

2021

## Exploring the Millennial's Work Meaning and Job Engagement Experience: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study

Monique Simone Anderson  
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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Monique Simone Anderson

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Walden University  
2021

Abstract

Exploring the Millennial's Work Meaning and Job Engagement Experience:

A Transcendental Phenomenological Study

by

Monique Simone Anderson

MBA, Belhaven College, 2002

BS, California State Polytechnic University Pomona, 1998

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

November 2021

## Abstract

The millennial generation is now most of the workforce population. This generation's engagement behaviors, expectations, and mindsets differ from those of other generations, and directly impact organizational performance. Despite existing generalizations about Millennials, there is a gap in the literature relative to how this generation experiences meaning and engagement in the workplace. The overarching research question was developed to broaden the understanding of the work experiences across this cohort, and further inform solutions that affect Millennials' meaning and engagement with their jobs. To address this transcendental phenomenological study's research problem and purpose, qualitative data were collected from multiple sources of evidence including semistructured interviews, an engagement survey, and current literature. This study was framed using the concept of engagement and meaningful work across generational cohorts as defined by Khan, Hoole and Bonnema. The results of the data analysis revealed 6 themes that characterized meaningful work for Millennials: (a) making an impact, (b) displaying value for reward, (c) enjoying work/fun, (d) contentment with work team, (e) having a support system, and (f) physical/mental/creative exertion. The data analysis also revealed 12 themes that characterized Millennials' engagement: (a) connection, (b) collaboration, (c) team focused, (d) direction, (e) tools, (f) limited distractions, (g) fun, (h) communication, (i) trust, (j) openness, (k) creativity, and (l) mentoring. Business leaders can use the results of this study to promote positive social change by developing policies and processes that improve Millennials' engagement in meaningful work and enhance future business outcomes.

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## Dedication

I dedicate the manifestation of this journey to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; I would not have been able to complete this indescribable journey without His grace, a spirit of perseverance, purposed knowledge, imparted wisdom, and a better understanding of why this work had to be completed.

Second, I dedicate this work to my husband Bryant, who has patiently and encouragingly completed this journey with me. He has challenged and strengthened me in ways that birthed the “don’t give up”, “you can do this”, and the ultimate fight to finish. I appreciate and love you more than words will ever be able to express.

I also dedicate this work to my parents who have always been four of my greatest cheerleaders, cheering me on through each part of this journey, physically and in spirit. I am grateful for every word of encouragement and how you celebrate this accomplishment with me. I am officially your Dr. Daughter!

Finally, I dedicate this work to every leader that strives to be a good shepherd to the flocks (Millennials) they are called to lead; and to every leader who seeks to understand before being understood. My hope is that this work will add to your knowledge, wisdom, and understanding of millennials’ work meaning and engagement experiences and help you to enrich the experiences of the millennials that you work with and lead.

## Acknowledgments

While there are too many to name, it is an honor to be able to acknowledge and appreciate the many people who have contributed to the manifestation of this study and me reaching this point. I want to thank everyone who has contributed to this experience in any way, shape, or form – I acknowledge and appreciate you more than I will ever be able to express. While the journey has been long, it has also been purposed, and each part of it has contributed to and provided me the necessary experiences, knowledge, wisdom, and understanding required to complete this part of my journey. While I at times had hoped this journey would look differently than it did, it was not supposed to be any different than it was and could not be completed any sooner or later; it was purposed for now – for such a time as this and to contribute to supporting solutions for the related social issues that we are experiencing in the world today.

Special thanks to my Dissertation Team – Dr. Levitt and Dr. Halkias. Thank you, Dr. Levitt, for serving as my Chair - for your authenticity, gentle way, your patience, encouragement, and cheerleading, and providing the push I needed to finish this part of the test and cross the finish line. You agreed to be my Chair at a time when I was deeply discouraged, and when it seemed like this process would never end - and I was ready to throw in the towel! Your guidance provided me with the hope and direction that I needed to keep going and finish - yes, finally finish! I appreciate your character and style and you allowing me to organically dig deeper to find the very best version of me and to make sure I demonstrated that in this work. Thank you, Dr. Halkias, for serving on my team and for your leadership in helping me to effectively organize and navigate this

tedious process. I appreciate your insight to help me select the right methodology, your directness, your attention to detail and for reading every word, and for gently redirecting me with direction that I could follow and tools I could use to reach a successful end. You were just what I needed when I needed it and I am so grateful. I appreciate you more than you know and am fortunate that you were a part of my team. Dr. Levitt and Dr. Halkias, I acknowledge you and thank you for everything; who you are has made a difference in my life and will further enable me to continue making a difference in the lives of others.



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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Millennials officially became the largest generation in the workforce in 2016 (Fry, 2016). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, within the next 2 years, it is predicted that more than half of the U.S. workforce will be made up of Millennials, further growing to 75% over the next 10 years (Fry, 2018). With a growing number of Millennials present in the workplace, increasing this cohort's significance and impact on business performance, organizational dynamics are changing, engagement levels are not improving, attrition rates are rising, and performance outcomes are at risk (Bond, 2016; Schullery, 2013; Walden et al., 2017). In the current state, the strength and success of the workplace will depend on what the millennial generation can accomplish.

Gallup's research identified Millennials as the least engaged generation cohort in the workforce, with only 29% engaged, 55% not engaged, and 16% actively disengaged (2016). Millennials also change jobs more frequently than other generations, nearly 21% of Millennials reported that a job change had been made within the last year, and 60% reported being open to a different job opportunity (Gallup, 2016). Ultimately, disengaged Millennials and their resulting turnover cost the U.S. economy more than \$30.5 billion annually (2016).

In addition to the economic burden that Millennials have contributed to, their growing impact and influence carries over into many areas. The contributions of the millennial population are shifting and reshaping various elements of our behavior, impacting social and workplace behaviors, communication, and dictating how social media is used (Gallup, 2016); demanding ecological directives and responsibility and

how organizations are remain accountable and contribute to making the world better (Paulino Gatti, 2020); altering political patterns and changing the agendas of politicians (Zachara, 2020) ; and innovating technological advancements and the pace at which the use of technology is rapidly expanding (Nawaz, 2020).

According to the 2018 Deloitte Millennial Survey, because the workplace has not prioritized employees, society, and the environment, along with stakeholders' interests and profits, Millennials have had difficulty connecting and finding meaning and purpose in the workplace and frequently move from job to job in search of these workplace attributes (2018). While related studies have identified a relationship between millennial engagement, work meaning, and business outcomes, more needs to be learned about these relationships and the potential impact on the future state of the workplace.

In this qualitative phenomenological study, I aimed to explore other Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement, and disengagement in the workplace. The outcome of exploring Millennials' experiences of meaning at work and job engagement and disengagement in organizations could potentially support increasing knowledge depth and overall awareness of this generation based on actual experiences, providing actionable insights that can impact engagement, related work relationships, positive social change in the workplace, and favorable performance outcomes.

### **Background of the Study**

The millennial cohort is now the largest and most impactful population in the workforce, and it is critical to take notice of it (Fry, 2016). The increasing effects of millennial engagement are critical to sustaining the workplace. Further, understanding

and influencing the drivers of this cohort's engagement are equally important to note, understand, and practice. Schullery (2013) summarized themes presented in much of the literature on engagement and disengagement and the impact of both on the well-being of the workplace. While numerous surveys have identified the surface details related to what keeps Millennials engaged, research shows that millennial engagement in the workplace is not improving (Gallup, 2016).

While many studies have been conducted about Millennials, this cohort has proven to be more different than the generational stereotypes and generalizations have revealed. There is more to be learned about and gleaned from the individual differences and experiences of engagement and work meaning within the millennial cohort. The workplace cannot continue to rely on generalizations that are missing depth and proving not to be as prevalent as prior studies have concluded (Anderson et al., 2017).

Disengagement in the workplace should be taken very seriously. Further, with more than half of the workforce disengaged, organizations are increasingly subject to a significant financial burden. Research outcomes continue to warn of the increasing condition, implications, and financial burden of disengagement; and further bring to light how little is known about what keeps Millennials engaged (Rastogi et al., 2018).

Engagement levels are not changing because organizations have not found the root of the issue and do not recognize what needs to be changed (Bond, 2016). More needs to be learned about what keeps Millennials engaged so that organizations can identify actionable interventions and effective countermeasures.



Previous studies have been conducted to explore the relationships amongst meaningfulness, work engagement, and organizational commitment. Research conducted by Geldenhuys et al. (2014) concluded that meaningful work leads to satisfied, engaged, and committed employees that are more productive and choose to remain loyal to organizations. This and other related studies also found a relationship between positivity, psychological meaningfulness, and organizational commitment (Geue, 2018; Walden et al., 2017). More must be learned about the Millennials' actual related experiences of work meaning, engagement, and disengagement in the workplace.

While it is important to note that the workforce consists of different generational cohorts, it is likewise essential to understand that each cohort may differ in perception of the workplace and expression of their perception of the workplace (Kultalahti et al., 2014). How these differences are addressed is critical to the well-being of the workplace (Kampf et al., 2017). Low employee engagement causes disruption, dysfunction, and dissatisfaction in the workplace. Poor engagement levels can also be used by leaders to identify leadership deficiencies, underlying culture challenges, and where clarity in roles and responsibilities may be lacking. The number of engaged employees in a workplace can determine how successful an organization is. It is predicted that leaders that make an effort to identify and understand generational differences, especially with Millennials, and further adjust leadership practices to align with employee needs and motivators, influence better business outcomes in the workplace (Stewart et al., 2017).

## **Problem Statement**

Disengagement in the workplace has been a growing concern for some time now, creating a significant financial burden to organizations. With more than 70% of all employees disengaged, lacking engagement costs companies \$450 to \$550 billion a year in poor performance (Rastogi et al., 2018). Employees' search for meaning in their work may contribute to numerous losses to an organization, including poor morale and productivity, and ultimately turnover if the organization does not provide a sense of work meaning and engagement (Geldenhuys et al., 2014). Millennials recently overtook baby boomers as the largest living generation in the United States, with 75 million members (Fry, 2016). Born between 1981 and 1996, Millennials are at the early-to-mid points of their careers (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). In light of this generation's growing influence in the workplace, ongoing employer-employee relationship development with Millennials is one of today's major contemporary business concerns (Cassell, 2017). The general social problem is that leaders may have limited knowledge of Millennials' work meaning, engagement, and disengagement experiences (Walden et al., 2017).

Increasing one's work meaning will lead to more engagement with an organization; however, qualitative research focusing on experiences of work meaning and engagement among the millennial generation is limited in the scholarly literature (Geue, 2018). While the literature is rich in generalizations regarding Millennials' preferences and engagement drivers, the voice of this generation that supported and better-informed senior leaders about both engagement and disengagement perspectives was needed (Coates, 2017; Holmberg-Wright et al., 2017). Specifically, as this generation is

becoming the driving force in organizations, it was essential for leaders to gain further insight into what satisfies Millennials in a job and how they engage with their work (Hoole & Bonnema, 2015). The specific management problem was addressed to increase awareness, and to inform leaders how Millennials experience meaningful work and job engagement in the workplace, as this phenomenon was largely unknown to leaders (Kolodinsky et al., 2018; Weeks & Schaffert, 2017).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative empirical phenomenological study was to explore Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement in the workplace. I collected data through extended, in-depth interviews in the informal, interactive process characteristic of the empirical phenomenological tradition of open-ended questions and dialogue as prescribed by Moustakas (1994). I used the responses to the interview questions to generate original data composed of 'naïve' descriptions to explore the meaning of the participants' work meaning experiences and job engagement.

### **Research Question**

The primary research question for this study was: What are Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement, and disengagement in organizations?

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study was grounded in Khan's (1990) concept of *employee engagement* and Hoole and Bonnema's (2015) *meaningful work across generational cohorts*. Khan (1990) was the first academic researcher to define the concept of employee engagement.

Khan's (1990) definition of employee engagement was used by Saks (2006) to develop a social exchange theory about employee engagement in organizations. Saks's (2006) social exchange theory on employee engagement is a theoretical basis for why employees become more or less engaged in their work. This theory proposes that commitments at work are made through a series of interactions between parties in a state of give-and-take interdependence and result in engagement or disengagement. Cassell (2017) and Naim and Lenka's (2017) recent studies extended Saks's (2006) social exchange theory by suggesting that supervisor support, mentoring, and social media to support Millennials' work engagement and recommended future qualitative research to broaden our understanding and to support Millennials' work engagement further.

Hoole and Bonnema (2015) wrote that meaningful work originated as a concept from the philosophical principles associated with the meaning of life, as a feeling of purpose in one's overall existence, which creates a sense of harmony and completeness. Meaningful work was first grounded in Maslow's (1943) needs hierarchy, which Maslow presented as a theory of human motivation in his seminal work. Maslow's hierarchy places self-actualization at the top of the pyramid, with the underlying principle that one progresses to the next level of the hierarchy once a specific need is fulfilled. A person, therefore, constantly strives to become fully realized (Maslow, 1943). According to Overell (2008), this translates into self-actualization in work and happens when a person assimilates work completely into identity.

Hoole and Bonnema (2015) extended Overell's (2008) work to develop a concept of *meaningful work across generational cohorts*. Hoole and Bonnema studied why

generational cohorts experience work engagement and meaningful work differently. These scholars concluded that within the diverse and changing landscape in the workplace, the focus of many organizations needs to start shifting toward the needs and values of different generational cohorts, and future research should focus on more in-depth qualitative studies that explored the experience of work across generational cohorts (Hoole & Bonnema, 2015).

### **Nature of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement, and disengagement in the workplace. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) explained that quantitative research specifically seeks to explain, predict, and further generalize concepts, variables, and hypotheses to a more significant population, and quantitative research intends to establish, confirm, or validate relationships and develop generalizations that contribute to theory. In contrast to quantitative inquiry, qualitative research is more holistic and emergent and seeks to understand complex situations better; qualitative inquiry explores and based on observation, builds theory from the ground up (p. 95).

The purpose and significance of this study were best served by a qualitative method and approach, namely, a transcendental phenomenological methodology. I used the three steps that embrace the tradition of transcendental phenomenology to investigate and make meaning of Millennials' experiences: (a) epoché, disclosure and examination of experiences and feelings; (b) transcendental phenomenological reduction and bracketing, suspending judgment and describing the essences of the phenomenon; and (c)

imaginative variation, used to deduce the central structural meaning of experiences (Moustakas, 1994). I applied the above steps in the preparation methods, collecting data, and organizing and analyzing data.

I pursued this study with a fresh eye and open mind, acquiring new knowledge from the essence of experiences (see Moustakas, 1994). I used this method to create a disciplined and systematic approach in which I set aside prejudgments, preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge from prior experiences of the phenomenon. I used the transcendental phenomenology design to facilitate a connected, open, receptive, and naïve investigation, as participants described their lived experiences of the phenomenon. This method is the most appropriate to explore the lived experiences of participants and the meaning of those experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Peshkin, 1993).

Creswell (1998) recommends several steps to carry out a sound qualitative study. To conduct this study, I required adequate and quality participation. Through this participation, I collected data to support this study. I achieved data saturation to support a meaningful study; saturation indicated that no new information was expected to be added or enhanced or changed the study's findings. I purposefully selected 10 participants from the population of current or formerly employed millennial employees to voluntarily participate in this study.

I collected data using predetermined interview questions in which I incorporated the 12 questions from Gallup's Q12 Engagement Survey and 14 additional engagement and worked meaning-related interview questions. I selected the questions because they could generate open-ended responses about Millennials' lived experiences of work

meaning and engagement. I developed the questions to guide and deploy a person-to-person interview process in which I focused on a bracketed topic and questions. I organized the data collection to support analysis and facilitate individual descriptions and synthesis of meanings and essences of Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement and disengagement in the workplace.

I analyzed the data using Moustakas' modification of the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data. I used: (a) bracketing, (b) horizontalization, (c) clustering and thematizing, (d) textural descriptions of the experiences, (e) structural descriptions of the experiences, and (f) textural and structural synthesis (Moustakas, 1994). From the individual textural-structural descriptions, I developed a composite description of the meanings and essences of Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement and disengagement in the workplace, representing the group.

### **Definitions**

I used the following key terms, which are associated with the millennial experience in the workplace, in this study:

*Actively Disengaged*: This term refers to a person unhappy at work, busy acting out unhappiness, and undermining what engaged coworkers accomplish (Gallup, 2016).

*Baby Boomer* (1946-1964)(Lancaster & Stillman, 2002) : This cohort is generally characterized as being optimistic, team-oriented, and striving for personal gratification in the workplace. Personal growth and development are essential to baby boomers in any job that they pursue. Baby boomers are work-oriented (frequently workaholics) and believe workers should spend at least five years with an employer before looking for

another job. Baby boomers sometimes feel discriminated against because of their age and will spend money and time prioritizing health and wellness to appear to be youthful.

Baby boomers like to be involved and relevant to carrying out the mission and vision of their employer.

*Engaged:* This term refers to how a person works passionately and feels a profound connection to the organization (Gallup, 2016; McGrath & McGrath, 2013).

*Engagement:* This term refers to a commitment to the organization, job ownership, and pride, more discretionary effort, passion and excitement, commitment to execution and the bottom line. It also refers to the willingness to invest oneself and expend one's discretionary effort to help the employer succeed (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Little & Little, 2006; Macey & Schneider, 2008;).

*Generational Cohort:* This term refers to a group of individuals born at about the same time and experience historical events at about the same point in their human development. Individuals in the same generational cohort tend to think differently from those born in another period (Ting et al., 2012)

*Generation X (1965 – 1980)*(Lancaster & Stillman, 2002): This cohort is generally characterized as appreciative of diversity and see it as an opportunity rather than a challenge. Generation X tends to think globally and believe the world has always been connected economically. This generation tries to balance work life with personal life and educational pursuits, have strong computer skills and are technically inclined, try to make the workplace fun, and like to keep interactions and work attire informal. In the workplace, this cohort is known to be self-reliant and to appreciate supervisors who do



not micromanage. Generation X tends to use pragmatic approaches to problems at work, home, and other areas of life.

*Meaningful work (MW)*: This term refers to a meaningful experience of experiencing positive meaning in work, sensing that work is a crucial avenue for making meaning, and perceiving one's work to benefit some greater good (Steger et al., 2012).

*Millennials (also known as Gen Y; 1981 – 1996)*(Lancaster & Stillman, 2002): This cohort is generally characterized as being optimistic about the future, taking pride in their contributions to civic duty activities, possessing confidence, and valuing achievement. They are further described as being overly competitive or competing for things that do not require competition, taking strong stands on issues of morality, being wise to the ways of the street, easily finding and accessing resources of just about any kind, and not only appreciating diversity but embracing it.

*Not Engaged*: This term refers to a person checked out, putting in hours instead of energy (Gallup, 2016); employees that are not engaged are said to be psychologically unattached to their work and the organizations that they work for associating their jobs with nothing more than a paycheck (McGrath & McGrath, 2013).

### **Assumptions**

In this study, I explored millennial experiences of work meaning, engagement, and disengagement. I assumed that an interview approach was reliable and the most effective means to identify the individual expression of opinions and actual thoughts of participating Millennials who experienced the phenomenon explored in the study. I assumed that selecting millennial participants with a bachelor's degree and 5 or more

years of work experience for this study provided a sound representation of the population currently experiencing the phenomenon under study. I assumed that all participants found value in exploring the topic of study; and further that the information obtained during the study would inform the outcome of positive social change in the workplace.

I was the primary data collection instrument in this qualitative study. I chose to be the instrument in this study to protect the quality and nature of the study by ensuring that the distance between researcher and participants was close, interactive, and organic. I assumed that the instrument choice appropriately and effectively facilitated all participants of the study in truthfully representing themselves and their experiences as Millennials. All participants articulated their related experiences in the English language.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The focus of this study was to understand Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement and disengagement in the workplace. While there are multiple cohorts in the workforce, I selected this generational cohort because it now makes up the largest workforce (more than 50%). The millennial population is expected to grow to over 75% of the workforce over the next 10 years. Millennials are the largest population in the workforce and the least engaged cohort, with the most significant impact on future business outcomes (Walden et al., 2017).

Delimitations narrowed the scope of the study. I selected participation criteria due to their significance and representation of the millennial population, as 39% of the millennial population holds a bachelor's degree or higher and 28% of Millennials desire to stay with a company for more than 5 years (Deloitte, 2018; Pew Research Center,

2015). The data collection sample for this study was delimited to Millennials that met the following criteria: (a) had earned a bachelor's degree, (b) had completed 5 years of post degree work experience, and (c) had the willingness to articulate individual experiences of meaningful work, job engagement, and disengagement in the organizations where currently or previously employed.

This study has the potential of transferability and expansion to future research related to understanding and improving alternate subsets of millennial work meaning, engagement, and disengagement in the workplace. Additionally, this research approach could be used to investigate the experiences of other generational cohorts in comparison to the millennial cohort, increasing knowledge depth and overall awareness of multiple generational cohorts based on actual experiences, and providing actionable insights that can impact engagement, related work relationships, collective positive social change in the workplace, and favorable performance outcomes.

### **Limitations**

This study had limitations that must be acknowledged and addressed. The first limitations of this study were researcher bias, prejudices, and attitudes that may have impacted interpretation and approach. These limitations were induced by the nature of the methodology and were addressed in the preparation and epoché process. Another limitation was the sample size, which did not support generalizing the outcome across a population or other populations. While the outcome cannot be generalized, Creswell (2007) recommended using rich and full descriptions that a reader could use to determine

if and how experiences described applies to their respective situation. Moustakas (1994) further stated that,

...utilizing these descriptions, reflections, and our imagination in arriving at an understanding of what is, in seeing the conditions through which what is comes to be, and in utilizing a process that in its very application opens possibilities for awareness, knowledge, and action (p. 175).

A third limitation was the participant's willingness to articulate related experiences honestly. To address this limitation, I took actions to ensure that the research process maintained confidentiality, encouraged forthright answers, emphasized the need for participants to be mindful of accuracy, and reminded participants of the impact they potentially have to enhance and impact other Millennials' experiences of work meaning, engagement, and disengagement, and future social change in the workplace.

### **Significance of the Study**

This qualitative study was significant because what is known about millennial experiences of meaning at work and job engagement and disengagement in organizations lacks depth – and prescribed that further research was needed (Coates, 2017). As the population of Millennials in the workplace and disengagement increases, business outcomes remain at risk, and sustaining business operations becomes more difficult, it is clear that more needed to be known about Millennials' experience of meaningful work and job engagement (Kolodinsky et al., 2018). The outcome of this study contributed to identifying a more prosperous and deeper understanding of this cohort, based on their lived experiences versus quantitative generalizations. The general implications learned

from this study may be necessary to leaders of Millennials, informing future solutions that may influence the improvement of millennial work meaning and job engagement.

What was learned from this study may be used to inform and contribute to organizations' future welfare and success as impacted by the improvement of millennial experiences of meaning at work and related job engagement and performance. This study was aimed to learn more about Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement, and disengagement in the workplace. From a theory-building perspective, examining Millennials' work engagement needs extended Khan's (1990) concept of employee engagement and Hoole and Bonnema's (2015) meaningful work across generational cohorts.

### **Significance to Practice**

Disengagement is on the rise in the workplace, limiting organizational growth and resulting in related financial burdens (Rastogi et al., 2018). Prior studies have explored and determined a relationship between work meaning, work engagement, and organizational commitment and results (Geue, 2018). This study was significant to practice because it aimed to explore further the work meaning, engagement, and disengagement experiences of Millennials [the largest generational cohort population in the workplace] (Fry, 2016).

Bond (2016) suggested that engagement is not improving in the workplace because organizations are not consciously changing, recognizing, or understanding what needs to change. What was learned about millennial experiences in this study could be used to educate leaders, create, and package data that clarifies prior cohort

generalizations, and accurately inform the creation of effective engagement strategies that impact future millennial work meaning and improve engagement experiences, future business outcomes, and the significance of competitive advantage which is the driving goal of most companies (Jacobs & Chase, 2011).

### **Significance to Theory**

The landscape is rapidly changing in the workplace. This study was significant to the development of work meaning and engagement theories. Achieving a better understanding of Millennials' work meaning and engagement experiences may enable leaders to improve future experiences of work meaning and engagement. The outcome of this study further informed Hoole and Bonnema's (2015) development of the concept of *meaningful work across generational cohorts*. The outcome of this study also informed this concept by shifting toward the needs and values of different generational cohorts, namely the millennial cohort (Hoole & Bonnema, 2015).

### **Significance to Social Change**

Stewart et al. (2017) highlight that there are certainly differences in the perceptions, behaviors, attitudes, and opinions of each of the generations; and potential differences in how we should address these differences. The outcome of this study may benefit leaders by informing the process of addressing related differences. Kultalahti and Liisa Viitala (2014) examined perceptions of Millennials concerning what makes work motivating and reviewed implications for human resource management practices. The outcome of exploring Millennials' experiences of meaning at work and job engagement and disengagement in organizations could

potentially support increasing further awareness of this generation based on actual experiences, providing actionable insights that can impact work relationships and positive social change in the workplace.

### **Summary and Transition**

The growing millennial population in the workplace, decreasing engagement, and the detrimental impact and consequences of disengagement in the workplace motivated a call to conduct this research. As a result of organizations not adequately prioritizing employees, society, and the environment along with stakeholders' interests and profits, Millennials have had difficulty connecting and finding meaning and purpose in the workplace, disrupting business operations and impacting performance levels as they frequently move from job to job in search of these workplace attributes (Deloitte, 2018). While general studies have been conducted on millennial work meaning and engagement, Anderson et al. (2017) emphasized that leaders should recognize the importance of managing individuals by focusing on individual differences rather than relying on generational stereotypes, which may not be as prevalent as the existing literature suggests. The current state of the workplace supported that millennial experiences of meaningful work and job engagement remain largely unknown to leaders (Kolodinsky et al., 2018; Weeks & Schaffert, 2017).

A qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was an appropriate form of inquiry to explore other Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement, and disengagement in the workplace. The conceptual framework that guided this study was grounded in Khan's (1990) concept of *employee engagement* and Hoole

and Bonnema's (2015) concept of *meaningful work across generational cohorts* and further explored the experience of engagement and work meaning across the millennial cohort. This study suggested further research related to increasing awareness of the millennial population in the workplace (Fry, 2016). The study also further expanded on studies that have explored the relationships amongst meaningfulness, work engagement, and organizational commitment (Geldenhuys et al., 2014; Geue, 2018) and included the rare inquiry of Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement in the workplace. In Chapter 2, I reviewed the literature that informed and developed this study's motivation and significance, related themes, and conceptual framework.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Millennials are at the early-to-mid points of their careers (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002) and recently overtook baby boomers as the largest living generation in the United States, with more than 75 million members (Fry, 2016). As this generation becomes the driving force in organizations, leaders must gain further depth and insight into what satisfies Millennials in a job and how they engage with their work (Hoole & Bonnema, 2015). In light of this generation's growing influence in the workplace, ongoing employer-employee relationship development with Millennials is one of today's major contemporary business concerns (Cassell, 2017).

With more than 70% of all employees disengaged, lacking engagement costs companies \$450 to \$550 billion a year in poor performance (Rastogi et al., 2018). Disengagement in the workplace has been a growing concern for some time now, creating a significant financial burden to organizations and inhibiting the ability of organizations to maximize competitive advantage and financial growth. Employees' search for meaning in their work may contribute to related and numerous losses to an organization, including poor morale and productivity, and ultimately, turnover if the organization does not provide a sense of work meaning and engagement (Geldenhuis et al., 2014).

While the literature is rich in generalizations regarding the preferences and engagement drivers of Millennials, this study is essential because the unheard voice of this generation can inform senior leaders about what is still unknown about engagement and disengagement perspectives (Coates, 2017; Holmberg-Wright et al., 2017). The

purpose of this qualitative empirical phenomenological study was to explore Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement in the workplace.

In Chapter 2, I will review the literature search strategy and conceptual framework used for this study. A summary of the literature review and the conceptual wisdom extracted from the review is presented in this chapter, as the foundation on which this study and investigation of Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement and disengagement in the workplace was built.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

Chapter 2 was created out of an interest in learning and understanding more about Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement, and disengagement in the workplace. This chapter includes a review of the literature that substantiated further pursuit of inquiry related to Millennials' lived experiences of work meaning and job engagement and the consequences of not doing so. This chapter begins with an introduction of the conceptual framework and continues with a synthesis of the journey through the literature that built a case for pursuing the problem presented in this study.

I used various library databases and search engines in determining, selecting, and developing the research topic (Walden Library Databases – ProQuest, EBSCO Host, Business Source Complete, Google Scholar, Google, etc.). I used the following search terms to support the search for information: *workplace engagement and disengagement, engagement, engagement in the workplace, engagement drivers, the impact of engagement in the workplace, financial implications of engagement in the workplace,*

*engagement statistics, social exchange theory, Millennials in the workplace, meaningfulness in the workplace, meaningful work across generations, organizational commitment, generational cohorts, Millennial/generation y, generation x, baby boomer, generational engagement perceptions, the importance of Millennials in the workplace, Millennials and workplace practices, phenomenology, transcendental phenomenology, epoché, and social change.* I used these and related terms to identify and obtain books, dissertations, articles, surveys, and related information. I reviewed hundreds of articles, books, summaries, discussions, and dissertations , and included more than a hundred articles and books as references supporting this study.

My search through the literature began with a review of related dissertations on Millennials, engagement, and work meaning and included a review of quantitative and qualitative dissertations. I specifically examined phenomenological or transcendental phenomenological studies on millennial engagement and work meaning in the workplace. The initial evaluation process resulted in the identification of a few studies on the topic of interest and further supported the selection of a qualitative methodology, namely a transcendental phenomenological approach as most appropriate. Further evaluation of related dissertations substantiated a social need and pulling interest to continue research in the selected area. Additionally, I used the initial review of related dissertations to identify a path to initial references and other triggered themes and search terms to focus on in the following literature review phase.

Through the next part of the literature search, I continued to evaluate the latest themes presented in much of the literature on engagement, including conceptual elements

of engagement, meaningful work across generational cohorts, social exchange theory and the impact of each on the well-being of the workplace. I continued the literature review through an evaluation of the increasing condition, implications, and financial burden of disengagement, highlighting recommended countermeasures and lacking related information and studies in noted areas of work meaning and engagement. A turn was then taken to evaluate literature that further explored any possible relationships amongst meaningfulness, work engagement, and organizational commitment and differences in related perceptions, behaviors, attitudes, opinions, and solutions across the generations, calling attention to Millennials in the workplace, their impact, and highlighting caution worth taking notice of. The next natural progression in the literature review was to move past generational stereotypes and examine the perceptions of Millennials and what makes their work motivating and meaningful, and further what are drivers of millennial engagement. Next, the literature review progressed to evaluate that if Millennials are critical to the workplace, and there is a relationship between engagement and organizational commitment, why organizations are not changing or recognizing a need to change related to this cohort's engagement in the workplace. I concluded my review of the literature having identified a case for conducting further investigation into Millennials' lived experiences of work meaning, engagement, and disengagement.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study was grounded in Khan's (1990) concept of employee engagement and Hoole and Bonnema's (2015) concept of meaningful work across generational cohorts. Khan (1990) was the first academic researcher to define the concept of employee

engagement. The findings of this empirical investigation can be used by leaders to increase awareness, advance their knowledge and to support a deeper understanding of Millennials' experiences of meaning at work and job engagement in organizations. The findings can also be used to contribute original qualitative data to the study's conceptual framework.

Kahn (1990) defined engagement as an employee's ability to harness their full self at work and identified three psychological conditions that enable it: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. Kahn proposed that engagement is not static and an employee's workplace experiences, including these psychological conditions, can cause engagement to change and fluctuate as the work environment changes and fluctuates. Kahn's engagement concept supports that if leaders can better understand engagement and what drives engagement, changes can be made to create workplace environments where engagement can flourish.

Kahn's definition of employee engagement was utilized by Saks (2006) to develop a social exchange theory about employee engagement in organizations. Saks's (2006) social exchange theory on employee engagement is a theoretical basis to explain why employees become more or less engaged toward their work. According to this social exchange theory, work relationships are built on mutual obligations. Relationships are constantly evaluated and re-evaluated based on the value they produce and will potentially thrive as long as the rules of social exchange theory are not broken. Social exchange theory proposes that commitments at work are made through a series of interactions between parties who are in a state of give-and-take interdependence, and

depending on how parties interact with each other, results in either engagement or disengagement.

Cassell (2017) and Naim and Lenka's (2017) recent studies extended Saks's (2006) social exchange theory by incorporating leadership awareness of Millennials and their entry into and growing impact in the workplace. Millennial growth and impact in the workplace add to its complexity, including three distinctly present and interacting generations—baby boomers, Generation X, and Millennials—working together (Naim & Lenka, 2018). Multiple generations are working together with their differing work values, preferences, and characteristics, creating an even more unique dynamic and a level of complexity and challenge that the workplace has yet to understand or fully overcome. Millennials draw particular research interest as baby boomers are rapidly retiring and the Millennials' presence in the workplace continues to grow and impact business outcomes (2018). Further, the outcome of these studies suggests that social exchange theory, perceived organization support, affective commitment, and mentoring related actions can be implemented by leaders to support Millennials' work engagement and recommend future qualitative research to broaden our understanding and further support Millennials' work engagement.

Meaningful work was first grounded in Maslow's (1943) needs hierarchy, which Maslow presented as a theory of human motivation in his seminal work. Maslow's hierarchy places self-actualization at the top of the pyramid, with the underlying principle that another takes its place when a specific need is fulfilled. A person, therefore, constantly strives to become fully realized (Maslow, 1943). Maslow's concept of self-

actualization continues to evolve and remains centered around understanding what people need, how people's needs differ, and discovering what motivates and fulfills people.

Maslow's concept of self-actualization is aligned to the following key areas: (a) if you understand and meet people's needs, they will remain motivated and productive; (b) people are motivated by more than just money; (c) people experience satisfaction in a variety of different ways; and (d) self-actualization can be achieved by anyone (Maslow et al., 1998). According to Overell (2008), this translates into self-actualization in work and happens when a person assimilates work into identity.

Hoole and Bonnema (2015) extended Overell's (2008) work to develop a concept of meaningful work across generational cohorts that studied why generational cohorts experience work engagement and meaningful work differently. These scholars concluded that within the diverse and changing landscape in the workplace, the focus of many organizations needs to start shifting toward the needs and values of different generational cohorts, and future research can focus on more in-depth qualitative studies exploring the experience of work across generational cohorts (Hoole & Bonnema, 2015).

Hoole and Bonnema (2015) suggested that meaningful work originated as a concept from the philosophical principles associated with the meaning of life, as a feeling of purpose in one's overall existence, which creates a sense of harmony and completeness. Their study aimed to help leaders determine whether there is a relationship between work engagement and meaningful work and if varying levels exist between different generational cohorts. While the results of their study suggest that different

cohorts have different needs and values, it is also suggested that engagement strategies may need to be designed accordingly to be more effective.

The purpose of this study was to explore Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement, and disengagement in the workplace and is grounded in the described conceptual framework. I used the participant's responses to the interview questions to generate original data comprised of naïve descriptions obtained through open-ended questions and dialogue to explore the meaning of the participants' work experiences and job engagement. The outcome of this study may be used to further inform leaders about Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and engagement and potentially supported the development of future engagement strategies geared toward Millennials in the workplace.

### **Literature Review**

There are recommended steps to ensure an exhaustive literature review is completed. Efron and Ravid (2019) prescribed that the literature review be developed with a clear focus, specific goals, defined perspective, adequate coverage, organization, and a specific audience in mind. I presented these elements in Chapter 1 where the topic, purpose, and significance of this study were introduced. Before developing the elements presented in Chapter 1, steps to support a useful literature review were followed. As recommended by Machi & McEvoy (2016), steps for this study included an extensive investigation of the literature, selecting the topic, assessing related claims, searching the literature, analyzing the literature, and then writing the review. The process of the literature review was critical. Through this process I discovered a rationale for the study



and the information learned aided me with establishing a foundation of knowledge on the topic of study. Through this process, I also identified gaps or questions that remained from similar research, and further, identified connections made between what exists in the literature and what could be added to unfold and substantiate the planned research (Tracy, 2019).

A search of literature resulted in identifying several outputs: numerous studies laden with generalizations about the Millennials, the importance of this cohort to the workplace, and further, regarding the workplace and leadership preferences and engagement drivers of this cohort (Baldonado, 2008; Dulin, 2005; Stratman, 2007). Additional studies explored the lived experiences of Millennials in the workplace and identified that prior assumptions about Millennials and interpretations about this cohort might not have produced accurate guidance for leaders on how to best work with Millennials (Ballard, 2010; Monroe, 2010; et al.). As identified by Coates (2017), the voice of Millennials that may support and better inform senior leaders about their experiences of work meaning and engagement was lacking and supported that further inquiry and research in this area was still needed.

Gaston (2018), et al., have conducted studies focused on millennial engagement experiences, and meaningful work was identified as an emerging theme surrounding positive engagement experiences and a stimulus for further research to build an additional knowledge base in this area. As recommended by Moustakas (1994), I selected a transcendental phenomenological approach as most appropriate to understand better such elements of the human experience, and to expand on each of the studies reviewed.

Further, a transcendental phenomenological approach was most appropriate as it embraces the concept of epoché, articulated by Husserl (as cited in Sheehan, 2014) as the conscious setting aside of current or preconceived thoughts, beliefs, and judgments that lend themselves to bias.

This literature review included a review of: generations in the workplace, millennial differentiation, the millennial hierarchy of needs, workplace engagement, meaningful work, the concept and importance of engagement and meaningful work in the workplace, a summary of the themes that developed the purpose and substantiated the research, a review of the millennial cohort in the workplace, millennial engagement and work meaning...

### **Generations in the Workplace**

The literature is laden with studies on generational cohort theory that have concluded certain traits to be inclusive of and vary across generations; differences across generations are not based on biological processes but are triggered and grounded in social events (Moss, 2010). According to Moss, the variation across generations has been attributed to or influenced by historical events or social changes that affect values, attitudes, and beliefs; further, related events that take place during formative years are said to have a significant impact and influence – shaping values, attitudes, and beliefs of each cohort (2010).

Generational cohorts have been studied and compared throughout the literature for many decades. The labels and periods for each generation have been debated over time and are not an exact representation but rather a descriptive guide used to define the

four generations introduced in this study. Each generation is a product of its time and displays unique characteristics (Berstein et al., 2008). In reviewing how generations are defined across the world, how generations are defined in America differs marginally from those established in other countries (Moss, 2010). While “how” generations are defined (age groups classify individuals) are only marginally different worldwide, it is not recommended that Western generational models be broadly applied to a global workplace. While similar events have occurred throughout the world during generational timeframes, geographical factors have also proven to influence the formation of generational beliefs and behavior in many cases (Erickson, 2011). This further demonstrates the different lenses through which individuals view events and form their opinions, values, perspectives, and behaviors in the workplace – with growing variation as the “workplace” becomes more and more global.

Lancaster and Stillman (2002) define generational identity as a state of mind shaped by many events and influences (p.32). Similarly, it is essential to remember that every individual is unique and may identify with their generation or another; and share characteristics and relate well with the generations they fall between. While age may place an individual in one generation, other influences may dictate a connection to another. However, generations are defined, every individual must personally define what generation they fit into (p.32).

The literature suggests that organizations continue to rely on age and generation research outcomes to heavily inform their engagement strategies and gain insight into each generation's interests, values, and preferences (Deloitte, 2018). Individuals need to

define and express what generation or generations they identify with so that leaders can likewise develop ways to identify with the members of their teams and ensure that all generations can work together toward a common goal in the workplace. The identification process is a significant starting point for leaders. With this knowledge, leaders are better equipped to acknowledge, appreciate, and respect generational differences on their teams; and further, leaders who are informed about generational differences are better able to personalize leader interactions based on related preferences.

Figure 1 provides an outline of the generations provided by the Pew Research Center; these definitions are commonly used to describe the generations in the workplace and those that will be used for this study (Fry, 2018).

### **Figure 1**

#### *The Generations Defined*

*The Generations Defined, (Pew Research Center, 2015)*

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#### **Generation Z (Post-Millennial Generation)**

Born: 1997 and later

#### **Millennial Generation**

Born: 1981 – 1996

#### **Generation X**

Born: 1965 – 1980

#### **Baby Boom Generation ( Baby Boomers)**

Born: 1948 – 1964

#### **Silent Generation (Traditionalists)**

Born 1945 and earlier

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### *Traditionalists*

Teens of the 1950s are known as the generation of Traditionalists. Born before the end of World War II (1945 and earlier; 63 million), this group is also referred to as Veterans, Builders, or the Silent generation (Bernstein et al., 2008; Fry, 2018). Brought up in a regimen that taught them to value quality, respect, and authority, this generation is known for their loyalty. Europe and America's booming, postwar economies created opportunities on every corner; opportunities created enthusiasm and excitement for the world of work and what it had to offer – the general motivation was to take full advantage of each one (Erickson, 2011). This generation is known as the first actual generation of innovators, hailing our world's first creators of vaccines, the brave souls that ignited the civil rights movement, and the first pioneers to lay the foundation for today's technological climate (Wiedmer, 2015).

To the Traditionalists, longevity with one employer is seen as a positive measure of success. Dedicated to getting the job done, Traditionalists like to know that they are respected and valued and promoted based on their strong work ethic and seniority, deserving respect based on their roles. On the other hand, this generation is often considered “silent” because they supported the status quo and lack concern for rapid change (Patterson, 2007). Resulting financial success became a symbol for this generation – a measure of the degree to which their teenage dreams had come true. While society designates retirement for most in this age group, in the spirit of loyalty and perseverance, this generation is staying in the workplace longer, reflecting both the need

for their skills and the impact of such laws as the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (Bernstein et al., 2008).

Characteristics of a traditionalist in the workplace can be described as – hard-working, loyal, duty and responsibility for leisure, rules, and guidelines abiding and respectful to authority and leadership. In summary, every generation leaves a legacy of values and a foundation for generations that follow to build on. While each generation is unique, it is essential to remember that each generation is also birthed from the seeds of the preceding generation, building on the legacy, and developing into something new.

#### *Baby Boomers*

Born between 1946 and 1964 (80 million) to parents driven by opportunity and optimism, this generational cohort has shaped American society since its inception (Bernstein et al., 2008; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). Characterized by their hard work, long hours, and commitment to their employers, baby boomers, are dedicated, extremely loyal, and self-reliant. They value loyalty and often keep their jobs for long periods and often stay with the same company for the duration of their careers.

The baby boomer's teenage years of the '60s and '70s were filled with societal causes and political and cultural revolution. Witnessing the assassinations of some of the most promising leaders – John Kennedy, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King – the boomers were driven, in a degree of desperation, and with the optimism of their upbringing, to find an avenue to support needed change (Parry & Urwin, 2011). Resulting from their experience, this cohort emphasizes the desire to be respected and recognized for their contributions and dues they have paid (Lyons & Kuron, 2014).

More children were born in this era than any other to date. Boomers were said to have lived in a world that was too small to contain them. This circumstance produced a need to compete and is the influencing factor that drives the competitive behavior and descriptive characteristic that marks the members of this group. Boomers understand that success will not come easy or without sacrifice in light of the competition, and sacrifice is required to get ahead. While boomers value sacrifice, they also value personal gratification and feedback that sets them apart, emphasizes their value, and is accompanied by financial rewards.

Boomers remain enormously influential in the workplace as they continue serving in senior leadership and executive roles. This influence has a significant impact on workplace culture and the future state of the organization. Even at or near retirement age, some boomers continue to work, as they may not be adequately prepared to retire. Building on the shoulders of Traditionalists, boomers in the workplace are also characterized by their work ethic, often working as many hours as it takes to ensure the job gets done right, and often at the risk of everything else, including work-life balance. Boomers also expect the team to share and practice their values, working long hours and producing quality work at any cost. This cohort generates high value and risk for many organizations, previously making up the largest population of employees, experience, skills, etc., and risk of mass exodus due to various triggers and implications (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008).

*Generation X*

The first generation born (1965 – 1980; 46 million) into the world of computer technology and the culture created by the parenting baby boomers and Traditionalists, this generation is a small cohort compared to the preceding and following generations (Patterson, 2007). The latchkey children of this generation have learned to be self-reliant and readily able to adapt to change. Insisting on a better work-life balance and family than they experienced, this group is sometimes misread as poor team players unwilling to do what it takes to get the job done. Many members of this generation are highly educated and impatient in environments that do not support the development and related advancement opportunities (p.20). Generation X has been defined as the most highly educated generation of all the generations in the workplace (Widemer, 2015).

This small population in the workforce is somewhat set apart. Their action to carve out an individual identity separate from the Traditionalists and baby boomers is often misunderstood (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). Growing up in the heightened shadows of crime and divorce, this generation demonstrates trust and relationship issues, putting faith in themselves rather than the institutions that have failed them in the formative part of their lives (p.25). Traditionalists are tagged as loyal, and boomers optimistic, Gen Xers have been marked by skepticism (p.25). Although highly skilled and educated, and the likely choice to serve in the leadership roles left vacant by the Boomers, based on their small size, this generation, by sheer number, will not be able to fill such a gap.

Generation X took a peculiar turn from the Traditionalists and boomers as characterized in the workplace. While this cohort remains true to demonstrating a strong



work ethic and producing quality work, life experiences have tainted this cohort's view of and respect for authority, status, or title. This cohort experienced the long work hours of their parents and the impact this choice had on family life, frequently resulting in divorce, and have uniquely made a point to find alternate paths to success, with the goal of not repeating the same behaviors and avoiding the same outcomes. Contrary to the two prior generations, Generation X prefers to work smarter and not harder, valuing quality over quantity.

### *Generation Y/Millennials*

The next baby boom (86 million+ strong) is the Echo Boom, Generation Y, the Baby Busters, Millennials, or Generation Next (Gilbert, 2011; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). This generation has been on the radar from its inception (1981 – 1996). Born in an age of terrorism and unpredictable events, the teenage years of this generation have impressed upon its members a sense of impatience, immediacy, and living life to the fullest as a priority (Erickson, 2008). Putting related behavior challenges aside, this generation is the future's most valuable group of human resources. Employers must figure out how to retain and engage this intelligent, practical, techno-savvy cohort in the workforce (2002, p.27; Kropp, 2012; White, 2012).

Millennials have been directly affected by personal threats stemming from violent outbreaks, readily available illegal drugs, and the proliferation of gangs, naming personal safety as their number one workplace issue (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002, p.29). Having the wisdom of generations that have gone before them, this generation is predicted to be the next great hope for the workforce. Having close family ties (grandparents, parents,

and siblings) and related influences across the generations, Generation Y is fortunate to be the recipients of the other generations' loyalty, optimism, and cautious insights, marking this generation with affluence and valuable character realism.

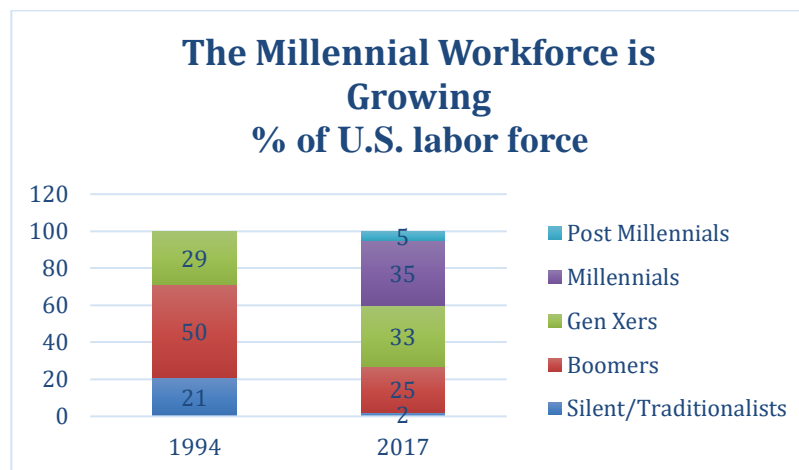
Millennials are characterized as the most diverse cohort in the workplace. While members of prior generations more closely relate to the general descriptions of their cohort, Millennials are even more unique, as there are significant variations within and across the generation that continue to unfold and expand the “general” description of this cohort. Now well-established and the majority population in the workplace, the workplace characteristics of Millennials continue to evolve out of their optimism, confidence, and search for meaning in their work.

### **The Millennial Differentiation**

Millennials matter because of the vast experience and characteristic differences compared to other generations and because they are the largest generation to enter and impact the workforce compared to others (Asghar, 2014; Deloitte Millennial Survey, 2016). Figure 2 demonstrates the shift that is taking place in the US labor force; Millennials now make up more than one-third of the US labor population (Fry, 2018). There are differences across generations regarding their expression of values and what they expect from the organization. Further, the differences and gaps will potentially have a growing impact on employee engagement (Gallup, 2016). By learning more about the generations and their differences and further addressing the most significant issues and their impact, organizations can better understand and close the gaps related to overall engagement and performance.

## Figure 2

*Generation Shift in the US Labor Force (Fry, 2018).*



After 2020, it is predicted that a full 86 million Millennials will be in the workplace, representing a significant percentage of the total working population (Asghar, 2014). The outlook of Millennials and what they expect from their work experience is very different; they are well educated, technology-savvy, confident, and energetic. While Millennials are equipped for success, they prefer a balance that includes challenges that meet high expectations for self and their teams as a whole, and a work environment that meets these needs but allows them to have a life outside of work as well (Mazzoni, 2014; Paknad, 2015).

Millennials are creating a shift in the workplace, flattening the structure, and pushing the rest of the organization out of their comfort zones (Deloitte, 2016). The traditional ways of doing things are being questioned, and the millennial social mindset establishes a “new normal.” Millennials view the traditional workplace as an extension of the home, and this cohort strongly desires and demands purpose-driven employment and

work that brings meaning to their lives (Wood, 2019). Researching Millennials can help leaders and employers understand what this means and how to meet the cohort's expectations that make up the majority of the population in the workplace.

### **Millennials Hierarchy of Needs**

Maslow perceived basic needs must be met as a foundation to an individual's development – physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization (1943). Maslow conditions our motivation to the desire to achieve or maintain the various conditions upon which these basic satisfactions rest and also by particular more intellectual desires (p.395-396). According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, people first have to meet the first four needs before they can start helping others and experience self-actualization; higher-level needs are not significant until lower-level needs are satisfied (1943). Understanding what motivates and engages people toward work behavior is critical; if employers understand the needs of Millennials and meet those needs, there is a good chance that Millennials will be engaged or highly engaged in the workplace. Further, when applying Maslow's theory, this conditions our engagement to the desire to achieve or maintain various conditions, and this concept may help leaders better understand or connect how unmet needs can lead to disengagement (Gilbert, 2011).

When comparing Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to Millennial Needs, there may be similarities and links to engagement based on how needs are being met. The figure below combines and describes a comparison of Maslow's Hierarchy and Millennial needs and a related linkage to engagement. Creating engaging work environments and work

experiences will be critical for organizations that employ Millennials, and by doing so, organizations that do can expect to outperform those who do not (Cattermole, 2018).

