. By withholding effort, a staff member may believe he or she is neutralizing perceived injustices. An increase in effort may signify a true belief and commitment to the mission of the university, which in turn, may help increase persistence and thus, the overall effectiveness of the institution.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the perceptions of university staff concerning their job and their value to the university community and the relationship of these perceptions to their discretionary effort with respect to 1) mattering and marginality and 2) meaning and malaise (Karpiak, 1997). Mattering and marginality is the staff's perception of caring and interest by the administration and faculty toward them; meaning and malaise is the staff's extent of caring and interest related to their work (Karpiak, 1997). Discretionary effort measures the extent of how hard an employee believes he or she is working (Yankelovich & Immerwahr, 1983). In the previous chapter, other common employee measurement factors were introduced and defined. These factors included such concepts as organizational culture, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and perceived organizational support. The literature review explored the commonalities of these concepts with the concept of the 4 M's and DE. This chapter defines the population that was studied and provides the questions used to analyze the 4 M's and DE. Methods of analyzing the data are also described in chapter three.

Population

Bauer (2000), tellingly, summarized the need for staff surveys stating, "often, classified employees are treated differently from faculty and professional staff, and they may experience and report perceptions of the environment that differ from other campus employees" (p. 94). In other words, employees of the same university may see and

understand and experience the culture differently, especially such diverse groups as faculty and staff. Many studies have been conducted to better understand faculty needs, yet these studies may not be generalizable to staff because of the different perceptions held by staff and faculty (Bauer, 2000; Deming, 1993; Glaser, Zamanou, & Hacker, 1987; Oudenhoven & Gibson-Harman, 1999; Tierney, 1988). This study focused on university staff in order to better understand the needs and perceptions of staff members.

Although Bauer (2000) separated classified employees from professional staff, this researcher chose to combine the two groups into one population, based upon belief that university employee groups can be broadly categorized as faculty, staff and administration. Also, based upon the literature review, professional staff (those not considered administrators) were lacking in their own studies. Furthermore, this population (classified and professional) may comprise between forty and fifty percent of the employees at a university (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). By combining the two groups, this study was able to research a population that is not well-known, nor well defined. Two universities were chosen to participate in this study, and as evidenced by the literature review in chapter two, so seldom do staff have an opportunity to be heard, voice an opinion or offer a suggestion, the researcher believed it was important to include the entire population in the study. University A employs approximately 217 non-faculty employees and University B employs approximately 318 non-faculty employees, and all non-faculty employees were surveyed to capture data pertaining to the research questions. Table 1 provides a description of the population of the staff members at the two universities. Note that both schools employee a great

majority (>70%) of staff members that are 40 +. Also of interest are the similarities in length of employment tenure.

Table 1

Demographics of the University Staff Population

		Population	
		University A	University B
Gender	Female	62.7%	53.5%
	Male	37.3%	46.5%
Age	20-39	23.0%	20.1%
	40-49	36.4%	42.2%
	50+	40.6%	37.7%
Employment Tenure			
	1 day – 5 years	44.7%	41.5%
	6 – 10 years	23.9%	30.5%
	11 -20 years	20.7%	22.0%
	21 -50 years	10.7%	6.0%

Both University A and University B are regional universities in the same state and report to the same governing board. The two schools were chosen to participate in the study because of their similarities, such as employee classification, full time enrollment (FTE) and student headcount. Each school is one of the largest employers for their respective county and salary expenditures are comparable for each institution. As indicated in Table 2, both schools expend around 10% of their budget on salaries for classified/support personnel and between 8.5% - 9% of their budget on salaries for professional and administrative employees. This would indicate that employees in similar positions at both universities are making comparable salaries. The examination of salary scales and surveying the perceptions of salary/job responsibilities equity is outside the

scope of this study, however, salary issues may impact perceptions of staff members.

Therefore, it is important to survey employees with like salaries in order to mitigate the effect of salary on perceptions.

County unemployment rates range from 2.70% to 3.80% and county populations range from 26,142 to 35,143 as shown in Table 2. By choosing institutions located in rural areas with comparable low unemployment rates, one may assume that alternative job opportunities are similar in each area. If other job opportunities are available, then a person who chooses to stay at the university may believe they are making a difference or they have found meaning in their job.

Table 2

Demographic Information for University A and B

Categories	University A	University B
E&G Budget (2002-2003) ¹	\$26,667,941	\$33,200,039
Salaries (% of total budget) ¹ :		
Teaching	36.79%	34.70%
Professional	9.12%	8.50%
Other Salaries and Wages	10.03%	9.70%
Employees ¹ :		
Faculty	151	219
Admin./Prof. Staff (Exempt)	59	64
Other Staff (Non-exempt)	99	146
Projected FTE Enrollment Fall '02 ¹	3,471	4,450
Projected Headcount Fall '02 ¹	4,594	4,980
City Population (2000 Census) ²	15,691	9,859
County Population (2000 Census) ²	35,143	26,142
County Unemployment (Oct. '02) ³	3.80%	2.70%

1 2002-03 Budget Books as submitted to the governing board, June, 2002

2 Oklahoma Department of Commerce, www.odoc.state.ok.us, 11/26/02

3 Oklahoma Labor Force Statistics, www.oesc.state.ok.us, 11/26/02

Because of the similarities in campuses and communities, it was assumed the cultures of the two universities would be comparable. In other words, if the communities

had similar characteristics then it might be assumed that the employees have similar characteristics and share some common values. Also, as noted in chapter one, the researcher is an employee of one of the universities. In order to control for a potential conflict-of-interest on behalf of the participants and the researcher, it was determined by the researcher and the doctoral committee that it would be best to survey at least two schools.

Method of Data Collection

Permission to conduct an employee survey was gained from each school's equivalent of an Institutional Review Board and from the President of each institution. Each staff member received an individually addressed packet in their campus mailbox. The packets contained the survey instrument (see Appendix B), letter from the researcher explaining the study and their rights as voluntary participants (see Appendix A), and a self-addressed stamped envelope in order to return the survey. Additionally, at University A, the Vice-Presidents, either by e-mail or in person, reassured their employees that all responses would be confidential and that they (the administration) would not have access to any completed surveys, nor would they be told of any confidential information.

Sample and Response Rate

During the month of January 2004, the survey instrument was sent to 217 non-faculty/non-administrative employees of University A. Within two weeks of the original return deadline of February 13, 2004, an identical survey was sent to those who had not

yet responded. The “second request” surveys had a March 5, 2004 deadline. At the end of February 2004, the survey instrument was sent to 318 non-faculty/non-administrative employees of University B. Within two weeks of the original return deadline of March 26, 2004, an identical survey was sent to those who had not yet responded. The “second request” surveys had an April 9, 2004 deadline.

For University A, 124 (57.14%) surveys were returned. For University B, 141 (44.3%) surveys were returned. The original surveys were coded so the researcher would know who had not yet responded. The “second request” surveys were not marked with any identifying codes since the purpose of coding was only to identify who had not responded to the original mailing. Even though an attempt was made to only send surveys to non-faculty, non-administrative employees, 34 surveys were received where the respondents had marked either administrator or faculty. Upon further research of the employee’s particular job classification it was determined that 26 of the employees were actually professional or classified staff, according to the operational definitions of this study. (Note, all 26 surveys discussed previously were turned in on the first request, therefore, the researcher was able to identify the respondent). The job classification was then changed to reflect their operationally defined position on campus. The remaining eight surveys were either determined to have been completed by a faculty member or administrator or not able to identify respondent because of not coding the second request surveys and were omitted from further data analysis. After the omission of these eight surveys, University A had a response rate of 55.76% (n=121) and University B had a response rate of 42.7% (n=136).

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument used for this research project was designed to measure the perceptions of university staff concerning their job and their perceived value to the university community and the relationship of these perceptions to their discretionary effort. The instrument was developed as a result of reviewing related literature in the field of higher education, organizational behavior and organizational culture. Questions used to measure discretionary effort are largely based on the work of Entwistle (2001) whereas, questions for the 4 M's evolved from several studies (Colbert & Kwon, 2000; Dick & Metcalfe, 2001; Glaser et al., 1987; McCarthy & Keefe, 1999; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001; Rucci et al, 1998).

A qualitative section of the survey was added to this study in an attempt to further understand staff perceptions of the 4 M's. The open ended questions were designed so the participant could elaborate on critical incidents that helped them find meaning in their job or what caused them to have feelings of malaise. The participant was able to provide details of an incident where they believed they mattered to the university and an incident that made them feel marginalized. The open-ended questions provided an avenue for potential themes to emerge that may not have been captured in the categorical questions, thus potentially providing further understanding of staff and opportunities for further research.

Although Baird (1990) did not specifically address the issue of staff employees, he did reiterate the need for surveys to assess the campus climate and to aid in “understanding how the members perceive its realities and how they react to their perceptions is important so that decision makers can avoid actions that would be

detrimental to their institution” (p. 35). Gall, Gall and Borg (2003) noted that surveys or questionnaires aid the researcher in collecting data on phenomena that is not directly observable such as opinions and values. Surveys assist policy makers in identifying campus climate aspects such as “perceptions, expectations, satisfactions, and dissatisfactions of the people who make up the campus community” (Baird, 1990, p. 35).

Based upon various survey instruments used in employee studies, a survey instrument was developed that captured data related to the research questions. The researcher developed original questions and/or modified existing questions to best meet the needs of this particular study. Response choices for survey questions 1 – 34 utilized a five point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The following research questions were addressed:

1. What is the staff’s perception of the level of mattering or marginalization that they experience at the institution where they work?
2. What is the staff member’s perception of the level of meaning or malaise that they experience in their job?
3. How do meaning/malaise and mattering/marginality differ among the classifications of staff (front-line, backstage, academic)?
4. How do meaning/malaise and mattering/marginality differ based upon staff characteristics such as age, gender, tenure, level of education and intent to stay?
5. Are meaning/malaise and mattering/marginality associated with discretionary effort of staff?

Survey questions related to research question number one were designed to measure to what extent a staff member perceived that they matter to the university, specifically, administrators and faculty and/or the level of marginalization the employee perceived. Survey questions related to research question number two were designed to measure the level of meaning and/or malaise perceived by staff employees. Research question three was developed because of the researcher's belief that university staff may be divided into three unique classifications depending on the type of job they perform. Because of the differences in classifications, employees may differ on their perceptions of the 4 M's. Certain staff characteristics may be a factor on an employee's perception of the 4 M's, therefore, research question four addresses various staff characteristics and analyzes any differences on the 4 M's. As noted in chapter two, organizational commitment appears to be reflective of the operational definitions of mattering/marginality and discretionary efforts. Age, education and organizational tenure have been found to have a role in organization commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Therefore, demographic information was collected to analyze possible relationships with staff characteristics and the 4 M's. Lastly, research question five introduced the concept of discretionary effort and analyzes the relationship between the 4 M's and DE. Collectively, these five questions aided the assessment of how employees perceive their environment and the knowledge gained may be useful in assessing the campus climate as so noted by Baird (1990).

Variables

The variables in this study were employee perceptions of job and organizational attributes (meaning, malaise, mattering and marginality), employee characteristics (age, gender, tenure, level of education and intent to stay), employee sub-groups (front-line, back stage and academic) and discretionary effort. For research questions three and four, the independent variables are classification and employee characteristics and the dependent variables are meaning, malaise, mattering and marginality. The independent variables for research question five are meaning, malaise, mattering and marginality and the dependent variable is discretionary effort.

Data Analysis

Factor Analysis

Initial data analysis began with factor analysis. Johnson (1998) noted that the purpose of factor analysis was to “create(s) a new set of uncorrelated variables from a set of correlated variables” (p. 148). Because the survey instrument was based upon various survey instruments and because the 4 M’s and discretionary effort are not as widely used as other concepts (i.e. job satisfaction, morale, OCB, POS, etc), factor analysis was used to help determine if the questions chosen for the survey were related and if subsets (meaning/malaise, mattering/marginality and discretionary effort) could be established for further analysis. Once the subsets were established, additional data analysis was performed in order to answer the research questions. The method of analysis for each research question is described in the next section.

Research Questions

The following statistical analyses were selected to answer the five research questions:

Research Question 1: What is the staff's perception of the level of mattering or marginalization that they experience at the institution where they work?

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the mattering and/or marginalization the employee perceived. Table 3 lists the mattering and/or marginalization questions found in the survey.

