Leveraging Organizational Socialization to Enhance Employability

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to make sense of the lived experiences of 140 professionals as they related to organizational socialization and employability. It offered the salient themes that emerged from interview, questionnaire, and focus group data collected from organizational members residing in the United States. Findings revealed that employability was enhanced when organizational members were able to manage or overcome traumatic workplace betrayals such as: 1) Sexism, 2) Racism, 3) Sexual Harassment, 4) Pay Disparities, 5) Threats to Safety, and 6) Fraudulent Complaints and/or Disciplinary Actions, etc. This work encompassed strategies to promote effective organizational socialization, which may help improve employability. Supporting an existing framework on organizational socialization, this research has implications for member retention and human resources management.

INTRODUCTION

In conjunction with honing their critical thinking skills to function in society, many professionals develop their talents, skills, and abilities to secure employment. It's imperative for firms to comprehend how organizational members experience organizations, so they can adequately prepare professionals for the workplace (Gates, 2009). Moreover, as societies around the United States become more diverse, according to the United States Census Bureau (2021) as well as Whitford (2020), scholars and practitioners will benefit from extending their comprehension of how employees are socialized and how they experience organizations, as talented employees can help organizations gain a competitive advantage (Gates, 2009; 2019). Consequently, organizations that are impervious to the influence socialization has on professionals will miss critical opportunities to enhance employability with superior socialization.

While employability could be a factor for some professionals, many organizations are wrestling with the challenge of attracting and retaining good talent. The great exodus, according to The Great Resignation: The Mass Exodus from the Workforce (2022), may have hiring managers frantic about retaining personnel while leaders desperately seek to keep them engaged (Gates, 2023; Macey & Schneider, 2008). These changing environments may have implications for organizational socialization (Jablin, 1984; 1987; 2001; Gates, 2009) as some of the beliefs about socialization may no longer resonate with organizational members nor scholars and practitioners. Extant research made assumptions about how organizational members were socialized (Jablin, 1984; 1987; 2001; Gates, 2009), and subsequent research needs to examine current organizational socialization frameworks to determine how they capture, or fail to capture, the essence of how employees perceive they are socialized into organizations (Gates, 2009) and how to remain employable.

Making sense of organizational socialization may help organizational members devise strategies to enhance their employability. Scholars suggest that organizational members simultaneously shape and react to their organizational settings through a process referred to as sense making (Thurlow & Mills, 2009). People enact their roles while they are also obtaining feedback from their environments, enabling them to modify their actions accordingly (Weick, 1988). Weick (1993) maintained that "The basic idea of sensemaking is that reality is an ongoing accomplishment that emerges from efforts to create order and make retrospective sense of what occurs" (p. 635). When it comes to organizational communication and organizational socialization,

many employees strive to make sense of their organizations in order to enhance their employability. They want to retain their jobs, so it becomes necessary to adhere to the cultural norms and values espoused by their respective organizations.

Through organizational socialization (Gates, 2009), members make sense of their respective organizations to enhance their employability. Organizational socialization encompasses learning the ropes of an organization (Allen, 1995; 1996), and savvy employees align themselves closely with the cultures of their organizations. This allows them to enjoy greater acceptance (Gates, 2023). Not everybody is embraced by organizations, and some organizational members don't desire integration due to incongruent values. Incompatible values may impede the ability of some organizational members to be fully embraced by their respective organizations, especially if said employees occupy spaces where marginalization is integrated into the fabric of those cultures (Gates, 2009; 2023). As a result, these employees may seek other strategies to enhance employability. When organizational members have difficulty making sense of environments that render them marginalized, they may contemplate leaving organizations or augmenting their skills with tactics to boost employability so they can stay. While most employees can readily identify hostile climates, they may not always know how to navigate them. In order to enhance employability, making sense of organizational socialization and how organizational members experience it may be one place to start.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employability

The term employability seems to have a multitude of meanings. It has been utilized differently in various contexts. Below are three of the ways in which Campbell, Cooper, Rueckert, and Smtih (2019) conceptualize the term:

> Employability [is defined as] an attribute of the propensity of the individual student to get employment (Harvey, 2000), and the second, frames employability as a set of skills, understandings and knowledge that make graduates more likely to gain employment, and successfully navigate their careers and lifelong learning (Yorke, 2006)… A third view of employability, referred to as the 'learning view', has begun, more recently, to position employability as a central component of higher education curriculum (Campbell, Cooper, Rueckert, & Smith, 2019, p. 502).