### Figure 3

*Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to Millennial Needs (Maslow, 1943; Gilbert, 2011)*

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs	Millennial Needs	Link to Engagement	Additional Millennial Needs
↓Survival/Functional	A job, income	Disengaged	Autonomy and flexibility
↓Safety/Security	Full-time work, safe work conditions	Not Engaged	
↓Social/Belonging	Pleasant co-workers, sense of belonging, great team dynamics	Almost Engaged	Fun with those they enjoy working with
↓Esteem	Respect and feedback from leaders, sense of achievement	Engaged	Recognition and respect
⊕Self-Actualization	Doing good, giving back, work that matters – work meaning	Highly Engaged	Meaningful work, a chance to learn and grow

### Engagement

Expanding on the conceptual context of engagement and Kahn's (1990) definition, engagement also refers to the extent to which employees commit – rationally or emotionally – to something or someone in an organization (Council, 2004; Little & Little, 2006). The organization's size matters when it comes to how engaged employees are; in many cases, employees in large organizations are less engaged than employees in smaller ones (Gallup, 2016; Mann & McCarville, 2016). Employees who work for larger companies (more than 1,000 workers) report lower levels of engagement than those who work for smaller companies.

Deemed a source of competitive advantage, some companies have ten times as many highly committed and contributing employees as others, and in those organizations,

engagement is viewed as the differentiation and key to performance and retention (Sharma & Kaur, 2014). Highly engaged employees try 57 % harder, perform 20 % better, and are 87 % less likely to leave than their disengaged counterparts (Council, 2004; Seijts & Crim, 2006). Additionally, according to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, related to engagement, employees are more likely to commit emotionally if their self-interested needs are met (Council, 2004; Crabtree, 2005).

Employee engagement is a strong predictor of positive organizational performance and a two-way relationship between employer and employee (Juhdi et al., 2013; Markos & Sridevi, 2010; Sharma & Kaur, 2014). This relationship contributes to financial outcomes for organizations, and while large companies are getting bigger, they are not equally or equitably becoming more profitable (Mann & McCarville, 2016). Attention to employee engagement may lead to greater profits.

Additionally, engagement is an essential indicator of occupational well-being for both employees and organizations (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Drivers of engagement include the availability of job resources including: social support from colleagues and leaders, performance feedback, skill variety, autonomy, learning opportunities, the salience of job resources, and personal resources (2008). Some of the reasons why engaged workers perform better than non-engaged workers have been attributed to finding meaning in their work, or their experience of positive emotions of happiness, joy, and enthusiasm and their experience with better health; as a result, engaged workers create their job and personal resources and transfer their engagement to others (p.215 - 216).

*Employee Engagement and Organizational Performance*

Studies have confirmed a positive relationship between employee engagement and organizational performance outcomes: employee retention, productivity, profitability, customer loyalty, and safety (Markos, & Sridevi, 2010; et al.). Research also indicates that companies with an engaged workforce experience above-average performance, while organizations where employees are disengaged critically impact their bottom line. Disengaged employees are said to miss an average of three and a half more days per year, are less productive, and cost the U.S. economy billions per year (Crabtree, 2005; Markos & Sridevi, 2010; Sterling, 2015). With just over a third of the workforce engaged, there is a severe need to discover a solution to increase engagement in the workplace. Further, across the generations, Millennials are the least engaged generation (Gallup, 2016). Employee engagement may be vital to improving performance, and there is a pressing need to reflect on the relationship between employee engagement and business outcomes, and further the aspects that influence this engagement.

The literature suggests that with a growing number of generations present in the workplace, organizational dynamics are changing, engagement levels are not improving, and resulting performance outcomes are at risk (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017; et.al.). While the literature has identified a relationship between engagement, employee fit and business outcomes, more needs to be learned about these relationships and the potential impact these relationships have on the organization's future state (Bundy et al., 2017; et al.). Research efforts must continue to identify gaps and provide information to support closing them to protect the best interests of the workforce and organizations in the future

(Harter, 2020). Further, with the information learned, organizations must translate information into policies and culture that builds and develops a culture where leaders engage, close the gaps, and protect future interests and business objectives. As the generational structure is changing with the times, organizations must change along with it. Ignoring this reality will not make the problem go away. A reactive approach may not be able to sustain future organizations as it has in the past. Not acting is likely to make the challenge of staying ahead of or keeping up with the competition more difficult, or ultimately an impossible task.

### **Work Meaning**

While defining work meaning is an individual and unique process, it consists of experiencing positive meaning in work, sensing that work is a crucial avenue for making meaning, and perceiving one's work to benefit some greater good (Overell, 2008; Steger et al., 2012). Meaning is a concept that is linked to our existence; work meaning encompasses the workplace as a part of our existence (Geldenhuys et al., 2014). Ultimately, meaningful work is the degree to which an employee's work experience provides meaning, value, and is worthwhile.

Meaningful work has been linked to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and a person's striving to become fully realized; this translates to self-actualization in work and happens when a person assimilates work into identity (Maslow, 1943). Ultimately, from Maslow's perspective, a meaningful work experience and journey to self-actualization incorporate autonomy, a sufficient income, and the opportunity to develop on a moral level. Generations in the workplace may define and experience meaningful work differently.



Recent studies showed a significant difference between baby boomers and Millennials' definitions of work meaning in the workplace (Hoole & Bonnema, 2015). As baby boomers are vastly exiting the workplace and Millennials are becoming the majority in the workplace, a better understanding of Millennials' meaningful work experiences is needed.

### **Engagement and Work Meaning in the Workplace**

The latest themes presented in the literature on engagement and its impact on the well-being of the workplace support that the effects of engagement are critical to sustaining the workplace (Schullery, 2013). Understanding and influencing the drivers of engagement are equally important to note, understand and practice, namely what drives the engagement of each generation in the workplace.

In response to a growing engagement dilemma in the workplace, studies have been conducted to explore the relationships amongst work meaning, engagement, and organizational commitment; and it has been determined that a strong relationship exists between engagement, employee communication, and organizational commitment (Walden et al., 2017). Related studies also confirm that meaningful work can yield benefits for organizations and lead to positive work outcomes, including engaged and committed employees, productivity, and retention (Geldenhuis et al., 2014). Because most engaged employees remain committed to the organization, it is critical to determine what fosters every employee's engagement and then remove obstacles that hinder that engagement. Further research is warranted to understand better the impact of meaningful work on all aspects of the organization.

There are differences in perceptions across the generations regarding engagement contributors in the workplace (Bindu, 2017). While organizations have addressed general engagement issues and implemented engagement policies, most have done so without differentiation to the generations. Suppose it has been determined that there are differences in how generation cohorts define and experience work meaning and engagement in the workplace. In that case, more must be learned about these differences so that organizations can tailor their engagement policies and practices to address this diversity (Hoole & Bonnema, 2015).

### **Why Millennials, Why Engagement, Why Now?**

In a review of the literature, several themes were discovered that called attention to the need for additional research. Theme 1 - Millennials officially became the largest generation in the workforce in 2016 (Fry, 2016); as of the year 2020, more than half of the U.S. workforce is made up of Millennials; and over the next ten years will grow to 75% of the workforce (Fry, 2018). Theme 2 - Millennials have been identified as the least engaged generation cohort in the workforce, with only 29% engaged, 55% not engaged, and 16% actively disengaged, frequently changing jobs and always open to different job opportunities; Stagnant engagement is impacting the U.S. economy by more than \$30.5 billion annually (Gallup, 2016). According to the Deloitte Millennial Survey (2018), if Millennials find it difficult to connect and find meaning and purpose in the workplace, they will frequently move from job to job in search of preferred business attributes. Theme 3 – With a growing number of Millennials present in the workplace, organizational dynamics are changing, engagement levels are not improving, attrition

rates are rising, and performance outcomes are at risk (Bond, 2016; Schullery, 2013; Walden et al., 2017).

### **Millennials in the Workplace**

Leaders are cautioned to heighten their awareness of the millennial population in the workplace as this generation is expected to outnumber every other cohort in the workplace over the next ten years (Fry, 2016). Organizations should strongly consider what the majority population in the workplace means to workplace culture, how policies are currently written and may need to be revised and executed, and how the millennial majority will continue to impact business outcomes. This is a significant and historical change for the workplace, and what is done now to prepare for this change will have a positive or negative bearing on future business outcomes.

A new norm regarding the millennial majority in the workplace is settling into organizations. With continued studies, more and more are being discovered about this unique cohort, exposing the apparent differences within this cohort - amongst male and female, and spanning across industries (Kaifi et al., 2012). As Millennials are transitioning into leadership roles in great numbers and with a unique and dynamic influence, organizations must take time to learn about and prepare for the generation that is quickly taking over the workplace.

Managing and retaining Millennials in the workplace using the same practices as other cohorts does not produce the same results. Social exchange theory has been commonly used to understand better the reciprocal relationships that develop between employees and organizations – namely, work meaning and engagement that may impact

affective millennial commitment to organizations (Cassell, 2017). Obtaining a better understanding of this cohort's preferences and unique characteristics from this conceptual perspective and translating this understanding into workplace solutions may be the key to providing work meaning, improving engagement, and ultimately retaining Millennials in the workplace.

Millennials are transforming the workplace and the related changes that are taking place in the workplace. The differences seen with Millennials are notable compared to other generations – being the first generation to think and operate from a global mindset and demonstrating differences within the generation compared to other generations (Canedo et al., 2017). Compared to other generations, Millennials are more narcissistic, have higher levels of self-esteem and extroversion, are more confident and individualistic, and have more mental health concerns (2017). These differences warrant further investigation to be better understood as they impact how Millennials find meaning in their work, interact and engage in the workplace.

### **Millennial Engagement and Work Meaning in the Workplace**

Millennials have different values than their counterparts do and what influences the engagement of this cohort differs as well. Several layers of differences must be considered when organizations attempt to engage and retain this cohort, differences that span across demographics and industries (Carrillo et al., 2017). While numerous surveys have identified the surface details, countermeasures have not significantly impacted workplace engagement. Engagement levels are not changing because organizations may not be changing in the right ways. Millennials continue to move from organization to

organization, searching for meaning – in leadership that inspires mission/vision, a sense of community, and work meaning (Bond, 2016).

Engagement is key to workplace productivity and is perceived differently across the generations; millennial perceptions of engagement may be notably different from the other generations. Similarly, the meaning of work and the effects of meaningful work on millennial engagement and commitment to the organizations have been identified through related studies in several industries (Jung & Yoon, 2016). Organizations must learn more about millennial engagement to influence what engages this generation at work effectively. A deeper dive into the engagement experiences of Millennials is critical, as there appears to be information that has not yet been discovered about Millennials and how to keep them engaged (Schullery, 2013). Further inquiry can help identify the scope, width, and depth of millennial work meaning and improve millennial engagement in the workplace.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Millennials are now the largest, most diverse, and least engaged cohort (only 29% engaged - emotionally and behaviorally connected to their jobs) in the workplace, yet constantly seeking meaning and fulfillment in their careers. Millennials also reign as the most talked about and misunderstood cohort in the workplace. Given the importance and impact of engagement in the workplace, more research is needed to better understand and find solutions that organizations can use to provide Millennials what they are looking for, improve engagement and related outcomes, and protect the future state of the workplace.

Organizations must find ways to develop the workplace environment to engage and fulfill the majority of the workforce. We have previously learned that Millennials are technology savvy, embrace collaboration, and thrive in environments that lead to creating a sense of purpose, fulfillment and making a positive social impact through their work. While related studies have identified a relationship between millennial engagement, work meaning, and business outcomes, more needs to be learned about these relationships and the potential impact on the future state of the workplace. The purpose of this qualitative empirical phenomenological study is to explore Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement in the workplace. The outcome of exploring Millennials' experiences of meaning at work and job engagement and disengagement in organizations could potentially support increasing knowledge depth and overall awareness of this generation based on actual experiences, providing actionable insights that can impact engagement, related work relationships, positive social change in the workplace, and favorable performance outcomes.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative empirical phenomenological study was to explore Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement in the workplace. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, within the next 2 years, it is predicted that more than half of the U.S. workforce will be made up of Millennials, further growing to 75 % over the next 10 years (Fry, 2018). Millennials are growing to be the largest cohort in the workplace and are equally the least engaged, negatively impacting the U.S. economy by more than \$30.5 billion annually (Gallup, 2016).

Millennials continue to find it challenging to connect and find meaning and purpose in the workplace (Deloitte, 2018). Related studies have identified a relationship between millennial engagement, work meaning, and business outcomes, yet surveys and studies continue to reveal that deployed solutions are not impacting millennial work meaning and engagement. More needs to be learned about these relationships and the potential impact these relationships have on the future state of the workplace.

Many qualitative models guide social research. I selected a transcendental phenomenological model as the most appropriate foundation and framework to build this study and based on Moustakas's (1994) aligned recommendation. This qualitative model guided me with conducting the most organic form of inquiry and investigation, and with appropriately facilitating the discovery of the participants' meanings of their lived experiences. I highlighted additional details about the research method, the transcendental phenomenological research design, and the rationale for selecting this methodology in this chapter.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

I selected the research methodology and design motivated by the purpose of the study and the research question: What are Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement and disengagement in organizations? In light of the research purpose and focus, I selected a qualitative method over a quantitative method for this study. As explained by Barnham (2015), quantitative research is objective, uses hard factual data, and seeks to explain, predict, and generalize; and in contrast, qualitative research is interpretive and subjective, and focused on finding deeper meaning, and seeks to explore, build, and gain a better understanding of complex situation. A qualitative method was selected as the most suitable for the type of inquiry carried out in this study.

Research design can also be viewed as the planning strategy used to solve the research problem (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The selected design is critical as it provided the structure and processes that were followed and carried out in the research. To better understand the rationale for the selected qualitative research design, it is clarifying to review and distinguish the characteristics of some of the different qualitative designs evaluated; namely the case study, ethnography, phenomenological study, grounded theory study, and content analysis, for the appropriate application and considering the basis of the research purpose, focus, data required, and the methods used for data collection and analysis.

The summary below highlights the purpose, focus, and methods of data collection and analysis prescribed for each of the qualitative designs used to conduct practical research, and as described by Leedy and Ormrod (2005):(a) the case study is used with a



purpose of understanding a person or situation in greater depth, with a focus on one or more cases within its/their natural setting, using observations and interviews as methods of data collection, and using common themes to synthesize data into an overall portrait of the cases ; (b) ethnography is used with a purpose of understanding how behaviors reflect the culture of a group, with focus on a specific field site shared by a common culture, applying the use of participant observation and interviews as methods of data collection, and identifying significant structures and beliefs to organize data into a logical whole; (c) phenomenological studies are used with a purpose of understanding an experience from the participants' point of view, with a focus on a particular phenomenon typically lived and perceived by human beings, using in-depth and unstructured interviews and purposeful sampling as methods of data collection, and integrating the meaning of units derived from the data into a typical experience; (d) grounded theory studies are used with a purpose of deriving a theory from data collected in a natural setting, with a focus on process and interactions and how they influence each other, using data from interviews and other relevant data sources to construct theories from categories and interrelationships; and (e) content analysis studies are used to identify specific characteristics of a body of material, with focus on verbal or a behavioral form of communication, using sampling and coding of predetermined characteristics to complete descriptive or statistical analysis to answer the research question.

This study was conducted with a goal of investigating the lived experiences of work meaning and engagement of the participants. I selected a phenomenological approach as most appropriate, as this approach aligned to the research purpose and focus

to investigate and better understand the experiences from the participants' viewpoints and as the phenomenon is typically lived and perceived by human beings (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Further, I used a transcendental phenomenological design, as this approach emphasized focus on the participant's subjective experiences and interpretations of the world and guided the process of attempting to understand how the world appeared (within the scope of investigation) to subjects under study (Trochim, 2001).

The transcendental phenomenological architecture was significant and appropriate for this study as it incorporated three core process steps that facilitated the discovery of knowledge: *epoché*, *transcendental-phenomenological reduction*, and *imaginative variation*. As recommended by Moustakas (1994), incorporating these steps was significant to the study's outcome to ensure that the research process was conducted, outside of bias, preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon being studied. Epoché, the first step, is a form of preparation used by researchers to facilitate incorporating disciplined and systematic steps and setting aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being studied. Epoché was followed by transcendental phenomenological reduction, which included developing descriptions of meanings in the participants' experiences in a "fresh and open way". Imaginative variation followed; this step is used by the researcher to capture the structural substance of the participants' experience and provided a guide that was used to collect and synthesize meanings from the data collected in this study. While other qualitative approaches used by researchers are sound, by comparison to a transcendental phenomenological approach, using another

method for this study may not have served the research purpose/goal and focus as effectively in leading to a specific description of the participants' experiences.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the qualitative researcher may differ by research approach. The researcher may be an observer, participant, or observer-participant (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). For this phenomenological study, I attempted to understand Millennials' perceptions, perspectives, and understandings of work meaning and engagement in the workplace and learn more about what it is like to experience these occurrences first-hand. As an observer and data collection instrument for this study, I observed the depictions of multiple Millennials' lived experiences of work meaning and engagement, which supported determining generalizations of what this experience was like from the participants' perspectives.

There were several responsibilities to consider as observer and data instrument and in deriving knowledge from this phenomenological study. These responsibilities included ethical integrity and confidentiality, epoché – to avoid judgment and see from stands before our eyes what can be distinguished and described (Butler, 2016), transcendental-phenomenological reduction – to grasp the structural essences of experiences (Moustakas, 1994), and imaginative variation – to reach a point of distinction among the countless variations of actual and possible perceptions that can be combined and synthesized to provide meaning (1994).

Quantitative research is conducted regularly to measure workplace engagement and related millennial interactions in the workplace (Deloitte, 2018; Gallup, 2016).

Related quantitative research is objective and has used objective survey data to explain, predict, and generalize issues surrounding millennial work meaning and engagement in the workplace. While data have been obtained year after year, results have not translated into solutions that significantly improve millennial work meaning and engagement levels in the workplace. According to the 2018 Deloitte Millennial Survey, because the workplace has not prioritized employees, Millennials have had difficulty connecting and finding meaning and purpose in the workplace and frequently move from job to job in search of these attributes. While related surveys continue to support a relationship between millennial engagement, work meaning, and business outcomes, more needs to be learned about these relationships and the potential impact these relationships have on the future state of the workplace. The qualitative inquiry was better suited to inform this learning.

While I am not a member of the millennial cohort, I work with, lead, and manage Millennials in the workplace and am directly impacted by millennial engagement and disengagement. As suggested by Toma (2006), researcher awareness of Millennials and their impact in the workplace further supported credibility as observer and data instrument for the study. The participants I selected for this study did not have any supervisory, instructor, or relationship ties involving positions of power. However, because of my organizational position, I was mindful of any power issues that could have transpired during the research process. To avoid any conflicts of interest and ethical or confidentiality concerns, and as recommended by Finlay (2013), I did not select participants from my immediate work environment, participation was voluntary and

expired at request, and to ensure confidentiality, responses were not linked by name to participants.

### **Methodology**

Epistemology is the study of knowledge or how people come to know information (Trochim, 2001). Research methodology also involves how information becomes known, but more specifically describes the processes and structure used to search for knowledge and finding evidence that can help people understand the world better. There are three methodology structures: a quantitative, qualitative, and a mixed-methods approach, which is the combination of the two (Kothari, 2004). Quantitative research is commonly used to answer questions about relationships among measured variables and explain, predict, and control phenomena. Quantitative research is also called a traditional, experimental, or positivist approach to research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

Alternatively, qualitative research is conducted to find deeper meaning and answer questions about the nature of phenomena, describing and understanding them from the participant's point of view; qualitative methodologies are also known as interpretive, constructivist, or post-positivist approaches (2005). Both quantitative and qualitative methods have similar guiding processes but end with different outcomes in mind: quantitative research verifies, confirms, or disconfirms, and qualitative research describes experiences (Creswell, 1998).

In some cases, it may be appropriate to use both methods to back up findings. This is called a mixed-methods approach. The research methodology structure selected needed to answer the research question without compromising the quality of the research

outcome (Morse, 2016). Ultimately, I selected a qualitative structure because it was determined the most effective to support a process that best answered the research questions, and without compromising the quality of the research outcome.

The purpose of this study was to explore Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement and disengagement in the workplace. Qualitative methods are often used to support social research (Haradhan, 2018). Related methods effectively facilitate the search for deeper insights and further development of conceptual theories that quantitative methods alone cannot provide (Thyer, 2012). My selection of the appropriate research method aimed to reflect alignment with the purpose of the research, the desired nature of the research process, what data were available and how it was collected, how the data were analyzed to determine meaning, and how the findings of the research were communicated (Isaacs, 2014). A qualitative method was selected as the most appropriate for this study and aligned to each of these defining elements. In the following sections, I outline the details around participant selection logic, the instrumentation used for the study, the procedures used for recruitment, participation, data collection, and the data analysis plan.

### **Participant Selection Logic**

I developed the sampling strategy for this study with four elements in mind: (a) defining the research sample (inclusions and exclusions, i.e., only Millennials meeting specific criteria were included, all other generational cohorts were excluded from the sample), (b) determining the appropriate sample size (i.e., 5-25 participants, or until data saturation was reached), (c) developing a sample strategy, (i.e., what actions were taken),

and (d) recruiting participants for the study (i.e., how were participants recruited for the study) (Robinson, 2013). By establishing a sampling strategy I was able to create boundaries and scope for the study. Further, by developing and using a sampling strategy, I protected the quality of the research outcome and focused on achieving the purpose of the study.

The purpose of this study was to learn more about Millennials' lived experiences of work meaning, engagement, and disengagement in the workplace. As outlined by Moustakas (1994), using the transcendental phenomenological approach did not prescribe set criteria for locating and selecting research participants but did describe essential considerations that were followed in this study. All participants demonstrated an interest in understanding more about the nature and meaning of the phenomenon, were willing to participate and articulate responses through lengthy interviews, granted the right to record the interview, and understood that data obtained would be evaluated, synthesized, and published as evidence of the results of this study.

While used with many research approaches, purposeful sampling by nature (to form generalizations outside the participant population)(Gentles et al., 2015) was not appropriate for a transcendental phenomenological study. The exact sample size needed to reach saturation in a qualitative study was difficult to estimate in advance. However, I completed the process with an appropriate and carefully selected sample of 10 millennial participants who had experienced the phenomenon studied, and the final number was determined by saturation/informational redundancy/nothing new happening . Essentially, the appropriate sample size was reached, and data saturation was achieved when there

was enough information obtained to replicate the study, and no other codes signifying new properties of uncovered patterns emerged (Fusch & Ness, 2015); or theoretical saturation, described by van Rijnsvoever (2017) as relevant information needed to gain complete insights, had been reached. Further, the appropriate sample size was considered met when the information obtained had become helpful in understanding the complexity, depth, variation, and context surrounding the phenomenon; and was not intended to represent entire populations as quantitative approaches aim to do (Gentles et al., 2015).

### ***Sampling Population, Criteria, and Strategy***

The participants were carefully selected from the millennial population. Selected Millennials were either male or female; worked for at least five years with a bachelor's degree in any field; had worked for one or multiple organizations of any size; articulated an understanding of experiencing positive meaning in their work experiences, engagement (a commitment to), or disengagement – (lack of commitment to) in the workplace. The study was socialized via social media and other means of research recruitment.

Candidates were invited to participate via formal electronic invitation using various modes – including LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, the Walden Research Participant Pool, and an organized email invitation. Socialization of the study included an overview of the study and a soft invitation to gauge interest from attendees to participate in the study; this was completed via email. Once candidates with interest were identified, informed consent and a questionnaire, including millennial-based demographics, was requested from each interested candidate; each participant completed



this step via Survey Monkey. The researcher used the informed consent and demographics survey information to determine whether or not each candidate met the criteria to participate. Once candidates were determined to meet all criteria to participate, each was asked to complete the Gallup Q12 survey using a provided link. Upon completion of the survey, each candidate contacted the researcher with a preferred date for an interview.

Once contacted with a preferred date, an interview was scheduled via email and completed with each participant via Zoom. Each interview was conducted and included: confirmation of informed consent, confirmation that participation criteria were met, confirmation of consent to be recorded, an introduction to the study, an introduction by each participant, and each participant responding to the twenty-six interview questions. After each interview was completed, the interviews were transcribed (word for word) and sent to each participant for a member check. Once all member checks were confirmed, the data gathered was analyzed to support and inform the results of this study.

### **Instrumentation**

Phenomenological studies almost always incorporate the use of lengthy and unstructured interviews, with the researcher serving as the data collection instrument of choice and with a carefully selected sample of participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon being studied (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). For this study, unstructured interviews along with the Gallup Q12 Engagement Survey Questionnaire (a measure of employee engagement and related impact) were used to collect data and verify internal consistency, with the researcher as the primary data collection instrument.

Observations from the questionnaires and interviews were collected, recorded, and used as primary data to inform the study.

Instrumentation rigor and bias management are critical elements that must be appropriately addressed to protect rigor, manage bias, and ensure the research outcomes' quality. Pilot studies are often conducted to try out planned and proposed methods to be carried out (Chenail, 2011). When pilot studies are not possible, investigator interviews can similarly be used to assess potential bias and simulate interview outcomes (2011). In addition to investigator interviews, a methodological congruence instrument can also serve as an alignment gage, offering the researcher guidance and helping the researcher set reasonable expectations to ensure an effective qualitative inquiry outcome (Willgens et al., 2016). A methodological congruence instrument (MCI) can help the researcher determine if the research is methodologically consistent across all sections. Further, it improves rigor and accountability. The Walden rubric checklist for qualitative research served as the MCI for this study.

Phenomenological research uses an inductive approach that aims to uncover the complete substance of an experience. Transcendental phenomenology embodies the multidimensional nature of the human experience, suspending the researcher's point of view and preconceived notions to understand the participant's experience fully (Moustakas, 1994). Data collection included interviews with probing questions, written self-reports, and other forms of personal expression to obtain participants' personal views, and data analysis to allow for codes to emerge from the data rather than being pre-assigned. Ultimately, the role of the phenomenological researcher is to bring to life the

participant's experience, enabling the reader to grasp and understand what it is like to have experienced the phenomenon under study. A transcendental phenomenological methodology provided logical, systematic, and coherent design elements that lead the researcher to the desired outcome.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

#### *Recruitment.*

Successful recruitment is critical to research outcomes but can sometimes present a challenge, primarily when recruiting from specific target populations (Namageyo-Funa et al., 2014). The researcher has spent more than twenty years in multiple organizations and has built a strong business network across multiple large organizations. Employing recommended recruitment strategies, including network collaboration and word-of-mouth socialization, further supported this study's meaningful and successful recruitment process.