Table 3

Survey Questions Associated with Mattering/Marginalization

Survey Question #	Question
1	Administrators recognize my contribution to University A/B.
2	Faculty recognize my contribution to University A/B.
11	I feel that University A/B looks after my interests.
12	I feel there is a connection with the work I do and the overall mission of University A/B.
13	I have opportunities to participate in training to improve my performance.
19*	If I did not perform my job, University would not change
21	My opinions count in this institution.
29	Staff are kept up-to-date about issues that affect them.
30	Staff are regularly asked to identify areas needing improvement
31	There is an atmosphere of trust in this institution
32	This institution treats staff in a consistent and fair manner
34	This institution values the ideas of workers at every level
*	Reverse Scoring

Research Question 2: What is the staff member's perception of the level of meaning or malaise that they experience in their job?

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the meaning and/or malaise the employee perceived. Table 4 lists the meaning and/or malaise questions found in the survey.

Table 4

Survey Questions Associated with Meaning/Malaise

Survey Question #	Question
3	I am challenged by my job.
4	I am proud to say I work at University A/B.
14	I like the kind of work I do.
17*	I would leave this institution if I could afford to quit.
18*	I'm not really interested in University A/B, it's just a job.
23	My work gives me a sense of accomplishment and pride.
28	Remaining a member of this institution is important to me.
33*	If I could find another job, I would leave this institution.
*	Reverse Scoring

Research Question 3: How do meaning/malaise and mattering/marginality differ among the classifications of staff (front-line, backstage, academic)? Survey question 38 asked the respondent to indicate their job classification: Administrator, Faculty, Professional Staff or Classified/Support Staff. Survey question 39 asked the respondents to further their classification by choosing a sub-group: Front-line, Backstage, or Academic. Definitions were provided to enable the user to better understand the concepts. Data was analyzed using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to answer research question 3.

Research Question 4: How do meaning/malaise and mattering/marginality differ based upon staff characteristics such as age, gender, tenure, level of education and intent to stay. Data was analyzed using analysis of variance (ANOVA). Survey questions 35-37 and 40 - 42 provided demographic information in order to answer research question 4.

Research Questions 5: Are meaning/malaise and mattering/marginality associated with discretionary effort of staff? Regression analysis was used to answer research question five. The following survey questions listed in Table 5 were used to gather data on discretionary effort.

Table 5

Survey Questions Associated with Discretionary Effort

Survey Question #	Question
5	I am willing to make major changes in the way I do my work in order to improve services.
6	I consistently look for ways to improve how I work, even when things are running well.
7	I continuously try to identify and solve problems not yet recognized by those I serve.
8*	I could increase my effort at work quite significantly.
9	I expend extra effort on behalf of my institution to help us avoid incurring unnecessary costs.
10	I feel an obligation to put in a good day's work for this institution.
15	I put a great deal of effort into my job over and above what is required.
16	I strive to provide high quality service to those I serve.
20	My co-workers consider me to be an energetic worker.
24*	On a regular basis, I put into my job only the amount of effort required to keep me from getting fired or disciplined.
25	On a regular basis, I spend a fair amount of time thinking about how to improve things at work.
26	On a regular basis, I spend extra effort on behalf of my co-workers, which results in benefits to my institution.
27	On a regular basis, I spend extra effort to benefit my institution.
43	If you really wanted to, how much do you think you could improve your own effectiveness on the job, by a little, say about 10% or by a great deal, like being twice as effective as you are now, or something in between? By a little By a great deal Something in between (___%)
44	How much effort do you put into your job beyond what is required? A great deal Some Very Little
45	Which of these four opinions do you agree with most? "In my job I do what is asked of me. Nobody can criticize me there. But I cannot see why I should exert extra effort beyond that." "I often have to force myself to go to work. I therefore only do what is absolutely necessary." "I put myself out in my work and I often do more than is expected and/or asked of me. My job is so important to me that I sacrifice much for it." "All in all I enjoy my work and every now and then I do more than is required."

Open-ended Responses

The last section of the survey allowed the respondent the opportunity, as the survey noted, to “describe any incidents you feel may be examples of your personal experiences of finding meaning, experiencing malaise, mattering or being marginalized.” Although providing open-ended questions may not be a true form of qualitative research, it does contain one characteristic that Merriam (1998) used to define qualitative research. The first characteristic noted by Merriam is the researcher is focused on “understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants’ perspectives” (p. 6). The respondents were provided the researcher’s expanded definition of the 4 M’s which included general characteristics associated with concept. Chapter one listed the operational definitions of the 4 M’s and Table 6 lists the expanded definition provided to the respondent. By allowing the participants to describe their own thoughts of the 4 M’s, the study was enriched by including an emic, or insider’s perspective of the 4 M’s (Merriam, 1998).

Table 6

Expanded Definitions of Meaning/Malaise and Mattering/Marginality

Survey Question #	Expanded Definition
46	Meaning - Many factors may help a person to find meaning in their job. Such factors such as relationships with co-workers and supervisors, level of job satisfaction, high level of caring and interest in one's job may contribute to finding meaning in one's job. Can you think back to any situation in your work that gave you a sense of meaning and importance or value of the work you do?
47	Malaise – A sense of malaise has been described as placing a low value on one's job. An employee experiencing malaise may show little concern or interest for their job. "Burn-out," "going through the motions," and "just collecting a paycheck" may be phrases used to describe an employee experiencing malaise. Has there been a time that you experienced malaise? Was there a particular incident or series of incidents that let you to a feeling of malaise?
48	Mattering – Often times, believing that administrators and/or faculty care about you and are interested in you leads to a feeling that you and your work matters to the university. Can you think back to a situation in your work where you had the sense that you mattered to the university, that the university cared about your interests and well-being?
49	Marginality – If one perceives that their job does not matter to administrators and/or faculty, an employee may feel marginalized. That is, you may feel that little importance is placed upon the job you perform. Has there been a time when you felt marginalized as an employee. Can you describe the situation?

Creswell (2003) described the use of open-ended questions with closed-ended questions as integration or mixing the data and suggests that it may occur concurrently. He also described this mix-methods approach as the "concurrent triangulation approach" (p. 217) and describes the approach as follows:

This model generally uses separate quantitative and qualitative methods as a means to offset the weaknesses inherent within one method with the strengths of the other method. In this case, the quantitative and qualitative data collection is concurrent, happening in one phase of the research study....This strategy usually integrates the results of the two methods during the interpretation phase. This interpretation can either note the convergence of the findings as a way to strengthen the knowledge claims of the study or explain any lack of convergence that may result (p. 217).

Research questions 1 and 2 were answered both with quantitative data and qualitative data. This type of data analysis was described by Creswell (2003) as:

Mixing at the stage of data analysis and interpretation might involve transforming qualitative themes or codes into quantitative numbers and comparing that information with quantitative results in an “interpretation” section of a study” (p. 212)

Besides supplying the open-ended data as quantitative numbers, selected quotes were also used to further describe the respondent’s definition of the 4 M’s.

Each reported comment from the open-ended questions was analyzed and group together according to the themes and categories that emerged using the qualitative methodology of content analysis. Content analysis has been defined as a process of simultaneously coding and constructing categories (Merriam, 1998). Frequencies and percentages of the themes were computed and analyzed (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2003). Participants may have a different definition of the 4 M’s than the researcher and the

open-ended responses allowed for comparisons and contrasts to the quantitative findings (Barrett et al., 1995). Indeed, as Barrett et al. noted in their study, the differences between the quantitative and qualitative data “suggest that the quantitative data might not tell us the ‘whole story’ when it comes to employees’ perception” (p. 28).

Summary

This research project focused on the non-instructional staff of two regional universities and a description of the population to be studied was provided at the beginning of chapter three. A survey instrument was designed to measure the perceptions of university staff concerning their job and their perceived value to the university community and the relationship of these perceptions to their discretionary effort. The survey instrument was delivered to 535 non-faculty staff members of two regional universities. Of the surveys returned (n=265), 257 were deemed useable and data analysis commenced. Chapter three concluded with a description of how the data would be analyzed in relation to each research question. The next chapter will provide the results of the survey and will include both quantitative and qualitative data.

Chapter Four: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the perceptions of university staff concerning their job and their value to the university community and the relationship of these perceptions to their discretionary effort with respect to 1) mattering and marginality and 2) meaning and malaise. Non-instructional staff may comprise between forty and fifty percent of the employees according to estimates by the U.S. Department of Education in the *Fall Staff in Postsecondary Institutions*, 1997 (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). University staff members are the least studied group of higher education employees (Barrett, Vander Putten, Peterson, & Cameron, 1995; Oudenhoven & Gibson-Harman, 1999).

This chapter presents data collected through surveys completed by non-faculty employees of two regional universities, hereafter, referred to as University A and University B. University A and B are located in the same state and as noted in chapter three, have similar characteristics regarding size, FTE, and community traits. Collectively, 535 surveys were sent to the two regional universities. University A had a response rate of 55.76% (n=121) and University B had a response rate of 42.7% (n=136). Between the two universities, there were 257 surveys deemed usable for data analysis. The subsequent sections of chapter four discuss data analysis and provide a summary of results for each research question.

Demographic Variables

Questions 35 – 42 of the survey were designed to collect demographic data and were analyzed using frequency distribution. Demographic information was needed in responding to research question four. As noted above, non-faculty staff are the least studied group on a university campus and consequently, we know little of the demographic make-up of this group. Nationwide, the overall population of other professional (support/service) staff as reported in the *Fall Staff in Postsecondary Institutions, 1997* (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999) was 60% female. Of the 257 respondents, 64.2% were female which are similar to the nationwide statistic. As can be seen in Table 7, respondent's demographic data was reflective of the staff population of the two universities.

Table 7

Demographics Comparisons between Population and Sample

		University A		University B	
		Population	Sample	Population	Sample
Gender	Female	62.7%	66.7%	53.5%	61.8%
	Male	37.3%	33.3%	46.5%	38.7%
Age	20-39	23.0%	24.2%	20.1%	17.6%
	40-49	36.4%	35.0%	42.2%	36.8%
	50+	40.6%	33.3%	37.7%	45.6%
	Blank		7.5%		
Employment Tenure	1 day – 5 years	44.7%	46.7%	41.5%	40.4%
	6 – 10 years	23.9%	20.8%	30.5%	23.6%
	11 -20 years	20.7%	21.7%	22.0%	25.7%
	21 -50 years	10.7%	10.8%	6.0%	10.3%

Table 8 provides demographic information such as age, education and length of employment and further distinguishes the demographics by gender. The largest group of

respondents fell into the 50+ category (41.6 %) with those falling between ages 40 and 49 accounting for 36.6 % of the staff. Bachelor's degrees (31.1 %), some college (24.1 %) and Master's degrees (24.1 %) accounted for the majority of educational attainment (see Table 8). The educational attainment was as expected with an almost even distribution among some college, undergraduate degree and graduate degree. In the researcher's mind, the most surprising demographic was the length of employment and the fact that 43.2% of the employees had served at their university for less than 5 years. With an older population of employees, one would expect to see longer lengths of employment.

Table 8

Distribution of Gender by Age, Education and Length of Employment

	Female		Male		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Age						
20 – 39	33	12.8%	20	7.8%	53	20.6%
40 – 49	69	26.9%	25	9.7%	94	36.6%
50 +	63	24.5%	44	17.1%	107	41.6%
Missing			3	1.2%	3	1.2%
Total	165	64.2%	92	35.8%	257	100.0%
Education						
Less than HS	0	0.0%	1	0.3%	1	.3%
High School	10	3.9%	14	5.4%	24	9.3%
Some College	47	18.3%	15	5.8%	62	24.1%
Associate's Degree	11	4.3%	1	0.3%	12	4.6%
Bachelor's Degree	57	22.2%	23	8.9%	80	31.1%
Master's Degree	39	15.2%	23	8.9%	62	24.1%
Ed.D/Ph.D./ Prof. Degree	1	0.3%	7	2.8%	8	3.1%
Other	0	0.0%	4	1.7%	4	1.7%
Missing	0	0.0%	4	1.7%	4	1.7%
Total	165	64.2%	92	35.8%	257	100.0%
Length of Employment						
0 – 5 years	66	25.7%	45	17.5%	111	43.2%
6 – 10 years	40	15.6%	17	6.6%	57	22.2%
11 – 20 years	38	14.8%	23	8.9%	61	23.7%
20 + years	21	8.2%	7	2.7%	28	10.9%
Total	165	64.2%	92	35.8%	257	100.0%

*Data Analysis**Survey*

A survey instrument was developed that captured data related to the research questions. The researcher developed original questions and/or modified existing questions to best meet the needs of this particular study. Response choices for survey

questions 1 – 34 utilized a five point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Demographic information was captured in survey questions 35-42. Survey questions 43-45 related to discretionary effort and used various scales (see Appendix B). The last section of the survey (questions 46 – 50) provided the respondent the opportunity to answer open-ended questions.

