

The organizational socialization process of nonprofit workers

by

Emily Roth

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Major Professor
Dr. Sarah E. Riforgiate

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Abstract

A commonly held belief in higher education is that a student's educational program paves the way towards a specific career choice, forcing students to intentionally choose courses in preparation for a particular line of work (Lair & Wieland, 2012). Recognizing the influential role of education (Jablin, 2001) and the increasing numbers of nonprofit education programs (Mirabella & McDonald, 2012), it is important to understand the educational expectations created by university programs and how these expectations are enacted as students become nonprofit employees. To better understand communication practices that shape the expectations, experiences, and worker identities, this study applies organizational assimilation theory to nonprofit education and work through interviews of nonprofit employees' experiences after completing a nonprofit education program.

Qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts indicates that nonprofit-focused educational programs socialize students to work for a cause that they find personally meaningful. However, not all students are able to meet this expectation, creating two paths, a straight path and a winding path in search of meaningful work. Those on the straight path who found personally meaningful work attributed their experience to an internal locus of control based on an intentional job search and workplace opportunities. Participants who did not find the personally meaningful work they expected used external control attributions by blaming the job market, the way their generation approaches work, and how their educational program created unrealistic expectations. Findings deepen understandings of organizational assimilation theory in terms of education, while bridging educational practices and organizational assimilation theory to contribute practical implications. Practical implications include encouraging education programs to facilitate volunteering and networking opportunities for their students, prospective

nonprofit workers to seek out volunteer and job shadowing opportunities, and nonprofit organizations to focus on the assimilation process of new employees.

Keywords: organizational socialization; higher education; nonprofit work; meaningful work

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the Staley School of Leadership Studies and the Department of Communication Studies, who saw potential in me when I did not.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

“Perhaps leaders as stewards of greatness, rather than leaders as amassers of wealth, will be the next generation’s calling” (Burlingame, 2009, p. 66).

The “Millennial” generation or “Generation Y” is the focus of this quotation (Burlingame, 2009). Millennials are born between 1980 and 1995, often are the children of the Baby Boomer generation (Foot & Stoffman, 1998), and have distinctive expectations regarding desirable work (Wey Smola & Sutton, 2002). Specifically, millennials “long to be part of something bigger than themselves” and are motivated by work having a purpose rather than a paycheck (Moore, 2014). For example, Hewlett, Sherbin, and Sumberg (2009) tell the story of a millennial college senior who used a corporate graduate deferral program, taking a gap year to work in India at a nonprofit organization before starting at his corporate position. He fulfilled his desire to work for a purpose and not regret joining the company through this deferral program. Millennial’s desire to have purposeful work may help to explain the increasing interest in the nonprofit sector.

A commonly held belief in higher education is that a student’s educational program paves the way towards a specific career choice, forcing students to intentionally choose courses to prepare them for a particular line of work (Lair & Wieland, 2012). The intentionality in higher education helps explain the increase in United States colleges and universities that provide education for nonprofit managers (Mirabella, 2007). In 1990 only 17 universities in the United States offered a graduate concentration in nonprofit management (Mirabella, 2007). Fast-forward to 2011, when 136 universities offer undergraduate courses in nonprofit management, 239 universities provide graduate courses, 97 universities offer undergraduate nonprofit concentrations, and 156 universities have graduate concentrations (Mirabella & McDonald,

2012). The increasing availability of education and nonprofit careers provides a backdrop for setting student expectations about future careers.

Recognizing the influential role of education for millennial students and the increasing numbers of nonprofit education programs, it is important to understand the educational expectations created by university programs and how these expectations are enacted as students become nonprofit employees. To better understand communication practices that shape expectations, this study applies organizational assimilation theory to nonprofit education and work through interviews of nonprofit employees' experiences after completing a nonprofit education program. Findings bridge educational practices and organizational assimilation theory to contribute practical implications for programs and extend theory. Next, pertinent research investigating the nonprofit sector and organizational socialization processes are reviewed.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Nonprofit Sector

A nonprofit is “a group organized for purposes other than generating profit and in which no part of the organization's income is distributed to its members, directors, or officers” (Legal Information Institute, 2016). Nonprofits can also be described as “organizations that work to improve the common good of society in some way, typically through charitable, educational, scientific or religious means” (Green, 2014) and providing myriad services including health, educational, religious, social, legal, civic, and cultural (Leete, 2006).

Meaningful Missions

Nonprofits often have a noble mission of providing services without focusing on their bottom-line. Being mission-driven has its advantages and disadvantages when considering the perspective of employees. The mission first attracts individuals to the nonprofit (Bradach, Tierney, & Stone, 2008) and then through socialization processes the nonprofit employees buy into the mission (Jablin, 2001); high commitment to the mission often results in employee retention despite low financial compensation or benefits (Kim & Lee, 2007). The mission of a nonprofit also draws in volunteers who offer their time for no financial rewards (Bradach et al., 2008). If a mission is the central force behind a nonprofit, it can contribute to a limited business strategy, with employees “inspired” by the mission but with little “direction” (Bradach et al., 2008, p. 2). As reasoned by McHattan, Bradshaw, Gallagher, and Reeves (2011), having a business strategy for nonprofit organizations is vitally important because it “enables them to develop a clear vision of short- and long-term goals as well as procedures for ensuring these goals are met” ensuring sustainability for the organization (p. 247). This is particularly important

for millennials who “were raised to appreciate structure, direction, explanation, and engagement” (Holt, Marques, & Way, 2012, p. 92).

Not having a business strategy may not be entirely disadvantageous. Mirvis and Hackett (1983) argue, “the move to run government agencies and nonprofits ‘more like a business’ needs to be carefully considered. If not, they may lose their identities and employees’ motivation and satisfaction may actually suffer” (p. 11). This argument takes into account nonprofit organizations being unique due to workers being motivated not by the dollar amount on their paycheck, but by the intrinsic rewards and high job satisfaction (Mirvis & Hackett, 1983). The millennial generation may find this particularly attractive because they primarily seek intrinsic rewards (De Cooman & Dries, 2012). The characteristics of low pay and high purpose contribute to the perception of nonprofit work being considered “meaningful work” (Mirvis & Hackett, 1983).

Due to the high sacrifice, long hours, and financial instability, people engaging in meaningful work may be perceived as passionate and committed to the work as demonstrated in narratives of successful entrepreneurs who began popular nonprofits, and thus are an extreme example of nonprofit work (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010). Viewing high-levels of passion and commitment as a requirement can be a double-edged sword for nonprofits as it may excite potential workers and may deter them as well (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010). Therefore, it is imperative to understand the influential communication that creates the expectations of potential workers who are then excited by nonprofit work.

Opinion Spectrum

Nonprofits are also surrounded by diverse opinions regarding the legitimacy of this work. On one end of the spectrum, some question nonprofit work as being an actual job. Clair (1996)

studied the colloquialism “a real job” based on college student perceptions, concluding that nonprofit work is not considered to be “a real job” because of lower status and low financial compensation. Clair’s (1996) conclusion of nonprofits not being perceived as “a real job,” and the possible shift in the perceptions of nonprofit work since the 1996 study warrants further examination.

While some individuals may not even consider nonprofit work an actual job, others perceive nonprofits as warm but incompetent (Aaker, Vohs, & Mogliner, 2010). Because of the perceived incompetence of nonprofits, people are more attracted to for-profit work (Aaker et al., 2010). There are both a positive (warm) and negative (incompetent) opinions attached to nonprofits, which can leave people torn or undecided about them. However, the opinions of warmth and incompetence can be altered by the nonprofit making them more desirable (Aaker et al., 2010).