Participants were recruited by written invitation to corporate employee networks via LinkedIn and other similar qualitative research participant recruiting methods – Walden University Research Participant Pool, Facebook, and Instagram. While the selected recruitment means produced an adequate pool of participants for the study, the initial method did not produce enough participants with just one round; a second round of recruitment was conducted to ensure the required sample size.

#### *Participation.*

Upon informed and signed consent to voluntarily and confidentially participate and complete a demographics survey, a Gallup Q12 survey/questionnaire was triggered

for participant completion (electronically). A calendar invite was created to electronically schedule a one-on-one interview with each participant once the completed questionnaire was completed, returned, and evaluated. In light of participant location and convenience, interviews took via video meeting (Zoom). Both researcher and participant were able to see and hear each other and allowed for recording to be effectively utilized. The interview environment was conducive to observing and recording by the researcher. Every individual interview session lasted no less than forty minutes and no longer than one and a half hours. A total of two hours was allotted and scheduled for each interview.

***Data Collection.***

Each interview was recorded using two modes, written notes/journal recorded by the researcher and a video/voice recording using a video/voice recording device via Zoom. While the video was used to support transcription, only the audio portion of the interview was retained in the research records. The confidentiality of each participant was protected throughout the recording process. Primary data were collected from the selected pool of millennial participants; the participants included ten participants, and each was interviewed. Data were collected until thematic saturation was achieved, with no new themes emerging from additional interviews and the data collection process. A second round of interviews was not required. The researcher collected data from observations and responses made through the described interview process. The researcher provided all participants with a summary report of questionnaire results and a complete (word for word) transcription of the interview.

In summary, the steps below were followed to complete the participation selection and data collection process:

1. Created study description and participation invite (included informed consent to participate).
2. Identified a list of participants to recruit to participate in the study.
3. Sent out invites and ads to potential participants, requesting a response by a set date, including a signed informed consent form and completion of a demographics survey to determine eligibility.
4. Upon receiving an informed consent form and verification of met criteria to participate, triggered a request to complete the Gallup Q12 Survey and requested proposed dates for interview planning and scheduling.
  - a. Reviewed demographics questionnaire to determine participant eligibility
  - b. Confirmed interview session and prepared for the interview session
  - c. Conducted and recorded interview observations
  - d. Organized interview recordings into themes
  - e. Repeated process until thematic saturation had been reached
5. Summarized questionnaire reports and interview transcriptions for member check and sent out summaries and participation thank you notes.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The research question sought to uncover Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement and disengagement in organizations. Moustaka's (1994) modified data analysis guidelines were applied to this study to help uncover and further investigate related millennial experiences. Related steps included: horizontalization – extraction of significant statements with the equal value given to all participant statements, reduction, and elimination – developing the meaning of units extracted from significant statements and eliminating duplications, clustering and thematizing – analyzing and coding interview responses, validation – the process of confirming, individual textual description – textual or written comparison, interpretation, and description, and textural-structural description – an integration of what and how participants experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Data extraction, comparison, and analysis were executed through one-on-one interviews surrounding each participant's related lived experiences of the phenomenon under study. Once the data were collected, it was then summarized, evaluated, coded, validated, and appropriately fused together to support deriving meaning from the phenomenon and further supporting accurately describing and conveying the essence of experiences to others (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

Gallup's Q12 survey questionnaire is a trusted and effective engagement measurement tool used by many organizations to measure employee engagement and the impact of employee engagement on the elements that matter most to organizations (Gallup, 2016). The questionnaire has been used to survey more than 35 million

employees across multiple organizations worldwide, repeatedly identifying the engagement concern that many organizations face. The survey includes twelve engagement questions tied to business outcomes, using a scoring scale from one to five, highlighting engagement levels, strengths, and opportunities. Data obtained from the questionnaire was used to support internal consistency and establish a measure of accountability regarding the participant's articulation of engagement level and aligned the researcher to the participant's engagement situation. The Q12 questions were also used to guide related engagement questioning during the one-on-one interview process.

Interviews in qualitative studies are usually unstructured and evolve around the research question. The interview was intended to obtain additional information about the participant's experiences of the phenomenon under study. Creswell (1998) recommends several guidelines to conduct a productive interview: (a) identify some questions in advance, (b) make sure participants are representative of the group, (c) find a suitable location/mode of conducting the interview, (d) get written permission, (e) establish and maintain rapport, (f) focus on the actual rather than the abstract or hypothetical, (g) do not add words to descriptions – let participant's express in their way, (h) record responses verbatim, (i) keep reactions to yourself, (j) treat responses as perceptions versus facts... To protect the stability of the research process, the interview process stayed close to these mentioned guidelines, and questioning followed the baseline of engagement status as established by the participant's answers to the engagement survey/questionnaire.

Qualitative coding is an essential part of the research process and refers to categorizing the data to develop themes (Saldana, 2015). Transcriptions taken from

interview journal entries were categorized into themes and sub-themes of work meaning and engagement. Hand-coding or manual coding was utilized instead of software doing the interpretation work, because as the researcher, I was closer to the data as collector and interpreter. I served as the primary source of coding for this study, using NVivo software and Excel as a database to assist with organizing and beginning the process of categorizing the data, and leading to the creation of themes that represented the data and addressed the research outcomes (Edhlund & McDougall, 2019). Discrepant cases of data that did not align with majority themes were treated as outliers or exceptions and placed in a miscellaneous category. This category was equally evaluated for related contribution to and determination of the overall research outcome.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the rigor or degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study; elements of trustworthiness include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Hadi & Closs, 2016).

#### **Credibility**

The credibility of a study refers to confidence in the truth of the study and its findings and is said to be the essential criterion (Hadi & Closs, 2016). Credibility and trustworthiness for this study were increased by using triangulation or multiple data collection sources (Gallup Q12 questionnaire and interview), and using strategy to gauge internal consistency and measure validity of the outcome. These data collection sources



provided and validated the data used to describe the participant's experiences of work meaning, engagement, and disengagement in the workplace.

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the degree to which the research results can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or research settings (Trochim, 2001). The research process can be transferred to other cohorts or specific groups within the cohort under study. Full and rich descriptions were used to describe millennial experiences of work meaning and engagement and disengagement in the workplace, providing a model for future researchers to apply to similar groups and even other cohorts. The criteria selected was intentionally broad to allow selection and data to be collected from a significant and appropriate sample of the millennial population. The selection criteria further supported transferability and the potential expansion of this research to subsets of the criteria used for this study and to investigate other related contexts and situations.

### **Dependability**

Dependability in qualitative research prescribes the researcher to account for changing context in which the research occurs – both in the setting and how the researcher carries out the research (Trochim, 2001). An audit trail was utilized and provided as evidence that can be utilized to replicate or repeat the research process in and from other contexts.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability assumes that the researcher brings a unique perspective to the study and refers to the degree to which others can collaborate or confirm results.

Ultimately, this element of trustworthiness relates to the research findings demonstrating that results are based on the participant's words and narrative of their experience of the phenomenon versus researcher bias and perception (Trochim, 2001). To address this element, epoché was engaged as prescribed by Moustakas (1994).

### **Ethical Procedures**

The researcher has to ensure that research participants are protected throughout the research process. Areas of protection include protection from harm, informed consent, a right to privacy, and integrity with all dealings throughout the research process (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). All data collected during the research process is held in confidence to ensure that all participants are protected in each area. The following ethical procedures were followed for this research study:

- The researcher complied with the required guidelines for submitting requests to and receiving approval from the Internal Review Board (IRB) to conduct this study.
- Participants were fully advised on the scope, purpose, and role they will play in achieving the purpose of this study. Signed consent was obtained from each participant before any interactions. This consent included a summary of the study, participant expectations, process rules, commitment of researcher, and participant rights and protections.
- A summary of interview transcriptions was shared with the participants, and a final confirmation to proceed was requested. Participants were able

to elect to exclude their contribution at any time if they deemed that moving forward would bring or cause any hurt, harm, or danger.

- All data collected for this study is stored in Excel and NVivo and transcriptions made in Microsoft Word. Data is stored in confidence and labeled by an identifier (PID000#) to protect the identity of each participant.
- While research results will be published in the form of a dissertation, and elements of this study may be submitted to and published in a peer-reviewed journal, all participants were made aware of this during the informed consent process and before providing any data to the study.

### **Summary**

By way of a transcendental phenomenological approach, the purpose of this qualitative empirical phenomenological study was to explore Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement in the workplace. This qualitative research method allowed for discovering the essence and description of the phenomenon through a questionnaire to align on participant engagement and then by interviewing participants via interviews. A transcendental phenomenological design emphasized focus on people's subjective experiences and interpretations of the world and facilitated the researcher with attempting to understand how the world appears (within the scope of investigation) to subjects under study.

The sampling strategy for this project was developed with four elements in mind – defining the research sample (inclusions and exclusions, i.e., only Millennials meeting

specific criteria were included, all other generational cohorts were excluded from the sample), determining the appropriate sample size (i.e., 5-25 participants, or until data saturation was reached), developing a sample strategy, (i.e., what actions were taken), and recruiting participants for the study (i.e., how participants were recruited for the study) (Robinson, 2013).

Instrumentation rigor and bias management are critical elements that were appropriately addressed to protect rigor, manage bias, and ensure the quality of the research outcomes. Ensuring the research strategy incorporated methods to support credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability protected the quality of the outcome of this study. In addition, ethical procedures were followed to protect participants and research outcomes. With the research process completed, Chapter 4 summarizes the research results.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement, and disengagement in the workplace. The line of questioning and data collected supported the research question for this study: What are Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement and disengagement in organizations? I developed this question as a result of personal inquiry and experience, and after an extensive review of the literature revealed widening gaps and warranted a deeper search for its answer. Further, the outcome of exploring Millennials' experiences of meaning at work and job engagement and disengagement in organizations supported increasing knowledge depth and overall awareness of this generation based on their actual experiences, providing actionable insights that can impact engagement, related work relationships, positive social change in the workplace, and favorable performance outcomes.

I highlighted several gaps in the literature regarding Millennials and their work meaning and engagement experiences in the workplace. While it is generally known that increasing one's work meaning will lead to more engagement in an organization, qualitative research focusing on millennial experiences of work meaning and engagement has been relatively limited and is still enormously misunderstood (Geue, 2018). While my review of the literature exposed rich generalizations regarding Millennials' preferences and engagement drivers, the voice of this generation supporting and better informing senior leaders about their engagement and work meaning was needed and was addressed with this study (Coates, 2017; Holmberg-Wright et al., 2017). Specifically, as

this generation is becoming the driving force in organizations, it was essential for leaders to gain additional insight into what satisfies Millennials in a job and how they engage with their work (Hoole & Bonnema, 2015). As Millennials continue to dominate the workforce population, their engagement behaviors, expectations, and mindsets continue to keep performance outcomes at risk, impacting profitability, productivity, and innovation (Gallup, 2016). My goal for this study was to address the specific management problem and help to uncover how Millennials' experience meaningful work and job engagement in the workplace, as it has remained unknown primarily to leaders and continues to impact many organizations (Kolodinsky et al., 2018; Weeks & Schaffert, 2017).

I applied Moustakas's (1994) modified data analysis guidelines to this study to help uncover and further investigate related millennial experiences. Related steps followed in this study included: (a) horizontalization or the extraction of significant statements with the equal value given to all participant statements; (b) reduction and elimination or developing the meaning of units extracted from significant statements and eliminating duplications; (c) clustering and thematizing or analyzing and coding interview responses; (d) validation or the process of confirming; (e) individual textual description which is textual or written comparison, interpretation, and description; and (f) textural-structural description which is an integration of what and how participants experienced the phenomenon.

I completed the following steps for this study:

I conducted each interview via Zoom using 26 pre-established questions to explore each participant's engagement and work meaning experiences. I asked each participant the same questions, and the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed word for word via a Word Document.

I created an Excel spreadsheet to ensure horizontalization with each question and the responses to each question for the ten interviewees. I assigned a number to each interviewee and each were identified by their assigned number (PID000#). I evaluated the response to each question, extracted significant statements from each response, and underlined these statements in the document. I recorded each particular point and categorized each point as stated in a separate column until all points for each response were identified.

I extracted each significant statement from responses and evaluated each statement to ensure reduction and elimination. I then created meaning units from each point recorded and re-categorized into meaningful categories. I consolidated all duplications and noted any exception statements.

I conducted clustering and thematizing by manually narrowing the remaining statements into organic themes and codes. The themes were work meaning and engagement and codes were organically defined by the responses. There were six codes manually derived from the data for work meaning and 12 codes manually derived from the data for engagement.

I requested each participant to confirm their responses as accurate and each were allowed to revise/correct any of the responses that may have been wrongly transcribed. I

conducted this activity via email, sending transcriptions to each participant with a deadline of two business days to complete the confirmation process. This action supported the validation of each participant's response.

I completed individual textual description as compared, interpreted, and described in the study results. In the final step, I satisfied the textural-structural description with an integration and summary of what and how the participants experienced the phenomenon - meaningful work and engagement in the workplace.

The result of this transcendental phenomenological study encompasses the lived experiences of Millennials' work meaning and engagement not currently documented in the related and scholarly literature pool. I presented this study's summary and results as extracted and integrated from the data obtained using the steps described above. In this chapter, I present the study's details and how I conducted it. I also present a summary of the research elements that led to the outcome. I included the following components in this chapter: the research setting, participant demographics and characteristics, how data were collected and analyzed, evidence of trustworthiness for this study, and the final results and outcome of the study.

### **Research Setting**

I collected data for this study by conducting semistructured interviews with 10 Millennials that met the participant criteria (each had obtained a bachelor's degree or higher and had more than five years of work experience). Twenty-six questions were used to guide the interview process, and each participant answered all 26 questions. All participants completed their interviews virtually via Zoom. I recorded each interview



using two modes: written notes/journal recorded by me and a video/voice recording using a video/voice recording device via Zoom. I used the video to support transcription, and only the audio portion of the interview was retained in the researcher records. One participant elected to participate using only audio. I could see and hear all other participants throughout the interview process which lasted between 40 to 75 minutes. I also collected secondary data via Gallup's Q12 Engagement Survey to support internal consistency and to validate the participants' overall engagement experience. This process was completed by the participants but not tied to individual interview responses. I collected and summarized the outcome of the survey for comparison purposes and to observe alignment with the responses provided during the interview. Participants were not identified in the survey.

I recruited participants by written invitation via LinkedIn and other qualitative research participant recruiting methods, including the Walden University Research Participant Pool, Facebook, and Instagram. I used an IRB-approved flyer to socialize the study and invite qualified Millennials to participate. The circulation included instructions to follow if criteria were met and if interested in participating or to obtain more information about the study before deciding. I invited those interested in participating to review and sign the informed consent and complete a demographics survey via Survey Monkey.

After I reviewed candidate information and confirmed participation criteria, I invited participants and sent a link to complete the Gallup Q12 engagement survey. Concurrently, I asked each participant to provide a preferred time for their virtual

interview once the Gallup Q12 Survey was completed, and I scheduled and completed interviews accordingly. There were more than 28 interested candidates that responded. Those disqualified did not meet the required criteria or failed to complete the required actions to participate (i.e., demographics survey, Gallup Q12 survey, or schedule an interview). Twenty-six interested candidates completed the informed consent, 18 completed the demographics survey, and 10 interested candidates qualified to participate in the study, completing the Gallup Q12 engagement survey and interview.

Responsiveness was a challenge during the data collection process, and I had to make several attempts (contacting candidates via email three to four times) to capture the 10 participants that ultimately participated in the study. The selected means of recruitment produced an adequate pool of participants for the study, but the initial method did not produce enough participants for the study with just one round; I conducted the second round of recruitment to ensure the required sample size was obtained, all steps completed, and saturation was attained. I completed the data collection process over 8 weeks.

The participants for this study were male and female Millennials who had completed a bachelor's degree or higher and had 5 or more years of work experience in any field. Participants were from various ethnic backgrounds and resided in the United States and the Caribbean (Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago). I completed all interviews at times requested by the participant and each took place in a quiet and distraction-free virtual environment. I conducted each interview following a set protocol. I first introduced the study, including confirmation by the participant of their informed consent,

met criteria, agreement to be recorded, and a summary of the study. Next, I asked each participant to introduce themselves and provide a summary of their background.

Following the introduction, each participant answered 26 predetermined questions about engagement and work meaning which included a closing statement. At the end of each interview, I thanked each participant and advised them of the following steps, including a member check. I noted that all participants were free from distractions and observed lots of energy and passion in their expressions as they freely shared their work meaning and engagement experiences with me. Several participants noted an interest in the results of the study.

### **Demographics**

While used with many research approaches, purposeful sampling by nature (to form generalizations outside the participant population) was inappropriate for this transcendental phenomenological study. The exact sample size needed to reach saturation in a qualitative study was difficult to estimate in advance. I carefully selected the participants for this study from the millennial population. The 10 participants each met the study criteria and made up a diverse pool for the study. The demographics survey completed by each participant included the following categories: gender, year of birth, race/ethnicity, work industry, education, and participant's relationship to the researcher. There were two male and eight female participants.

The ages of the participants spanned across the range band (1981 – 1996), with most participants born in the mid- to late 1980's. Half of the participants identified as Black/African American, a third identified as White/Caucasian, and a fifth identified with

multiple ethnicities (Black, White, Native American, Hispanic). Participant's work spanned across multiple industries/fields, including higher education, supply chain, philanthropy/non-profit, technology, aerospace, construction management, and medical translation (freelance work); 40% of participants worked in the field of higher education. All participants identified as well-educated, with more than half of the participants having earned a master's or noted they were currently pursuing another degree; one participant had earned a doctorate. Eighty percent of the participants were located in the United States of America, and 20% were located in the Caribbean ( Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago). Six participants were identified as part of LinkedIn Network recruiting, and four participants were identified from other recruiting efforts (Walden Research Participant Pool, Facebook, Instagram). Figure 4 below summarizes the demographic details for all 10 participants in this study. I assigned each participant an identifier as indicated and referred to this identifier in all communications and descriptions in this study.

**Figure 4***Participants' Demographics and Characteristics*

Participant #	Gender	Year Born	Race/Ethnicity	Work Industry	Education	Location	Relation to Researcher
(1)PID0001	Female	1982	Black/African American	Higher Education/University	Doctorate	USA	LinkedIn Network
(2)PID0002	Female	1991	White/Caucasian	Higher Education/University	Bachelors	USA	Other
(3)PID0008	Female	1991	White/Caucasian	Higher Education/University	Masters	USA	Other
(4)PID0013	Female	1985	Black/African American	Supply Chain/Utilities	Bachelors	USA	LinkedIn Network
(5)PID0014	Male	1985	Multiple Ethnicity/Other : Black, White, Native American	Philanthropy/Non-Profit Mgmt./Foundation	Bachelors	USA	LinkedIn Network
(6)PID0015	Male	1981	Black/African American	Electrical Engineering/Technology	Masters	USA	LinkedIn Network
(7)PID0018	Female	1986	Black/African American	OpEx/Data Mgmt./Quality - Aerospace	Masters	USA	LinkedIn Network
(8)PID0023	Female	1987	White/Caucasian	Construction Mgmt.	Bachelors	USA	LinkedIn Network
(9)PID0025	Female	1989	Multiple Ethnicity/Other : Hispanic, White, Southern European	Medical Translation/Freelance Work	Bachelors	Trinidad & Tobago	Other
(10)PID0026	Female	1985	Black/African American	Higher Education/University	Masters	Jamaica	Other

**Data Collection**

Data collection commenced upon Walden University's IRB approval to conduct the study (Approval# 03-23-21-0018209, exp. 3/22/2022). I began recruiting efforts on March 24, 2021. Ten participants were selected using purposeful sampling from the millennial population, and data were collected from each participant upon informed consent and verification of completed demographics surveys, and then via Gallup Q12

engagement survey and an interview. The participants were carefully selected from the millennial population that met the following criteria: five years of work experience for one or more organizations of any size and an earned bachelor's degree in any field.

The study recruitment strategy was fulfilled via social media and other means of research recruitment. Candidates were invited to participate via approved electronic invitation/flyer and using various modes – including LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and the Walden Research Participant Pool. Socialization of the study included a brief overview of the study and a soft invitation to gauge interest from attendees to participate in the study. Candidates responded via the direct messaging function within the social media mode and/or via direct email. Once interested candidates contacted me to participate, links to complete the informed consent and a millennial-based demographics survey were requested from each interested candidate; each participant completed this step via Survey Monkey. The informed consent and demographics survey information was evaluated to determine whether or not each candidate met the criteria to participate.

### **Gallup Q12 Engagement Survey**

Gallup's Q12 engagement survey was used in this study to measure and validate participants' overall engagement experience. The questionnaire has been used to survey more than 35 million employees across multiple organizations worldwide – repeatedly identifying the engagement concern that many organizations face. This survey included 12 engagement questions related to business outcomes, using a scoring scale from one to five, highlighting engagement levels, strengths, and opportunities. Data obtained from the questionnaire was used to establish a measure of accountability regarding the

participant's articulation of their engagement levels and aligned the researcher to the participant's engagement situations and internal consistency.

The Q12 questions were also used in part to guide related engagement questioning during the one-on-one interview process. Once candidates were determined to have met all criteria to participate, each was asked to complete the Gallup Q12 engagement survey using a provided link and, upon completion, to provide a preferred interview date and time. Upon completing the survey, each candidate contacted the researcher with a preferred date/time for their interview.

### **Semistructured Interviews**

Once contacted with a preferred date, an interview was scheduled via email and completed with each participant via Zoom. Each interview was conducted and included: confirmation of informed consent, confirmation that participation criteria were met - and they still agreed to participate, confirmation of consent to be recorded, an introduction to the study, an introduction by each participant, and then each participant responded to twenty-six predetermined interview questions. The interviews conducted in this study were semistructured and evolved around the work meaning and engagement-based research question.

The interviews were conducted to obtain additional information about each participant's experiences of the phenomenon. Creswell's (1998) recommended guidelines for conducting productive interviews were intentionally applied and included: (a) identifying 26 questions in advance that were related to engagement and work meaning, (b) making sure participants were representative of the group and met the approved

criteria, (c) finding and utilizing a suitable mode of conducting the interview – via Zoom, (d) obtaining written permission from each participant – via signed informed consent and again during the interview process, (e) establishing and maintaining rapport – throughout the data collection process, (f) focusing on the actual rather than the abstract or hypothetical, (g) not adding words to descriptions – and letting participant’s express experiences in their way, (h) recording responses verbatim, (i) keeping reactions to myself, and (j) treating responses as perceptions versus facts. To protect the stability of the research process, the interview process stayed close to these mentioned guidelines.

After each interview was completed, the interviews were recorded and transcribed (word for word) and sent to each participant for a member check. The transcription of each interview took seven to eight hours each to complete and was sent via email to each participant for their review and confirmation/approval. Each participant was given two days to review their transcript and provide confirmation. Once all member checks were confirmed, the data gathered was analyzed to support and inform the results of this study. Each participant spent a total of one and a half to two hours each completing the required steps to complete the data collection process. Data collection was concluded upon final member check confirmation on June 29, 2021.

### **Data Analysis**

Moustaka’s (1994) modified Van Kaam data analysis guidelines were applied to this study, starting with epoché/bracketing, to help uncover and further investigate related millennial work meaning and engagement experiences. Before kicking off the study, I consciously “stepped out of myself” and set aside all preconceptions, biases, and what I



thought I knew about the phenomenon being studied. During this conscious reflection, I committed to allowing the process to organically connect me with how each participant experienced work meaning and engagement. I started each interview with a clean slate and no forethought about how each participant would respond to each question. This allowed me to connect with each participant from their point of view, walk in their experiences with them, and discover and accurately explain the participant's lived experiences of work meaning and engagement.

Data extraction, comparison, and analysis were executed by way of information obtained from participant's responses to the *Gallup Q12 Employee Engagement Survey*, and one-on-one interviews surrounding each participant's related lived experiences of work meaning and engagement. Once the data were collected, it was summarized, evaluated, coded, validated, and appropriately fused together to support deriving meaning from the phenomenon and accurately describing and conveying the experiences to others (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Data analysis for this transcendental study was carried out following the guidelines of Moustakas (1994) modified Van Kaam method of analysis – horizontalization, reduction/elimination, clustering/thematizing, validation, individual textual description, and textural structural description. The details of each of the steps taken to analyze the data obtained in this study are further described below.

### **Horizontalization**

Participants in this study were energetic, demonstrated interest, and provided thoughtful and in-depth responses to the interview questions. All participants exhibited high energy and passion when describing their work meaning and engagement

experiences, both with positive and negative experiences. Each participant demonstrated the ability and desire to articulate their experiences and perceptions regarding the phenomenon clearly. The data were uniformly collected from each participant and documented in a spreadsheet for side-by-side comparison. All data were treated equally, and no quote or statement was more important than any other. Significant statements regarding the participant's work meaning and engagement experiences were highlighted, and themes were identified and provided meaning to the phenomenon. This was the beginning of a preliminary coding process – the highlighting and extracting every statement relevant to the participant's experiences of work meaning and engagement (the phenomenon). Following are all the significant statements made about work meaning and engagement as quoted by each participant:

***Significant statements from participant PID0001:***

- “To me, I think it means taking your gifts, your skills, and your talents and using them in a way that impacts an organization for good or helps make it better; it is finding what an individual is specifically passionate about or what they find to be meaningful and being able to work in that area.”
- “Being engaged is being invested in the mission and being on the same page about things like expectations and goals and actively working toward those goals and having them in the back of your mind; having to be a little more intentional about how you are engaged can be difficult if you are feeling disconnected from your job or you are not getting the feedback or guidance that you would need.”

- “There is just something different about being in person and face to face with people, interacting and collaborating, versus being online and collaborating....”