As noted above, the survey items were then linked to each research question. Factor analysis was performed on the survey questions in order to determine if the questions were related and if the subsets of meaning/malaise, mattering/marginality and discretionary effort could be established. Once the subsets were established, additional data analysis (as described below) was performed in order to answer the research questions. In addition to the quantitative portion of the survey and data analysis, respondents had the opportunity to respond to open-ended questions. These questions provided the participant with a definition of each of the 4 M's and asked that they complete the question by relating their own thoughts and experiences on the topics. Even though the staff may find meaning in their job and may perceive that they matter somewhat to the institution, can we gather further insights into what fosters meaning and a sense of mattering? The comments and observations imparted rich additional insights and were used to help answer research questions one and two.

Factor Analysis

Factor analysis has several goals, one of which is “to determine whether a smaller set of uncorrelated variables exists that will explain the relationships that exist between the original variables” (Johnson, 1998, p. 147). Because the survey instruments for this study was based upon various survey instruments and because the 4 M's and

discretionary effort are not as widely used as other concepts (i.e. job satisfaction, morale, organizational citizenship behavior, perceived organizational support), factor analysis was used to help determine if the questions chosen for the survey were related and if subsets (meaning and malaise, mattering and marginality, and discretionary effort) could be established.

During factor analysis, several questions were found to load on more than one factor. Question 23 (My work gives me a sense of accomplishment and pride), was initially categorized as a meaning/malaise question, however, it loaded on both discretionary effort and meaning/malaise. Question 12 (I feel there is a connection with the work I do and the overall mission of University A/B) was initially categorized as a mattering/marginality question, however, it loaded on all three factors (meaning/malaise, mattering/marginality and discretionary effort). Question 3 (I am challenged by my job) was initially categorized as a meaning/malaise question, however, it loaded on both discretionary effort and meaning/malaise. Question 14 (I like the kind of work I do.) was initially categorized as a meaning/malaise question, however, it loaded on both discretionary effort and meaning/malaise. These four questions were not used in further analysis due to the high loading on more than one factor. In other words, it could not be determined statistically that the questions related to just the one concept the survey attempted to measure. Factor loadings are reported in Table 9. Factor 1, mattering/marginality showed the highest scores with 4 questions rating above a .800, the other two factors had questions with ratings above .700.

The reliability coefficient of mattering/marginality, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was .913. The reliability coefficient of meaning/malaise, as measured by

Cronbach's alpha, was .854. The reliability coefficient of discretionary effort, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was .854.

Table 9

Factor Loadings for 4 M's and DE

Item		Factor 1 Mattering / Marginality	Factor 2 Discretionary Effort	Factor 3 Meaning / Malaise
34	This institution values the ideas of workers at every level	.835		
32	This institution treats staff in a consistent and fair manner	.832		
31	There is an atmosphere of trust in this institution	.824		
29	Staff are kept up-to-date about issues that affect them.	.802		
30	Staff are regularly asked to identify areas needing improvement	.787		
11	I feel that University A looks after my interests.	.691		
1	Administrators recognize my contribution to University A.	.681		
21	My opinions count in this institution.	.677		
22	My role (or what I do) is considered important within University A.	.580		
2	Faculty recognize my contribution to University A.	.536		
13	I have opportunities to participate in training to improve my performance.	.500		
19*	If I did not perform my job, University A would not change	.342		
7	I continuously try to identify and solve problems not yet recognized by those I serve.		.728	
15	I put a great deal of effort into my job over and above what is required.		.714	
6	I consistently look for ways to improve how I work, even when things are running well.		.703	
27	On a regular basis, I spend extra effort to benefit my institution.		.672	
16	I strive to provide high quality service to those I serve.		.649	
20	My co-workers consider me to be an energetic worker.		.592	
26	On a regular basis, I spend extra effort on behalf of my co-workers, which results in benefits to my institution		.566	
9	I expend extra effort on behalf of my institution to help us avoid incurring unnecessary costs.		.564	
5	I am willing to make major changes in the way I do my work in order to improve services.		.548	
25	On a regular basis, I spend a fair amount of time thinking about how to improve things at work.		.546	
10	I feel an obligation to put in a good day's work for this institution.		.544	
24*	On a regular basis, I put into my job only the amount of effort required to keep me from getting fired or disciplined.		.500	
44	How much effort do you put into your job beyond what is required – a great deal, some or very little?		-.405	
17*	I would leave this institution if I could afford to quit.			.747
33*	If I could find another job, I would leave this institution.			.722
18*	I'm not really interested in University A, it's just a job.			.608
28	Remaining a member of this institution is important to me.			.580
4	I am proud to say I work at University A.			.559
*	Reverse Scoring			

Open-ended Responses

Through the use of open-ended questions at the end of the survey, the researcher collected data that answered the “how” and “what” questions – How does a person find meaning in their jobs? What may cause a person to believe that they matter to the university? What experiences lead to feelings of malaise and marginality? Not only do these findings contribute to answering the first two research questions, but they provide depth to the overall understanding of the 4 M’s as perceived by the respondents.

Each comment was reviewed and examined using content analysis. Merriam (1998) defines content analysis as a process of simultaneously coding and constructing categories “that capture relevant characteristics of the document’s content” (p. 160). The researcher began the content analysis with a set of categories gleaned from the literature review. As the comments were reviewed (separately for each question), additional categories emerged and some categories were deleted. This approach was described by Altheide as quoted in Merriam’s (1998) book, “Although categories and ‘variables’ initially guide the study, others are allowed and expected to emerge throughout the study.” (p. 160). Each of the 4 M’s was defined in more general terms than the researcher used in chapter one and the respondents were asked to provide any comments they wished. Selective quotes from the respondents are used in the next section to provide a clearer picture of the 4 M’s and to further answer research questions one and two.

Research Questions

Research Question 1. What is the staff's perception of the level of mattering or marginalization that they experience at the institution where they work?

Questions related to research question one are listed in Table 10 and were designed to measure to what extent a staff member perceived that they matter to the university, specifically, administrators and faculty and/or the level of marginalization the employee perceived. The mean (M) score for each mattering/marginalization question was calculated and then ranked from highest mean to the lowest mean. Table 10 shows the number (N) of respondents, the mean (M) and the standard deviation (SD) for each mattering/marginalization question. As the Likert-scale was rated as 1 –5 with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree, a rating of 3 would indicate a neutral response to the statement. With the statements utilized to address this research question, the means for the questions ranged from 2.89 – 3.61. Thus, the employees had, at best, neutral perceptions or agreement as to whether they mattered to their institution. Question 22 asked if the respondents perceived that their role was important within the university and with a mean of 3.61, ranked the highest among the mattering/marginalization questions, which would indicate that the employees perceive they mattered only somewhat to the university. Responses to question 34 (M=2.89) indicated that employees may perceive to be marginalized when it comes to offering their opinions or expressing their ideas. Open-ended responses are provided next and contribute to the data analysis by providing, in their own words, respondent's perceptions of mattering and marginality.

Table 10

Mattering/Marginality Descriptive Statistics

#	Question	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
22	My role (or what I do) is considered important within University A/B.	256	3.61	1.045
13	I have opportunities to participate in training to improve my performance.	257	3.51	1.153
19*	If I did not perform my job, University A/B would not change	255	3.40	1.114
1	Administrators recognize my contribution to University A/B.	256	3.39	1.121
11	I feel that University A/B looks after my interests.	257	3.35	1.069
2	Faculty recognize my contribution to University A/B.	255	3.30	1.015
29	Staff are kept up-to-date about issues that affect them.	257	3.29	1.130
32	This institution treats staff in a consistent and fair manner	257	3.11	1.172
21	My opinions count in this institution.	256	3.10	1.118
31	There is an atmosphere of trust in this institution	256	3.03	1.141
30	Staff are regularly asked to identify areas needing improvement	256	3.02	1.146
34	This institution values the ideas of workers at every level	257	2.89	1.107
*	Reverse Scoring			

Mattering. Of the 257 survey responses analyzed, respondents provided 136 comments to Question 48, which asked their thoughts on mattering. In chapter one and two, the researcher presented the idea that meaning and mattering were two separate and distinct concepts and the study attempted to separate the two concepts. Some respondents answered the open-ended questions as if the concepts were one in the same. This resulted in emergent themes that mirrored several of the themes from the meaning question. Table 11 provides a summary of the themes and the next paragraph further defines and describes the themes.

The emerged theme of “Communication” was further dissected into four sub-themes: others expressed appreciation/praise, allowed to express opinion or be involved, received recognition and inquiries into personal life. The theme

“Supervisors/Administration Actions” appears to be rather broad, however, the theme captures the importance placed by respondents on the behavior, reactions and responses exhibited by supervisors in various situations. One example of a supervisor’s action is quoted below:

“Approving an out-of-state conference when the budget was tight, my boss knew I needed a break.”

Additional quotes are listed elsewhere in this chapter. The theme “Responsibilities” captures the importance the respondents placed upon their duties and roles. “I know that the record keeping I do for other departments matter” is but one example of comments recorded under the “Responsibilities”. “Feeling Valued” emerged as a separate theme (as opposed to being grouped with other sub-themes of “Communication”) because six respondents used special wording that focused on being or feeling valued as a person and/or as an employee. “Pay Raises” emerged as a theme when six respondents specifically referred to salary issues such as increase in pay. “Perception of mattering to certain individuals” emerged as a theme when six respondents identified specific people or groups of people that have made them feel like they matter to the university. Listed below is Table 11 which summarizes the themes into quantifiable data. Following Table 11 is a more detailed discussion of the various themes and selected quotes that illustrate the perception of mattering.

Table 11

Summary of Themes Regarding Mattering

Themes	# Responses
Communication:	
Others expressed appreciation/praise	39
Allowed to express opinion or be involved	14
Received recognition	14
Inquiries into personal life, expressions of support	11
Supervisors/Administration Actions	14
Responsibilities/Quality of Work	9
Feeling Valued	6
Pay Raises	6
Perception of mattering to certain individuals	6
Other Miscellaneous Responses	17
Total Responses	136

The most common response to what helps a person perceive that they mattered was that others expressed appreciation or praise for the respondent's work. The following quote is just one example of the positive experiences, shared by employees, which relate to feeling appreciated.

"I completed a task for the VP of University A which was outside my duties – when the task was completed I received a letter thanking me for completing the job – still have the letter."

From the literature review, feeling valued and experiencing a sense of approval and respect lead to the perception that one matters to the organization (Greaves & Sorenson, 1999; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Respondents to this survey echoed these same thoughts in their responses as indicated by the quotes below.

"It is important to be valued as an employee, but when you are valued as an individual it makes all the difference."

“Recently, I have been included in meetings that I normally would not have attended. This makes me feel that my input and job is important.”

As Tierney (1988) noted, “People come to believe in their institution by the ways they interact and communicate with one another” (p. 16). Two themes emerged from the content analysis that appear to relate to interaction and communication - supervisor’s actions and perception of mattering to certain individuals. The following quotes help emphasize the staff’s perceptions of interaction and communication.

“I once worked for an administrator who took the time to learn about me and what my job does to enhance the university. He stood up for everyone.”

“I believe those in my department consider me valuable and a good employee. I do not believe those in positions that matter (Vice President, President) care one way or the other.”

“One of the faculty refers to me as his contact for good information. He makes me feel a sense of pride in my knowledge.”

Although seventeen responses were very individualized and did not fit into any one category or theme, their voices contributed significantly in understanding this topical area. The two quotes listed below are indicative of the individualization of the remarks provided by the respondents.

“Faculty & administration treats everyone as equals. Staff members have a say in many of the aspects of the University.”

“I work for a good institution & every time I call someone for help, I feel like I matter.”