On the opposite of the spectrum Eikenberry and Kluver (2004) argue:

Of primary importance is the necessity to shift our way of thinking about and working with nonprofit organizations. They are more than just tools for achieving the most efficient and effective mode of service delivery; they are also important vehicles for creating and maintaining a strong civil society. (p. 138)

Eikenberry and Kluver (2004) acknowledge nonprofit organization as efficient and effective; however, they go further stating that nonprofit organizations are essential for our world. If we accept that nonprofits are of importance to “maintaining a strong civil society” (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004, p. 138). This may explain the interest and growth in the nonprofit sector despite low employee financial compensation.

Educational Programs

Nonprofit-focused education programs are becoming more prevalent (Mirabella, 2007). These programs vary in curriculum and content based on what the educational institution perceives the students and a society needs (Larson, Wilson, & Chung, 2003). Varying curriculum approaches include an academic major, a minor, certificate programs, or a combination of the three (Dolch et al., 2007). Many curriculums move the focus beyond learning theory in the classroom and include nonprofit experiential learning by requiring internships and service-learning opportunities (Dolch et al., 2007). Providing opportunities to transition students into practitioners, these programs are intended to build “bridges between theory and practice” (Burlingame, 2009, p. 65).

One representative example of a nonprofit educational program is Murray State University’s academic minor in nonprofit leadership studies. The program started in 1996 as nonprofit management and is still offered in a program named Youth and Nonprofit Leadership (Dolch et al., 2007). The program has between 30-40 graduates per year, with an almost 100% job placement within a few months of graduation (Dolch et al., 2007). According to the program webpage, this program incorporates teaching, research, and service learning opportunities surrounding not only nonprofit management, but also philanthropy, social entrepreneurship, and policy advocacy (Nonprofit Leadership, n.d.). This is just one example of the hundreds of educational programs that focus on the nonprofit sector.

Although nonprofit education programs are popular, there may be unfortunate news for graduates looking for nonprofit work. Wang and Ashcraft (2012) argue, “Nonprofit organizations now prefer experienced professionals to new or recent graduates. Layoffs in other sectors have also increased competition for nonprofit jobs” (p.130). A further concern for

graduates trying to enter is career field is the trends of fewer nonprofit position openings and decreased turnover (Wang & Ashcraft, 2012).

The increasing number and interest of professional development programs may be explained by increasing demand of nonprofit organizations seeking more experienced professionals (Wang & Ashcraft, 2012). In nonprofit professional programs, individuals often take non-credit courses which are condensed to a shorter length of time to learn specific information and skills related to nonprofits, such as, fundraising, grant writing, marketing, and volunteer management (Wang & Ashcraft, 2012). Educational programs focused on nonprofit work provide a unique setting to investigate the creation of work expectations.

Organizational Socialization

The organizational assimilation theory stage model developed by Jablin in 1987 and revisited in 2001 explores the process of individuals as they prepare (anticipatory), enter (encounter), assimilate (metamorphosis), and leave (disengagement and exit) an organization. This process has been widely studied within traditional work settings (Hart, 2012; Ostroff & Koziowski, 1992; Waldeck, Seibold, & Flanagin, 2004) and has been expanded to nontraditional work such as internships (Dailey, 2016), volunteer work (Kramer, 2011), and college organizations (Davis & Myers, 2012). The focus of this study is on the process of socialization for current nonprofit workers; therefore, only the first three stages of the model will be discussed.

Anticipatory

Anticipatory socialization occurs prior to entering a job when individuals develop a set of expectations and beliefs about how people in that type of work communicate (Jablin, 2001). Individuals in this stage have the primary focus of seeking information that will help them

create expectations and beliefs about the job and make career decisions (Jablin, 2001). This stage is pertinent to this study because education programs provide important career information pre-workplace entry. Individuals experience two types of anticipatory socialization: role anticipatory socialization and organizational anticipatory socialization (Kramer, 2010).

Role anticipatory socialization

Role anticipatory socialization involves deciding what type of career to pursue, similar to a college student deciding his or her major (Kramer, 2010). Five sources can influence individuals during this stage: family, education, peers, earlier work experience, and media (Jablin, 2001). Education plays an important role in creating expectations of the workplace in the anticipatory socialization stage (Jablin, 2001). Specifically, during high school and college, individuals obtain specific information about the workplace based off of the courses they take (Jablin, 2001); thus it is important to gain a better understanding of the expectations created in educational programs geared towards nonprofit work. Specifically for nonprofit work, experience with volunteering is often an important source of socialization (Lee & Wilkins, 2011), which can be commonly obtained through the educational program. Anticipatory socialization does not end when a person stops his or her formal education, but it can actually be considered a life-long phase as he or she continues to change career paths (Kramer, 2010).

Organizational anticipatory socialization

Organizational anticipatory socialization is concerned with socialization within a specific organization (Kramer, 2010). Experiencing recruitment for an organization and going through the selection processes, such as interviews, develops more realistic expectations about the work (Scholarios, Lockyer, & Johnson, 2003). When the messages individuals receive help them form an accurate view, they are more likely to commit to the job and start developing job skills

(Scholarios et al., 2013). However, developing realistic expectations of the workplace is often difficult because the organization may accentuate positive impressions and hide negative information (Huffcutt, Culbertson, & Riforgiate, 2015); having contacts within the organization can help individuals obtain a more realistic perspective (Kramer, 2010). The present study focuses on this transformation of work expectations that takes place for individuals as they transition from student to employee in the nonprofit sector.

Internships

Internship “experiences allow students to develop new, more realistic work expectations, thus narrowing the work expectation-reality gap” (Barnett, 2012, p. 281). Internships uniquely position individuals as temporary organizational members, but they may not be seen as organizational members by full-time workers; thus, creating organizational identification tensions (Woo, Putnam, & Riforgiate, 2017). Depending upon the internship experience, an individual decides whether or not they want to perform that type of work (Dailey, 2016). While Jablin (2001) indicates that any prior experience to a full-time job should be considered as anticipatory socialization, Dailey (2016) argues that internships should be considered in the encounter stage of organizational socialization. Many educational programs require volunteer or internship work in the field. Therefore, considering anticipatory socialization processes and educational internships, the present study poses the question:

RQ₁: How do education programs use communication practices to socialize expectations of nonprofit work?

Encounter

The encounter stage occurs when the individual enters an organization after the anticipatory socialization stage (Jablin, 2001). The encounter stage includes communication

regarding the specifics of the work role, such as work performance and technical skills (Hart, 2012), which can be gathered from multiple sources during the encounter stage including formal orientation, training sessions, and through formal or informal mentors (Jablin, 2001).

Specifically within the encounter stage, experienced workers or authority figures within the organization provide memorable messages to the new employee (Stohl, 1986). Although authority figures, such as supervisors, are an important source in the assimilation process for newcomers, co-workers are equally as valuable (Hart, 2012; Ostroff & Koziowski, 1992). For example, when studying the role of humor in organizational entry, Heiss and Carmack (2012) found the veteran co-workers use humor as a tool to teach organizational culture to new employees in the encounter stage.

An individual in the encounter stage experiences a variety of emotions. While exploring job satisfaction within the first year of employment, Bowell, Shipp, Payne, and Culbertson (2009) found that “newcomers experience an initial high in job satisfaction within a few months after organizational entry, trending downward by 6 months on the job, with this decline tapering off by 1 year on the job” (p. 851). Although individuals may have high job satisfaction, they may also experience confusion between what they expected the job to be and the reality of the job (Jablin, 2001). To understand more about the nonprofit worker experience after completion of a nonprofit-focused educational program, the study poses the following question:

RQ₂: How do particular communication interpretations shape how nonprofit workers understand work experiences?

Metamorphosis

The metamorphosis stage is the peak of the organizational assimilation process because it is when individuals become fully participating members of the organization (Jablin, 1987).