All three definitions as articulated by Campbell, Cooper, Rueckert, and Smtih (2019) will be relevant to this current paper.

Employability discourse gained popularity in the 1990s. There seems to be two schools of thought on the concept, according to Pham (2021). The outcome of labor market conditions or one's employment status was the first conceptualization of the term, according to Pham (2021) as well as McQuaid and Lindsay (2005). The other conceptualization of employability has to do with "sustainability and meaningfulness of employment (e.g. job quality, personal growth, and satisfaction), not merely outcomes" Pham, 2021, p. 1331). This was supported by Fugate and Kinicki (2008) as well as Pham and Jackson (2020b). The second approach "mainly resulted from how individuals use their knowledge, skills, attitudes, and resources to present to employers and navigate the labor market" (Pham, 2021, p. 1331). Therefore, sustainability of employment was among the critical components to consider when examining employability.

Yet another scholar, Helen Kempster (2023), defined employability as "a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy." Employability has to do with being successful for the duration of one's career, not just immediately upon graduation from school. Therefore, graduates must: remain competitive, show that they can achieve goals, learn via a variety of sources such as university education, work experiences, extra-curricular activities, and volunteering (Kempster, 2023). Examining employability for the duration of one's

career, not just the short-term outcome, can uniquely position universities as well as organizations to identify strategies to enhance socialization of students and employees.

A variety of factors shape employability (Parnell, 2021). Some include academic education, club activities, course settings as well as the timing of one's internship. Moreover, students with good grades and long internships were regarded as more employable than students with poor grades and no internships, according to Zhang, Zhang, Xiong, Liu, and Zhai (2022). Some international students are confident of their employability based on a study of engineering students in the United States (Niu, Xu, Zhu, Hunter-Johnson, 2022). However, other students have alleged that international education and studying foreign languages did not enhance employability (Mueller & Robert, 2021). Niu et al, (2021) urged scholars to examine how students transitioned from university to workplace life, focusing on the keys to their success as employees.

Another salient component of employability was cultural fit. Employers hire for cultural fit (Hora, 2019) so as to enhance the chances of retaining employees. When employees espouse values that are congruent with their respective organizations, employees may be more inclined to commit to those organizations. When values are not in alignment, problems tend to emerge. These findings support the notion that while college degrees may help, a formal education is not sufficient. People must fit the cultures of their respective organizations as well as the cultures of their work teams. This is why some organizations are enlisting the help of talent optimization coaches to conduct personality assessments as these analyses help coaches determine how organizations can achieve the best organizational fits with people. For example, manufacturing companies in Wisconsin, according to Hora (2019), said they assessed personalities and determined where to situate people. They determined where they could make the biggest contribution based on skills as well as cultural compatibility (Hora, 2019). Ultimately, a college degree was not enough to secure and sustain employment.

Similarly, international students returning to their home countries for work had to show how their education abroad was relevant to their home countries so as to enhance employability. These students had to apply the education and experience abroad to local work, and sometimes that was not easily accomplished. The arduous task of becoming realigned with local cultures after having studied abroad may require more skills than one would assume. Students were expected to transfer the knowledge they acquired overseas to local organizations, but this did not always guarantee them a job (Phan, 2021). Once again savvy students must comprehend the cultures in which they are operating and devise strategies to enhance employability within their respective industries. If students and/or employees have skills that are transferable, that could enhance their employability. However, if the skills students acquired while in school abroad are irrelevant, these students and/or employees must be flexible enough to adapt to the new ways of conducting business. According to Jeske and Olson (2021), employees wanted flexibility from organizations, too, so flexibility and the willingness to customize work enhanced employability.