Marginality. Although staff members, on the whole, may feel they matter to the university, certain instances may bring out feelings of marginality. Marginality responses were similar to malaise responses in that many were individualized and difficult to categorize. Of the 257 survey responses analyzed, respondents provided 103 comments to Question 49, which asked about incidents of feeling marginalized (see Table 12).

Because the study examined marginality as the opposite of mattering, it was not surprising to see many common themes from mattering be expressed as a negative. This was especially evident in the theme “Opinions discounted/disregarded/not consulted” which is the opposite of what made employees feel that they mattered. The theme “Salary Issues” included such items as lack of pay raises, inequitable pay raises, and salary not commensurate with responsibilities. As with mattering, the theme “Supervisor/Administration Actions” focused primarily on the actions, behaviors and responses of the administration and/or supervisors – however, in this section, the actions were usually viewed as negative actions or lack of response. The type of job one was asked to perform and adding additional responsibilities to current job descriptions were the type of responses included under the theme “Job responsibilities”. Table 12, listed below, summarizes the themes into quantifiable data. Following Table 12 is a more detailed discussion of the various themes and selected quotes are given that describe the feelings of marginality.

Table 12

Summary of Themes Regarding Marginality

Themes	# Responses
Communication:	
Opinions discounted/disregarded/not consulted	14
Salary Issues	11
Past events/unfair treatment	10
Faculty arrogance/mistreatment	9
Supervisors/Administration Actions	8
Others not understanding job/job not viewed as important	7
Overheard opinions/derogatory remarks	6
Responsibilities/Quality of Work	4
No team effort	4
Feeling left out	4
Unfair/inequitable treatment among departments	4
Status quo seems acceptable standard	3
Other Miscellaneous Responses	19
Total Responses	103

Respondents felt marginalized when their opinions were discounted or disregarded and when they were not consulted on issues. Respondents quoted below shared specific instances that led them to feeling marginalized.

“Every time we try to give a personal opinion or make a request, we are told to keep it to ourselves.”

“Sometime I do not feel that my opinions or knowledge is respected unless it can be linked to my degree. Several times I have had a better grasp on how to solve a problem only to be discounted because I do not have a degree in that specific area. Talent, skill, and knowledge should be more important than a sheet of paper. You don’t have to have a degree in music

to sing, and you can get a degree in music without being able to carry a tune.”

Salary issues led eleven respondents to feel marginalized and although the respondents did not give many details, one was very blunt:

“My pay makes me feel marginalized.”

Past events and/or unfair treatment were mentioned by ten respondents as contributing factors of feeling marginalized, and an additional nine respondents specifically stated that faculty arrogance/mistreatment had led them to experiencing feelings of marginality. Even though the events may have occurred several years ago, they were still fresh in the minds of a few of the respondents that shared their experiences.

“Many, many years ago I was told by my boss to get back to my station.”

“Many of the faculty are of the opinion that their jobs are the only ones of importance and they believe staff are only here to serve them and ‘ride their coattails’.”

Supervisors and administrators were also singled out as causing some to have feelings of marginality. Seven respondents reported experiencing feelings of marginality when their supervisors/administrators/faculty did not understand their job or viewed their job as unimportant. The quotes given below illustrate the particular actions of administrators and faculty that lead to feelings of marginality.

“I feel my job is important but I also get the feeling from Administrators that it’s not necessarily important that ‘I’ do the job because anyone could do it.”

“The VP...walks around looking down his nose at staff and is always checking to see that we are actually working.”

“Faculty do not consider staff jobs to be important. Let one of them step in for a day and do our job. It takes everyone to make this place run smoothly.”

In summary, employees had, at best, marginal perceptions or agreements as to whether they mattered to their institution. The highest mean score for questions associated with mattering was only a 3.61 indicating that employees are just slightly above neutral when it comes to perceptions of mattering. Referring back to the graphical representation of mattering and marginality found in chapter one, employees in this study would rate themselves in the middle of the continuum, neither feeling that they mattered nor exhibiting strong feelings of marginality. The open-ended responses provided more insight into the perception of mattering and marginality. Communication, such as expressing appreciation/praise and being allowed to express an opinion and receiving recognition provided 67 respondents with a sense of mattering. Issues that created a sense of marginality varied among individuals, however, 13 themes emerged from the 103 responses. Moving away from mattering and marginality, employees appeared to

find some meaning in their jobs and the next section will describe the results of research question two.

Research Question 2. What is the staff member's perception of the level of meaning or malaise that they experience in their job?

Questions related to research question two are listed below (see Table 13) and were designed to measure the level of meaning and/or malaise perceived by staff employees. The mean (M) score for each meaning/malaise question was calculated and then ranked from highest mean to the lowest mean. Table 13 shows the number (N) of respondents, the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) for each meaning/malaise question. A Likert-scale was also used in response to questions related to meaning/malaise and the responses ranged from 3.48 – 4.25. Responses to question 4 (M=4.25) indicated that employees have found meaning in their jobs and exhibit this meaning as a source of pride. The lowest two means (questions 33 and 17) were reversed-scoring questions and the responses indicated that employees were just slightly interested in staying with the institution.

Table 13

Meaning/Malaise Descriptive Statistics

#	Question	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
4	I am proud to say I work at University A/B.	257	4.25	.902
18*	I'm not really interested in University A/B, it's just a job.	256	4.16	1.035
28	Remaining a member of this institution is important to me.	257	3.98	.974
33*	If I could find another job, I would leave this institution.	256	3.67	1.125
17*	I would leave this institution if I could afford to quit.	256	3.48	1.195
*	Reverse Scoring			

Results of the open-ended questions are provided next and allow for a greater understanding of what may yield a sense of meaning for an employee. Certain quotes have been included to illustrate the employee's perception of the definition of meaning and malaise.

Meaning. How does a staff member find meaning in their job? Of the 257 survey responses analyzed, respondents provided 213 comments to Question 46 which asked respondents to report incidents that gave them sense of meaning. Table 14 provides a summary of the themes and the next paragraph further defines and describes the themes.

As Table 14 shows, the overwhelming response to finding meaning falls under the theme "Communication". And as with mattering theme of communication, sub-themes emerged which included: others expressed appreciation, allowed to express opinion or be involved and received recognition. Although the communication sub-themes were similar with both the meaning and mattering concepts, "Student interaction" was an important theme unique to the meaning concept. Student interactions ranged from providing guidance/mentoring to helping solve problems. Once again, "Responsibilities" emerged as a popular them and as with mattering, this theme revolves around particular job descriptions and duties. It could be argued that the theme of "Customer Service" is a sub-theme of "Responsibilities", however, respondent comments in this category were more in line with going above and beyond job descriptions to help others. Co-worker relationships, supervisor relationships, faculty relationships and other types of relationships provided meaning to many of the respondents and were combined into one theme, "Relationships". Listed below is Table 14 which summarizes the themes into

quantifiable data. Following Table 14 is a more detailed discussion of the various themes and selected quotes that illustrate the perception of mattering.

Table 14

Summary of Themes Regarding Meaning

Themes	# Responses
Communication:	
Others expressed appreciation/praise	79
Allowed to express opinion or be involved	13
Received recognition	9
Student Interaction	40
Responsibilities/Quality of Work	25
Relationships	21
Customer Service	17
Other Miscellaneous Responses	9
Total Responses	213

From Barrett's et al. (1995) study, the concepts that contribute to organizational culture are closely attuned to the open-ended responses given in this study, namely: ideas and opinions are valued and feedback and recognition are readily provided. In this study, the most frequent responses to how an employee found meaning centered around communication and the incidents where others expressed appreciation and praise. Also, categorized under communication, were a number of incidents that involved the employee being allowed to express an opinion or being asked to participate. The following quotes indicate how the incidents shared in this study parallel the Barrett et al. study.

“Once my boss took the time to thank me for my courteous and professional manner when dealing with students and faculty; and how I worked to minimize disagreements between staff members.”

“I enjoy having input into a project by giving ideas and expertise of my own.”

Tierney’s (1988) sense of mission was illustrated by the high number of incidents that involved student interaction. Although the mission question was not used in the quantitative analysis due to the high loading on all three factors, it appeared that staff feel a part of the mission as evident in the encounters that were shared.

“It is satisfying to know that individual students are having a good experience at University A, maybe in part due to my help.”

“When I know I have made a freshman student more at ease on campus, I realize the importance other than the day-to-day work we do.”

Job responsibilities and quality of work performed supported a sense of meaning based on responses from 25 respondents. Also, providing customer service was listed by 17 respondents as incidents that provided meaning. Job responsibilities, quality of work and customer service may be a part of the sense of mission that Tierney (1988) speaks of in his research. The following participants shared their experiences which provide rich insights into the concept of meaning.

“In my job, janitor, what may be considered the bottom of the work chain, self pride in my performance and I am fortunate enough that almost all prof, doc and students in my building treat me with respect and courtesy, that I go the extra mile when they ask me, even if it may not be in my job description.”

“People coming to University B for the first time ask for me personally because of word of mouth about my courteous, patient and correct service.”

Co-workers and supervisor relationships have been found to have an impact on the meaning one finds in their jobs (Barrett et al., 1995; Hodson, 2001; Wheelless & Howard, 1983). Relationships with either co-workers or supervisors were cited by twenty-one of the respondents when given the opportunity to report on how they find meaning in their job.

“My coworkers; coming to work every day is almost always a positive experience. Their professionalism and conduct are a huge asset to our department”.

“I enjoy working with my supervisor; we’ve become good friends outside of the workplace. We work great together because we’re a lot alike.”

Malaise. Although common themes emerged around incidents that provided meaning, experiencing malaise appeared to be more personal. Through the content analysis additional themes emerged. As described in earlier chapters, malaise may be thought of as being the opposite of meaning. It is interesting to note that even though the employees found meaning in their jobs, there were many incidents that caused feelings of malaise. This difference would appear to mean that even though employees may experience malaise, the feeling is short-lived or does not have a long-term effect on finding meaning in one’s job. Of the 257 survey responses analyzed, respondents provided 131 comments to Question 47 which asked about incidents that led to feelings malaise (see Table 15).

In general, comments were more personal and did not fall into well-defined themes. “Salary Issues” and “Too Many Responsibilities” were the two themes with the most comments. “Salary Issues”, as with marginality, included such items lack of pay raises, inequitable pay raises and salary not commensurate with responsibilities. As with the other concepts, the theme “Supervisors/Administration Actions” combines the responses that focused on the negative or adverse actions, responses and behaviors of supervisors and administrators. The theme “Work Related Issues” combined the sharing of incidents that may have not been related or connected to individuals, but to the university as a whole and the policies and procedures of the institution. “Co-Workers” rather than “Relationships” emerged as a theme for the malaise concept because of the specificity of certain respondents, yet the theme still embodies the relationships with co-workers. Table 15 lists the themes and the number of responses and the “Other Miscellaneous Responses” category combined all comments that were only echoed by one or two respondents and did not “fit” into other categories. Following Table 15 is a more detailed discussion of the various themes and selected quotes are given that describe the feelings of malaise.

Table 15

Summary of Themes Regarding Malaise

Themes	# Responses
Salary Issues	17
Responsibilities/Quality of Work	15
Communication:	
Lack of recognition	13
Opinions discounted/disregarded	9
Lack of appreciation	7
No credit for job/responsibilities	5
Supervisors/Administration Actions	12
Treatment of staff	8
Repetition of work/not enough to do/bored	8
Yes, but no specifics	7
Personal/Non-work related issues	6
Work related issues	6
Co-workers	4
Lack of opportunities/advancement	3
Other Miscellaneous Responses	11
Total Responses	131

Salary issues ranked the highest of incidents causing employees to experience malaise. The selected quote below illustrates the connection this employee has made between malaise and discretionary effort.

“Yes, when other employees don’t do their job and still get the same raise & pay. So it doesn’t make any difference how much more you put into your job, you still get the same pay treatment.”

Since malaise may appear to be the opposite of meaning, it seems only natural that the opposite of recognition (lack of recognition) and not being asked for opinions and ideas would rank high on the incidents reported under the category of malaise.

“When administration has not seemed to recognize or acknowledged our effort because we are not teaching faculty. They put forth impressions sometimes that we are just hired help who can easily be replaced.”

“When decisions about [departmental] issues are made and done and I am left to deal with the consequences of poorly thought out plans of action.”