Where the encounter stage ends and the metamorphosis stage begins varies for individuals (Jablin, 2001). Knowing when the metamorphosis stage actually begins is not as important as what takes place during this stage. When individuals no longer consider themselves “new” provides a distinction of the encounter stage ending and the metamorphosis stage beginning (Kramer, 2010). During the metamorphosis stage, individuals learn new and modify preexisting attitudes and behaviors to align with the expectations of the organization to be totally accepted into the organization (Jablin, 1987). At this stage, individuals are “in” on the jokes that are part of the organization’s culture (Heiss & Carmack, 2012).

An important process occurring during the metamorphosis stage is role negotiation, where individuals interact with others to modify their position (Jablin, 2001). Other organizational members work to shape the individual to meet the needs and expectations of the organization, while the individual attempts to change the organization to meet his or her needs and expectations (Kramer, 2010). Both task and relational responsibilities can be modified during role negotiation (Kramer, 2010). Role negotiation complicates organizational assimilation theory’s stage model as it involves individuals experiencing some of the previous stages over again as they change and modify their work roles (Jablin, 2001). During the metamorphosis stage, individuals experience turning points as members of the organization, where they transition from an outsider to an insider or come to the understanding that they should separate from the organization (Bullis & Bach, 1989), which gives them a new perspective of the workplace.

Ideal Worker Norms

Throughout the socialization stages, individuals are introduced to and grapple with the understanding of what it means to be an ideal worker and what it means to be an ideal worker in

their particular organization. These expectations create an ideal worker norm. “Norms are broad rules of behavior that govern our expectations of others and of ourselves, and which carry penalties for those who deviate from the rules” (Drago, 2007, p. 7). Ideal worker norms expect individuals to prioritize work through spending the majority of their time and energy dedicated to that work, justified by their high levels of passion and loyalty to their work (Drago, 2007). A concept mostly focused on women, the ideal worker norm is experienced by all individuals who are at odds with what their expected organizational identity is and what their personal expectations are (Reid, 2015). Americans glorify organizational work filled with measureable hours and time input (Kelly, Ammons, Chermack, & Moen, 2010; Schulte, 2014). The ideal worker norms of being highly passionate and highly committed are depicted as being taken to extreme levels in the nonprofit sector (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010). These unique expectations the nonprofit worker has of the work and of themselves as workers leads to the question:

RQ₃: How do young nonprofit workers use communication to shape their nonprofit worker identities?

“Individuals cannot become functioning members of organizations and organizations cannot sustain themselves without socialization” (Ashforth, Sluss, & Harrison, 2007, p. 54). Considering the crucial function of socialization for organizations and individuals, it is necessary to deepen the understanding of organizational socialization. While some scholars have criticized the stage model approach to organizational socialization for being restrictive (Bullis, 1993; Smith & Turner, 1995), this study adopts the stance of Kramer and Miller (1999) by seeking to build upon the previous research of the organizational socialization stage model by applying it to nonprofit workers.

The development and modification of work expectations is evident in each stage of Jablin's (2001) organizational assimilation theory. The stages of anticipatory socialization and metamorphosis are particularly significant in regards to work expectations. The present study explores how communication is used to create and revise expectations held by nonprofit workers in reflecting on organizational assimilation experiences from education program experiences through early metamorphosis.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Researcher Reflexivity

As a graduate of a leadership educational program that housed a nonprofit-focused educational program, I developed an interest in my peers aspiring to work specifically in the nonprofit sector and how having this educational experience would affect them as practitioners. Even though not involved in the specific nonprofit-focused program, the courses I took within the leadership educational program largely focused on service-oriented work and required community engagement. I rarely saw an impact of the engaged service work within the community, which evolved into skepticism. While the service-oriented work was framed as a noble career path, I doubted the nobility of this work and the extent of intrinsic benefits provided by it. I questioned whether intrinsic rewards could outweigh the high sacrifices associated with nonprofit work. My peers in the nonprofit leadership program bought into the nobility of this work and positioned themselves for a career within the nonprofit sector by enrolling in the nonprofit-focused program.

Confused by the unique sector and even more unique education program, I sought to generate understanding of the experiences of the individuals during the creation and modification of expectations about nonprofit work. While being connected to a program and the people within the program invites me to recognize the value of this work, my skepticisms towards it also clouds the perspective.

Acknowledging my bias, I took several steps to ensure rigor in the research process. First, I worked with a committee of scholars to talk through my project design and findings to make sense of the data, helping to mitigate biases and portray a balanced analysis. Second, it is important that “qualitative researchers do not put words in members’ mouths, but rather attend to

viewpoints that diverge with those of the majority or with the author” (Tracy, 2010, p. 844). This study includes direct quotations from individuals who completed a non-profit focused education program and currently work in the nonprofit sector to illustrate the broad themes discussed in the findings (Tracy, 2010). To honor these voices, I also used member checking by sharing primary findings with each of my participants after analysis to confirm the study accurately represented their experiences (Tracy, 2013). This involved providing a draft of the study to all participants who provided an email address, as well summarizing the findings at the end of phone interviews to confirm the summaries were accurate.

Study Design

Embracing that reality is socially constructed, I position myself and this study in the interpretative paradigm. Qualitative methodology was chosen to gain insight into the experiences of nonprofit workers and capture participants’ understanding (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Specifically, to enhance understanding of the socialization of nonprofit workers, I conducted qualitative interviews, which have the capacity to “elucidate subjectively lived experiences and viewpoints from the respondents’ perspective” (Tracy, 2013, p. 132). From an interpretative standpoint the interviews create space for the co-creation of meaning in the interaction of the research and the participant (Tracy, 2013). Interviews are beneficial in providing rich data to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences. Aiming for depth rather than breadth, the interview process allowed for flexibility to ask about and follow up on the participant’s experiences (Tracy, 2013).

Participants

To increase understanding of the organizational socialization process of nonprofit workers, participants included individuals who 1) recently graduated from a nonprofit program

of study and 2) were currently working in the nonprofit sector for at least one year. By narrowing the participant qualifications for the study, the interviews had the opportunity to capture reflections of participants' previous expectations before entering nonprofit work (anticipatory) and the current perspective of nonprofit work they have (metamorphosis) to give insight into how expectations were created and modified. Requiring approximately one year of employment took into consideration the honeymoon period employees experience that begins to decrease at six months and fully ends after one year on the job (Bowell et al., 2009). Eleven individuals participated in this study and interviewing was concluded when no new data emerged, representing theoretical saturation (Tracy, 2013).

Table 1. Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Self-Identified Gender	Self-Identified Race	Age	Nonprofit work (In years)	Industry
Annie	Female	White	23	1	Family Health
Cady	Female	White	44	1.5	Hunger
Camilla	Female	White	22	1	Apparel
Carlie	Female	White	24	2	Mental Health
Charlotte	Female	White	29	5.5	Social Work
Collin	Male	White	23	4	Literacy
Claire	Female	White	24	3	Children's Health
Jack	Male	White	24	1	Teen Development
Natalie	Female	White	26	5	Nonprofit Development
Roger	Male	White	25	2	Homelessness
Sophia	Female	White	23	1	International Development

Participants' ages ranged from 22 to 44 years old. All the participants self-identified as white, with eight females and three males. Educational program types included academic minors with an emphasis in nonprofit work and academic undergraduate majors. Participants represented a variety of nonprofit organizations with no two participants working for the same organization. Organizations ranged from small grassroots to large national organizations, including a diversity of services from the apparel industry, to illiteracy in rural communities, and even serving other nonprofit organizations in a specific city.

Procedures

Participant Recruitment

To locate participants who met the narrow parameters for this study (nonprofit education and at least one year in a nonprofit position), I used personal contacts and snowball sampling techniques. "This involves asking participants for recommendations of acquaintances who might qualify for participation, leading to 'referral chains'" (Robinson, 2014, p. 13). Snowball sampling allowed participants to identify others who share a similar experience (Tracy, 2013) and enabled me to connect with potential participants who were harder to identify (Robinson, 2014; Tracy, 2013). I also contacted a nonprofit-focused education program to create a direct link to potential participants. By contacting alumni of the education program, the chain of referral expanded to allow for more participants. Additionally, I connected with colleagues whose institutions housed nonprofit-focused educational programs to expand types of education programs included.