“I just thought it was pretty interesting that they would label those students as the typical Millennial. And I kind of had to pipe up and say not all Millennials are like that. We are a very hard- working generation and we have had to put up with a lot.”

- “You know, growing up we have witnessed a lot of life and our generation has lived through a lot of big life experiences already, so for you to kind of stereotype Millennials as lazy and not hard-working. I do find that a little offensive; That’s the only time I have ever felt discriminated against – for being a Millennial.”

***Significant statements from participant PID0002:***

- “To me it is displaying your values. It means you are putting your values and your skills on display, and you hope to get a good and rewarding experience from it.”
- “It means coming together, that’s the biggest thing, coming together and everyone acknowledging and valuing your opinion and valuing your input and you not holding back. You know and feel like you have something to offer – you put it out there for them, you share it, you don’t keep it to yourself.”
- “If we are unable to grow, you might lose us a little bit. If you have a management staff that you have a hard time trusting or valuing the work that

you do, that will kind of draw us back a little bit. Economic impact, that is a big deal as well. That can make us a little scared, because starting over is something that we don't like to do but we know that as we grow, we will have to keep hitting a reset button. But we know that if we keep hitting a reset button, you continue to learn more and more about yourself. So, I guess the biggest thing is as long as we know that there is growth potential there, you will have our attention. As long as we don't have a person looking over our shoulder, or breathing down our necks, and not trusting us, that's going to make us push back."

- "Those baby boomers that are ahead of us that is getting ready to retire, it (this generation) kind of blocks us a little bit."
- "Millennials, we are team players, we like to play, we like to keep people going forward, but when you have that one in particular that is going to block, we'll push back, we will push back, and we may move on. So, as long as you keep us engaged, keep engaging with us, keep showing us there is some growth there, you trust us, hey, we'll play all day."

***Significant statements from participant PID0013:***

- "I enjoy doing what I do, and I wouldn't change it for the world. It means working hard, being a team player, being able to adapt to different situations, to see a problem and to figure out a solution and not just reacting and coming with emotions – it's pausing and figuring it out. It brings out our character, it can bring out the best or it can bring out the worst."

- “Just being able to laugh and just being able to have the comradery of everybody collectively coming together. I should be able to call all my buyers or colleagues and say hey I got this problem and I need you to help me figure this out. You may have this experience.”
- “I felt like I couldn’t relate or work with people that were not in the military. It felt like their mind frame was a little bit different. I still do think their mind frame is different, but I have learned to better communicate at their level so they can better understand where I am coming from.”

***Significant statements from participant PID0008:***

- “ I would say having a positive impact, doing what you are doing day in, and day out should have a benefit to not only you but the people around you that you are serving; to have fun; having support is a big thing as well.”
- “Engagement for me is not only knowing what is expected of me but giving me the tools to be successful at it. When I think of engagement, I do think of having fun while I am at work. Even though I am at home, I still do have fun being at work with my coworkers. I think about being happy and present at work. Being free of distractions is really important to be more engaged. Just get us what we need, and we are golden, and we will do what you need us to do.”
- “I think that listening to your employees is what is going to drive the success of your business.” “Giving us what we need to do the job effectively and listening to us to will only trickle down...”

- “When you ask for feedback listen to it but also act on it. I feel like a lot of the time feedback is pushed aside and never really taken seriously to the downfall and detriment to not only just the department but also to the business as well.”

*Significant statements from participant PID0015:*

- “The ability to use your skills in delivering a task; to use your skills to deliver a good task that will make a big impact. As long as I can make an impact, I am satisfied by that, and the related and particular tasks.”
- “If I had to describe engagement, I would say it’s all about communication. Communication, communication, communication... I feel like if there is clear communication and direction from leadership down to the employees – this brings out the best in everyone. When there is no clear direction and communication, people don’t know where to go. You have to give people direction on how to proceed and where to go.”
- “One more thing...trust. When you start micromanaging employees, especially Millennials, they get turned off quickly – that’s where trust comes in. You have to trust your employees – if you don’t trust them in the little things, it’s going to be tough to get the best out of them.”
- “I think every company’s goal is to be profitable and to return value to their shareholders and I respectfully agree with that. However, the backbone of that return on equity to shareholders is the employees, that’s number one.”

- “Number two, when you talk about those employees, how can you bring out the best in them? We are all different people. It is very important that people you assign to be managers are prepared to do so.”
- “Have good managers, trained managers. Managers that have a good impact, that listen to their employees.”
- “When employees share things with their managers, managers should keep those things confidential, they shouldn’t pass it on to other employees.”
- “Lastly, companies need to treat employees with respect and not just as a means to hitting numbers.”
- “What is causing this employee to be a low performer? What is causing the employee to be disengaged?”
- “I think companies need to spend time, not just in recruiting but also retaining and helping employees. It would be good to have people like Chief People Officers, not just HR, but a people officer that helps employees, to bring out the best in them, to help them remove roadblocks.”
- “I think this is something that gets Millennials excited – being in a super-fast paced environment and having the autonomy to do whatever they want to do. I think this is a reason why a lot of Millennials are attracted to tech because they feel like they have the autonomy to make decisions and not as much bureaucracy as there would be in regular traditional companies.”
- “This is one thing that I think Millennials love – they don’t want that traditional type of boring culture.”

*Significant statements from participant PID0023:*

- “Work meaning to me feels like satisfaction with what I do and a contentment with the team and the people that I work with; the value of the work you contribute, and the satisfaction that you gain from those contributions; you are happy or at least content with the people that you work with. You feel like you can trust them and that you are helping each other develop and learn new skills and promote each other. Talking good about people behind their backs is a great thing.”
- “Engagement comes a lot from communication. We are realizing that you can replicate some of that chemistry online, which obviously I’m fine with. Millennials I think are fine with that – we live behind computers; we are digital natives.”
- “I think other forms of engagement apart from communication would be a digital component. There is a digital component to engagement that is in writing.”
- “So, we are getting more and more personal with people, and we are opening up more. For me, personally, it makes me feel way more engaged, when I feel like I am getting to know someone along the way.”
- “If I am assigned a task and reaching out to someone for some part of it and I am not getting a response and I am flagging the email, I am following up constantly. If it’s like pulling teeth, then I really start to disengage. Then I



start to de-prioritize that task because I am not able to complete it on my own and the other people that I need are not helping.”

- “I think non-responsiveness is disengaging. If I am assigned a task and reaching out to someone for some part of it and I am not getting a response and I am flagging the email, I am following up constantly. If it’s like pulling teeth, then I really start to disengage.”
- “So, if I am forced to make a lot of assumptions, and the bosses who are delegating don’t give me the context around it, then I definitely feel a little bit less engaged and less enthusiastic.”
- “You may get some curmudgeonly responses because people are stuck working for a company where most of the workforce is made up of an older generation and maybe they don’t feel like they are being heard.”
- “I think there are so many stereotypes about Millennials in the workforce – that we are lazy – it’s one extreme or another – we don’t want to fall in line and do things the way they are “meant to be done”- which is the old way of doing things. Or it’s the exact opposite where people say Millennials are coming in and trying to change everything. They want to digitize everything; they want to overcomplicate everything because they think they are so smart.”
- “What you are doing has the potential to influence the way companies hire in the future, the cultures that they develop in the future, and the way that they develop talent – it could provide a wave of cultural change, which I think Millennials are looking for.”

- “Not that all Millennials are progressive and share every value as the same, but in general we do operate less on an army marching and more on the vibe and what the vibe of the company is.”
- “Actually, now people feel like they can move around – if they don’t like a company or culture fit, they can find a new job in a year or a couple of years until they find the right fit. We are just kind of taking our time and finding the right career path for us.”

*Significant statements from participant PID0025:*

- “The meaning I get from my work...I can answer that. Not just for me, but the impact that my work can have on society as a whole.”
- “What I think whenever I hear in a recruiting drive or whatever when I hear the sentence ‘we want to keep our workers engaged’ and what I think that means is – we want to keep them caring, we want to keep them present when they are at work, and not just accumulating hours...”
- “I am thinking I am at work now and I am going to be focused on it and I feel like it matters, and I am looking at and forward to the other things that I have to do.”
- “I wish I had found what I am doing or that I had found that I wanted to do nursing or something healthcare related ten years sooner. I find a big part of what I see happening to me and what I see happening to a lot of my friends – who just have a job that pays the bills.”

- “I don’t know if that is a very common thing to happen, but I do feel like a lot of people my age (aged between 30-35) are now feeling in the aftermath that they didn’t really think through what they wanted to study and their major that well. They just went because they had to.”

*Significant statements from participant PID0026:*

- “So, the meaning of work for me is the physical and mental exertion that you have to employ in order to achieve the goals and objectives of the institution. Some persons may think that it is just showing up for work, but it involves a lot of thought process and critical thinking, and even creativity in order for you to get the work done.”
- “My experience has been that I don’t think the organizations or institutions that you work in take into consideration the mental pressure that employees or myself would have had to go through in order to meet performance targets or to carry out duties or responsibilities.”
- “So, my engagement has to do with both staff and students, or colleagues I should say. So, as it relates to my colleagues, I find that basically I think probably because it is on the basis that I now work in a different capacity. What I find is that I have to apply a lot of emotional intelligence when engaging staff. A lot of persons are broken, and they are going through a lot of psychological issues.”

- “And you also deal with different levels of staff, so their knowledge base and intellectual capabilities is different. So, it makes it very challenging for you to be able to engage them.”
- “And so, it’s like when you are engaging persons, it cannot be a one size fits all kind of engagement, it has to be different based on the person.”
- “Well, I personally believe that we are now living in a modern society and so work, work meaning, takes into consideration different tenets and each must be carefully looked at and taken into consideration when, for example, job duties and responsibilities are being developed. That should also be looked into in the recruitment process, and also in terms of how you hold staff accountable.”
- “To add as it relates to engagement, I also think that attention needs to be paid on the expectations of leaders in the workplace and staff in general as it relates to engagement. There must be policies that are designed not just to benefit the organization, but also to benefit the staff as it relates to engagement.”

***Significant statements from participant PID0014:***

- “Work meaning to me means that understanding of how you spend your time against all the tasks and responsibilities that you have, against all the goals and outcomes that make your work meaningful – in terms of am I finding meaning in my job.”

- “I think it’s do I feel like at the end of 40-50+ hours a week that I am putting in, how much of it is going toward those things that are impacting the ‘why I’m here’ factor.”
- “I am motivated by knowing that my work has advanced the work of others or helped them or feeling useful, so these are things that add to a more general sense of meaning. But now I think I am choosier about that because I am a high, needing to define work person on the spectrum.”
- “...managers making time. I think that this is an area where managers can sometimes stumble.”
- “I think I kind of tend to create more of my own engagement experiences.”
- “One of the challenges that I feel myself yearning for is – I feel like Millennials are sort of always in this place like ‘I need career pathing’ – can you show me if I am a high performer, what in terms of development opportunities or career promotion opportunities - here or elsewhere – am I going toward... I feel like a lot of companies don’t always do that well.”
- “I think it feels scary for Millennials, because we know that the economy is real - people get laid off - it just happened last year. It feels like we know we need the guidance to develop in that way. Sometimes I feel like we are just having to propel and do that and be our own advocate. But I would wager that more Millennials are finding those mentors and things outside of their office and work structures – more of a supplement and band aid as opposed to employers taking the responsibility and considering how they are developing

leaders and carrying people through and that kind of thing. So, it feels like there is less investment in employees and people feel replaceable. It goes back to leaders finding time to lead and deciding what their organization can really do.”

- “I read this article saying that particularly among Millennials and younger folks, there is a very high rate of parental estrangement – where the kid is like – no more talking to mom and dad. Millennials care less about creating that harmony with mom and say I am just going to move to this state and have my own thing.”
- “What’s the lens shift that is really making us speak different languages especially when conflict arises and how happy we expect to be able to be personally, despite our choices.”
- “I love this geriatric Millennial stuff that is coming out - those geriatric Millennials are among the most poised in the office to navigate generational differences – from Boomers to X’s and things...I kind of see some truth in that because I find myself with the younger Millennials and sometimes with Gen Z – saying you are so entitled!”
- “There is just a little bit of a shift in formal culture – for example the use of the phrase ‘no problem’... Or they will say, no worries, no problem, like we are all just peers and we are all negotiating and exchanging that. There’s this generational thing where they are actually saying there is no special favor here

– no problem – I am doing what is expected of me – not you're welcome or a kind gesture of the sort.”

- “There is a disconnect there because I feel like at least as long as there are older people like me, people’s actions feel rude and disrespectful...”
- “I sometimes wonder if this is a generational change, do they need to know this anyhow - this just helps them be more gracious and build relationships...Definitely something in speaking and communication, there are some interesting things coming that we are going to see – not understanding some of the professional culture and even some of the parts that some of their older managers want to keep to just be together at work...”

***Significant statements from participant PID0018:***

- “Work for me means doing something; but not just anything, but something you love to do that is making an impact to an organization, to somebody, or to a team or group. When I talk about work, I can’t remove the balance of it. It is doing something that is not detrimental to your health - mental health, physical health, or emotional health. So doing something that you love to do that is making an impact to somebody or something.”
- “I feel like I am working because I am being productive, and I am seeing the change that is growing around me because of something that I am doing, or our team is doing.”

- “I think for me, engagement is about showing up. What I mean by showing up, is being available, being present, and being part of the conversation: that for me is engagement.”
- “It’s not just, and I myself have to work on this, especially in this time, where almost 90% of my time every day is spent in meetings... It’s trying to stay connected. In that meeting, it is not just zoning out, but actually understanding what is going on and participating in it and being a part of the team, being a part of the workforce...that for me is engagement.”
- “I think I am probably, maybe part of the 20% of the people that answered the questions the way I answered them. That is due to the type of supervisor that I have. I have worked with other companies and even in the same company and I can tell you that my experiences and answers to those questions would have been different. Most of my answers to the questions is a direct reflection of the type of supervisor that I have and the environment she has built for her team.”
- “Also, the other thing that I do want to say, when it comes to Millennials, we are very quick to go, go, go. I think from our predecessors, we have just learned that... Someone once said to me – when it comes to being loyal - you can be loyal to corporate America all that you want but corporate America cannot be loyal to you. So, when you start smelling that wind of change, you better start moving along with that change. That is the mentality of the Millennials – I don’t mind working for 7, 20 different companies in twenty years – because I don’t want to be stagnant. That’s the thing about Millennials; they want to quickly get to where



they need to be and as fast as they need to be. Compared to previous generations where you see people in positions for 5,6,7 years before they move to the next position.”

### **Reduction and Elimination**

The process of reduction and elimination in this study involved developing the meaning of units extracted from significant statements and eliminating any duplication or redundancies that were noted in the data. If the statement lent to unfolding the participant’s experience of work meaning and engagement and could be reduced to an underlying meaning, it was included. If the statement did not meet this criterion, it was considered ancillary and was separated. Statements that were excluded as a result of this process included:

#### *Work Meaning*

- “Everyone’s definition of meaningful is different.”(PID0001)
- “Honestly, I have heard so many times that if you do a good job and don’t expect anything it will eventually happen.” (PID0002)
- “Me having this job it means a lot. It definitely means a lot to me as a person.”(PID0013)
- “Unfortunately, I have had the displeasure of working for unsupportive people. It bogs and drags you down and doesn’t make you happy or make you want to get up in the morning.” (PID0008)
- “She’s a Millennial. She is a year or two older than me. We have the same birthday, maybe that’s why we connect so well!” (PID0008)

- “To me that is very sad and something that I initiated in my own unit (it is kind of against the universities documented policies) – when I say to my staff that it doesn’t mean that (if you want to take a sick day) you have to be physically sick – it could mean that you are overwhelmed, or going through depression, or you just need a break. I said that is ok with me...” (PID0026)
- “So, in reality, I was just the manager on duty – the burnt steak person – when you call to address a problem at a table.” (PID0014)
- “What does that mean to me, wow? I feel like that question is deep, but it shouldn’t be deep!” (PID0018)

### *Engagement*

- “...yeah, I don’t know if that makes sense.” (PID0001)
- “My manager, this is her first time doing something like this – we’ve got to come together to try to get this project off the ground.” (PID0002)
- “I just literally met my supervisor not too long ago when I did a tour with him. It’s a little bit different now – every man for himself.” (PID0013)
- “You know with supply chain everyone may be able to show you the basics, but they can’t always teach you what to do with those "what -if" scenarios. Sometimes things come up and you can have all the textbook experience in the world but sometimes that goes out the window when something happens. So, having been through that, I’d rather ask, what did you learn from this experience? What was the outcome? Can you help me? Versus just trying to go to a textbook –

because everything is not always textbook savvy or found in a textbook solution.”  
(PID0013)

- “I know they are just a Skype away.” (PID0008)
- “I think a lot of people a lot of people when they think of engagement think about pizza parties, lunches, what’s the organization going to give me today. But I don’t think about that at all.” (PID0008)
- “If you look at systems like Microsoft Teams or I don’t know what the Google equivalent is.”(PID0023)
- “They have incredibly big severances – for example they had a head of accounting who started accounting in Netflix from year zero to when it started to get global. When the nuance of the accounting shop became a global organization, they decided not to keep and promote and develop that person who was the founding accountant because she had never run and would need to learn, and on the fly, run a global team. Instead, they gave her a 2–3-year severance and told her to go get an MBA and possibly come back afterwards.” (PID0014)
- “If they decide to get rid of you, they pay you so that you can have time to pivot and transition. I have always thought about that extreme example – the Netflix Talent Culture.” (PID0014)

### **Clustering and Thematizing**

From all of the included statements that lent to describing the participant’s experiences of work meaning and engagement and could be reduced to an underlying meaning, I began to identify and group the underlying meanings in the data obtained into

themes. These groupings summarized the similar themes that expressed the experiences of work meaning and engagement for each participant.

Emerging themes included:

*Work Meaning Themes*

Theme One:

- Using gifts, skills, and talents to impact the organization for good or to make something better. What a person is passionate about and finds meaning in and works in that area. (PID0001)
- It means having a positive impact with what you're doing day in and day out; having a positive impact and benefiting not just you but those that you serve. (PID0008)
- It's the ability to use your skills to deliver a task and in doing so making a big impact. If I can make an impact, I am satisfied with that, and this is meaningful to me. (PID0015)
- It's the impact that my work can have on society as a whole. (PID0025)
- It's the why I am here factor - how am I spending my time against all the goals and outcomes that make my work meaningful. I am motivated by knowing that my work has advanced the work of others or helped others feel useful. I choose work that has meaning to me. (PID0014)
- Work meaning is doing something that you love to do and making an impact to an organization, to somebody, or to a team. (PID0018)

Theme Two:

- Displaying your values and hopefully getting a good reward and experience from it. It's leaving the good on the table. (PID0002)
- It's the value of work that you contribute and the satisfaction that you gain from those contributions (PID0023).

Theme Three:

- It's having fun. (PID0008)
- It's having a support system. (PID0008)

Theme Four:

- It's the physical and mental exertion that you have to employ to achieve the goals and objectives of the organization; the thought process, critical thinking, and creativity needed to get the work done . Organizations don't consider all of the mental work that is required and goes into getting the job done and need to pay more attention to this. (PID0026)

*Engagement Themes*

- Being invested in the mission and on the same page regarding goals and objectives; working in a way that benefits the mission. Being intentional about how you are engaged and connected to the organization. It's interacting with people and collaborating. (PID0001)
- It means coming together and becoming one with everyone you work with. It means not holding back but giving your all - if you have a contribution, you make it. (PID0002)

- It means collectively coming together. It means comradery. It means teamwork and helping each other. (PID0013)
- It means having clear expectations and tools to do the job successfully. It means having fun and being present. It means being free of distractions. (PID0008)
- It means communication (lots of it) and clear direction from leadership. It means communication of the vision and the direction that everyone should be going. It means that managers and leaders trust your work and don't micromanage you - this helps Millennials. (PID0015)
- It comes from communication and chemistry - how we communicate with each other and the tools we use to do so. How do we stay connected to our team and customers? This includes the digital component - Millennials are native to this but sometimes conflict comes from other generations who are less comfortable - they need to get more comfortable. It's being more personal with people and opening up and sharing more about yourself and learning more about others - this helps people to engage more. It means being responsive - when others are not responsive, this is demotivating and disengaging. (PID0023)
- It means being caring and being present at work. It means being focused at work and feeling like what you are doing matters. (PID0025)
- It means applying appropriate emotional intelligence. It is not a one size fits all type of thing - you have to deal with everyone appropriately and differently and try to find a balance. (PID0026)

- It means making time and being intentional about having engaging experiences. It means building comradery and creativity amongst your staff. It means having appropriate career pathing, mentoring and guidance even if it means that your next experience is outside of the organization and supports your development and growth. Managers don't always make time for this, and Millennials look outward for these things. (PID0014)
- It means showing up - being available, present, and part of the conversation. (PID0018)
- COVID pandemic played a role in and impacted engagement in 2020.
  - o COVID was a hinderance (PID0001)
  - o COVID was a hinderance and a help (PID0023, PID0018)

From the above themes and after further evaluation of the data, the following codes initially emerged as representative descriptions of the participant's experiences of work meaning and engagement:

*Work Meaning Codes*

- Making an Impact (skills, gifts, talents, people, organization)
- Displaying values for reward
- Enjoying work (working hard, solving problems, finding solutions)
- Contentment with work team (trust, learning, development, compliments, appreciation)
- Having fun
- Having a support system

- Physical, mental, and creative exertion ( to meet goals of organization)

#### *Engagement Codes*

- Connected/Focused/Intentional/Invested/Caring About Your Work
- Coming Together/Not Holding Back/Collaborative/Being Present/Showing Up/Being Part of the Conversation
- Comradery/Teamwork/Chemistry
- Clear Expectations/Vision/Direction
- Having tools to do job
- Free of Distractions/Minimal Distractions
- Having Fun
- Communication/Responsiveness
- Trust/No Micromanagement (Trust Work)
- Openness/Sharing (personal side)
- Emotional Intelligence
- Practicing creativity
- Making Time for Mentoring/Career Pathing

#### **Validation**

Once the themes and codes were generated from the data, a second look was given to the data to evaluate and ensure that what was extracted from the validated transcriptions was representative of the descriptions provided by each participant and accurately told the participant's stories.



### **Individual Textual Description**

An individual textual description is a textual or written comparison, interpretation, and description of each participant's experience in their own words or a narrative that explains the participant's perceptions of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). These descriptions were formed using extractions and quotes from the verbatim transcriptions recorded from each participant's interview. These descriptions were created based on the emerging themes and the perspectives from each experience.

Each narrative that follows describes the participant's perception of the phenomenon and their experiences of work meaning and engagement in the workplace (responses are listed in the order interviewed):

(PID0001) – This participant's experience of work meaning is driven by passion and using gifts and talents to make an impact - "To me, I think it means taking your gifts, your skills, and your talents and using them in a way that impacts an organization for good or helps make it better." It is essential to work in a field where you have passion and can use your gifts and talents. This participant is not fully experiencing meaningful work as they are not specifically using their gifts and talents in an area that they are passionate about - "Yes, in the sense that I am using my skills and talents to better the mission of the organization, but my specific passion is more in the counseling field and it's what I am working toward in my education and my professional goals long term."

This participant is missing a connection to their work and as a result is somewhat disengaged from their work because of this disconnection - "So sometimes having to be a little more intentional about how you are engaged can be difficult if you're feeling

disconnected from your job or you're not getting the feedback or guidance that you would need." External factors play a part in engagement (things that are beyond our control and not part of the original work plan); The COVID pandemic played a part in this participant's disconnection to their work; interacting face to face and collaborating in person is an important work element that connects and engages them, and this was seriously interrupted over the last year - "I used to feel really engaged, I think the last year or so, the last six months to a year I haven't felt as engaged. Just because I am not in the office every day, I am not seeing the people I normally see; even going into virtual meetings, I think has, can hurt the engagement, because I don't know there is just something different about being in person and face to face with people, interacting and collaborating, then being online collaborating."

This participant discredits millennial stereotyping that occurs in the workplace and feels discriminated against as a Millennial; and is impacted by the stereotyping that occurs by older generations in the workplace – namely baby boomers – "It's really interesting that you are focusing on Millennials specifically because I work with a lot of people who are in their mid to upper 60's... they would make comments about their millennial students and how they didn't work hard or how they wanted to get the easy way out on assignments or they complained about their grades... I just thought it was pretty interesting that they would label those students as the typical Millennial. We are a very hard- working generation and we have had to put up with a lot. So, for you to kind of stereo type Millennials as lazy and not hard-working, I do find that a little offensive. That's the only time I have ever felt discriminated against – for being a Millennial."

This participant works in higher education and has experienced limited work meaning in their current role, they are somewhat disengaged in their work, and do not see themselves working for their current organization in the next year as it lacks the characteristics, connection, and is not in their preferred field – “Probably not, no. I’m hoping to move over into the counseling field and do my internship and kind of start there since that is where my degree is going to be. That’s my ultimate goal. So, in a year, I won’t probably be there.”

(PID0002) – This participant’s experience of work meaning centers around expressing their values and experiencing fulfillment – “To me, it is displaying your values. It means you are putting your values and your skills on display, and you hope to get a good and rewarding experience from it.” In their experience, engagement is about coming together with others in the workplace and becoming one team – “It means coming together, that’s the biggest thing, coming together and everyone acknowledging and valuing your opinion and valuing your input and you not holding back. You know and feel like you have something to offer – you put it out there for them, you share it, you don’t keep it to yourself. You don’t hog it all because you want the spotlight for yourself. Once you find yourself engaging in being that team player, everything else will speak for itself. Engaging is just becoming one with everyone.”

As a Millennial this participant thrives in an environment where they can grow, are trusted by leaders, and where their work is valued –“ Honestly, as long as we know where we are in our current state and there is growth potential – it’s going to keep us engaged, it’s going to keep our attention, because if we are unable to grow, you might

lose us a little bit. If you have a management staff that you have a hard time trusting or valuing the work that you do, that will kind of draw us back a little bit.”