The employability of professionals as well as students also may be shaped by their ability to manage cross-cultural relationships on college campuses and in the workplace. Awuor (2021) maintained that Black African international students are part of the Black student body, and they are adversely shaped by the ubiquitous presence of racism in society, including college campuses. Blatant as well as covert racism adverselyimpacts all students, not just students from non-dominant racial groups. In addition to the obvious marginalization that racism causes students who are from non-dominant racial groups, racism impedes the ability of students from dominant groups to gain access to the knowledge they could gain from students who are members of groups traditionally disenfranchised. Communicating across cultures at the university level helps to prepare students for diverse workplaces. Subsequent research could help scholars and practitioners more fully grasp the complexities of how racism shapes organizational experiences for all races, not just individuals of African descent. Additionally, future research could explore the lived experiences of students who are African American / Black students on college campuses and in society, especially as these students interact with members of the dominant race (Awuor, 2021), which in the United

States tends to be people who are Caucasian / White.

Ji (2022) suggested that some students from non-dominant racial groups, such as students who are Chinese, attempted to enhance their perceived worth by aligning themselves with the dominant culture, which may increase their chances of being accepted in the larger society and securing employment. "Outgroup-favoring Chinese international students use stereotypes that exclude them out of the ingroup (e.g., "They don't speak English well."), according to Ji, 2022. Some Chinese students distanced themselves from other Chinese students who didn't speak English well or who had greater difficulty being socialized into the dominant culture where they attended school. "The negative ingroup stereotypes [which are stereotypes against their own cultural group or other Chinese students] may concern intercultural communication scholars, as [such stereotypes] perpetuate the marginalization of international students" (Ji, 2022). Moreover, these students attributed the inability of other Chinese students to adequately adapt to the host culture as an internal trait such as laziness or the unwillingness to apply themselves, ignoring the external factors at play. This myopic view of the lived experiences of Chinese learners renders some Asian students marginalized. Subsequent action needs to be taken to enhance the university experiences as well as the workplace experiences of Asian students.

Policymakers and university leaders should embed goals related to employability of students into higher education. Making this a priority may assist leaders in better preparing students for the workforce (Pouratashi & Zamani, 2019). Results revealed that "seriousness, persistence, flexibility, responsibility, time management, self-confidence, educational need assessment, oral and written communication, ability to analyze data, [ability to speak English, and many other traits enhanced employability on multiple levels.] Clearly a college degree was not enough. A number of factors influenced the employability of students. The desired outcome is for universities, and society in general, to socialize students in ways that make it more feasible for students and/or employees to enjoy sustained employment.

Research suggests that "Success depends not only on the number of university graduates, but mostly on professional qualifications and skills of graduates" (Pouratashi & Zamani, 2019). Engineering students were more confident in their employability after capstone courses, which reinforced concepts and skills covered in their academic programs. After the capstone courses, students were better communicators, better team players, better able to apply concepts from the academic programs, etc. They showed greater knowledge and skills as well as better behavior and attitude (Jen-Chia, Hsiao-Fang, Fan-Ru, 2022).

Leaders must also be able to identify activities that don't enhance employability or at least be willing to change perceptions about what enhances employability. For example, Mueller and Robertt (2021) suggested that students don't perceive that international education and learning a foreign language will improve their employability. Consequently, schools need to do a better job of showing students the relevance of international education, or institutions need to rethink the importance of requiring such education (Mueller & Robert, 2021). Studying abroad can enhance one's understanding of other cultures, and knowledge ascertained from cross-cultural interactions may increase the ability of organizational members to communicate across cultures in the workplace.