Data Collection

In order to become sensitized to the experiences of the participants, I conducted two and a half hours of field observations in classes offered through a nonprofit-focused program, met

with the instructor, and looked over course syllabi informing the interview protocol. Then participant data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) conducted both face-to-face and by phone. Interviews lasted between 41 and 51 minutes and averaged 46 minutes. Interviews were used to gather descriptions of events that occurred for the participant and to further understand the participants' perspective on their experience (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Acknowledging "the research interview is an interpersonal situation, a conversation between two partners about a theme of mutual interest" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 123), I first built rapport with each participant based on common interests in nonprofit work and education. After gaining permission from the participant, the interview was audio recorded. Each participant was informed that the recording could be stopped at any point they requested. Early conversation included an overview of the study before beginning with questions from the interview guide.

Interview guide explained

I used an interview guide which allowed for probing questions and flexibility throughout the interviews (see Appendix A) and created an environment that invited the participant to open up so I could listen carefully and reflect on their answers (Tracy, 2013). Interview questions concentrated on participant expectations about nonprofit organizations, both before entering the sector and currently as nonprofit workers, while allowing participants to guide the interview based on their personal experiences. This format provided information about anticipatory socialization and metamorphosis stages for nonprofit workers.

The interview questions and follow-up questions encouraged participants to share narratives and provide specific examples to gather rich data. The first question encouraged discussion of their experiences, asking "How did you first become interested in nonprofit work?"

This prompted participants to reflect on past experiences and conversations that were important as they started to realize their personal interest in pursuing nonprofit work. From this question, follow up questions targeted specific influences to help determine their role anticipatory socialization sources and how this ultimately led participants to a nonprofit-focused educational program.

Educational experience questions (i.e. “What certain takeaways do you use from your education in your work?” and “What is something that you use you would have learned before entering the sector?”) were asked to answer the first and second research questions. Follow up questions helped clarify and expand on participants’ responses (i.e. “In what specific way have you utilized that takeaway?” and “Why do you feel that it is important to learn this before entering the nonprofit sector?”).

The conversation then transitioned to discuss their current nonprofit work experience to capture the metamorphosis stage. This section provided information answering the third research question pertaining to how communication shapes nonprofit worker identities. This discussion began with participants describing their current nonprofit organization and technical aspects of their job. The discussion broadened to gain information on their perspective of the entire nonprofit sector based on their experiences (i.e. “What are the benefits of working for a nonprofit?” and “What are the challenges of working for a nonprofit?”). Follow up questions were asked to generate examples of their personal experiences and identify how they understood benefits and challenges of their work.

Lastly, discussion converged education with nonprofit work experiences, including questions about aspects they would change about the nonprofit sector and/or their education. This portion of the interview also involved asking participants to provide advice for students

currently in the anticipatory stage (“What advice would you give those who currently seeking education to work in the nonprofit sector?”). This furthered the discussion of nonprofit educational preparation and participants’ opinion of how individuals should construct their experiences.

Finally, demographic questions including participants’ age, self-identified race, and self-identified sex were asked to contextualize the findings. Questions also included information about how long the participants worked in the nonprofit sector and at specific organizations. What kind of nonprofit-focused educational program (certificate, minor, major, etc.) was discussed in the initial recruiting of the participant and is included in the participant demographic information.

Data Analysis

This study adopted Ellingson’s (2013) approach to qualitative data analysis as “the process of separating aggregated texts (oral, written, or visual) into smaller segments of meaning for close consideration, reflection, and interpretation” (p. 414). Analysis and data collection occurred simultaneously, which allowed me to adjust interview questions to “correct tendencies to follow preconceived notions about what is happening in the field” and “fill conceptual gaps” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 29). For example, questions were added in the interview guide about the interview and selection process of participants’ nonprofit organization in order to generate data to bridge the anticipatory and metamorphosis stages.

First, I transcribed the audiotaped interviews verbatim for analysis. By transcribing the interviews myself, I had the opportunity to become more intimate with the data (Tracy, 2013). This resulted in 142 single-spaced typed pages.

After an initial reading of the transcripts, I started with line-by-line coding to identify segments related to the research questions (Saldana, 2015). Initial coding created “first-level codes” that focused more on description and not interpretation (Tracy, 2013, p. 189). The first round provided a space to get closer to what the participants actually said and tended to be *in vivo* codes or codes that use the actual word or phrase of the participant to stay true to the participant’s voice (Tracy, 2013). This type of attention to detail with the data assisted in creating more insightful interpretations later on in the analysis process (Tracy, 2013). I read, reflected on, and provided a short description code such as “hands-on experience” or “required service.”

Second, I revisited the transcripts to produce “interpretive second-level codes” which “serve to explain, theorize, and synthesize” the data (Tracy, 2013, p. 194). Second-level codes go beyond description and interpret the data by searching for patterns and processes (Tracy, 2013). For example, second-level codes included “intentionality” and “meaningful work.”

Third, I revisited the theoretical framework’s literature to place data excerpts about the experiences that fit into the anticipatory or metamorphosis stages. This allowed me to concentrate on each stage of the socialization process as it pertained to the research questions. Then I created broad themes (i.e. socialization of expectations) that looked specifically for salient messages about expectations among the participants’ reflections and perceptions. The themes were identified by carefully considering and grouping together the codes gathered during the previous rounds of coding. This process is considered axial coding, in which I reconstructed the data that were broken into the smaller codes during the first part of the analysis process by finding relationships that make “conceptual sense” (Tracy, 2013, p. 195).

Throughout the research process, I practiced memo-writing to organize the data ultimately into established themes. Writing memos helped me reflect on the data by detailing emerging themes related to the research questions in which it is “the pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 162). While memos serve the purpose of defining and comparing codes, memo-writing is encouraged from the start of the research process to stop all other work on the project and think about the data (Charmaz, 2014).

I began writing memos after the first two interviews were collected. Memos were not deleted, instead I added new information from additional interviews and made adjustments as appropriate. For example one memo changed from focusing on the “benefits of the nonprofit education program” after starting with “providing a language” and adding “giving them a perspective.” This allowed me to document the process and interaction with the data throughout the entire collection and analysis of the data. Beyond ideas and interpretations, the memos included direct quotes from the participants to honor their voice; therefore, helping the research stay true to the participants’ perspective.

Chapter 4 - Findings

Considering the 11 interviews with individuals about their nonprofit-focused education and transition into the nonprofit sector, all of the participants described a similar *role anticipatory socialization* stage. Socialization occurred well before enrolling in nonprofit college programs. Participants described being socialized into nonprofit work by their families and early education, including required volunteer work for school activities, which acts as a strong socialization agent for nonprofit work (Lee & Wilkins, 2011). Jack credited his initial interest in nonprofit work from being “raised in a family that it was very important to everybody to give back to the community,” and Collin reflected on first being exposed by volunteering “during high school.” Participants then chose to go into a nonprofit-focused education program in college with a required internship component. Natalie recalled her internship experience “as the experience that I got the most out of” and Claire explained that her internship “filled a gap” in what was missing from the coursework in the education program. Family and education are influential sources of socialization during the role anticipatory socialization stage, which involves deciding what type of career to pursue (Kramer, 2010). The role anticipatory socialization stage continued on into college for the participants by choosing a nonprofit-focused education program.

Socialization of Expectations

To answer RQ₁ about how education programs use communication practices to socialize expectations of nonprofit work, participants spoke about their nonprofit-focused education experience, recalling how these programs emphasized nonprofit work being synonymous with meaningful work. Specifically, there were two themes about meaningful work. First, that to be

meaningful, the work must be personal. Second, because nonprofit work provides intrinsic benefits, the challenges associated with it are justified.