This participant is impacted by the state of the economy but is not afraid to start over if they are in the wrong environment; starting over helps this participant to continue to learn more about themselves and what they are capable of – “Economic impact, that is a big deal as well. That can make us a little scared, because starting over is something that we don’t like to do but we know that as we grow, we will have to keep hitting a reset button. But we know that if we keep hitting a reset button, you continue to learn more and more about yourself.” This participant is disengaged by lack of growth potential, being micromanaged, older generations that resist change – “So, I guess the biggest thing is as long as we know that there is growth potential there, you will have our attention. As long as we don’t have a person looking over our shoulder, or breathing down our necks, and not trusting us, that’s going to make us push back. And this may sound a little controversial, but that generation that is ahead of us, those baby boomers that are ahead of us that is getting ready to retire, it (this generation) kind of blocks us a little bit... Baby boomers really try to hold on to what’s still there.”

This participant is driven by working with a strong team, moving the organization forward, and overcoming having their potential blocked by older generations – “...because the Millennials, we are team players, we like to play, we like to keep people going forward, but when you have that one in particular that is going to block...” If this participant does not experience what they need in the work environment, they are not afraid to leave it and find one that provides their needs – “... we’ll push back, we will

push back, and we may move on. So, as long as you keep us engaged, keep engaging with us, keep showing us there is some growth there, you trust us, hey, we'll play all day.”

This participant works in higher education and is fairly new to their role. In the short time that they have been in their role they have found work meaning and a connection to their organization and described themselves as in their sweet spot and very engaged – “There is trust there – the trust has been established. The lines of communication are established. My opportunity to be creative has been established and level of encouragement that I get on a regular basis is all there. That just makes me proud of my organization and proud of myself. ...my supervisor she gives me the opportunity to expand on things that I can do to be helpful to faculty – she trusts me to do what I need to do. She doesn't micromanage me. I get the opportunity to be creative. It is fun.” This participant plans to continue working for their current organization, because of the meaning it provides and because they are strongly engaged in their work – “Yes, there is still a lot of work to be done and I'm still on this ride. I'm loving it.”

(PID0013) – This participant defines and experiences work meaning as having a connection to their work and doing something that they love; and having the opportunity to grow and develop – “I might be doing this type of job – I know what I am buying so that means a lot to me. I can see myself moving forward. I can talk to different people and easily adapt. I enjoy doing what I do, and I wouldn't change it for the world.”

Teamwork and adaptability are elements that support work meaning for this participant – “It means working hard, being a team player, being able to adapt to different

situations. Working means to see a problem and to figure out a solution and not just reacting and coming with emotions – it's pausing and figuring it out.” Work meaning also is representative of who you are as a person – your character and your personality – “ It brings out our character, it can bring out the best or it can bring out the worst.” For this participant, strong engagement has to do with having comradery, a strong connection with and coming together with your teammates – “Just being able to laugh and just being able to have the comradery of everybody collectively coming together. I should be able to call all my buyers or colleagues and say hey I got this problem and I need you to help me figure this out.”

This participant’s work meaning and engagement at work is centered around work ethic, strong optimism and having a positive attitude and this has been shaped by their military experiences – “I work until we are done.” “Now I just have a totally different mind frame. But I am truly enjoying this journey that I am on, and I have so many opportunities coming my way, so I am really looking forward to it all.” “Your attitude reflects everything and who you are as a person. You have a bad attitude and people don’t want to work with you, help you, or give you opportunities. You have to really have a good attitude. I have to really say that throughout all the jobs I have had – my career building – that is one thing that I have been consistent on. In my mind – I have had a good attitude.” “I try to see the optimistic side versus the negative side. I feel like if I have been through military tours, the workplace really isn’t that big of an issue to deal with – it’s a piece of cake. It’s not worth the stress that people give it.”

This participant has a military background and currently works in supply chain for a utilities company. They are new to their role and are experiencing a strong connection and meaning in their work. While engagement is growing, they feel like they could be more engaged in their work – working remotely due to COVID has impacted that. Because of what they have experienced so far with work meaning and engagement, they see themselves continuing their career with this organization and growing into other positions. “Yes, I definitely could see myself working for them for another year. And moving forward. Not in the same position, but definitely for the same organization.”

(PID0008) – This participant’s work meaning is fueled by working in an environment with a strong support system, having a positive impact and benefiting others with the work you are doing, and to have fun doing it – “I would say having a positive impact, doing what you are doing day in, and day out should have a benefit to not only you but the people around you that you are serving. Another work meaning would be to have fun. Having support is a big thing as well.”

For this participant, there is a strong link to fun with engagement. Their engagement is triggered by minimal distractions, clear expectations and having the tools to do the job. These elements help them to be happy, present and fully engaged at work – “Engagement for me is not only knowing what is expected of me but giving me the tools to be successful at it. When I think of engagement, I do think of having fun while I am at work. Even though I am at home, I still do have fun being at work with my coworkers.” “I think that when I think of engagement, I think about being happy and present at work. Being present is really important, because if you’re not present, you’re really just

existing.” “Being free of distractions is really important to be more engaged. ...just get us what we need, and we are golden, and we will do what you need us to do.” This participant strongly believes that having the tools to do your job and leaders listening to employees is the key to every organization’s success – “I think that listening to your employees is what is going to drive the success of your business. Giving us what we need to do the job effectively and listening to us to will only trickle down to the student experience and make it even better.” “...when you ask for feedback listen to it but also act on it. I feel like a lot of the time feedback is pushed aside and never really taken seriously to the downfall and detriment to not only just the department but also to the business as well.”

This participant works in higher education and is experiencing strong work meaning and engagement in their current role. They are extremely happy with their current organization and don’t ever intend to leave it as long as they are getting what they need and are able to engage in meaningful work – “I am a proud Walden alumni and Walden employee. I am Walden until the day I die. Yes, I think my work here is important. It means something and I am happy to be a part of it.”

(PID0015) – This participant experiences work meaning and is extremely satisfied when able to use their abilities to make an impact; impact is key – “...the ability to use your skills in delivering a task; to use your skills to deliver a good task that will make a big impact. Everyone does tasks and everyone does work, but does it make an impact... As long as I can make an impact, I am satisfied by that, and the related and particular tasks.” Communication, trust, and clear direction is what sparks engagement and brings



out the best in this participant – “I would say it’s all about communication. Communication, communication, communication... I feel like if there is clear communication and direction from leadership down to the employees – this brings out the best in everyone. When there is no clear direction and communication, people don’t know where to go. One more thing...trust.”

This participant becomes disengaged when they are micromanaged – “When you start micromanaging employees, especially Millennials, they get turned off quickly – that’s where trust comes in. You have to trust your employees – if you don’t trust them in the little things, it’s going to be tough to get the best out of them.”

This participant is strong on valuing employees and their work – this is the foundation for creating an engaging environment – “However, the backbone of that return on equity to shareholders is the employees, that’s number one.” Development of employees is key to a meaningful and engaging work environment and should be driven by strong leaders and mandated by organizations – “how can you bring out the best in them? We are all different people. It is very important that people you assign to be managers are prepared to do so. Because those managers, at the end of the day, are the gatekeepers of employees and keeping good employees and keeping good employees from leaving.”

Trust and confidentiality are key for this participant ; this breeds respect and bringing out the best in employees – “When employees share things with their managers, managers should keep those things confidential, they shouldn’t pass it on to other employees. ... companies need to treat employees with respect and not just as a means to

hitting numbers.” Disengagement is sometimes caused by companies not identifying the root cause of issues or trying to figure out what is causing performance issues – “But you didn’t hire those employees with the intent that they would be low performing employees. Why is that person a low performing employee? These are the things that companies should look at as well. What is causing this employee to be a low performer? What is causing the employee to be disengaged? We see that all the time. Why is that we have an employee that gets so excited on the first day, and the first month and second month of work at the company, but after a year of work they get disengaged?”

This participant is driven by root cause and corrective action and believes the focus should be on continued development. Engagement for this participant is hindered by roadblocks that are sometimes too difficult to move – “I think companies need to spend time, not just in recruiting but also retaining and helping employees. It would be good to have people like Chief People Officers, not just HR, but a people officer that helps employees, to bring out the best in them, to help them remove roadblocks. These are things that companies need to focus on as well.” Autonomy and limited politics are two culture points that this Millennial enjoys and thrives in – “I think this is a reason why a lot of Millennials are attracted to tech because they feel like they have the autonomy to make decisions and not as much bureaucracy as there would be in regular traditional companies.”

This Millennial is a game changer and believes other Millennials are as well; if the culture is not serving, services will be taken elsewhere - “This is one thing that I think Millennials love – they don’t want that traditional type of boring culture – where

managers and directors have a huge office, and they have to knock to get access to them – no Millennials don't like those types of things.” “I am part of that generation where if things don't align with my interests and I can't move up, then of course I would consider leaving.”

This participant currently works in the Tech industry and finds their work meaningful and engaging. However, they noted some of the challenges that they have observed that continue to position a wedge of concern and caution and that also appeals to their ability to find meaning and engage in their work – “Yes, however, I still feel like there is still more to do to bring in more minorities into the company. I think this is something that we have been discussing and trying to figure out how we can do that. But that is a big gap right now.” “...being a minority in a technical environment you have to constantly push and fight. At some point you don't want to fight and push anymore. You just want to do your job and let the chips fall where they may. For the non-minorities, they don't really need to fight as hard as we do. And I think that is one of the reasons why Millennials and minorities just get frustrated and say to themselves that – I don't think these people really like me or want me to be here... A lot of this is not just unconscious bias, but also unconscious racism as well too.”

This participant stands firm in their belief system, uniqueness and independence in the workplace - “Millennials are beginning to say no to being in one place for thirty years, or when twenty years comes, and the company finds themselves in a financial crisis just let me go and walk me out the door. We are not going to stand for that. We are going to find a way to be independent.”

(PID0023) – Satisfaction and contentment with what the work they are doing and the people they are working with defines work meaning for this participant – “Work meaning to me feels like satisfaction with what I do and a contentment with the team and the people that I work with; value of the work you contribute, and the satisfaction that you gain from those contributions. It means that you are happy or at least content with the people that you work with. You feel like you can trust them and that you are helping each other develop and learn new skills and promote each other. Talking good about people behind their backs is a great thing.” Communication and the chemistry that comes from it is the driver for this participant’s engagement in the workplace – “...engagement comes a lot from communication.”

Further this participant’s engagement is driven by their digital savvy and the chemistry found making related connections – “...we are realizing that you can replicate some of that chemistry online, which obviously I’m fine with. Millennials I think are fine with that – we live behind computers; we are digital natives. I think other forms of engagement apart from communication would be a digital component. There is a digital component to engagement that is in writing.” Being able to express their personal side and learning more about others (sharing personalities) helps this participant to engage more in their work – “I have also seen us transitioning to showing more of our personalities. So, we are getting more and more personal with people, and we are opening up more.

For me, personally, it makes me feel way more engaged, when I feel like I am getting to know someone along the way.” Lack of responsiveness and direction from

leaders is disengaging to this participant – “I think non-responsiveness. If it’s like pulling teeth, then I really start to disengage. Then I start to de-prioritize that task because I am not able to complete it on my own and the other people that I need are not helping. “So, if I am forced to make a lot of assumptions, and the bosses who are delegating don’t give me the context around it, then I definitely feel a little bit less engaged and less enthusiastic.” The culture and environment of an organization plays a big role in work meaning and engagement for this participant – “I feel like I have a pretty good idea and understanding, in general, about how Millennials would answer these questions; it’s very dependent on who they work for and their current level of satisfaction. You may get some curmudgeonly responses because people are stuck working for a company where most of the workforce is made up of an older generation and maybe they don’t feel like they are being heard.”

This participant works in construction management and described that the overall culture of an organization determines whether or not Millennials stay or go; if it’s a good fit they stay and if not, they go. This participant described Millennials as having a reputation for being non-committal or disloyal – or for jumping around. This participant doesn’t see themselves leaving their current company – they have work meaning, are engaged in their work and strongly connect to their organization’s culture – “I can’t really foresee an end to working with this company. Unless they really screw-up somehow – like if they were embezzling or something – then I might leave! They really would have to do something horrible.” “Millennials have a reputation for being non-committal or maybe even disloyal from a standpoint that people used to join a company and work there

for 40 years and retire. So, we kind of have this reputation for jumping around a lot. But I think we are just looking for someone who cares about us as much as we care about them. It's all of those ingredients that will - we can be the most loyal workforce in the world if you give us what we need to do that." "...So, it all is part of the culture." "The company culture, the type of work that we deliver, and the type of people that work for the company - I am proud of all of that and to be a part of it."

(PID0025) - This participant finds meaning in work that impacts society as a whole - "the meaning I get from my work...I can answer that. Not just for me, but the impact that my work can have on society as a whole." Being present, focused, and caring about what you do defines engagement for this participant - "What I think that means is - we want to keep them caring, we want to keep them present when they are at work, and not just accumulating hours." "When I think of engagement, I am thinking I am at work now and I am going to be focused on it and I feel like it matters, and I am looking at and forward to the other things that I have to do."

This participant described that they have had to go through a process to get to a place of work meaning and engagement, and like other Millennials wish they had discovered what they really wanted to do ten years ago - "I wish I had found what I am doing or that I had found that I wanted to do nursing or something healthcare related ten years sooner. I find a big part of what I see happening to me and what I see happening to a lot of my friends - who just have a job that pays the bills." This participant said they didn't really think about how their degree would line up to work when they chose their major - they studied what they were good at and went to school because they had to.

This sometimes causes Millennials to jump around from company to company trying to find meaning and a good fit – “It was a given that I would go to university. It didn’t matter for what – just that I had to go. I think that is why because I was a good student in this, I decided to just keep studying what I was good at rather than study something that would lead to something that I like. I don’t know if that is a very common thing to happen, but I do feel like a lot of people my age (aged between 30-35) are now feeling in the aftermath that they didn’t really think through what they wanted to study and their major that well. They just went because they had to.” “Therefore, I decided to study literature and I chose literature without thinking about where it would take me. Now I am doing it and that led me to a cool, well-paid position but I was so bored. Eventually, or what I am doing now, is basically reverse engineering. I said this is what I want to do, now what do I need to study that will eventually take me there.”

This participant works as a freelancer in medical translation and is currently studying to become a nurse after working in this field and wanting to take their career in the medical field further. They described their current work as meaningful and engaging and enjoy the flexibility and impact it has on the community – “Yes, basically I get to help people who would normally get no health care access or subpar access. I am helping them be seen, to get treatment and to be properly diagnosed.”

(PID0026) – Physical and mental exertion, critical thinking and creativity sum up work meaning for this participant – “The meaning of work for me is the physical and mental exertion that you have to employ in order to achieve the goals and objectives of

the institution. ... it involves a lot of thought process and critical thinking, and even creativity in order for you to get the work done.”

This participant does not think that organizations understand the mental input required to do most jobs – “My experience has been that I don’t think the organizations or institutions that you work in take into consideration the mental pressure that employees or myself would have had to go through in order to meet performance targets or to carry out duties or responsibilities.” Accountability in job duties should also be baked in to work meaning and helping employees to find it in an organization; this is missing in their organization and impacts them – “Work meaning, takes into consideration different tenets and each must be carefully looked at and taken into consideration when, for example, job duties and responsibilities are being developed. That should also be looked into in the recruitment process, and also in terms of how you hold staff accountable.”

The exchange of emotional intelligence defines the process of engagement for this participant – “What I find is that I have to apply a lot of emotional intelligence when engaging staff.” Engagement was described as how you deal with everyone that you work with, challenges and all. Engagement is personal, and not a one size fits all kind of thing - “And you also deal with different levels of staff, so their knowledge base and intellectual capabilities is different. So, it makes it very challenging for you to be able to engage them. And so, it’s like when you are engaging persons, it cannot be a one size fits all kind of engagement, it has to be different based on the person.”



Leaders of organizations need to pay more attention and be held more accountable to ensuring engagement and how it is practiced; it should benefit both the organization and every employee – “To add as it relates to engagement, I also think that attention needs to be paid on the expectations of leaders in the workplace and staff in general as it relates to engagement. There must be policies that are designed not just to benefit the organization, but also to benefit the staff as it relates to engagement.” This participant works in higher education and is currently working for an organization that is not a good fit for them. While they are engaged in meaningful work in their job, lacking resources, the behavior of older generations, and lacking accountability strongly impacts their ability to be strongly engaged.

If this participant could exit their current organization, they would at the first opportunity to find another organization that is more aligned to their overall needs in the workplace – “I guess I am proud (of working for my organization) – I think it would have to be yes and no as it relates to that – and it goes back to the students again.” “So, very rarely am I able to share something and have it accepted.” “But again as it relates to the internal conflicts, the poor fiscal management, the lack of accountability, that is not something that I am proud to be a part of because I believe the institution is here, higher education institutions are here to help with the development of society and if we can’t get it together as an institution... We are preparing people to go out there and become good managers and to hold people accountable to practice proper fiscal management and we are not doing it. That is not something that I am not proud to be a part of at all.” “There isn’t any accountability – even in the way in which the appraisal process is designed, an

individual knows what it is that they will be rated on or appraised on, so they will try to just do the bare minimum as it relates to that.” “I am also feeling like maybe this is not the place for me, and I need to find another organization and institution that is serious about business and align myself accordingly.”

(PID0014) – Having an impact and doing the things that make up why you are there, defines work meaning for this participant – “Work meaning to me means that understanding of how you spend your time against all the tasks and responsibilities that you have, against all the goals and outcomes that make your work meaningful – in terms of am I finding meaning in my job. I think it’s do I feel like at the end of 40-50+ hours a week that I am putting in, how much of it is going toward those things that are impacting the ‘why I’m here’ factor.” This participant is motivated by work that helps others – “I am motivated by knowing that my work has advanced the work of others or helped them or feeling useful, so these are things that add to a more general sense of meaning. I am a high, needing to define work person on the spectrum. ” Managers making time is an engagement driver for this participant – “...managers making time. I think that this is an area where managers can sometimes stumble.”

Work experiences that bring the team together and help to develop comradery and creativity is also engaging for this participant; many of which they described as creating themselves versus their organization creating those experiences for them – “I think I kind of tend to create more of my own engagement experiences. I think that – if I consider an example here - to try to build some comradery and creativity among the staff they did something called the “staff challenge” where – similar to Google’s 20% time- they let us

create a project, we could choose folks on staff that we want to work with to create a cool pitch for the foundation. It could be about anything or any cool idea that we had – it was like an idea contest. That was really engaging...” Career pathing, development and mentorship is also something that helps this participant to be more engaged in their work – “I feel like Millennials are sort of always in this place like ‘I need career pathing’ – can you show me if I am a high performer, what in terms of development opportunities or career promotion opportunities - here or elsewhere – am I going toward...I feel like a lot of companies don’t always do that well. I think it feels scary for Millennials because we know that the economy is real - people get laid off - it just happened last year. It feels like we know we need the guidance to develop in that way.”

This participant feels like they and other Millennials have to advocate for themselves more than they are advocated for, and organizations are not investing in employees as they should ( especially in this area); this is every organization’s responsibility – “Sometimes I feel like we are just having to propel and do that and be our own advocate. But I would wager that more Millennials are finding those mentors and things outside of their office and work structures – more of a supplement and band aid as opposed to employers taking the responsibility and considering how they are developing leaders and carrying people through and that kind of thing.” “So, it feels like there is less investment in employees and people feel replaceable. It goes back to leaders finding time to lead and deciding what their organization can really do.”

Parental estrangement is a factor that impacts Millennials as described by this participant. This Millennial is making their choices and choosing their happiness over

anything else in many cases – “I read this article saying that particularly among Millennials and younger folks, there is a very high rate of parental estrangement – where the kid is like – no more talking to mom and dad. What stuck with me is – of course I want individual happiness -that is how I make a lot of my decisions.” This Millennial believes that Millennials may speak another language and/or communicate differently than other generations especially when it comes to dealing with conflict – “What’s the lens shift that is really making us speak different languages especially when conflict arises and how happy we expect to be able to be personally, despite our choices.” This Millennial described a difference between older Millennials and younger ones – terming older Millennials as “geriatric Millennials”; this Millennial believes that older Millennials are able to interact better with other generations in the workplace – “I love this geriatric Millennial stuff that is coming out – those geriatric Millennials are among the most poised in the office to navigate generational differences – from boomers to X’s and things...”

This Millennial finds that younger Millennials behave with an air of entitlement in the workplace – “I kind of see some truth in that because I find myself with the younger Millennials and sometimes with Gen Z – saying you are so entitled!” This participant believes there are cultural differences between older and younger Millennials – “There is just a little bit of a shift in formal culture – for example the use of the phrase ‘no problem’...; Or they will say, no worries, no problem, like we are all just peers and we are all negotiating and exchanging... There is a disconnect there because I feel like at least as long as there are older people like me, people’s actions feel rude and

disrespectful...” “I think it’s more about casualizing the culture. I have seen it everywhere.” This Millennial says that soft skills are missing with younger Millennials – “Soft skills in career are important.” “Definitely something in speaking and communication, there are some interesting things coming that we are going to see – not understanding some of the professional culture and even some of the parts that some of their older managers want to keep to just be together at work...”

(PID0018) – This participant experiences work meaning as making an impact to a team or a group – “Work for me means doing something; but not just anything, but something you love to do that is making an impact to an organization, to somebody, or to a team or group or however you look at it.” This participant believes that work meaning exists when there is balance, and does not hinder your physical or mental health ,but enhances it – “When I talk about work, I can’t remove the balance of it. It is doing something that is not detrimental to your health - mental health, physical health, or emotional health. So doing something that you love to do that is making an impact to somebody or something.” For this participant, engagement is really about showing up and being present – “I think for me, engagement is about showing up. What I mean by showing up, is being available, being present, and being part of the conversation: that for me is engagement.”

Engagement is being intentional with finding a connection, actively being a part of the team and participating – “...but actually understanding what is going on and participating in it and being a part of team, being a part of the workforce...that for me is engagement.” This participant admits that engagement can be difficult, especially when a

large majority of your day is spent in meetings or laden with distractions – “I myself have to work on this, especially in this time, where almost 90% of my time every day is spent in meetings...” The COVID pandemic also played a part in this participant’s engagement level over the last year; distractions make it harder to stay engaged – “Last year, I really wasn’t fully engaged. I tried. I always try to be engaged. But if you think about the distraction of having the kids at home, being pregnant with hip pain and all of that, and so many different things going on, nobody knowing what was going to happen with the COVID situation... There were a lot of distractions that made it harder to be engaged.” This participant strongly noted work meaning and engagement have a lot to do with their supervisor and the environment created by their supervisor – “...due to the type of supervisor that I have. I have worked with other companies and even in the same company and I can tell you that my experiences and answers to those questions would have been different. Most of my answers to the questions is a direct reflection of the type of supervisor that I have and the environment that she has built for her team.”

Loyalty is a peculiar thing to this Millennial; while contentment with their current state may keep them at their organization, drastic changes to their environment or supervisor may change their course – “when it comes to being loyal - you can be loyal to corporate America all that you want but corporate America cannot be loyal to you. So, when you start smelling that wind of change, you better start moving along with that change.”

This Millennial is motivated by growth and development and will move around to find an environment that supports that – “ That is the mentality of the Millennials – I

don't mind working for 7, 20 different companies in twenty years – because I don't want to be stagnant.” “The reality is saying that - I am going to move if you are not ready to move me, and they (Millennials) are not afraid to do that. It's sad, but I think it is understandable as well.” This participant works in aerospace quality/operational excellence/data management and is in a good place in their current role – engaged in meaningful work; this is attributed to strong leadership, being able to make a difference with their work, working in a healthy and progressive environment with a strong team, and contributing to seeing the transformation happen- “This is the first time I came back from maternity leave (I have done this three times), and I felt like I needed to go back to work. I was excited to go back to work because I felt like I was going back to a healthy culture and a healthy team, a healthy environment, and I love what I do. I've been seeing that I am making a difference in the organization, so work has been outstanding.”

***Composite Textural Description.***

After extracting the individual textural descriptions from each participant's significant statements and further evaluating the collected data, I compiled a final list of the themes formed from the participant's responses. Common themes in the participant's experiences of work meaning and engagement were noted, and incidents of exception (only experienced by one participant) were noted but not included as a theme. Common themes for work meaning included: making an impact, displaying values for reward, enjoying work/having fun, contentment with a work team, having a support system, and physical/mental/creative exertion.

Common themes for engagement included: connected to/focused on/intentional/invested in/caring about work, coming together/not holding back/practicing collaboration/being present/showing up/being part of the conversation, comradery/teamwork/chemistry, clear expectations/vision/direction, having tools to do the job, free of distractions/minimal distractions, having fun, practical communication/responsiveness/emotional intelligence, trust in work/no micromanagement, openness/personal sharing side, practicing creativity, making time for mentoring/career pathing. Items of exception included: COVID as a temporary disruptor and contributor to related disruptions to the workplace.