Since responsibilities and quality of work were frequent responses to how a person finds meaning in their job, it is not surprising that feelings of malaise appear when a person feels overwhelmed or has too many responsibilities. As was noted in the section on marginality, some of the malaise incidents happened years ago, yet the experience is still fresh in the minds of some of the respondents.

“Many years ago, I was performing a myriad of job functions. This went on for a very lengthy time and left me feeling overwhelmed. Requests for assistance were ignored and I became ‘burned-out’.”

“Only being able to put out immediate fires without getting much accomplished.”

It should also be noted that eight respondents expressed that there was not enough to do, their job was too repetitious, leading some to experience malaise.

“I loved the job, it just doesn’t demand much. It’d be really hard to get burned out.”

“I’ve experienced burn-out from time to time. I associate this with performing the same job for a long time.”

Relationships (or lack of relationships) with administrators and the treatment of staff appear to contribute to feelings of malaise, as noted by the shared incidents below.

“Discouragement over being treated very disrespectfully by a supervisor led to wanting a change.”

“Frequently, the way administration treats us has the staff feeling like non-persons or peons.”

In summary, employee responses to meaning questions ranged from 3.48 to 4.25, indicating that employees agree with the perception of finding meaning in their job. The results also indicate that the employees are proud to work for their particular institution. As with the first research question, the open-ended responses provided a more in-depth description of how employees find meaning. They appear to find meaning with the same experiences that provided them with a sense of mattering – expressing appreciation, expressing opinions and receiving recognition. Thus, the first two research questions focused on how the employee perceives the 4 M’s, the next research question begins to distinguish the 4 M’s among different classifications of staff.

Research Question 3. How do meaning/malaise and mattering/marginality differ among the classifications of staff (front-line, backstage, academic)?

As defined and discussed in chapter one, staff employees may be divided into three classifications depending on the type of job they perform. Studies of organizations

found employees, formally and informally, categorized into sub-groups or sub-cultures (Trice & Beyer, 1993; Tierney, 1988). The classifications or sub-cultures used in this study were front-line, backstage and academic. A front-line employee may have one-on-one interaction with students, faculty and administration. A backstage employee may work behind the scenes and have limited contact with other constituents (Deal & Jenkins, 1994). An academic staff employee was defined as one working in an academic department with daily faculty interaction.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to evaluate the relationship between mattering/marginality and classification of staff. The independent variable, classification included three levels as reported by the respondents: front-line, back stage, and academic staff. The dependent variable was mattering/marginality. The ANOVA indicated no significance at the .05 level. Additionally, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to evaluate the relationship between meaning/malaise and classification of staff. The independent variable was based upon, again, the three levels of staff that were self-reported by the respondents: front-line, back stage, and academic staff. The dependent variable was meaning/malaise. The ANOVA was determined to be significant at the .05 level with $F(2,223) = 3.526$, $p = .031$. A Bonferroni post hoc test, was then conducted to determine specific differences among the three levels of classification. The significant difference was determined to be between front-line and backstage employees.

Research Question 4: How do meaning/malaise and mattering/marginality differ based upon staff characteristics such as age, gender, tenure, level of education and intent to stay?

As there is no concrete research that explores the relationship of the demographic characteristics stated in this research question to meaning/malaise and mattering/marginality, this study attempted to provide baseline data that would address this question. As noted in chapter two, there have been studies that addressed demographic characteristics and job satisfaction and organizational commitment, two concepts that may be associated with meaning/malaise and mattering/marginality. The following results were ascertained from this query.

Age: A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to evaluate the relationship between mattering/marginality and age. The independent variable, age included three levels: 20-39, 40 – 49 and 50+. The dependent variable was mattering/marginality. The ANOVA was determined to be significant at the .05 level with $F(2,251) = 5.249$, $p = .006$. A Bonferroni post hoc test was then conducted to determine specific differences among the three levels of classification. The significant difference was determined to be between ages 40 – 49 and 50+.

Next, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to evaluate the relationship between meaning/malaise and age. The independent variable remained the same the same as above and the dependent variable was meaning/malaise. The ANOVA was determined to be significant at the .05 level with $F(2,251) = 4.835$, $p = .009$. A Bonferroni post hoc test was then conducted to determine specific differences among the

three levels of classification. The significant difference was determined to be between ages 20 – 39 and 40 – 49 and also between ages 20 – 39 and 50+.

Gender: A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to evaluate the relationship between mattering/marginality and gender of staff. The independent variable, gender included two levels: female and male. The dependent variable was mattering/marginality. The ANOVA indicated no significance at the .05 level. Then, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to evaluate the relationship between meaning/malaise and gender of staff. As noted above, the independent variable, gender included two levels: female and male. The dependent variable was meaning/malaise. The ANOVA indicated no significance at the .05 level.

Tenure: A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to evaluate the relationship between mattering/marginality and tenure (length of employment). The independent variable, tenure included four levels: 1 day – 5 years, 6 years – 10 years, 11 years – 20 years, 21 years +. The dependent variable was mattering/marginality. The ANOVA indicated no significance at the .05 level. Secondly, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to evaluate the relationship between meaning/malaise and tenure (length of employment). The independent variable as listed above, included four levels and the dependent variable was meaning/malaise. The ANOVA indicated no significance at the .05 level.

Level of Education: A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to evaluate the relationship between mattering/marginality and level of education. The independent variable, level of education included eight levels:

Less than high school diploma
High School

Bachelor's Degree
Master's Degree

Some College, but no degree
Associate's Degree

Ed.D./Ph.D./Prof. Degree
Other

The dependent variable was mattering/marginality. The ANOVA indicated no significance at the .05 level. Next, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to evaluate the relationship between meaning/malaise and level of education. The independent variable, level of education included the eight levels listed above and the dependent variable was meaning/malaise. The ANOVA indicated no significance at the .05 level.

Intent to Stay: A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to evaluate the relationship between mattering/marginality and intent to stay. The independent variable, intent to stay included five levels based upon a 1 - 5 Likert-scale: Very Unlikely, Unlikely, Neutral, Likely and Very Likely. The dependent variable was mattering/marginality. The ANOVA was determined to be significant at the .05 level with $F(4.249) = 6.577$, $p < .000$. A Bonferroni post hoc test was then conducted to determine specific differences among the 5 classifications of intent to stay. The significant difference was determined to be between unlikely and very likely; neutral and very likely; and likely and very likely.

Then, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to evaluate the relationship between meaning/malaise and intent to stay. The independent variable, intent to stay included five levels: Very Unlikely, Unlikely, Neutral, Likely and Very Likely. The dependent variable was meaning/malaise. The ANOVA was determined to be significant at the .05 level with $F(4.249) = 18.032$, $p < .000$. A Bonferroni post hoc test was then conducted to determine specific differences among the 5 classifications of intent to stay. The significant difference was determined to be between very unlikely and

unlikely; unlikely and neutral; unlikely and likely; unlikely and very likely; neutral and very likely; likely and very likely.

Research Question 5. Are meaning/malaise and mattering/marginality associated with discretionary effort of staff?

Discretionary effort, as defined previously, measures the extent of how hard an employee believes he or she is working. Various survey questions were used to determine an employee's perception of their discretionary effort. Regression analysis did not indicate significance.

Discussion of the Results

The previous sections of chapter 4 presented the findings of the study and listed the results in a quantifiable manner. The next section will expand upon the findings and discuss the results of each research question and provide the reader with the researcher's interpretations of certain data.

Research Question One

The first research question, "What is the staff's perception of the level of mattering or marginalization that they experience at the institution where they work?" was addressed by the rating of staff perception to questions related to mattering /marginalization and through content analysis of open-ended questions, in particular, survey questions 48 and 49. The mean ratings for staff perception of mattering/marginalization ranged from 2.89 to 3.61, which indicated that staff had a limited agreement of a perception of mattering and that marginalization was being

perceived in the workplace when it came to the institution valuing the ideas of workers at all levels ($M=2.89$). It is interesting to note that the most common situation cited for feeling like one matters was when others expressed appreciation or praise. In other words, common expressions of gratitude translated into believing one matters. As will be discussed in the next section, expression of appreciation and praise also provided many of the respondents with a sense of meaning in their jobs.

Within the same theme of communication, 28 respondents felt that when they were allowed to express opinions or when they received recognition led them to perceptions of mattering to the university. Along those same lines, 14 respondents expressed similar sentiments in the negative light. That is, having their opinions discounted, disregarded or just not being consulted led these respondents to feel marginalized. The open-ended responses support the quantitative results of feelings of marginalization when not allowed to be involved or express an opinion. Why would staff members believe that their opinions may not matter? Trice and Beyer (1993) noted the distinction between staff and line managers and discussed how each group, functioning as subcultures, may undermine the cooperation and coordination of each workgroup. They proposed that opinions of staff maybe discounted due to perceived threats to the power and control maintained by management. The following quote illustrates a clear distinction between staff and administration and the possible conflicts that may exist.

“Administration should get out of their offices and experience what they look down on and see what it is like.”

Why is it important to ask employees their opinion? Deal & Jenkins (1994) noted that not only does it help ensure that resources are wisely invested, but that

Asking for employee opinions and responses helps generate wise decisions and increases employees' involvement and interest.

Recognizing and responding to employee ideas about needed equipment acknowledges their ability and know-how (p. 172).

So, asking opinions of staff member takes advantage of the expertise and knowledge of the employees, provides recognition to the employee and protects the resources of the institution.

Salary issues were not specifically addressed in the survey, yet the topic emerged as a common theme that caused employees to experience feelings of marginality. Seventeen respondents commented on salary issues when discussing marginality and one participant, in particular, succinctly combined both mattering and marginality themes in the first quote listed below.

“It is much easier to perform well if you believe others appreciate [that] what you do is important and you are adequately compensated.”

“Staff members work longer hours yet have little or no means of moving up or have the opportunity for pay raises. Raises are very selected.”

“I feel a lot of staff and support people actually do much more work and are productive and our pay sure does not reflect that we are an important part of the team.”

Research Question Two

Deal and Jenkins (1994) stated, “Employees have to feel that their work has meaning. They need to feel an emotional, existential connection to the total organization” (p. 185). The second research question, “What is the staff member’s perception of the level of meaning or malaise that they experience in their job?” was written in order to discover the level of meaning one finds in his or her job and to discover the emotional connection that Deal and Jenkins (1994) spoke of in their study. The topic of meaning and malaise was addressed by the rating of staff perception to questions related to meaning/malaise and with the open-ended questions (46 and 47) that asked the respondent to recount incidents where they found meaning or felt malaise. The mean ratings for staff perception of meaning/malaise ranged from 3.48 to 4.25, which indicated that staff had a higher level of agreement to finding meaning in their job ($M=4.25$) versus the level of agreement of perceiving that their job mattered to the university ($M=3.61$). The distinction between meaning/malaise and mattering/marginalization may be the level of personalization one attributes to the concepts. Although employees only slightly agreed to perceiving that they mattered to the university, the employees appeared to agree with finding meaning in their jobs as indicated by the mean scores. The “how” one finds meaning was very similar to what makes one perceive that they matter. As with mattering, receiving an expression of appreciation or praise led many respondents to find or experience meaning in their jobs. Although the study measured perceptions of meaning/malaise and analyzed the open-ended responses for the “how”, it must be recognized that other spurious factors may

influence meaning and malaise. Self-worth is one such spurious factor that may affect meaning and malaise, as noted by the respondent quoted below.

“The way one feels about his or her job may have more to do with how the individual feels about self than with what the job is.”

Not surprisingly, student interactions played an important role in respondents experiencing a sense of meaning. Student interaction is reflective of the positive experiences Karpiak (2000) noted in her study of faculty at mid life, “they derive pleasure and gratification from mentoring students, nurturing them,...and affecting their lives” (p. 127). The quote listed below is typical of the comments made by the respondents regarding student interactions.

“I love my job because it allows me to meet so many wonderful young people. Meeting people and offering friendship and encouragement in additions to my other duties is very satisfying.”

So, not only is student interaction important to faculty, it is important to staff members as well. Further study into the types of student interactions would provide additional clarification as to how one experiences meaning.

Research Question Three

The third research question, “How do meaning/malaise and mattering/marginality differ among the classifications of staff (front-line, backstage, academic)?” was addressed by analyzing the 4 M’s based upon levels of classification (front-line, backstage, academic). There appeared to be no significance between classification based upon mattering/marginality, however, classification was found to have a significant difference

within the meaning/malaise construct. Further analysis revealed that the significant difference was found to be among front-line and back stage employees.