Personally Meaningful Work

As previously established, nonprofit work can be considered meaningful work (Mirvis & Hackett, 1983). The idea of meaningful work has become a societal norm and according to the participants is perpetuated by educational programs. Sophia reflected on a memorable message from her instructor in the nonprofit-focused program:

Actually one of my professors always used to ask us what is the thing that keeps you up at night? Like what's the problem that bothers you and what is the thing that . . . gets you out of bed in the morning . . . what motivates you. He's like the answers to those problems or those questions are probably the thing you should be working for in your life. That was kind of like... I can do that as a job.

Sophia's reflection recognizes the importance the educational program conveyed on working towards one specific cause that the *individual* personally cares about; this framing implies that it is not nonprofit work generally that is meaningful work, but nonprofit work that is *personally meaningful*. Jack confirmed this interpretation by providing advice to narrow interests, "I mean find the one or two topics that really spark your interest and kind of cater your – cater your schooling and everything else around that area and your volunteering around that." Following in a similar vein, Claire advised prospective nonprofit workers:

Any issue pretty much has, like, nonprofits established directed toward it and so if, you know, you wake up and, like, and the first thing that you think about in the morning is that thing that you really care about, like, you should look for a job in a nonprofit

because, um, there are frustrations but there are real things that you need to do that, um, really matter, and you know you feel really good about it at the end of the day.

In agreement Annie noted, “I do think that’s important in the nonprofit sector that you kind of have to have...some sort of interest in the mission.”

Participants expressed a desire to have high levels of passion and commitment to their work and held this expectation of their coworkers. Sophia described, “Everyone [at her work] is really caring and yeah attached in some way.” Further, Roger explained that the personal connection to the work is important because those employees “tend to stay.” Romanticizing meaningful work contributes to the ideal of people working for something greater than themselves (Wrzesniewski, 2003). Although initially thought of as entirely altruistic work to help others, the participants expressed that because the nonprofit work is personally meaningful, they benefit from it. By framing work in this significant and positive way, participants also expressed a willingness to put up with the challenges that come along with this type of work.

Justifiable Challenges

Educational programs’ influence goes beyond instructors’ messages and into the coursework. Camilla explained that a class project exposed her to “the mess of the nonprofit sector.” She continued, “I had to think about board members. I had to think about grants. I had to think about mission and vision statements. I had to think about funding. I had to think about, um, risk.”

While the educational programs introduced participants to challenges in the nonprofit sector, the meaningful work narrative became a means to justify why participants should still work in the nonprofit sector despite its challenges. As noted by Claire, despite some of the “frustrations” that come along with a nonprofit job, participants believed that “there are real

things that ... really matter,” which makes this work worth it. In the middle of describing her organization’s programs, Cady said, “I love it. I absolutely love it. Some days are stressful as all get out and hard, but at the end of the day I always feel good about what I did.” Cady admitted that while nonprofit work could be difficult, the good feelings from seeing she had an “impact” on people outweigh the negative stress.

Natalie shared the same sentiment, focusing specifically on the negative of low pay. She shared, “I would much rather, um, enjoy getting out of bed every morning, um, and be getting paid half of you know whatever, um, I would be getting paid to go somewhere that only focused on profit and wasn’t as fulfilling.” Natalie highlights a shift away from the perspective of work to earn money to support herself to the perspective that work should be a means to reach personal fulfillment. Interestingly, the idea of earning money and being fulfilled are situated in opposition of each other. Cady explained a challenge of nonprofit work is “money, because for the most part, and not in my pocket . . . [but] to serve the mission.” She interrupted her thought to clarify that she was not complaining about money for herself, but money for the mission. By not caring about extrinsic benefits, the participants framed themselves and those who were in nonprofit classes with them as “caring” and “altruistic.”

Charlotte shared, “I mean you get to work towards something that you believe in. I think that’s the biggest, um, benefit. Um, I think any time you’re spending time giving of yourself for, um, for other people; you get a benefit from that.” Therefore, according to the participants, personal fulfillment is found through helping others; this benefit justifies engaging in nonprofit work despite the challenges associated with it. Further, personal compensation is downplayed to highlight the importance of funding the mission. Nonprofit work positions the intrinsic reward to be more valuable to a person than the extrinsic benefits (England & Folbre, 1999). Participants’

narratives support that the higher satisfaction from meaningful work often results in individuals working even more when they receive little extrinsic reward (Wrzesniewski, 2003). While all participants spoke to how important it is to find their work meaningful, some were more successful than others at finding work meaningful to them.

Diverging Narratives

In response to RQ₂, how do particular communication interpretations shape how nonprofit workers understand work experiences, two distinct narratives developed from the data. The first narrative the straight path ($n = 5$) follows the desired or traditional track of entering a job that participants find meaningful and staying at the job to be promoted. The winding path ($n = 6$) involved struggling to find a job that participants considered meaningful; therefore, using communication to make sense of their experiences that did not align with the ideal worker narrative.

Straight Path

“It’s about feeling fulfilled and if my job has a lot of purpose and, um, I definitely get that here.”

Five participants described traveling down a straight path and finding their first job meaningful, adhering to ideal worker norms of commitment and passion. The participants in this subset gave shorter responses to questions during the interviews and often the questions needed to be repeated and/or rephrased to illicit a response. Participants in this subset explained they were patient and intentional about their job search. They drove the job search process by seeking out the right jobs and making effort to find opportunities within their respective organizations to personally challenge them and to advance internally.

Table 2. Participant Paths

Narrative	Pseudonym	Self-Identified Gender	Self-Identified Race	Age	Nonprofit work (In years)	Industry
Straight Path	Charlotte	Female	White	29	5.5	Social Work
Straight Path	Sophia	Female	White	23	1	International Development
Straight Path	Annie	Female	White	23	1	Family Health
Straight Path	Carlie	Female	White	24	2	Mental Health
Straight Path	Cady	Female	White	44	1.5	Hunger
Winding Path	Collin	Male	White	23	4	Literacy
Winding Path	Camilla	Female	White	22	1	Apparel
Winding Path	Jack	Male	White	24	1	Teen Development
Winding Path	Natalie	Female	White	26	5	Nonprofit Development
Winding Path	Claire	Female	White	24	3	Children's Health
Winding Path	Roger	Male	White	25	2	Homelessness

Intentional and Patient Job Search

Straight path participants felt fulfilled in their nonprofit work, describing their job search process as both intentional and patient. Participants described intentionally applying to organizations by considering the nonprofit's overall mission. For example, Annie explained that having a "connection" to her nonprofit's mission is what attracted her to apply for her position and Sophia specifically sought out "internationally-focused" nonprofit organizations that were "sustainable and empowering."

Cady described her job search process:

I spent the whole summer with my kids and I just stayed home . . . but I looked for jobs all summer long and so every job that looked like it fit that I just applied for because I wanted to help people. I applied for organizations that were in the LGBTQ sector. I applied anything that I felt like I had a passion for and I would make a difference in, like I'm not – I like animals, but I'm not passionate about it, so I stayed away from those types of jobs, you know, because you don't want to go into it and only be half-way there.

Straight path participants also explained how the job search took time. Within Cady's response above, she described being able to spend the summer after graduation searching for a job and paying attention specifically to organizations that she has a passion for. Annie explained how she "shadowed" at her organization in "October," but did not start working at her job until "July" after graduation. By being patient and sticking to organizations that are of personal interest, straight path participants reasoned that they were able to find the meaningful work they desired. The narratives suggest that searching specifically for organizations that align with personal values makes the socialization process smoother for entering and staying at the organization. The intentional job search process improved the chance to find personally meaningful work; through purposefully engaging in *organizational anticipatory socialization* by identifying and connecting with the organization's mission and values, participants indicated they were in control in finding the right organization.