Themes related to the Millennials' overall work meaning and engagement experiences included: (*experiences*) millennial judgment, stereotyping, organizational culture, leadership, environment, and personal happiness. A depiction of themes by category (work meaning and engagement) and the participant is shown in the table below:



Figure 5

## Themes from Participant's Responses

	(1) PID0001	(2) PID0002	(3) PID0008	(4) PID0013	(5) PID0014	(6) PID0015	(7) PID0018	(8) PID0023	(9) PID0025	(10)PID0026
<b>Work Meaning</b>										
<i>Making an Impact</i>	x		x		x	x	x		x	
<i>Displaying Values for Reward</i>		x		x		x		x	x	
<i>Enjoying Work/Having Fun</i>			x	x	x					
<i>Contentment with Work Team</i>			x	x			x	x		x
<i>Having a Support System</i>			x	x			x			
<i>Physical/Mental/Creative Exertion</i>		x		x	x					x
<b>Engagement</b>										
<i>Connection - connected to/focused on/intentional/invested in/caring about work</i>	x	x			x		x		x	
<i>Collaboration - coming together/not holding back/practicing collaboration/being present/showing up/being part of the conversation</i>	x	x		x			x	x	x	x
<i>Team Focused - comradery/teamwork/chemistry</i>	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		
<i>Direction - clear expectations/vision/direction</i>	x		x			x	x			
<i>Tools - having tools to do the job</i>			x					x	x	x
<i>Distractions - free of distractions/minimal distractions</i>			x				x			
<i>Fun - having fun</i>			x							
<i>Communication - effective communication/responsiveness/emotional intelligence</i>			x	x		x		x		x
<i>Trust - trust in work/no micromanagement</i>		x				x		x		
<i>Openness - openness/sharing personal side</i>					x			x		
<i>Creativity - practicing creativity</i>		x			x					
<i>Mentoring - making time for mentoring/career pathing/development</i>					x	x	x			x

### **Bracketing and Imaginative Variation: Extracting Meaning**

In transcendental phenomenological research, it is essential to mitigate the injection of the researcher's preconceptions about the phenomenon into the study through bracketing (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Bracketing is the process of suppressing the researcher's preconceptions that can potentially corrupt the research process and skew the research outcome. Conscious reflection about the phenomenon was practiced throughout each step of the research process. I reflected on my preconceived ideas about work meaning and engagement and determinedly set them aside as I engaged with the participants and captured their related experiences of the phenomenon. Additionally, I intentionally utilized a semistructured approach and pre-designed questions; each participant asked the same questions.

As I collected the data, I did so from each participant's perspective, transcribing their word-for-word descriptions of how they experienced work meaning and engagement in the workplace. As I completed the data analysis and constructed themes, descriptions, and textural meanings, I did so conscientiously and outside of my ideas, thoughts, and notions as Moustakas (1994) recommended and was required to conduct a meaningful and meaningful, and sound study.

Using imaginative variation, I further expounded on the themes and built structural descriptions of each participant's experience through a bracketed approach. Imaginative variation requires the researcher to observe the phenomenon from various perspectives, and through this process, develop the essence or a more distinct explanation of the participants' experience (Moustakas, 1994). This process begins during the

interview process and is also described in phenomenological research as a “mental experiment” – where features of the experiences are imaginatively altered to view the phenomenon under investigation from varying perspectives (Turley et al., 2016).

### **Individual Structural Descriptions**

Imaginative variation was used as an interview technique in this study to support extracting a thoroughly detailed and intuitive empirical account of the phenomenon (Turley et al., 2016). This included asking participants to recall and explain related experiential work meaning and engagement moments and examples versus just asking participants to describe their related experiences of work meaning and engagement. This produced a less mechanical process and allowed me to connect with and experience the participant’s experiences in the moment and in a thoughtful and empathetic way. This process supported a well-articulated flow of information from each participant and ultimately birthed the organic descriptions of how each participant experienced work meaning and engagement.

#### ***Structural Description of Participant PID0001***

The lived experience of work meaning and engagement is heavily grounded in doing what you are passionate about and impacting for participant PID0001. For this participant, work meaning and engagement are also impacted by leadership behavior and how connected they feel to their work and the people they work with. For this participant, work meaning and engagement can also be impacted by external factors that can unexpectedly interrupt the workplace, like COVID. In their current state, this participant finds some meaning in their work because they are impacting the lives of the first-

generation students they indirectly support. This participant's connection to their work and work meaning experience would be stronger if they directly interacted with the students they support. External factors, namely the COVID pandemic, have also had a temporary impact on the state of their overall engagement experience and growing disconnection from their work.

Participant PID0001's level of engagement has been negatively impacted this last year by their changing work environment as COVID has impacted their connection to work, personal interactions, collaboration, and people being present at work; and has also been affected by the judgmental/stereotyping and less than favorable behavior of some of their baby boomer team members. In addition, this participant's engagement is also impacted because they are not currently working in their chosen profession. As they complete their master's degree, they look forward to leaving their current role and moving into their desired profession; and anticipate their work meaning and engagement experience on the next part of their career journey to look and feel differently in an environment more conducive to their needs.

#### ***Structural Description of Participant PID0002***

Participant PID0002, after a previous period of reflection, recently transitioned into a position of purpose and fulfillment. This purpose connected them to their work and played a significant role in their experience of work meaning and engagement. For this participant, it is essential to engage in meaningful work that allows them to put themselves out there and deposit their best self at all times. This happens better for participant PID0002 when they work with a strong team in an environment that has a

good balance of healthy challenge/growth potential, trust, and creative flow. For this participant, work means displaying your values and who you are to a strong team and in the right environment and being rewarded in return. When there is a connection to your work, it is also much easier for this participant to stay engaged.

Participant PID0002 is more engaged when there is strong collaboration and healthy interactions within their organization and creatively thrives when able to do so where there is potential to grow and develop in a nurturing and trust-based environment. PID0002 is sometimes disengaged by the behaviors of baby boomer co-workers that sometimes block potential progress and try to hold on to the past. This participant believes that when the correct elements exist, they will choose to stay with an organization for as long as the organization will allow them to. When the work environment lacks certain elements, including growth, trust, and creativity, while it may be difficult, this participant has no problem leaving a lacking work environment to find what they are looking for.

### ***Structural Description of Participant PID0013***

For this participant, their experience of work meaning comes from the connection they have to their job and getting paid to do what they love. PID0013 is motivated by a strong team connection, the unique comradery that comes with their profession, and effective communication flow. Negativity, bad attitudes, and lacking work ethic in the workplace disengage this participant . Their military background has given them a unique perspective about their profession, what makes work meaningful, and how they engage in their work.

***Structural Description of Participant PID0008***

This participant experiences meaning in their work when making an impact while doing work that they enjoy, with people they admire, and for an organization that makes the world better. For this participant, work meaning is also strongly defined by the team you work with and having a solid support system and work environment. The chemistry drives this participant's engagement experience they share with their organization, their team members, strong leadership connections, having the right tools to do their job, being free of distractions that hinder them from getting their job done, and keeping things light and fun at work. They are disengaged by distractions that limit their success and when they feel like they are not being heard.

***Structural Description of Participant PID0015***

This participant experiences work meaning when they can use their experiences and abilities to make an impact in the lives of others. Participant PID0015 is driven and intensely engaged when communication is frequent, flowing, and effective, and leadership vision and direction are clear and aligned with their personal and professional values. This participant thrives in a work environment where leaders care about them, trust their work, and are not always looking over their shoulders and micromanaging. They also admire organizations that put their people first and create an environment where they can thrive and are celebrated and rewarded for their contributions.

Having autonomy in their work and working in an environment with limited political distractions helps this participant stay intensely engaged in their work. This participant is disengaged by organizational practices that blatantly do not make an effort

to provide equal opportunities for minorities, when unconscious bias/racism exists, when there is a lack of confidentiality and trust from leaders, and when words of leadership do not match actions. As a Millennial, this participant says that they will not just adapt to wrong behavior in the workplace; they will either fight to change it or find another organization to work for.

***Structural Description of Participant PID0023***

For this participant, work meaning is experienced when they find satisfaction and contentment with their work and the people they work with. Further, their work meaning is found in the value of their work and its impact on what is meaningful to them.

Participant PID0023 experiences work meaning when they are working in an environment grounded in trust and development. The main driver of this participant's engagement is strong communication and making genuine and holistic connections in the workplace. Lack of responsiveness and having to make assumptions with little direction can be disengaging for this participant. The culture and environment of their organization play a big part in this participant's work meaning and engagement experiences; they are intensely engaged in their work and strongly connected and aligned to their organization's culture and do not see themselves ever leaving unless something drastically changes in their current organization's environment, behaviors, or the overall organizational culture.

***Structural Description of Participant PID0025***

This participant finds meaning in their work when their work impacts society as a whole. Being present, focused, and caring about what they do is how this participant

experiences engagement. This participant's engagement is affected, and they become disengaged when they do not have a connection with their work when the necessary tools to do their job are missing, and when there is limited meaning in their work and the outcome of their work – when their work is not having a positive impact on society. This participant makes conscious decisions to ensure they are engaged in meaningful work. When they experienced themselves in a position that lacked meaning in the past, they navigated to another job and are now in the process of navigating to another profession that supports this connection for them.

#### ***Structural Description of Participant PID0026***

This participant experiences work meaning when working amongst a strong team and physically, mentally, and creatively exerting energy toward an impactful and common goal. Participant PID0026 finds that their engagement is most potent when they are allowed to be a part of the conversation and share their knowledge and experiences toward finding solutions. Emotional intelligence and strong communication are also driving forces in this participant's engagement experience. This participant's engagement is negatively impacted by organizational hypocrisy, leadership accountability, and limited resources.

Their engagement experience is also impacted, and they find themselves disengaged when the behavior of older generations in the workplace discredits their value to the team. While this participant experiences work meaning in their current role as they interact with students, they are somewhat disconnected and disengaged from their organization and job in more ways because of poor fiscal management, lack of



accountability, and organizational practices that are not aligned to the established values, mission, and vision.

***Structural Description of Participant PID0014***

For this participant, work meaning is experienced when they impact while doing the things that make up why they are there. Further, their work meaning experience increases when they know that their work is helping others or advancing the work of others. Participant PID0014 experiences engagement in environments where they feel connected to their work and can bring their whole self to work. Their experience is enhanced when their manager makes time for them – supporting their development and growth – advocating for them, guiding their progress, and promoting them along their career path. Further, this participant experiences engagement when working with a strong work team and participating in work experiences that bring their team together, and when there is a spirit of comradery and team synergy present, which inspires their creative flow.

This participant experiences disengagement when the organization they are working for does not advocate for them or take some responsibility for their development, making them feel like their work brings value to the organization. This participant also experiences disengagement when experiencing the cultural differences that they believe exist between older Millennials (geriatric Millennials) and younger Millennials – and when younger Millennials interact with an air of entitlement in the workplace. Navigating the shift in traditional culture is a challenge to this Millennial's engagement experience and one they seek to understand better.

### ***Structural Description of Participant PID0018***

Work meaning is experienced by this participant when they impact a team or a group while doing something they love to do. Their work meaning experience is optimal when there is a good balance and when their physical and mental health is not hindered but helped by their work experiences. This participant experiences engagement when they are connected to their work in an engaging environment, working with a strong team, and actively participating as part of the team. For this participant, engagement naturally occurs and is strengthened in an environment where they are appreciated, valued, supported, and developed.

This participant's experience is that they find a way to stay engaged in the right environment by being intentional, showing up, being available, being present, and being a part of the conversation. Participant PID0018's engagement experience has been impacted by external factors like COVID and related distractions like resource constraints that interrupt their balance. However, this participant's engagement experience is fueled by resilience because of the supervisor they work for, the support they provide, and the engaging environment their supervisor has created for her team.

### **Composite Structural Description**

The textural-structural descriptions that emerged from the data characterize the meaning and spirit of the participant in lived experiences of work meaning and engagement (Moustakas, 1994). This process integrated the participants' individual experiences into a universal description of the group's phenomenon experience (Moustakas, 1994). For the final step in the data analysis process, I developed integration

of all the individual textural and structural descriptions into a synthesized description of the participants' experiences and representative of all of the common elements across each of the participants' lived experiences of work meaning and engagement in the workplace. Through this process and imaginative variation, work meaning and engagement themes organically emerged and were connected directly from the data obtained from all participants. The composite textural–structural description that I developed is an integration of what and how the participants in this study experienced work meaning and engagement in the workplace; further, this description's purpose is to provide the overall essence of the participants' experience of work meaning and engagement in the workplace.

### **Synthesized Textural and Structural Description**

The Millennials' experience of work meaning and engagement in the workplace is firmly grounded in their connection with their organizations and their consequential ability to make a difference somehow. This experience is further defined by their work's positive impact on the people receiving the meaningful outcomes of their efforts and actively creating mission-driven contributions to their organizations.

Millennials' experience of work meaning builds on a foundation of making an impact. Their work meaning experience is further enhanced when they can genuinely express themselves at work, display their values, and get paid for doing things they are good at and love to do. The experience of work meaning is strengthened when Millennials can work among other solid and competent team members who share their values and commitment to making an impact through their work.

While having an impact is key to Millennials experiencing work meaning, their work meaning experience is optimized when they include strong leadership and a team support system. This includes leaders caring about them as a person and being part of a synergized team that grows and thrives together toward a common goal. Millennials thrive and can maximize their physical, mental, and creative exertion toward impacting organizations that meet their work meaning needs.

Millennials experience engagement in several connected ways. Millennials' engagement experience is significantly tied to their work experience, meaning: It is easier for them to engage in meaningful work. Millennials are not as much connected to the organizations they work for as they are to the work they do for those organizations and the environments created for them to work in. These two elements keep Millennials engaged, fulfilled, and not looking to find new opportunities in other companies.

Millennials' connection to their work environment is a significant element of their experience. When Millennials are connected to their work, they can focus on the tasks at hand, stay invested in, and care deeply about the work they do. Several elements strongly influence the millennial engagement experience and Millennials' performance continuum in an organization. These engagement influencing elements collectively include a spirit of *collaboration* – not holding back, showing up and being part of the conversation, *team focus* – strong leader support, comradery, chemistry and a spirit of teamwork, *direction* – having clear expectations, vision, and guidance, *tools* - having tools needed to get the job done right, *distractions* – having minimal distractions, *fun* - enjoying and having a good time at work, *communication* – effective communication, responsiveness, and emotional

intelligence, *trust* - leadership trust in work, and no micromanagement, *openness* – open to sharing both personal and professional sides, *creativity* – creative flow unhindered, and *mentoring* – leaders making time for mentoring, career pathing, and development.

When Millennials are engaged in meaningful work in an engaging environment, they are content and do not desire to leave the organizations they work for. If Millennials are doing meaningful work but are missing a connection to their organization or elements of their work environment, they may stay with an organization and attempt to find those connections. If the connections are not made, they become disengaged and often seek employment elsewhere and at the soonest opportunity.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

While conducting a qualitative study, it is essential to demonstrate that the data analysis was conducted precisely, consistently, and exhaustively (Nowell et al., 2017). Trustworthiness is explained through the elements of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Data analysis for this study met these criteria by applying the modified van Kaam method of data analysis as prescribed by Moustakas (1994) and with evidence of trustworthiness provided in the prior sections to support the results. Through the rigorous method used to complete the data analysis for this study, and with the details disclosed, the reader will recognize that the process used is trustworthy.

### **Gallup Q12 Engagement Survey Summary**

Data obtained from the Q12 Survey was not used as a one-to-one measure against each participant's responses to the interview questions but was used as a method of

triangulation to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study by checking for internal consistency and establishing a measure of accountability regarding the participant's articulation of their engagement levels and helped to align the researcher to the participants' overall engagement experiences as compared to the interview responses. The Q12 data were used to confirm the participants' overall engagement levels and validate the essence of the participants' overall engagement and work meaning experience as they described it through the interview process.

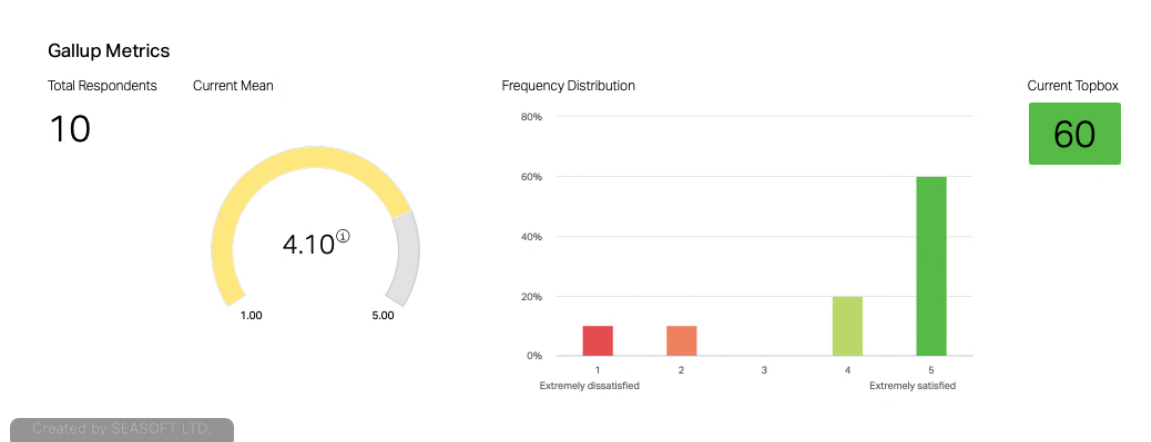
The results of the Q12 Employee Engagement Survey were closely aligned to the responses provided by the participants during each of the interviews and as described in the synthesized textural and structural description. On a five-point scale, where five means extremely satisfied and one means extremely dissatisfied, the overall score indicated how satisfied each participant was with their current company as a place to work in terms of engagement. The overall satisfaction score for the participants in this study was 4.10 out of 5.0.

The areas that most impacted this score positively toward engagement were participants knowing what is expected of them at work (4.6) and knowing where they stand/current progression based on leader engagement and feedback (4.0). The areas that impacted this overall score negatively and away from engagement were participants not having the necessary equipment to do their jobs (3.9) and how the participants' development was encouraged/managed at work (3.7). The essence of the Employee Engagement Survey measured the participant's overall engagement as 4.1 out of 5.0, which aligns with the outcome of the interviews. The outcome supported internal

consistency in the study and further supported the trustworthiness of the participant's interview responses.

## Figure 6

### *Summary of Q12 Survey Results – Overall Engagement of Participants*



## Credibility

The credibility of a study refers to confidence in the truth of the study and its findings and is said to be the essential criterion (Hadi & Closs, 2016). Credibility attends to supporting a connection between the participant's responses and the researcher's representation of those responses (Nowell et al., 2017). This study's credibility and trustworthiness were increased by member checking (each participant asked to verify and confirm their responses) and triangulation or multiple data collection sources– Gallup Q12 questionnaire (anonymous survey facilitated by Gallup) and interview. Responses from both sources were compared to test validity. These data collection sources were used to describe and validate the essence of the participants' overall experience of work meaning and engagement in the workplace.



**Transferability**

Transferability refers to the degree to which the research results can be applied to or transferred to similar contexts or research settings (Nassaji, 2020). The research process applied to this study generated breadth and depth descriptions of the millennial participants' lived experiences of work meaning and engagement. The model used for this study and the conceptual framework of engagement in the workplace and meaningful work across cohorts can easily be replicated to conduct other studies and in varying contexts. For example, the research process applied to this study can be transferred to explore the work meaning, and engagement experiences of other cohorts or specific sub-groups within the cohort explored in this study.

**Dependability**

Dependability in qualitative research prescribes that the researcher reports the findings so that others would arrive at the same conclusions if they interpreted the data. It further encompasses the reliability of the measures and data collection tools used in the study (Nassaji, 2020). An audit trail was utilized and provided as evidence that can be utilized to replicate or repeat the research process in and from other contexts. The audit trail incorporated a review of the elements applied as prescribed by Moustaka's modified van Kaam method for preparing, collecting, organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing data (1994). Evaluation of the audit trail included supervision of this study and periodic external audit through each milestone of this study and conducted by my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Ken Levitt, and committee member, Dr. Daphne Halkias, to further

confirm that steps were followed appropriately and effectively, and to support the dependability and trustworthiness of the results of this study.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability assumes that the researcher brings a unique perspective to the study and refers to how results can be collaborated with or confirmed by others (Trochim, 2001). Ultimately, this element of trustworthiness is established when the research findings demonstrate that results can be replicated and are based on the participant's words and narratives of their experiences of the phenomenon versus findings based on researcher bias and perception (Nassaji, 2020). This element was addressed through my reflective and intentional application of epoché/bracketing from the start to the end of the study (blocking assumptions and biases to describe the phenomenon in terms of its system of meaning)(Moustakas, 1994). Through an audit trail or the use of thorough descriptions and details of the research process (describing how the data were collected, how the data were analyzed – coded and themes derived, and how the data were interpreted and described), and by applying triangulation (the use of Gallup's Q12 questionnaire as a comparative measure of the overall results and outcome).

### **Study Results**

This study was grounded in Khan's (1990) concept of *employee engagement* and Hoole and Bonnema's (2015) concept of *meaningful work across generational cohorts*. In this study, *engaged* referred to how a person worked with passion and felt a profound connection to their organization (Gallup, 2016; McGrath & McGrath, 2013), and *engagement* referred to the overall commitment a person had to an organization and their

willingness to invest and expend their efforts to help the organization succeed (Little & Little, 2006; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Additionally, *work meaning* or *meaningful work* referred to a meaningful experience of experiencing positive meaning in work, sensing that work is a crucial avenue for making meaning, and perceiving one's work to benefit some greater good (Steger et al., 2012). This study sought to explore Millennials' work meaning and engagement experiences to expand Hoole and Bonnema's concept of *meaningful work across generational cohorts* and Saks' *social exchange theory on employee engagement* that explains why employees become more or less engaged toward their work.

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to explore other Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement, and disengagement in the workplace. The research question for this study was developed to support achieving that purpose and appropriately address the research problem. The research question was: What are Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement and disengagement in organizations? Themes of millennial work meaning and engagement experiences were constructed from the participant's responses to the interview questions. A summary of the generated themes and outcomes are highlighted below:

**Figure 7**

*Summary of Theme Outcomes Based on Participants' Statements (Work Meaning)*

<b>Work Meaning – Themes (# of participant inputs)</b>	<b>Participants' Theme Forming Excerpts ("Experiencing work meaning is...")</b>
<b>Making an Impact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Using gifts and talents to impact the organization for good or to make something better."</li> <li>- "Having a positive impact with what you're doing day in and day out; benefiting those that you serve."</li> <li>- "The ability to use your skills to deliver a task and in doing so making a big impact."</li> <li>- "The impact that my work can have on society as a whole."</li> <li>- "The why I am here factor – knowing that my work has advanced the work of others or helped others feel useful."</li> <li>- "Doing something that you love to do and making an impact to an organization, to somebody, or to a team."</li> </ul>
<b>Displaying Values for Reward</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Displaying your values and hopefully getting a good reward and experience from it."</li> <li>- "Leaving the good on the table."</li> <li>- "Just you on display... When you are putting yourself on display – who you are really."</li> <li>- "The value of the work that you contribute and the satisfaction that you gain from those contributions."</li> </ul>
<b>Enjoying Work/Having Fun</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Enjoying what I do..."</li> <li>- "Having fun..., I think if you can't have fun, it would be miserable."</li> </ul>
<b>Contentment with Work Team</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Being a team player and being able to adapt to different situations."</li> <li>- "Seeing a problem and figuring out a solution..."</li> <li>- "Contentment with the team and people that I work with; you can trust each other and develop and learn new skills from each other."</li> <li>- "I am seeing the change that is growing around me because of what I am doing, or our team is doing..."</li> </ul>
<b>Having a Support System</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Having a support system..."</li> <li>- "Having support is a big thing as well..."</li> <li>- "Having a support system whether that be a direct supervisor or lateral support through your coworkers is really important as well."</li> </ul>
<b>Physical/Mental/Creative Exertion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Physical and mental exertion that you have to employ to achieve goals and objectives of the organization."</li> <li>- "It involves a lot of thought processes and critical thinking, and even creativity in order to get the work done."</li> </ul>

**Figure 8**

*Summary of Theme Outcomes Based on Participants' Statements (Engagement)*

<b>Engagement – Themes (# of participant inputs)</b>	<b>Participants' Theme Forming Excerpts ("Experiencing engagement is...")</b>
<b>Connection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Being invested in the mission and on the same page regarding goals and objectives."</li> <li>- "Being intentional about how you are engaged and connected to the organization."</li> <li>- "Coming together and becoming one with everyone you work with."</li> <li>- "Caring and being present at work."</li> <li>- "Being focused at work and feeling like what you are doing matters."</li> <li>- "Showing up, being available, being present, and being a part of the conversation."</li> </ul>
<b>Collaboration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Working in a way that benefits the mission."</li> <li>- "Interacting with people and collaborating."</li> <li>- "Not holding back but giving your all – if you have a contribution, you make it."</li> <li>- "Collectively coming together."</li> <li>- "Making time and being intentional about having engaging experiences..."</li> </ul>
<b>Team Focused</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Comradery, teamwork, and helping each other."</li> <li>- "Building comradery and creativity amongst staff."</li> </ul>
<b>Direction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Having clear expectations..."</li> <li>- "Clear direction from leadership. Communication of the vision and direction that everyone should be going."</li> </ul>
<b>Tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Having tools to do the job successfully."</li> </ul>
<b>Distractions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Being free of distractions..."</li> </ul>
<b>Fun</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Having fun and being present..."</li> </ul>
<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Communication, communication, communication..."</li> <li>- "Communication and chemistry – how we communicate with each other and the tools we use to do so."</li> <li>- "Being responsive – when others are not responsive, this is demotivating and disengaging..."</li> <li>- "Practicing appropriate emotional intelligence..."</li> </ul>
<b>Trust</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Managers and leaders trust your work and don't micromanage you."</li> </ul>
<b>Openness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Being more personal with people and opening up and sharing more about yourself and learning more about others."</li> </ul>

<b>Creativity</b>	- “Building comradery and creativity amongst your staff.”
<b>Mentoring</b>	- “Having appropriate career pathing, mentoring, guidance – even if it means your next experience is outside of the current organization.” - “Supporting your development and growth..”

**Figure 9**

*Summary of Participants’ Responses – Overall Engagement/Engaged*

<b>Participant ID</b>	<b>Engaged</b>	<b>Supporting Statement</b>
<i>PID0001</i>	No	“I used to feel really engaged, I think the last year or so, the last six months to a year I haven’t felt as engaged.”
<i>PID0002</i>	Yes	“I am engaged in my current state.”
<i>PID0008</i>	Yes	“I recommend my employer for the culture, the people, specifically the people, they really make it the place that it is.”
<i>PID0013</i>	Somewhat	“Not so much, I need to be. I am putting a little more pressure on myself to just learn the ins and outs right now and then I can engage later.”
<i>PID0014</i>	Yes	“That was really engaging...” “I tend to create more of my own engagement experiences.”
<i>PID0015</i>	Yes	“I think right now, I am in a really good position.”
<i>PID0018</i>	Yes	“Yes. I am engaged. Last year, I wasn’t fully engaged, I tried. I always try to be engaged. But if you think about the distractions...”
<i>PID0023</i>	Yes	“It makes me feel way more engaged...”
<i>PID0025</i>	Yes	“Yes, I think I am.”
<i>PID0026</i>	Yes	“I am engaged in my work.”