Finally, career social support had a positive influence on employability, according to Xia, Gu, Huang, Zhu, Cheng (2020). This suggests that after students graduate, they continue to need support as professionals in their careers, relying on human resources functions and other means of assistance (Boon, Hartog, and Lepak, 2019; Liu, Bartram, and Leggat, 2020). Organizations seem to recognize this need for subsequent support, and as a result they tend to focus on rewarding, motivating, training, and safety when it comes to employees (Boon, Hartog, and Lepak, 2019; Marko, Radivoj, Jovana, 2022; The resignation, 2022). Perhaps future research could examine how former students experience the workplace and help determine what they may have lacked during the educational process (Phan, 2021). Graduate employability needs to be assessed after students leave school to determine, more adequately, their level of employability.

HUMAN RESOURCES

This section will emphasize the importance of human resources. Traditionally, human resources has been defined as "the experiences, capabilities, knowledge, skills, and judgement of the firm's employees" (Parnell, 2021, p. 227). It can be evaluated on three levels: 1) board of directors, 2) top management, and 3) middle management, supervisors, and employees (Parnell, 2021). Essentially, human resources efforts have to do with the strategic management and the development of employees because "even the best strategies will fail withouta talented workforce to implement them" (Parnell, 2021, p. 228). Human resources functions tend to entail recruiting, hiring, onboarding, training, developing, and managing employees so that they can add value to their respective workplaces (Liu, Bartram, Leggat, 2020; Zhang, Gates, Neal, & Stark, 2009; Boon, Hartog, & Lepak, 2019). Because employees are crucial to organizational success, it's imperative for organizationsto comprehend how organizational members experience organizational socialization and human resources activities in general.

According to Boon, Hartog, and Lepak (2019), employees respond differently to strategies designed to manage employees, a notion which has been supported by other scholars such as Liu, Bartram, and Leggat (2020). In a study examining the experiences of doctors and nurses during recruitment, hiring, onboarding, and transformational leadership, etc., statistical differences between nurses and doctors were evident. The study also addressed job security, training, information sharing, job quality, and team building (Liu, Bartram, Leggat, 2020). These findings suggested that organizational members regard processes and experiences with human resources differently, which produced a greater need to comprehend human resources management on individual and systemic levels.

A growing trend in the field of human resources has to do with psychological contracts. These contracts referred to the explicit and implicit organizational agreements, the fulfillment, and non-fulfillments of workplace relationships as they related to mutual obligations, expectations, and promises (Savarimuthu & Rachael, 2017). When contracts were breached, employees felt betrayed or like they had been subjected to injustices. Mutual respect, acting in good faith, open communication, sharing information and other resources tended to help promote positive interactions and clear contracts. Expectations have to be communicated for both parties to fulfill the contracts (Savarimuthu & Rachael, 2017). "Employer and employee will have to create good intentions, confidence, and feelings of attachment in the minds of each other which will in return strengthen their bond and also influence on how they intend to behave and reciprocate their mutuality towards each other" (Savarimuthu & Rachael, 2017, p. 109). These contracts were contingent on mutually respectful relationships as healthy professional interpersonal relationships were crucial to organizational socialization. Organizations can enhance human resources management, as it relates to engagement and socialization, by improving the psychological environments created for employees (Hussain & Mubarik, 2021).

One way in which psychological contracts have been fulfilled in the workplace was with greater flexibility, especially during a Covid19 era. With the increase in remote work which resulted because of the pandemic, new hires anticipate more flexibility, customization, and personalization with the onboarding process (Jeske & Olson, 2021). Moreover, hiring, onboarding, as well as training and development were expected to be interconnected so as to enhance the process of integrating employees into organizations (Jeske & Olson, 2021). Another way to maintain these psychological contracts and to enhance employee engagement was by maintaining work environments that were conducive to success. Hostile environments whereby employees were bullied and/or treated rudely caused workers to become less engaged because they had to exert a lot of psychological energy processing and making sense of workplace concerns (Gates, 2023; Malik & Bjorkqvist, 2019; Teo, Nguyen, Trevelyan, Lamm, Boocock, 2021). Organizations must promote collegial interactions so as to cultivate communication climates conducive to employees being more productive (Teo, Nguyen, Trevelyan, Lamm, Boocock, 2021). Workplace bullying causes stress, and the distraction may

result in less engagement and compromised productivity. However, family support can help mediate the influence the stress has on employees (Malik & Bjorkqvist, 2019; Gates, 2023).