Climbing the Ladder

Participants on both paths described needing to be "challenged" in their workplace; however, those on the straight path described looking for a challenge and opportunities within

their current organization. Charlotte, who had been in the organization for five years, describes her work role transitions:

I started out being a visit supervisor for families in the child welfare system, um, and then I started doing some office work instead . . . in the same program, but . . . helping with some of the billing and referrals and different things in the office . . . and then I became a supervisor over a team of people in that same program and I was in that position, I think, for two or three years, and then I moved, I just moved to (city) a year ago, and that's when I started working with the foster care [for the same organization].

Charlotte was able to stay loyal to the organization while continuing to challenge herself by gaining new responsibilities.

Annie entered her organization within a year of graduating college and has found new opportunities to keep her in the same organization.

Well, right now, I'm technically part-time . . . I'm starting full-time this week. I'm actually adding . . . , another kind of part-time role, so I'm gonna be the event and volunteer coordinator.

Annie described the organization as being “really helpful . . . making sure that I can kind of stick around a little while.” The support of the organization helped her meet her full-time job needs and her desire to work with the development team. Annie's story supports the idea that having high commitment to the mission often results in employee retention despite little financial compensation or benefits (Kim & Lee, 2007).

Straight path participants described how they were able to find opportunities in their organizations that created new challenges and an increased passion for serving the mission. Participants on the straight path sought and received opportunities internally, which facilitated

them fulfilling the ideal worker norm of being loyal to the organization. Specifically, participants' expressed desire to "stick around" and work through job transitions and challenges adheres to the societal expectations of how ideal employees should approach work. Further, as explained in the answer to the first research question, in nonprofit work, the ideal worker finds personally meaningful work and navigates challenges as part of that work; this contributes to heightened expectations of commitment and passion for nonprofit workers. Having a high level of passion and commitment is described as being necessary for nonprofit workers to succeed (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010). The participants on the straight path described their experiences in a way that fulfilled and perpetuated the extreme ideal worker norms for nonprofit work.

Straight path participants attributed their success to intrinsic motivations, including selecting the right organization and committing to the organization to advance. They viewed successful advancement as something they had worked to achieve. For these participants, their work expectations shaped in the *anticipatory socialization* stage were met, allowing them to live out the ideal worker norms unlike the participants on the winding path.

Winding Path

"I think we graduate thinking like we're gonna change the world, and all these great things are gonna happen, um, and sometimes in jobs that's not always, you know, the case, and so my first job was a real challenge."

Six of the 11 participants characterized their experience as a winding path and did not find the fulfillment they were looking for right after college graduation; either they were unhappy with current employment or had already left their first job in search of that fulfillment. During the *role anticipatory socialization* process the meaningful work framing of a nonprofit career created an expectation for participants that their work should be their "passion" or

“calling.” When the participants reached later stages of organizational socialization and they did not believe their work to be meaningful, this created dissonance between expectations created in the *role anticipatory socialization* stage and their current job situation. Six participants followed this path using communication to make sense of their experiences by framing their experiences as a product of their generation, the job market, and the unrealistic expectations education. The participants use conforming to one ideal norm work (high-levels of passion) to justify defying another ideal worker norm (high-levels of commitment). As a result, these interviews involved longer explanations to answer interview questions, including interruptions in their sentences as they made sense of their experiences.

Generational

Participants who did not find personally meaningful work and had either already exited their first organization or were planning to exit their current organization reasoned their actions by being a part of the millennial generation. Winding path participants explained how work is approached differently now compared to how previous generations who valued loyalty to a company. They reasoned that changing jobs is the new normal for this generation of workers. For example, Natalie responded to criticisms she has heard about her generation moving from job-to-job and positions and reinterpreted this behavior as a positive action.

People say ‘oh millennials they never stay anywhere more than two years,’ but for someone to be able to bring . . . a wealth of experience from different organizations I think can be a little bit of an edge.

While Natalie believed that having different work experiences can give you “an edge,” Claire also considered what this might mean to those who still operate within the traditional narrative of job loyalty.

I worried a lot, you know, about what that would look like on a resume, you know, quitting your first job after a year, but I just kind of decided like, ugh, it's not worth it to not be happy, you know, or to not be challenged, um, so I went for it and I am really glad that I did.

Claire prioritized her happiness and personal work desires above the company loyalty that previous generations have been described to value. Personal fulfillment in a job was important as Collin described his generation as “The most socially engaged, care-oriented generation in a long time, and I think, U.S. culture” and Jack characterized them as “committed to making a difference.” Not only is this generation longing for their work to have a purpose (Moore, 2014), they also want this purpose to be personal. Standing in direct juxtaposition are the ideals of work for the benefit of others versus work for personal benefit. This generation of workers desires both ideals simultaneously, believing they can be found through nonprofit work. As indicated in addressing the first research question, participants were socialized by educational programs to believe nonprofit work should be personally meaningful; however, when the work is meaningful to others but not to them, the participants struggled with the tension. By using communication to reconcile this rupture, participants ultimately favored their own well-being over others. Understanding that personally meaningful work is such a critical component for the participants engaging in nonprofit work, it helped them justify leaving a job for another that may be more meaningful to them.

Job Market

When describing searching for a job as they transitioned from education to the workforce, participants spoke about the reality of the job market. This new workforce generation understands that companies may be in a different position now than they were with previous

generations. For example Natalie explained, “As millennials we don’t feel that loyalty from the company anymore because companies can’t provide that loyalty anymore.” This comment signifies one reason the millennial generation of workers is switching jobs is beyond personal control, but actually a consequence of growing up in a bad economy.

Jack, who is still struggling to find a fulfilling nonprofit job, describes what he found in his search:

There are plenty of openings for people that have you know 5 to 10 years’ experience in nonprofits . . . but they’re pretty limited when it comes to entry level, so I’m not sure if that, that’s just because there’s not many jobs on the market.

Jack’s interpretation of the job market speaks to experiences of the young graduate who feels limited by lack of work experience; therefore, Jack discussed struggling to even find jobs available that he believes he is qualified for. Jack’s comments support the finding that nonprofit organizations are seeking more experienced professionals as opposed to the new graduate (Wang & Ashcraft, 2012). This realization prompted Jack to volunteer at an organization he felt a personal connection with, while working for a different organization to gain additional experience in the hopes of eventually obtaining his desired meaningful work.

Despite her interests in specific missions, Claire described her job search as being pressured to find any job, sharing:

I was sort of at that point where a lot of people are when you graduate you just feel like you have to get a job and like all your friends are getting jobs and you know you’re not . . . I applied for a couple jobs that I was really interested in and just wasn’t hearing anything and so by July after graduation and this job came up I just kind of took it without even really knowing what it was because I felt like I needed a job, you know.

Ultimately, the jobs were not available and the pressure to obtain a job after college like her peers resulted in applying and taking a job without a strong belief in the organization's mission.

Admitting that settling for a job was practical, but not ideal, she goes on to say:

I don't think I was as intentional in the job seeking . . . aspect because there was that pressure to just get a job, but . . . hopefully other students take more time . . . and really be patient and wait . . . for something to come up, but obviously that's not always possible . . . you gotta pay the bills.

While advising others, Claire also makes an important recognition that sometimes patience is not an option due to practical concerns, such as paying bills. The lack of persistence during the *organizational anticipatory socialization* stage created a challenging experience for the winding path participants, positioning *organizational anticipatory socialization* as an important discernment stage in finding personally meaningful work.

Educational Unrealistic Expectations

Even though the participants on the winding path expressed a deep desire to engage in meaningful work, they also expressed frustration with the meaningful work narrative highlighted in their education programs believing that it set unrealistic expectations of nonprofit work. Claire framed the transition from education to work being a "harsh reality" due to her first job not reflecting the values of "inclusivity" and "thoughtfulness" taught and practiced within the her educational program.

Unique to nonprofit work is the focus on making progress on social issues. Camilla explained how the problems were set up in the classroom and how they were not as simple in the real world that she is now working in:

I just feel like it's messy because the people you're helping don't always want to be helped and . . . why it worked in the classroom and why it's clean in the classroom is because it's a classroom problem. The problem is meant to be solved.