### **Thematic Outcomes: Millennials’ Work Meaning Experience**

Millennials’ lived experience of positive meaning in work, sensing that work is a key avenue for making meaning, and perceiving one’s work to benefit some greater good is optimized when the following elements are present in the work environment: they are engaged in tasks/work that allows them to *make an impact*, they are enabled to *display their values for reward*, they *enjoy the work that they do and have fun*, they are *content with their work teams*, they have solid leadership and peer *support system*, and they are

engaged in a healthy mix of *physical, mental, and creative exertion*. Further, Millennials become more engaged in their work when their work is meaningful.

### **Thematic Outcomes: Millennials' Engagement Experience**

Millennials lived experience working with passion, feeling a profound connection to their organization, their overall commitment to their organization, and their willingness to invest and expend their efforts to help their organizations succeed is maximized when they are engaged in meaningful work. Further, Millennials experience more robust engagement and remain loyal to their organizations when their working environments are characterized and enriched by *connection, collaboration, team focus, direction, tools, minimal distractions, fun, communication, trust, openness, creativity, and mentoring*. Millennials' lived experience of disengagement occurs when the work environment is missing or lacking these same characteristics. Additionally, when Millennials experience disengagement, their loyalty ends, and attention is shifted toward readily finding a more suitable and meaningful environment to work in.

### **Discrepant Cases**

During the data collection process, there was one discrepant or rather unique case where one of the participants engaged in a work environment that differed from the others. Nine of the participants described their lived experiences of work meaning and engagement in traditional organizational work settings, and this one participant was a freelancer that worked for multiple agencies. While the work environment of this participant was uniquely different, this participant's descriptions of their lived experiences of work meaning and engagement were not.

### **Summary**

Data were collected for this phenomenological study using the research question: What are Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement and disengagement in organizations? Data were gathered by conducting interviews with ten millennial participants and then data analysis using the modified Van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994). A thorough evaluation of the participant's responses and the prescribed data analysis exercise produced the six themes of experiencing work meaning and the twelve themes of experiencing engagement that closely describes these lived experiences of Millennials as extensively described in the study results.

The findings of this empirical investigation will now inform the advancement of knowledge and a deeper understanding of Millennials' experiences of meaning at work and job engagement in organizations, advancing the study's conceptual framework. In the final chapter, Chapter 5, my interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, implications of this study, and the conclusion of this study will be presented.



## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The millennial cohort is now the largest and most impactful population in the workforce, making up 75 % of the workforce over the next 10 years (Fry, 2018). Leaders' limited knowledge of Millennials' work meaning, engagement, and disengagement experiences have impacted millennial engagement and the ability of organizations to effectively sustain the workplace (Walden et al., 2017). Understanding and influencing the drivers of this cohort's work meaning and engagement are more important than ever. I conducted this study to explore Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement, and disengagement in the workplace, and to discover related drivers to further inform leaders about Millennials. The purpose and significance of this study were best served by a qualitative method and approach, specifically, a transcendental phenomenological methodology.

I collected the data for this study by conducting semistructured interviews using 26 predetermined questions to guide the process. The participants of this study described their lived experiences of work meaning as being engaged in tasks/work that allows them to make an impact, are enabled to display their values for reward, enjoying the work that they do and having fun, when they are content with their work teams, when they have solid leadership and peer support system, and when they are engaged in a healthy mix of physical, mental, and creative exertion. Further, Millennials described that they become more engaged in their work when their work is meaningful and when their working environments are characterized and enriched by connection, collaboration, team focus, direction, tools, minimal distractions, fun, communication, trust, openness, creativity, and

mentoring. Millennials' lived experience of disengagement occurs when the work environment is missing or lacking these same characteristics. Additionally, when the work environment is lacking these qualities, Millennials may experience disengagement and shift their attention toward readily finding more suitable and meaningful environments to work in.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The data collected in this study showed that Millennials' lived experience of positive meaning in work, sensing that work is a key avenue for making meaning, and perceiving one's work to benefit some greater good, is optimized when certain elements are present in the work environment. The data also showed that Millennials become more engaged in their work when the work they are doing is meaningful to them.

The data further revealed that Millennials lived experience working with passion, feeling a profound connection to their organization, their overall commitment to their organization, and their willingness to invest and expend their efforts to help their organizations succeed is maximized when they are engaged in meaningful work. Further, Millennials experience more robust engagement and remain loyal to their organizations when their working environments are characterized and enriched by these characteristics. To the contrary, Millennials' lived experience of disengagement occurs, and they are motivated to change jobs, when their work environments are missing or lacking these same characteristics.

This study was grounded in Khan's (1990) concept of employee engagement and Hoole and Bonnema's (2015) concept of meaningful work across generational cohorts.

Kahn (1990) defined engagement as an employee's ability to harness their full self at work and identified three psychological conditions that enable it: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. Kahn proposed that engagement is not static and an employee's workplace experiences, including these psychological conditions, can cause engagement to change and fluctuate as the work environment changes and fluctuates. Kahn's engagement concept supports that if leaders can better understand engagement and what drives engagement, changes can be made to create workplace environments where engagement can flourish. The findings of this study confirmed Khan's concept of employee engagement. The descriptions provided by the participants of this study validated that engagement changed and fluctuated as elements of their work environments changed and fluctuated.

Kahn's definition of employee engagement was utilized by Saks (2006) to develop a social exchange theory about employee engagement in organizations. Saks's (2006) social exchange theory on employee engagement provides a theoretical basis to explain why employees become more or less engaged toward their work. According to this social exchange theory, work relationships are built on mutual obligations. Relationships are constantly evaluated and re-evaluated based on the value they produce and will potentially thrive as long as the rules of social exchange theory are not broken. This same social exchange theory proposes that commitments at work are made through a series of interactions between parties who are in a state of give-and-take interdependence, and depending on how parties interact with each other, results in either engagement or disengagement. The results of this study also confirm Saks's social exchange theory on

engagement. When Millennials' work meaning elements or related interactions change, or do not provide desired outcomes or feelings, disengagement occurs, their loyalty ends, and attention is shifted toward readily finding a more suitable and meaningful environment to work in.

Cassell (2017) and Naim and Lenka's (2017) recent studies extended Saks's (2006) social exchange theory by incorporating leadership awareness of Millennials and their entry into and growing impact in the workplace. Millennial growth and impact in the workplace add to its complexity, including three distinctly present and interacting generations—baby boomers, Generation X, and Millennials—working together (Naim & Lenka, 2018). Multiple generations are working together with their differing work values, preferences, and characteristics, creating an even more unique dynamic and a level of complexity and challenge that the workplace has yet to understand or overcome fully. The data from this study confirms the complexity that exists in the workplace and further highlights the strained relationship between Millennials and other generations, namely baby boomers. The data also confirmed that the expressed values, preferences, and behaviors of baby boomers are distinctly different from Millennials and have impacted or influenced the Millennials' state of engagement and disengagement in the workplace.

Meaningful work was first grounded in Maslow's (1943) needs hierarchy, which Maslow presented as a theory of human motivation in his seminal work. Maslow's hierarchy places self-actualization at the top of the pyramid, with the underlying principle that another takes its place when a specific need is fulfilled. A person, therefore, constantly strives to become fully realized (Maslow, 1943). According to Overell (2008),

this translates into self-actualization in work and happens when a person assimilates work into identity. The results of this study confirm that a relationship exists between work meaning and fulfillment as it relates to work and identity. As highlighted in details of the research results, each of the participants' descriptions of their work meaning and engagement experiences were tied to an assimilation of their work to their identity and what was uniquely meaningful to them.

Hoole and Bonnema (2015) extended Overell's (2008) work to develop a concept of meaningful work across generational cohorts that studied why generational cohorts experience work engagement and meaningful work differently. The results of this study did not specifically capture how other generational cohorts experienced the phenomenon explored. However, the experiences described by the participants in this study confirmed that the behaviors of other cohorts, namely baby boomers, and as it relates to meaningful work and engagement, and in their related interactions in the workplace, differed from theirs. These descriptions included examples of comments made and how they have been specifically treated and stereotyped by other generational cohorts in the workplace.

Hoole and Bonnema (2015) suggested that meaningful work originated as a concept from the philosophical principles associated with the meaning of life, as a feeling of purpose in one's overall existence, which creates a sense of harmony and completeness. The results of their study aimed to help leaders determine whether there is a relationship between work engagement and meaningful work and if varying levels exist between different generational cohorts. The results of this study extended the findings of Hoole and Bonnema's study, confirming that a relationship does exist between work

engagement and meaningful work for Millennials. The results of this study can be compared to other study outcomes when evaluating or comparing the related experiences of other generational cohorts.

When comparing Maslow's hierarchy of needs to millennial needs, there are similarities and links to engagement based on how needs are being met. Cattermole (2018) concluded that creating engaging work environments and work experiences would be critical for organizations that employ Millennials. The findings of this study confirmed what meaningful work is and how it does contribute to a more engaging work environment and practice of engagement. The findings also confirmed that when Millennials' needs are not met, this leads to disengagement, and attention is then shifted toward readily finding an environment that meets their needs.

The purpose of this study was to explore Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement, and disengagement in the workplace and was grounded in the described conceptual framework. I used the responses to the interview questions to generate original data comprised of naïve descriptions obtained through open-ended questions and dialogue to explore the meaning of the participants' work experiences and job engagement. The results of this study support the implications for social change for Millennials including business leaders using findings to develop policies and processes that facilitate Millennials' engagement in meaningful work and improving how they positively impact future business outcomes. The findings of this empirical investigation achieved the purpose of advancing knowledge and a deeper understanding of Millennials' experiences of meaning at work and job engagement in

organizations and did contribute original qualitative data to the study's conceptual framework. The outcome of this study may be used to further inform leaders about Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and engagement and will potentially support the development of future engagement strategies geared toward Millennials in the workplace. The implementation of future engagement strategies centered around the information learned about Millennials will play an important part in shaping their growing impact on productivity, profitability, and innovation in the workplace.

### **Limitations of the Study**

I acknowledged and addressed the nature of conducting a transcendental phenomenological study which Creswell (2007) noted can be characterized by various limitations. The first limitations of this study were researcher bias, prejudices, and attitudes that may have impacted interpretation and approach. These limitations were induced by the nature of the methodology. I addressed this limitation through Moustakas's (1994) recommended use of conscious practice of bracketing and epoché throughout the research process.

Another limitation was the sample size, which did not support generalizing the outcome across a population or other populations. While the outcome cannot be generalized, Creswell (2007) recommended using rich and full descriptions that assist the reader in determining if and how experiences described may apply to their respective situation. Likewise, Moustakas (1994) called attention to the benefits of utilizing these "descriptions, reflections, and imagination in arriving at an understanding of what is, in

seeing the conditions through which what is comes to be, and in utilizing a process that in application opens possibilities for awareness, knowledge, and action”.

I completed the study with an appropriate and carefully selected sample of 10 millennial participants who had experienced the phenomenon studied, and the final number was determined by saturation/informational redundancy/nothing new happening (Omona, 2013). I determined that the appropriate sample size was reached and data saturation was achieved when there was enough information obtained to replicate the study, and no other codes signifying new properties of uncovered patterns emerged (Fusch & Ness, 2015) and theoretical saturation, relevant information needed to gain complete insights, had been reached (van Rijnsoever, 2017). Further, the appropriate sample size was considered met when the information obtained had reached a state that could be translated and described in a way that would be helpful in understanding the complexity, depth, variation, and context surrounding the phenomenon. While the outcome cannot be generalized, and was not intended to represent entire populations, this limitation was overcome as the data obtained were translated into rich and full descriptions that can assist the reader in determining if and how the Millennials’ experiences described may apply to their respective situations.

A third limitation was the participants’ willingness to articulate related experiences honestly. I addressed this limitation in the research process by ensuring confidentiality, encouraging forthright answers during the interview process, emphasizing the need for participants to be mindful of accuracy by confirming their answers through member checks, and reminding participants of their ability to impact and enhance other



Millennials' experiences of work meaning and engagement, and future social change in the workplace.

### **Recommendations**

While previous studies have been conducted about Millennials, the outcome of this study further confirms that this cohort is more unique than the generational stereotypes and generalizations have revealed. Further, the outcome of this study shows there is still much more to be learned about and gleaned from the individual differences and experiences of engagement and work meaning within the millennial cohort.

The results of my study provided actionable insights about Millennial's lived experiences of work meaning, and engagement and disengagement in the workplace. While the intent of this qualitative study was not to generalize the outcome across the entire millennial population, what was learned and how I have described what was learned, can potentially assist leaders with determining how related experiences can be applied to their respective situations. The results of this study not only confirmed and expanded the conceptual framework, but also identified opportunities for future research that could expand it further.

The research design used to complete this study can easily be transferred to conduct similar studies focused on other cohorts or specific groups within the millennial cohort. Those outcomes can be used to further extend Hoole and Bonnema (2015) work to develop the concept of meaningful work across generational cohorts, further identifying and expanding why generational cohorts experience work engagement and meaningful work differently. Based on the experiences of the millennial participants in

this study and their interactions with baby boomers, the related work meaning and engagement experiences of baby boomers warrants further inquiry and should be prioritized.

Several of the descriptions provided by the participants of this study about their experiences of work meaning and engagement were tied to specific characteristics of their work environments including: culture, leadership practices, employee behaviors, and job fit. Future research could focus on understanding how each of these elements impact millennial work meaning and engagement experiences in the workplace. Other insights and nuances about millennial work meaning and engagement experiences that emerged from the data and warrant further research include: the effect of the COVID pandemic on the work meaning and engagement experiences of Millennials, comparing the work meaning and engagement experiences of geriatric and younger Millennials, the effect of parental estrangement on millennial work meaning and engagement experiences, comparing the work meaning and engagement experiences of minority and non-minority Millennials, the work meaning and engagement experiences of Millennials in different industries... These are just a few of many possible opportunities for future research that could further expand the related knowledge base and influence related social change.

### **Implications**

The population of Millennials is expected to grow to over 75% of the workforce over the next ten years. Millennials are the largest population in the workforce and the least engaged cohort, with the most significant impact on future business outcomes (Walden et al., 2017). Millennials' lack of meaning in their work impacts their

engagement and contributes to numerous losses to an organization, including poor morale and productivity, and ultimately turnover if the organization does not find a way to provide an acceptable sense of work meaning and engagement (Geldenhuis et al., 2014).

The outcome of this study contributed to identifying a deeper understanding of Millennials based on their lived experiences versus generalizations. The general implications gleaned from this study will help leaders of Millennials, informing future solutions that may influence the improvement of millennial work meaning and job engagement. What was learned from this study will inform and contribute to organizational performance as impacted by the improvement of related millennial experiences of meaning at work and related job engagement and performance.

### **Implications to Practice**

This study was significant to practice because it aimed to explore further the work meaning, engagement, and disengagement experiences of Millennials [the largest generational cohort population in the workplace] (Fry, 2016). Bond (2016) suggested that engagement is not improving in the workplace because organizations are not consciously changing, recognizing, or understanding what needs to change. What was learned about millennial experiences in this study can now be used to educate leaders, create, and package data in a way that clarifies prior cohort generalizations, and accurately informs the creation of effective engagement strategies that will impact future millennial work meaning and improve engagement experiences and future business outcomes. By improving the work meaning and engagement experiences of Millennials, they are more likely to remain engaged and productive toward contributing to achieving the mission,

vision, and objectives of their organizations; and are less likely to experience disengagement, end their loyalty and shift their attention to finding a more suitable and meaningful environment to work in.

### **Implications to Theory**

This study was significant to the development of work meaning and engagement theories. Achieving a better understanding of Millennials' work meaning and engagement experiences enables leaders to improve future experiences of work meaning and engagement. Through this study, we learned more about Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement, and disengagement in the workplace. From a theory-building perspective, examining Millennials' work engagement needs extended Khan's (1990) concept of employee engagement and Hoole and Bonnema's (2015) meaningful work across generational cohorts. This study also paved the way for future related research and conceptual expansion.

### **Implications to Social Change**

Stewart, Oliver, Cravens, & Oishi (2017) highlight that there are certainly differences in the perceptions, behaviors, attitudes, and opinions of each of the generations; and potential differences in how we should address these differences. The outcome of this study provided information about the perceptions, behaviors, attitudes, and opinions of Millennials, and will benefit leaders by informing the process of addressing related differences between other cohorts. The outcome of exploring Millennials' experiences of meaning at work and job engagement and disengagement in organizations increases awareness of this generation based on actual experiences. Further,

the outcome of this study provided actionable insights that can impact work relationships and positive social change in the workplace.

### **Conclusions**

Millennials are now the majority cohort present in the workplace. With Millennials at the center of attention, organizational dynamics are changing and being impacted by the effects of limited meaningful work, stagnant engagement levels, and troubling attrition rates. Related attrition continues to impact the economy by billions of dollars annually. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement and disengagement in the workplace and contribute to addressing this critical social dilemma.

Six work meaning themes and twelve engagement themes emerged from the data to answer the research question: What are Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement and disengagement in organizations? Through this study, we learned that Millennials' lived experience of positive meaning in work is optimized when they are engaged in tasks/work that allows them to *make an impact*, they are enabled to *display their values for reward*, they *enjoy the work that they do and have fun*, they are *content with their work teams*, they have solid leadership and peer *support system*, and they are engaged in a healthy mix of *physical, mental, and creative exertion*. Further, we learned that Millennials become more engaged in their work when their work is meaningful. Finally, we learned that Millennials experience more robust engagement and remain loyal to their organizations when their working environments are characterized

and enriched by *connection, collaboration, team focus, direction, tools, minimal distractions, fun, communication, trust, openness, creativity, and mentoring.*

The findings of this empirical investigation now inform the advancement of knowledge and a deeper understanding of Millennials' experiences of meaning at work and job engagement in organizations, advancing the study's conceptual framework. Further, these findings can be used to inform and create future engagement assessments and tools. The findings will help leaders to quickly address and measure what matters most for the millennial majority in the workplace and what will influence their performance and future business outcomes.

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## Appendix A: Letter of Introduction and Recruitment

Dear Invitee,

My name is Monique Anderson, and I am a doctoral student at Walden University – School of Management. I am writing to invite you to participate in my final study to complete the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Management. I will be conducting a study purposed to explore Millennials and their lived experiences of meaningful work and engagement and disengagement in the workplace. As the population of Millennials in the workplace increases and disengagement decreases, it is clear that more needs to be learned about your experiences of meaningful work and job engagement.

If you elect to participate, your inputs will contribute to the data collection process for this study. Data will be collected through the use of a questionnaire and in-depth interviews that include open-ended questions and dialogue will be conducted in person or by video- conference. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from participation at any time. Please note that confidentiality will be practiced and personal identifiers about participants will not be disclosed.

If you are interested in participating, please review and return the *letter of informed consent*. If you would like additional information before deciding to participate, please request information in response to this email. I appreciate your consideration and look forward to your reply.

In the spirit of positive social change,

Monique Anderson, MBA – PhD Candidate

Walden University

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Date:

Participant Identifier:

Mode of Interview:

### **Interview Introduction:**

Interviewer Dialogue:

I would like to take a moment to welcome you and thank you again for agreeing to participate in this study.

Please confirm that you have read and returned the informed consent form, meet the criteria to participate and still agree to participate in this study by saying “yes or no”. Have you read, meet the criteria, and returned the informed consent form and still agree to participate in this study? (Record response)

Please be reminded that the audio portion of our interactions will be recorded to support accuracy in transcription. Please verbally confirm that you agree to be recorded, by saying “yes” or “no”. Throughout this study, if you would like to stop the recording at any time, please signify by saying, “please stop recording”. When you are prepared to continue, please signify by saying “ok to resume recording”. Do you agree to be recorded? (Record response)

Thank you again for your confirming your agreement to participate in this study – “Exploring the Millennial’s Work Meaning and Engagement Experience: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study”.

You are a part of the millennial cohort which is now the largest and most impactful population in the workforce and critical to take notice of. The increasing effects of millennial engagement are critical to sustaining the workplace. Further, understanding and influencing the drivers of this cohort’s engagement are equally important to understand and practice. While numerous surveys have lent to identifying the surface details related to what keeps Millennials engaged, research shows that millennial engagement in the workplace continues to decline.

While many studies have been conducted about Millennials, this cohort has proven to be more different than the generational stereotypes and generalizations have revealed. There is more to be learned about and gleaned from the individual differences and lived experiences of engagement and work meaning that exist within the millennial cohort. The workplace cannot continue to rely on generalizations that are clearly missing depth and proving to not be as prevalent as prior studies have concluded.

Disengagement in the workplace should be taken very seriously. Further, with more than half of the workforce disengaged or actively disengaged, organizations are increasingly

subject to significant financial burden. Research outcomes continue to warn of the increasing condition, implications, and financial burden of disengagement; and further bring to light how little is really known about what keeps Millennials engaged. Engagement levels are not changing because organizations have not found the root of the issue and are not recognizing what actually needs to be changed. This study is underway because more needs to be learned about what keeps Millennials engaged so that organizations can identify actionable interventions and effective countermeasures. Previous studies have been conducted to explore the relationships amongst meaningfulness, work engagement, and organizational commitment. Research concluded that meaningful work leads to satisfied, engaged, and committed employees that are more productive and choose to remain loyal to organizations. This and other related studies also found that a relationship exists between positivity, psychological meaningfulness, and organizational commitment. More needs to be learned about the Millennials' actual experiences of work meaning, engagement, and disengagement in the workplace. The purpose of this study is to explore Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement and disengagement in the workplace. To address this gap in the existing literature, data will be collected through the use of in-depth interviews in the informal, interactive process and tradition of open-ended questions and dialogue.

During the interview you will be asked a series of questions about your lived experiences of work meaning, engagement, and disengagement and asked to articulate and discuss those lived experiences with the researcher. All interactions will be recorded – audio and transcription; while it is critical for the researcher to both see and hear the participant throughout this process, only the audio and transcriptions will be recorded. Recordings will be shared with all participants and participants will be given an opportunity to review and correct any inaccuracies that have been recorded by the researcher. If the participant does not respond within the required timeframe, the researcher will accept no response as agreement to proceed with recordings as stated.

### **Gallup Q12 Index:**

Gallup's employee engagement work is based on more than 30 years of in-depth behavioral economic research involving more than 17 million employees. Through rigorous research, Gallup has identified 12 core elements -- the Q12 -- that link powerfully to key business outcomes. These 12 statements emerged as those that best predict employee and workgroup performance. Each participant will be requested to answer each of these questions in order to evaluate the participant's lived experiences of engagement and prior to the interview. The results of this element will be collected separately and electronically by Gallup, and the results summarized and reported for comparison and alignment with interview results.

*The Twelve Questions are:*

1. Do you know what is expected of you at work?
2. Do you have the materials and equipment to do your work right?

3. At work, do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day?
4. In the last seven days, have you received recognition or praise for doing good work?
5. Does your supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about you as a person?
6. Is there someone at work who encourages your development?
7. At work, do your opinions seem to count?
8. Does the mission/purpose of your company make you feel your job is important?
9. Are your associates (fellow employees) committed to doing quality work?
10. Do you have a best friend at work?
11. In the last six months, has someone at work talked to you about your progress?
12. In the last year, have you had opportunities to learn and grow?

**Interview:**

*Research Questioning:*

What are Millennials' lived experiences of meaningful work and job engagement and disengagement in organizations?

*Process Guide:*

1. Informed Consent received by invited participant – establish participant identifier and file (code)
2. Gallup Q12 Index sent to participant, completed, and submitted
3. Gallup Q12 Index responses received from participant, evaluated, and filed
4. Interview scheduled and confirmed with each participant
5. Interview executed – introductions, confirm consent to participate and be recorded, start recording, complete questioning, request additional participant questions and provide answers, thank participant, close interview, stop recording
6. Review interview inputs and prepare recordings (transcriptions and audio) to share with participant; within three business days researcher will electronically share recordings with participant to ensure what has been recorded is accurate and complete. Participant will have two business days to review and respond with any corrections; no response will be accepted as agreement to proceed with inputs as is. Send thank you with contact information to participant with member check communication.

*Questions:*

1. Do you know what is expected of you at work?
2. Do you have the materials and equipment to do your work right?
3. At work, do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day? What do you do best?
4. In the last seven days, have you received recognition or praise for doing good work?
5. Does your supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about you as a person?
6. Is there someone at work who encourages your development?
7. At work, do your opinions seem to count?



8. Does the mission/purpose of your company make you feel your job is important?
9. Are your associates (fellow employees) committed to doing quality work?
10. Do you have a best friend at work?
11. In the last six months, has someone at work talked to you about your progress?
12. In the last year, have you had opportunities to learn and grow?
13. How do you feel about work today?
14. Would you recommend your current organization to friends as an employer?
15. Do you feel excited about coming to work?
16. Are you proud of working for your organization?
17. Are you satisfied with your current compensation and benefits?
18. Do you enjoy working with your team?
19. Do you find your work for your organization meaningful?
20. Does your organization's vision and values inspire you?
21. Do others provide you with recognition for your accomplishments at work?
22. Do you feel like your supervisor is invested in your success?
23. Do you see yourself working for your current organization in a year?
24. Describe your work meaning experience in your own words? (What does work meaning mean to you in your own words; what has your experience with work meaning been?)
25. Describe your experience of engagement in your own words? (What has been your experience of engagement in the workplace)
26. Final thoughts (anything else that you would like to add -experiences, work meaning, engagement)