Classification of staff was self-reported and short definitions were included in the survey. The majority of respondents self-classified themselves as front-line employees (n=161, 62.6%) which was of interest to the researcher. Since the classification was self-reported, those thought to be backstage employees by the researcher may actually think of themselves as front-line employees. This follows what Trice and Beyer (1993) noted,

Organizations are typically multicultural, meaning that they have multiple subcultures within them. Members can belong to more than one of these subcultures; in fact, belonging to multiple subcultures may be more the rule than the exceptions (p. 175).

By believing and acting as they are front-line employees, an employee may feel more of a connection to the university and feel they are a vital part of the mission. Front-line employee may be more than a label, it may be a mindset and further research would help us better understand the concept.

Research Question Four

The fourth research question, “How do meaning/malaise and mattering/marginality differ based upon staff characteristics such as age, gender, tenure, level of education and intent to stay?” was determined by analyzing the 4 M’s based upon the five demographical items of age, gender, tenure, level of education and intent to stay. As with other studies, demographics or individual characteristics often exhibit mixed results. Ting (1997) found age and race, but not gender and education, to have a significant effect on job satisfaction. Length of service in their present job (tenure) had a

significant effect on job satisfaction in Oshagbemi's (2000) study of university faculty. Clark and colleagues (1996) found job satisfaction to be U-shaped in relation to age, even when controlling for level of education and job tenure.

Age was found to have a significant difference on both meaning/malaise and mattering/marginality. Further analysis revealed that the significance was between the older employees, those 40 and above. One might be tempted to conclude that the older employees have settled into jobs they are comfortable with and that may contribute to their sense of meaning and mattering. However, the demographic data shows 43% (n=109) have been in their job less than 5 years and of those, 70% (n=76) are age 40 and older. This would indicate that the older employees may have changed jobs recently and their sense of meaning and mattering may come from the challenges and rewards of a new job or career. Further research is needed in order to better understand the relationship between age, length of tenure and the 4 M's.

Gender, tenure and level of education did not appear to have a significant difference on both meaning/malaise and mattering/marginality. Intent to stay was found to have a significant difference on both meaning/malaise and mattering/marginality. This is understandable since one would expect to stay at a job where one has found meaning and where one perceives that they matter to the institution, such as this respondent quoted below.

"Wouldn't want to work anywhere else! I enjoy coming to work everyday and I enjoy what I do."

It would also be expected that one would leave a job if they had not find meaning or experienced a sense of mattering.

Research Question Five

The fifth research question, “Are meaning/malaise and mattering/marginality associated with discretionary effort of staff?” explored the relationship between the 4 M’s and DE. Regression analysis did not indicate an association between the 4 M’s and DE. Although the results of this study did not yield a significant association between the 4 Ms & DE, some open-ended responses, as quoted below, captured the data differently, thus providing an opportunity for future research.

“I don’t believe we are encouraged or given any incentives at all to perform at a higher level than “marginal”. When an employee does [perform at a higher level] it is simply of their own volition and [,] dependent upon the job position (higher profile or visibility)[,] is the effort recognized.”

Also, an area that some respondents reported as causing a sense of malaise was that of being overwhelmed with too many responsibilities and stressed. These types of experiences could have a potential effect on discretionary effort. Interestingly enough, those that may be overwhelmed may be adding to their feelings of malaise when they see others who appear not to have enough to do. These types of organizational conflicts, as noted below, and their effect on discretionary effort are areas that need to be explored further.

“Coming from the private sector, it seems that there are more employees than are needed. I have observed in my position and others around the campus that there is a lot of free time to do personal business (talk on phone, computer time, etc).”

Although the data analysis did not indicate an association with the 4 M’s and DE, the following personal account illustrates the need to better understand and study the relationship. The vignette also allows one to be reflective of actions taken in the past and provides a reminder to be cautious when making decisions that affect the lives of employees and the institution.

“When there was a change to be made in my department...I was left without a job, although I was told I could be first to interview for any positions open on campus. Therefore, I did interview for another department as secretary... I had to take the secretarial job at the rock bottom salary at which new employees are hired. Nothing that I had done before that was above and beyond my job was considered... So, of course, now I do not volunteer or attend any campus functions. I did not take vacation or sick leave days before, but now that I have about 30 days accrued over the past 3 years, I take every one of them.”

There are usually two sides to every story and the above personal account allows us only a glimpse of this one employee’s perception. However, it has been said that perception is reality, and whether the sequence of events is true or not, this employee has now changed his or her working habits, possibly to the detriment of the institution.

Lastly, it must be noted that employees were allowed to provide general comments at the end of the survey. These comments were not included in the data that determined the themes for the concepts of the 4 M's, however, upon further review of the comments, one particular theme emerged – “Class/Education Distinction.” Under this theme, 14 respondents supplied comments that appeared to be related to the differences and distinction between faculty, staff and administration which is consistent with other research (Deming, 1993; Glaser, Zamanou & Hacker, 1987; Oudenhoven & Gibson-Harman, 1999; Tierney, 1988). A few of the quotes listed below illustrate an apparent common perception that staff have of faculty and administration.

“My biggest complaint...is that we have such a distinctive class system.”

I do not like the class divisions between administration, faculty and staff. The atmosphere is such that we must always be careful not to offend faculty...”

“I would prefer for some faculty to remember that all are created equal. A PhD degree does not allow one person to be superior over another.”

“Too many people are sitting around on their “credentials” while others aren’t compensated for being productive...There is not necessarily a connection between intelligence & education.”

These perceptions illustrate the differences in sub-cultures. Sub-cultures, as described in chapter 2, may have conflicting cultural views (Masland, 2000). And as Trice and Beyer (1993) noted, many sub-cultures are formed around occupations. The “Class/Education Distinction” category did not originate from 4 M’s questions, yet the comments contain underlying tones of marginality. Emerging themes from marginality, such as faculty arrogance, past events/unfair treatment and others not understanding job/job not viewed as important clearly fall under the umbrella of “Class/Education Distinction”.

Summary

In summary, results of the data analysis showed employees only to have a slight sense of perceiving to matter to their institution and they feel somewhat marginalized when their opinions are not valued. Open-ended responses indicated that many employees feel they matter when others express appreciation or praise for their work. Marginality open-ended responses echoed the quantitative data, in that, more respondents listed incidents of not being heard or consulted as causing them to experience feelings of marginality than any other incidents.

Employees, according to the results, have found meaning in their jobs and are not experiencing malaise. Once again, open-ended responses provided greater descriptions on what helps an employee find meaning in their job. For those that listed an incident that provided meaning, the highest category was that of receiving appreciation and praise. Although the quantitative results did not show employees to have a sense of malaise, for those that responded to the open-ended questions, salary issues and too many responsibilities may be areas causing the employee to experience malaise.

As discussed, there appeared to be a difference between the results of the quantitative and qualitative data. One explanation for these differences is the language factor. The 4 M's were described and defined prior to asking for critical incidents that would exemplify the 4 M's. The participants were free to define the 4 M's as they saw fit, not necessarily as the researcher defined the concepts. The quantitative questions never used the words meaning/malaise, mattering/marginality or discretionary effort. Rather, the researcher relied upon concepts that defined the 4 M's and DE in order to frame the questions.

For research question three, significance was determined between meaning/malaise and classification, most notably between front-line and backstage staff. And for research question four, significance was found between mattering/marginality and age and intent to stay. Significance was also found between meaning/malaise and age and intent to stay. Lastly, no relationship was found between the 4 M's and DE. The next chapter will discuss conclusions and present recommendations based on the data analysis.

Chapter Five: Conclusions, Recommendations and Implications

Almost every institution of higher education has a mission statement. These mission statements usually articulate what the university would like to accomplish and whom they would like to serve. What role do employees, in particular staff, play in implementing the institutional mission? Do employees, especially staff members, feel connected or a part of the campus community? How might employees be categorized throughout the institution? How do staff view faculty and administrators? How might these views affect productivity? The purpose of this study was to explore these staff issues along with issues related to finding meaning in one's job and believing that one's job matters to faculty and administration. The next sections will focus on providing conclusions that evolved from the study. The five conclusions correspond to the research questions and provide a basis for the recommendations presented in later sections. The last section will discuss areas for future research.

Conclusions

Conclusion One: Employees exhibit perceptions of neutrality regarding overall recognition of mattering or marginalization, however, the employees are able to articulate incidents that bring about specific feelings of mattering or marginalization.

At first glance this neutrality appears to be a step backwards in the pursuit of knowledge concerning university staff, yet if you compare the results of the qualitative data, the results begin to make sense. Three survey questions asked similar questions

which essentially focused on one concept – does the university value my ideas and opinions? Mean scores ranged from 2.89 to 3.10, which, according to the Likert scale used, hovers around the neutral response. When asked to respond to the mattering and marginality open-ended questions, 14 respondents believed that the university allowed them to express their opinions and to be involved and 14 respondents believed that the university did not allow them to express their opinions or that their opinions were discounted. Participants also responded with the same thoughts on being involved and asking their opinions when asked to respond to the meaning (n=13) and malaise (n=9) open-ended questions.

What does this neutrality mean and why is it important? The employees in this survey may not feel that they matter to the university yet they do not really feel marginalized either. One must ask, did the quantitative data measure the “long-term” concepts of mattering and marginality and the qualitative data measure the “short-term” aspects of the two concepts? The quantitative section of the survey was viewed through lenses of accumulated experiences, whereas the qualitative section captured snapshots of critical incidents. The critical incidents help to answer what makes a person feel they matter or what makes a person feel marginalized. Since the respondents appear to be neutral regarding their perception of mattering, supervisors and administrators can look at the critical incidents and begin to implement or take action on those issues that promote mattering, such as asking the opinions of staff and/or including staff in the decision making process.

Conclusion Two: Employees are proud to work at their respective institutions and have found meaning through expressions of appreciation, job responsibilities, student interactions and work-related relationships.

Not only did the quantitative data show that employees have found meaning in their job, the open-ended responses allowed the researcher to answer “how” an employee finds meaning or “what” may provide meaning to an employee. Mean scores ranged from 3.48 to 4.25 with a Likert scale score of 4 indicating agreement with the survey statements presented. The qualitative responses mirrored many of the mattering/marginality responses. The most often cited critical incident that enabled a person to experience meaning came when people expressed appreciation and/or praise (n=79). The second most cited examples of finding meaning came through student interactions (n=40).

The findings of this study replicate other studies results in that several factors appear to influence or affect the level of meaning staff associate with his or her job: co-workers, supervisors, job satisfaction and morale (Barrett et al, 1995; Hodson, 2001; Ting, 1997; Wheelless & Howard, 1983). Job responsibilities (n=25) and work-related relationships (n=21) helped respondents find meaning in their job. Job responsibilities, as defined earlier, captures the importance the respondents placed upon their duties and roles and may be a factor of job satisfaction.

The interesting dynamics of this conclusion lead one to ask the question, “How are employees finding meaning, yet they do not really believe that they matter to the university?” The dynamic is further complicated with the overlapping of themes found in the qualitative portion of the survey (i.e. others expressed appreciation or praise, allowed

to express opinion or be involved and received recognition). It would seem that student interactions, job responsibilities and work-related relationships provide the difference between meaning and mattering to an employee. Therefore, it is imperative to promote these types of actions in order to help employees find meaning. One means of promoting job responsibilities is to focus on how the responsibilities connect to the overall mission of the university and work-related relationships may be enhanced with communication and education. The recommendations section will further expound upon these ideas.

Conclusion Three: There is no significant difference among classifications of staff as they relate to mattering/marginality, however, there is significance among classifications (front line vs. back stage) when it comes to the concept of meaning/malaise.

This is an important conclusion because the employees were allowed to self-classify themselves in the various classifications (front-line, back stage and academic). The front-line classification was chosen by 71.2% (n=161) of the participants. The classification of backstage employee was chosen by 19.5% (n=44) of the respondents and 9.3% (n=21) respondents chose the academic classification. The researcher, according to the definitions provided to the respondents, thought more employees would choose the back stage classification rather than the front-line classification. Even more important is the fact that a backstage employee (by definition) sees himself or herself as being on the front-line and interacting with students, faculty, administration and other constituents.