From Camilla's perspective, the classroom set up the expectation that problems always have answers and through nonprofit work, the problems of the world can be fixed. Collin came to realize the difficult position of an instructor for this line of work, explaining:

It's hard right because you don't want to crush someone's aspirations with pessimism but at the same time it seems like, um, it can be salutary just realize that the problems exist for good reasons and the problems exist because they're really deeply entrenched systematic ills in our society . . . trying to give people healthy dose of realism as they step into this kind of stuff I think is really important.

While it is a difficult position for those in higher education, Collin explained that being realistic in understanding the world's problems is important, particularly if it is the role of the instructor to prepare students to enter the business of helping make progress. Understanding that these students are planning to enter the nonprofit sector, Jack explained that he "wasn't exactly prepared on what it takes to find those jobs . . . I mean if we, if we learned a little bit more about how to actually translate our education into a career that would have been helpful."

Notably, only those who are struggling or have struggled to find meaningful work expressed sentiments of unrealistic expectations created by their education program. Buying into the belief that higher education paves the way towards a specific career choice (Lair & Wieland, 2012), participants' explained how their expectations of work were violated when they did not find work meaningful. By not fulfilling the expectations created in the *role anticipatory socialization* stage, the participants did not experience the *metamorphosis* stage. The winding

path participants looked for external justification (societal shifts, job market and education programs) for not meeting ideal worker norm expectations while the straight path participants attributed their success to internal factors (intentional and patient job search, and work hard and climb the ladder). People relying on an external locus of control believe that the circumstances are due to outside causes while those having an internal locus of control attribute the circumstances to intrinsic factors (Cupach, Canary, & Spitzberg, 2010). Within this study, the winding path participants can be described as relying on an external locus of control and the straight path participants relying on an internal locus of control.

Those who found nonprofit work that met expectations did not have to make sense of their experience in the same way as those who followed the path that did not comply with the expectations. The participants telling the winding path narrative used communication to make sense of their own experience of not meeting expectations; this was evident in the reflective interviews given by the participants that included long utterances after questions with little probing. The use of communication allowed them to do some identity repair work by attributing their path to external attributions. Identity work involves using communication to actively process how individuals see themselves and how others see them (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002), which contributed to the findings for RQ₃.

Nonprofit Worker Identity

After understanding the socialization process of nonprofit workers, findings from RQ₁ and RQ₂ contribute to answering RQ₃, which asks: How do young nonprofit workers use communication to shape their worker identities? The findings highlight the prioritization of nonprofit workers' professional identity, associating with a cause, and the implications of identifying as a nonprofit worker in terms of confronting and changing existing stereotypes.

You Are Your Work

Claire “feel(s) really good about it at the end of the day,” Jack “can sleep better at night,” and Natalie “enjoy(s) getting out of bed every morning” because they believe nonprofit work allows them to make an impact for a cause that is personally relevant. The participant descriptions suggest that identity as a specific type of worker affects aspects of their lives beyond the workday. For the participants, work became the reason they were living as they conformed to the ideal worker norms of high-levels of passion and commitment (Drago, 2007). The extremism of work taking precedence over a person’s other identities is not only expected but understood as necessary when engaging in personally meaningful work (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010); therefore, the ideal workers norms are intensified because of the identification with work.

Understanding the importance placed on meaningful work, the distinction of work as meaningful and work as personally meaningful becomes crucial if worker identity is prioritized over other identities (Kirby & Buzzanell, 2014). If an individual works for a nonprofit, he or she becomes associated with the specific cause of the nonprofit. Roger explained that when he identifies as a nonprofit worker, he also must then discuss his organization’s cause of homelessness. More specifically he also must explain the:

Misunderstanding on the public end of the side of like what your mission is and like what the issues you’re addressing are ‘cause like especially with homelessness. There’s a lot of like misunderstanding of like what causes it or like what type of people are homeless.

Charlotte explained that she alternates between describing herself as working for a “nonprofit” and working in “social work” when she describes her job to others because they might have “pretty strong negative feelings” regarding the demographic of people she works

with. By framing her work more generally as nonprofit, she distances herself from a cause some might see as controversial; however, identifying as a nonprofit worker has its own implications.

Confronting/Changing the Stereotypes

By identifying as a nonprofit worker, these participants had to confront the wide spectrum of opinions about their work. Jack explained the reaction he received after telling for-profit workers about his major:

They kind of scoff at you and they wondered why you picked that. There's no money in nonprofit. You know that's the stigma that it carries, and I understand that but . . . it has no basis to it and the fact that people are so much more concerned, the majority of people, are so much more concerned with personal gains . . . is a little concerning.

For Jack, the for-profit workers did not understand the motivation to work for little money, suggesting that a similar perspective of Clair's (1996) nonprofit work not being a real job is still held today. Others who were not socialized to value intrinsic benefits over extrinsic benefits do not view the nonprofit worker positively.

For Roger, it was assumed that as a nonprofit worker his work must be fulfilling. "One example is when you're like oh I work at a nonprofit people are like wow that must be really rewarding . . . that must be so fulfilling." Others assumed nonprofit work to be fulfilling regardless of whether the participants actually felt fulfilled by their work. The responses of others to the nonprofit worker identity center around the "stigma" of nonprofit work not offering the extrinsic benefits the for-profit sector provides concluding that this work must then provide intrinsic benefits. By confronting stereotypes about nonprofit work, the participants are confirming their identity as a nonprofit worker.

While some may still hold negative opinions of nonprofit work, these opinions may also be starting to change. Charlotte explained that people who are “quite a bit older . . . still might see it as you don’t make any money.” Charlotte indicated that the stigma is still held today, but it is really only older people who hold that belief because younger generations are “pretty flexible” with work. Natalie shared her thoughts on the changing opinions of nonprofit work, attributing some of the change to nonprofit-focused educational programs being offered as the:

First big step towards really bringing the nonprofit job up to the same level as a marketing job . . . a banking job . . . [an] engineer job . . . I think that really levels it out because it’s saying here are special skills that you need to be in this industry . . . it’s not something that you just join haphazardly though a lot of people do and it works out fine, but I think making it intentional makes it an intentional career path for people, and I think that’s huge. I think that’s the way of the future.

With the belief that higher education is a direct link to a career (Lair & Wieland, 2012), having an education program focused on a career legitimizes it. Annie also commented on the changing nonprofit sector, “I think a lot of it is young people too . . . just being more education offered about it.” Annie expressed the younger generations are being socialized differently and therefore are forming more accepting opinions about nonprofit work. The participants’ explanations represent a shift toward Eikenberry and Kluver’s (2004) argument of nonprofits being viewed as “vehicles for creating and maintaining a strong civil society” (p.138). Ultimately, taking on a nonprofit worker identity means taking on the opinions that surround the organizational work, but nonprofit workers are hopeful that the opinions are changing to be more positive, accrediting the change to socialization particularly in education.

All participants shared a similar *role anticipatory socialization* stage, explaining that their education contributed to expectations that nonprofit work would be personally meaningful, which justified the associated challenges in nonprofit work. After completing the nonprofit-focused education program participants developed two distinct narratives based on their experiences. Those that followed the straight path met expectations created during *role anticipatory socialization* and confirmed ideal worker norms attributing the success to internal factors (being intentional and working hard to advance). Participants on the winding path did not meet *role anticipatory socialization* expectations; therefore, to make sense of their experiences they used external justification (job market, societal shifts, and education programs) to reframe ideal worker norms. Findings highlight the prioritization of participants' professional identity being especially prevalent for nonprofit workers as they associate themselves with a cause and the implications of identifying as a nonprofit worker in terms of confronting and changing existing stereotypes.