Those positive about their jobs and those that have found meaning in their job may have classified themselves as front-line and those that are not positive and have not

found meaning may have classified themselves as back stage. Further research may reveal if being labeled a back stage employee has negative connotations to some employees. And as noted earlier, status and identity may become important to staff as they determine where they “fit” within the university (mattering) and how they reconcile their job responsibilities with other, more dominant and prestigious roles (meaning).

As described in chapter 4, employees were allowed to provide general comments at the end of the survey. Within the general comments (n=114), one particular theme emerged – “Class/Education Distinction” that had not surfaced within 3 of the 4 other concepts (mattering, meaning and malaise). The 4th concept, marginality had an emerged theme labeled “Faculty arrogance/mistreatment” that could conceivably be thought of as “Class/Education Distinction”. Within the “Class/Education Distinction” theme, 14 respondents supplied comments that appeared to be related to the differences and distinction between faculty, staff and administration which is consistent with other research (Deming, 1993; Glaser, Zamanou & Hacker, 1987; Oudenhoven & Gibson-Harman, 1999; Tierney, 1988).

Conclusion Four: The demographic characteristic of age was found to have a significant difference as it related to the 4 M’s, yet level of education did not appear to make a significant difference.

The results or conclusions that age was found to have a significant difference as it related to the 4 M’s was not surprising to the researcher because age has been shown to have an impact on job satisfaction (Clark et al., 1996; Ting, 1997). What makes this conclusion interesting is that the significance was between the older employees, those 40

and above. On the surface, this would appear to be intuitively correct assuming that older employees have settled into jobs they are comfortable with and have presumably reconciled their career goals with their current job. This assumption does not appear to be the case in this study – the vast majority of employees that have worked at their respective universities for less than five years were over 40 years old. This would indicate that the older employees may have changed jobs recently and their sense of meaning and mattering may come from the challenges and rewards of a new job or career. The question then becomes, how do we help maintain this level of meaning and mattering as the employee progresses through their career?

As this study began to evolve in the mind of the researcher, the basic question of “How does a person’s level of education affect their job performance?” led the researcher to concepts such as organizational commitment and perceived organizational support. From these concepts, the researcher then searched for a means to bring the concepts together and study them, not in isolation, but as an overall framework for understanding the staff employee. The 4 M’s became this framework and the study began to produce information on the staff employee. For example, as conclusion four stated, the level of education was not significant to the 4 M’s. The researcher erroneously speculated that those without a college education would resent working at an institution of higher learning where they would be helping people achieve a goal that they themselves had not been able to accomplish. The results of this study have cast a shadow on the initial speculative thinking that one of the recommendations might be to provide opportunities for training and education to staff level employees. Rather, the results indicate that

demographics such as level of education are not significant to the 4 M's and therefore, we must focus time, energy and resources on what does affect the 4 M's.

Conclusion Five: There appeared to be no association between the 4 M's and DE according to the quantitative data analysis, however, incidents were described in the open-ended responses that would indicate otherwise.

The quantitative data analysis is contrary to the expectations of the researcher and appears to be inconsistent with some of the previously discussed studies (Barrett et al., 1995; Blackburn et al., 1991; Godwin & Markham, 1996; Hodson, 2001). Even though no association was found in the quantitative data, several respondents described incidents that could potentially define discretionary effort. One quote, in particular, stands out: "I don't believe we are encouraged or given any incentives at all to perform at a higher level than "marginal"." This respondent has captured the spirit of discretionary effort and has opened a window for future research – what incentives are needed to encourage a person to perform at a higher level? One incentive may be merit pay raises.

Salary issues emerged as a common theme throughout the qualitative sections of mattering (n=6), marginality (n=11) and malaise (n=17). Another respondent echoed the connection between discretionary effort and salary when asked if they had ever experienced malaise:

"Yes, when other employees don't do their job and still get the same raise & pay. So it doesn't make any difference how much more you put into your job, you still get the same pay treatment."

Because of these statements and others like them, the researcher would agree with Barrett et al., (1995) in that, “quantitative data might not tell us the ‘whole story’ when it comes to employees’ perceptions” (p. 28). Although the quantitative data shows no association between the 4 M’s and DE, the qualitative data provides information that may indirectly be associated with discretionary effort. For instance, salary issues were cited as incidents that caused feelings marginality (n=11) and feelings of malaise (n=17) and among these 28 responses, some participants (n=11) connected their particular salary issue to discretionary effort.

As discussed in chapter 4, some respondents reported being overwhelmed with too many responsibilities, thus leading them to experience malaise. This type of experience could have a potential effect on discretionary effort because the employee either begins to tackle tasks that are easy to accomplish while ignoring more difficult important tasks or spends his or her time “putting out fires”. Either scenario does not add to the efficiency and productivity of the employee’s respective department.

Lastly, there were several participants (n= 9) who felt they had performed exceptionally well or completed a task outside of their area, yet they were not recognized for their efforts. Recognition was cited as a means of experiencing mattering (n=14), meaning (n=9) and lack of recognition was cited as a means of experiencing malaise (n=13). As noted above with salary issues, recognition may be indirectly associated with discretionary effort. In an attempt to combat factors that may affect discretionary effort, the following section describes the recommendations that have evolved from this study and conclusions discussed above.

Recommendations

Clearly, one study cannot fully and adequately define a population so diverse as university staff. However, one study can begin to gather data that strives to describe and understand this particular and somewhat unique group of employees. And with this gathering of data, one can begin to see certain themes emerging that lend themselves to recommendations and reminders of how we go about our daily business. The next sections outline four recommendations that may provide administrators an opportunity to analyze their current management techniques and reevaluate human resource management philosophies.

Recommendation One: Acknowledge and Understand Sub-cultures

The first recommendation is to increase the awareness, across campus, of the various perceptions of the university that different groups hold. As noted in conclusion three, there was no significant difference among classifications as they relate to mattering/marginality, but there was significant difference as the classifications relate to meaning/malaise. The researcher has concluded that the significant differences came about because the employees were allowed to self-classify themselves and many of the employees chose the front-line category. This unique outcome of the study reiterates the statements and findings that different groups or sub-cultures hold different perspectives of the same organization (Deming, 1993; Glaser, Zamanou & Hacker, 1987; Oudenhoven & Gibson-Harman, 1999; Tierney, 1988). Although one of the research questions examined the different perspectives of staff with regards to their own classification, it was outside the scope of this study to compare the perceptions of the sub-cultures of faculty, staff and administration. Yet the different perceptions and sub-cultures were

evident in responses provided by staff members when allowed to supply any type of general comment.

“My biggest complaint...is that we have such a distinctive class system.”

“I do not like the class divisions between administration, faculty and staff.

The atmosphere is such that we must always be careful not to offend faculty...”

Trice and Beyer (1993) broadly defined ethnocentrism as a sense of kind membership and superiority over others that are not of like membership. They further defined ethnocentrism in terms of occupations and warned that it can “become a formidable barrier to understanding and cooperation among groups in work settings (p. 185).” Occupational ethnocentrism, if left unchecked, may inhibit work-related relationships and these work-related relationships play an important role in the lives of staff, in that, they help an employee find meaning in their job. Recognizing that occupational ethnocentrism may exist on a campus is the first step in understanding various sub-cultures. The second step is to begin communication among the groups which is a component of the next recommendation

Recommendation Two: Include Staff in Decision Making Processes

The second recommendation to be derived from this study is that supervisors, managers and other administrators should include staff members in the decision-making process as much as possible, invite the staff members to join campus-wide committees and involve staff members in department meetings. Asking the opinion of a staff

member allows that employee to have input and to be recognized. This in turn adds to the employee's sense of meaning and mattering. The administrator also benefits by gaining perspectives of those in the trenches which may lead to more informed decision-making. As Kezar and Eckel (2004) noted, "...the more inclusive processes with broad participation increase the likelihood of valuable input that can improve a policy or decision (p. 388)."

Along these same lines of communication, provide opportunities for various administrative departments to interact with faculty groups so that there may be a better understanding of what goes on outside of the classroom. Faculty governance has long been a topic of scholarly research, with focus on structure and theories such as human relations, social cognition, cultural and open systems (Kezar & Eckel, 2004). By encouraging and allowing staff involvement in governance, such as a Staff Senate, an institution may move towards a more shared type of governance, which as noted by Pope and Miller (2000), "...allows for institutional introspection and reflection and provides for a creative way to find multiple solution to complex problems (p. 636)." Ultimately, the university will benefit as all employees work together to best meet the needs of the students.

Recommendation Three: Connect the Mission of the University with Staff Responsibilities

Provide a clear understanding to staff as to where they fit within the institution and their importance to the institution's mission and goals. This may be achieved through an examination and reevaluation of job descriptions. Conclusion two discussed how job responsibilities played an important role with staff and their sense of meaning. It

will be imperative during the reevaluation of and possible changes in job descriptions to maintain elements of the job that provide meaning. Communication will be a key in understanding and defining what part of the job provides the most potential for meaning to each individual. A by-product of this examination may be a reassignment of duties.

As noted earlier, staff may experience a sense of malaise when they are overwhelmed or stressed, yet others reported being bored. Possible realignment of duties may alleviate some areas of stress while focusing on accomplishing the mission of the university. A balanced and fair work flow is difficult to maintain, yet it is very important for the well-being of the employees.

Articulating the mission and goals of the university can be further enhanced through the employee evaluation process. During the evaluation process, guidelines and milestones can be set that focus on the mission of the university and how a particular job relates to the mission. Employees believe they matter when they hear others express appreciation, when they receive recognition and when they feel valued. Employee evaluations meetings are perfect opportunities for supervisors to offer appreciation and praise along with constructive comments to help the employee. Also during the evaluation meetings, the supervisor should take the time to discuss the successes of the university and how those successes relate back to the employee and their role. By establishing well-defined goals, employees can work towards continuous improvement and have a better understanding of where they “fit” within the university environment.

Recommendation Four: Show Appreciation and Provide Recognition to Staff

And finally, remember to say please and thank you. Everyone wants to feel appreciated and university staff are no exception. The lines were grayed in the eyes of the respondents when it came to differentiating between meaning and mattering. However, what was not blurred was the impact of showing appreciation and providing praise and recognition to those normally out of the spotlight.

Recall the participant that still has the thank-you note written by one of the Vice-Presidents. Written notes are an inexpensive but effective way of communicating appreciation. If you wish to thank an employee not under your immediate supervision, send an e-mail to the employee and copy his or her supervisor. This method not only shows appreciation to the employee it provides recognition by letting the supervisor know what was accomplished.

Salary issues emerged as an important topic to the respondents. Encourage employees to make suggestions on how to improve services and reduce expenditures. Establish an incentive program to pay employees for suggestions that are used. Begin a staff recognition dinner at the end of the year to hand out the incentives and to acknowledge other accomplishments, such as completing degree programs, achieving tenure milestones such as 10, 15 or 20 years. This not only will provide recognition of the employee among his or her peers, it will help to establish and maintain a sense of teamwork among the administration and staff.

Deal and Jenkins (1994) suggest providing nametags to all employees. When a custodial staff member or groundskeeper is asked for directions, it lets the constituent

know who they are talking to and it also shows the pride the organization has in its employees.

Symbols, such as name tags and recognition, are probably more important to backstage employees than to on-stage performers. Unseen people need a sense of belonging. They want to know that they add value to the company and are an important part of the company's success (p. 187).

These are just a few concrete examples of ways to show appreciation and to provide praise and recognition. Creative leadership will find ways to provide staff with the appreciation and recognition they deserve and need in order to believe that they matter to the university.

Implications for Future Research

As noted in previous chapters, this study originated from Karpiak's (1997) study of faculty members. From the disheartening findings that faculty perceived that they did not matter came the question, "Do staff feel that they matter?" This question evolved into applying the 4 M's to university staff. However, further research is needed to determine what makes up the 4 M's and the extent of their connectedness. Even though this study attempted to answer the "how" or "why" questions by using open-ended responses, more questions and issues may have been raised, especially in the areas of student interactions and salary issues. Other lines of research may be useful in determining if there are cultural factors such as the personal work ethic of the individual that may affect the 4 M's.