Chapter 5 - Implications

Considering the narratives of the nonprofit workers several theoretical implications are evident, pointing to possible future directions for communication research. The findings also suggest practical implications for nonprofit-focused educational programs, prospective nonprofit workers, and nonprofit organizations. Additionally, beneficial and problematic implications are outlined concerning personally meaningful work and future directions for scholarship.

Theoretical Implications and Future Directions for Scholars

Participant interviews complicate anticipatory socialization specifically for nonprofit work. At a very early age education programs are shaping millennial students and future generations by increasingly requiring service activities. Education is described as an important influential source in the anticipatory socialization stage (Jablin, 2001) and specifically in *role* anticipatory socialization (Kramer, 2010), which was confirmed by the participants. However, the participants discussed how their programs required service at specific organizations and also required an internship component, shifting into *organizational* anticipatory socialization and potentially the *encounter* stage. Interestingly, expectations of nonprofit work created by education programs were held onto by the participants even after they struggled to fulfill them; therefore, scholars should further their research efforts towards better understanding of education programs as a strong source in anticipatory socialization not just influencing general expectations of work but also expectations of specific types of work.

Future studies should explore how different student learning motivations (e.g. internal versus external) affect student experiences in education programs and what that the educational experiences mean for subsequent work experience. Understanding that education is just one

source of socialization (Kramer, 2010), it is also important to explore how other sources such as family create expectations of specific types of work.

Participants attributed their interest in nonprofit work to engagement in service activities both before and during college. With service acting as an influential socialization agent for nonprofit work (Lee & Wilkins, 2011), further exploration of increased service is important. . Nonprofit organizations allow individuals to become exposed to and enter organizations as volunteers. This unique exposure to an organization prompts a part of the anticipatory organizational socialization process not available to those in traditional for-profit organizations. Scholars should explore how the role of volunteering for nonprofit organizations impacts the socialization process of workers.

Educational Programs

Participants reflected on their education programs perpetuating the expectation of nonprofit work being personally meaningful; however, when the winding path participants did not fulfill this expectation, they struggled through unanticipated work experiences they were not prepared to handle. Considering the influential role education plays in role anticipatory socialization (Kramer, 2010), educational programs should expose students to other narratives beyond the ideal worker norm. This could mean bringing in alumni to speak in classes who have not had the traditional experience and have struggled with finding fulfillment as well as alumni who have been successful in finding personally meaningful work after graduation highlighting the time and effort put into the job search process to paint a more realistic picture upon entering the nonprofit sector. With exposure to different experiences, it may lessen the feeling of defeat a nonprofit worker may experience when his or her job does not meet the expectation of

fulfillment. Additionally, future research should investigate the role of inspirational messages in terms of both motivation and perceptions of realistic work.

Recognizing how volunteering and networking are described as crucial in finding a nonprofit job today, it is important for instructors and educational programs to facilitate opportunities for students to be more knowledgeable and intentional when they apply for a positions and begin the organizational anticipatory socialization stage. This could be to promote a professional development program that helps students to target specific areas of interest. With an emphasis on finding an individual's specific cause, the education program should allow for autonomy to choose what organization they work with for class projects and internships helping to provide hands-on opportunities.

Prospective Nonprofit Workers

While nonprofit-focused educational programs have responsibility to create realistic expectations for their students, the students have a responsibility for their success after graduation. Numerous assessment tools (e.g. StrengthQuest, Myers-Briggs) can provide students a basis for exploring what fields would match their talents. This could help student narrow their career search and fine tune what positions they might be best suited for in nonprofits.

As described by the straight path participants the job search takes patience; therefore, prospective nonprofit workers should start the job search process early. The job search process should start with volunteering and shadowing at organizations the individuals have an interest in making it easier for the prospective nonprofit worker to keep the job search process intentional. This action step can begin even before students begin college allowing them to gain experience to become a qualified applicant and narrow down their interests. By beginning early and

conducting an intentional job search, there is a higher chance of engaging in personally meaningful work.

Nonprofit Organizations

Through socialization processes, nonprofit employees identify with organizational missions (Jablin, 2001), in turn high commitment to the missions often results in employee retention (Kim & Lee, 2007). Nonprofit organizations can change and implement practices to help with the assimilation process to avoid turnover. They also should focus on and extend the encounter stage by conducting honest interviews about the position that detail the realistic expectations of the position. By having realistic expectations, individuals are more likely to commit to the job (Scholarios, Lockyer, & Johnson, 2003). Considering the desire to personally make an impact this generation has, nonprofit organizations should spend time explaining and allowing the new employee to see and understand how the position they are in helps make progress toward the mission of the organization.

Personally Meaningful Work

Viewing nonprofit work as being personally meaningful creates both beneficial and problematic implications. One benefit is that personally meaningful work may provide the impetus to fight for a cause deemed important and promote a culture of perseverance to overcome challenges. However, encouraging individuals to only seek out causes that are personally meaningful may result in important causes receiving inadequate attention and support. Another concern is if straight path participants are successful at finding personally meaningful work in their first job, they may not learn how to overcome potential adversities when something goes wrong. Whereas the winding path participants may be more committed when they find the right organization because they had to work hard to obtain the position. Future research should

investigate straight path and winding path participants longitudinally to gain an understanding of how these early career experiences impact later experiences and nonprofit worker identity.

Conclusion

By applying organizational assimilation theory to nonprofit education and work through interviews of nonprofit employees' experiences after completing a nonprofit education program, this study examined how nonprofit-focused educational programs shape perceptions of nonprofit work as personally meaningful; therefore, justifying challenges that come along with nonprofit work. After being socialized to follow their passions and being proclaimed the most socially engaged generation, millennials enter the workforce with expectations that are either met or violated, causing them to use communication to make sense of experiences that are different from earlier socialization processes. The expectations shape the nonprofit worker identity and the opinions surrounding nonprofit work. Findings suggest opinions about nonprofit work are shifting towards being a more acceptable line of work. Understanding the importance of socialization shaping the experiences of recent graduates of nonprofit-focused education programs, the education programs, prospective nonprofit workers, and nonprofit organizations can implement changes to improve the young nonprofit worker's transition from education to work.

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Appendix A - Interview Protocol

Interview Guide for Organizational Socialization of Nonprofit Workers.

1. How did you first become interested in working in the non-profit sector?
 - a. Can you describe a specific influence, such as specific person or experience?
 - b. What about this person or experience influenced your interest in nonprofits?
 - c. At about what age did you notice this influence?
2. Please tell me about your education for nonprofit work.
 - a. Were there certain things taught that helped in your learning?
 - i. If so, what were they?
 - b. What is something that you were taught that has stuck with you?
 - c. In what ways could your college education prepared you better?
 - d. What is something you wish you knew about nonprofit work before starting?
In what way do you wish you could have learned this?
3. When you first started what surprised you most about the work?
 - a. What specifically was unexpected?
 - b. How did it affect the way you viewed nonprofit work?
 - i. Can you describe a specific example?
4. Tell me about the nonprofit that you work at.
 - a. How did you find this organization?
 - b. What attracted you to it?
 - c. Why did you apply for a job at this organization over others?
 - d. How long have you worked here?
 - e. What is your specific position?

- f. How many hours during a typical week do you spend working?
5. What are the benefits of working for a nonprofit?
6. What are the challenges of working for a nonprofit?
 - a. If there are drawbacks, how do you negotiate the benefits and challenges of your kind of work?
7. If you could change, one thing about preparing to enter the nonprofit sector what would it be?
 - a. Why?
8. Would you encourage others to seek jobs in the nonprofit sector?
 - a. Why or Why not?
 - b. What advice would you give those who currently seeking education to work in the nonprofit sector?
9. Is there anything that you would like to add about your experience and interest in nonprofit work?
10. For recording purposes, I need to ask a few demographic questions.
 - a. How old are you?
 - b. What self-identified gender do you use?
 - c. What self-identified race are you?
 - d. Is there a pseudonym you would like to use?