Secondly, further research is needed into why employees change jobs and move into higher education positions. Did they find meaning in their old jobs? Did they perceive that they mattered to the previous employer? How do these perceptions affect their new job? Do the 4 M's and DE differ in the private sector compared to higher education? Since 43% of the respondents reported that they had worked at their current institution less than 5 years, can meaning and mattering be attributed to the novelty of a new job? These are the types of questions that can and should be addressed as we strive to learn more about university staff.

Thirdly, governance is an area that needs further research, especially concerning the inclusion of staff in the decision making process. As noted by Miller (2003), some researchers have found that simply including more participants may not improve the process, therefore, additional research is needed to determine who should be included in the governance of an university. Composition of committees, expertise of individuals and other human dynamic concepts are fertile areas for additional research (Kezar & Eckel, 2004).

Summary

Chapter five presented conclusions, recommendations and implications for future research. The first section of the chapter provided the reader with five concise conclusions based upon the results of the data analysis. Participants have found meaning in their jobs, yet they appear to remain neutral in the area of mattering and marginality. The 4 M's affect the front-line employees more than the backstage and academic employees. Age was the only demographic affected by the 4 M's. And lastly, no association was found between the 4 M's and DE. Throughout the presentation of the

conclusions, qualitative data was used either to confirm the findings or to help explain inconsistencies in the data.

The next section of chapter five provided the reader with four recommendations based on the conclusions and the results of the data analysis. Among those four recommendations were ways to be more inclusive of staff and a reminder to show appreciation and provide recognition. Also included in chapter five was a section on implications for future research. As with any project, a plethora of questions were raised as the data analysis was completed and the conclusions drawn. Many of the questions were outside the scope of this project and will provide opportunities to researchers to continue the study of university staff.

Summary of Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the perceptions of university staff concerning their job and their value to the university community. The study also explored the relationship between these perceptions and the employee's perception of discretionary effort. By focusing on a population of university employees that have been relatively unresearched, this study provided baseline data for future research and discussion.

The baseline data may be found in the following conclusions. Staff employees neither feel they matter to the university nor do they feel marginalized by the university. They do find meaning in their jobs and are proud to work for their respective institutions. The staff member who considers himself or herself on the front-line finds more meaning in their job than those that consider themselves on the back stage or as an academic

employee. Age was found to significant to the concepts of the 4 M's, but level of education was not significant. And lastly, there appeared to be no association between the 4 M's and discretionary effort. This data was derived from the quantitative section of the study; the qualitative section provided rich insight into the concepts of the 4 M's and increased the depth of our knowledge of university staff.

The qualitative section of the survey assisted in answering the “how” and “what” questions. It was clear from the results that staff employees have found meaning in their jobs, but “how” do they derive this meaning? Also, if the employee does not feel they matter to the university, “what” would help them to perceive that they mattered? First and foremost, for both meaning and mattering, employees want to be appreciated and praised. Secondly, for both concepts, they want to be involved and included, both in their own departments and campus wide. Student interactions were an important source of meaning making for many of the employees, as was work-related relationships. The discovery of this information led the researcher to make four recommendations for the betterment of the staff and the university.

The four recommendations were: acknowledge and understand sub-cultures, include staff in decision making processes, connect the mission of the university with staff responsibilities and lastly, show appreciation and provide recognition to staff. All four recommendations flowed from information gleaned from both the quantitative and qualitative portions of the study. Through this study's conclusions and recommendations and possible realignment of practice, staff may gain a sense of belonging and the institution may gain effectiveness by the increase of commitment and dedication of the

staff. And if just one respondent perceived that they mattered because someone took the time to ask their opinion, then all the time and effort was well spent.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Letter

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent for Research Being Conducted Under the Auspices of the University of Oklahoma Norman Campus

Dear Potential Survey Participant:

My name is Shelley Ross and I am conducting a survey to complete my doctoral studies for the department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Oklahoma. You are being asked to participate in a study entitled "An Analysis of Meaning, Malaise, Mattering and Marginality and Their Relationship to Discretionary Effort Among University Staff Employees." Specifically, I am investigating the perceptions of staff employees and the association of these perceptions on discretionary effort. On behalf of my advisor, Dr. Myron Pope (Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies), we request your participation throughout this process.

The survey will analyze your perception of meaning, malaise, mattering and marginality and the relationship associated with discretionary effort. In other words, how do you find meaning in your job? Have you ever felt marginalized while performing your job? Do you believe your job matters to administrators and faculty? Discretionary effort may be defined as the level of effort you exert in performing your job duties. Demographical information and open-ended questions are at the end of the survey. The results of this research will benefit staff employees by enhancing the awareness of administrators regarding the perceptions of staff employees.

As only a small number of college and university employees have been selected to participate, your participation is vital to the success of this study. Only group data will be reported, and your responses will remain confidential. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you retain the right to withdraw at any time. No risks beyond those experienced in everyday life are anticipated by your participation in this research. The completion of the study should take only fifteen (15) minutes of your time. You must be 21 years of age or older to participate.

If you elect to participate in this study, please follow these instructions in completing and returning the survey:

1. Detach the envelope attached to the survey.
2. Read all instructions and complete the survey.
3. Enclose the completed survey in the envelope and return it to the address included in the survey instrument.

As a participant in this study, please be assured of the confidentiality of your responses. Information gained in this study will not be linked to you in any way. The principal investigator will be the only individual to view the responses.

Your consideration is greatly appreciated, and should you have any questions, please contact me at (580) 310-5262 or the address below if you have questions after the completion and submission of this survey. My email address is sross@mailclerk.ecok.edu. If you have additional inquiries about your rights, as a research participant, you may also contact the University of Oklahoma Norman Campus Institutional Review Board, 405-325-8110. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Shelley R. Ross, Principal Investigator
Graduate Student

Mailing Address: 530 E. 9th, Ada, OK 74820

By returning this survey in the envelope provided, you are agreeing to participate in the above-described research and indicating your understanding that your participation is voluntary and that you may refuse to participate or answer any questions without any penalty.

Appendix B: Survey Instrument

The purpose of this survey is to explore your perceptions as a staff member. All survey responses will be kept confidential.

Please complete survey and return by March 5, 2004. A self-addressed stamped envelope has been provided for your convenience.

Questions – Please circle your response		1 – Strongly Disagree	2 – Disagree	3 – Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly Agree
1	Administrators recognize my contribution to University A/B.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Faculty recognize my contribution to University A/B.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I am challenged by my job.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I am proud to say I work at University A/B.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I am willing to make major changes in the way I do my work in order to improve services.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I consistently look for ways to improve how I work, even when things are running well.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I continuously try to identify and solve problems not yet recognized by those I serve.	1	2	3	4	5
8	I could increase my effort at work quite significantly.	1	2	3	4	5
9	I expend extra effort on behalf of my institution to help us avoid incurring unnecessary costs.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I feel an obligation to put in a good day's work for this institution.	1	2	3	4	5
11	I feel that University A/B looks after my interests.	1	2	3	4	5
12	I feel there is a connection with the work I do and the overall mission of University A/B.	1	2	3	4	5
13	I have opportunities to participate in training to improve my performance.	1	2	3	4	5

Questions – Please circle your response		1 – Strongly Disagree	2 – Disagree	3 – Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly Agree
14	I like the kind of work I do.	1	2	3	4	5
15	I put a great deal of effort into my job over and above what is required.	1	2	3	4	5
16	I strive to provide high quality service to those I serve.	1	2	3	4	5
17	I would leave this institution if I could afford to quit.	1	2	3	4	5
18	I'm not really interested in University A/B, it's just a job.	1	2	3	4	5
19	If I did not perform my job, University A/B would not change.	1	2	3	4	5
20	My coworkers consider me to be an energetic worker.	1	2	3	4	5
21	My opinions count in this institution.	1	2	3	4	5
22	My role (or what I do) is considered important within University A/B.	1	2	3	4	5
23	My work gives me a sense of accomplishment and pride.	1	2	3	4	5
24	On a regular basis, I put into my job only the amount of effort required to keep me from getting fired or disciplined.	1	2	3	4	5
25	On a regular basis, I spend a fair amount of time thinking about how to improve things at work.	1	2	3	4	5
26	On a regular basis, I spend extra effort on behalf of my co-workers, which results in benefits to my institution.	1	2	3	4	5
27	On a regular basis, I spend extra effort to benefit my institution.	1	2	3	4	5

Questions – Please circle your response		1 – Strongly Disagree	2 – Disagree	3 – Neutral	4 – Agree	5 – Strongly Agree
28	Remaining a member of this institution is important to me.	1	2	3	4	5
29	Staff are kept up-to-date about issues that affect them.	1	2	3	4	5
30	Staff are regularly asked to identify areas needing improvement.	1	2	3	4	5
31	There is an atmosphere of trust in this institution	1	2	3	4	5
32	This institution treats staff in a consistent and fair manner.	1	2	3	4	5
33	If I could find another job, I would leave this institution.	1	2	3	4	5
34	This institution values the ideas of workers at every level.	1	2	3	4	5

Demographic Information and Open-ended Questions

Indicate your response by placing an “X” in the appropriate space next to each question or category.

35. Gender: _____Female _____Male

36. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

_____ Less than high school diploma	_____ Bachelor’s Degree
_____ High School	_____ Master’s Degree
_____ Some college, but no degree	_____ Ed.D./Ph.D./Prof. Degree
_____ Associate’s Degree	_____ Other: _____

37. Please indicate your age: _____

38. Please indicate your job classification:

____ Administrator ____ Faculty ____ Professional Staff ____ Classified/Support Staff

39. If you classified yourself as a professional or classified/support staff member, given the definitions below, which category most closely matches your job?

____ **Front-line** – daily contact with students, parents and/or other constituents

____ **Backstage** – little or no contact with those “outside” the university or with students

____ **Academic** – staff employee working in an academic department

40. Total number of years employed at this college?

____ 1 day – 5 years

____ 11 years – 20 years

____ 6 years – 10 years

____ 21 years – 50 years

41. How likely are you to continue your career at this college?

____ Very Unlikely

____ Likely

____ Unlikely

____ Very Likely

____ Neutral

42. How likely are you to continue to reside in this city/county for the next ten years?

____ Very Unlikely

____ Likely

____ Unlikely

____ Very Likely

____ Neutral

43. If you really wanted to, how much do you think you could improve your own effectiveness on the job, by a little, say about 10%, by a great deal, like being twice as effective as you are now, or something in between?

____ by a little ____ by a great deal ____ something in between (____%)

44. How much effort do you put into your job beyond what is required – a great deal, some or very little?

_____ a great deal _____ some _____ very little

45. Which of these four opinions do you agree with most? – Circle One

- ☐ “In my job I do what is asked of me. Nobody can criticize me there. But I cannot see why I should exert extra effort beyond that.”
- ☐ “I often have to force myself to go to work. I therefore only do what is absolutely necessary.”
- ☐ “I put myself out in my work and I often do more than is expected and/or asked of me. My job is so important to me that I sacrifice much for it”
- ☐ “All in all I enjoy my work and every now and then I do more than is required.”

After reading the definitions below, describe any incidents you feel may be examples of your personal experiences of finding meaning, experiencing malaise, mattering or being marginalized. Feel free to add any additional comments regarding what is important to you as a staff member.

46. **Meaning** – Many factors may help a person to find meaning in their job. Such factors such as relationships with co-workers and supervisors, level of job satisfaction, high level of caring and interest in one’s job may contribute to finding meaning in one’s job. Can you think back to any situation in your work that gave you a sense of meaning and importance or value of the work you do?

47. **Malaise** – A sense of malaise has been described as placing a low value on one’s job. An employee experiencing malaise may show little concern or interest for their job. “Burn-out,” “going through the motions,” and “just collecting a paycheck” may be phrases used to describe an employee experiencing malaise.

Has there been a time that you experienced malaise? Was there a particular incident or series of incidents that led you to a feeling of malaise?

48. **Mattering** – Often times, believing that administrators and/or faculty care about you and are interested in you leads to a feeling that you and your work matters to the university. Can you think back to a situation in your work where you had the sense that you mattered to the university, that the university cared about your interests and well-being?

49. **Marginality** – If one perceives that their job does not matter to administrators and/or faculty, an employee may feel marginalized. That is, you may feel that little importance is placed upon the job you perform. Has there been a time when you felt marginalized as an employee? Can you describe the situation?

50. Additional Comments: Is there anything else you would like to comment on regarding your job and/or the university environment?

You are finished!

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your opinions and comments are valued. Please be sure to mail the survey back by March 5, 2004.