Ultimately, research on human resources management revealed that the primary focus of personnel was on rewarding, motivating, training, and safety (Marko, Radivoj, Hamina, Jovana, 2022). The secondary issues seemed to be job evaluation, socialization, job satisfaction. However, employee turnover and engagement were emphasized as this may remain a salient concern for hiring managers (Marko, Radivoj, Hamina, Jovana, 2022; Gates, 2023; The resignation, 2022). While these functions and outcomes are important, Boon, Hartog, and Lepak (2019) suggested that organizations needed to place a greater emphasis on systems, not individuals, because systems shape individual experiences. Human resources systems were designed to encompass a variety of human resources practices that enable organizations to achieve overarching goals. Consequently, examining the systems in place to socialize organizational members may be a reasonable task (Gates, 2009; 2023).

ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION

To enhance employability, organizational members must have a firm grasp on organizational socialization. Organizational socialization has traditionally been defined as the ongoing processes of integrating organizational members into organizations, the process whereby organizational members learn the ropes of their respective jobs (Gates, 2020; 2009; 2002; 2001a; 2001b; Allen, 1995; 1996; Jablin,1986; 2001; Van Mannen, 1978; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Zhang, Gates, Nealy, Stark, 2009). In Jablin's (1982, 1984, 1987, 2001) conceptualization of the process, which he referred to as "assimilation," it encompassed anticipation, encounter, metamorphosis, and disengagement/exit. However, many organizational members do NOT experience organizations in that fashion (Allen, 1995; 1996; Gates, 1998; 1999; 2001a, 2001b; 2003a; 2003n; 2009; 2020; 2023; Bullis, 1993; Bullis & Stout, 2000). Jablin's model may not have fully captured the essence of how some non-dominant group members, such as African Americans, Latino/as, Asians, women, etc., experience organizations (Gates, 2021a; 2021b; 2020; 2019; 2001; 2002; 2003 2009; 2001a; 2001b; 1999; 1998; Caraballo & Gates, 2011). Moreover, not all organizational members are disengaged prior to exit. Some people are engaged right up until they exit because they want good references from their current employers should they need them in the future. These professionals may need to return to past employers for future employment, so it's crucial to maintain good rapports with organizational members as they exit firms. Excitement about forthcoming opportunities may create enough happiness and joy for employees to remain engaged as happy workers tend to be more engaged and more productive (Luthan, Luthan, & Luthan, 2021).

The process of assimilation as described by Jablin (1986; 2001) seemed linear in the rendition of what Jablin (1986; 2001) refers to as assimilation, not socialization, whereas other scholars have articulated a different, and perhaps a competing, perspective (Allen, 1996; Bullis, 1993; Bullis & Stout, 2000; Gates, 2002; 2003b; 2009). For example, Gates (2009), who preferred the term "socialization" due to the negative connotations associated with the term "assimilation," suggested that the dynamic process of organizational socialization was ongoing and everchanging as people are constantly receiving information and encountering aspects of their respective workplaces and their environments that shape how they show up in organizations. People are constantly making sense of the workplace due to ongoing changes on multiple levels, requiring organizational members to simultaneously enact and construct various organizational roles. Gates (2002; 2003b; 2009; 2020; 2023) also suggested, as did Allen (1995; 1996), that not all organizational members are accepted; not everybody reaches metamorphosis contrary to what Jablin (2001) indicated. Some people never become fully integrated into the workplace due to marginalization such as racism, sexism, classism as well as other factors including but not limited to traumatic workplace betrayals, such as sexual harassment, pay disparities, and more (Gates, 2023).
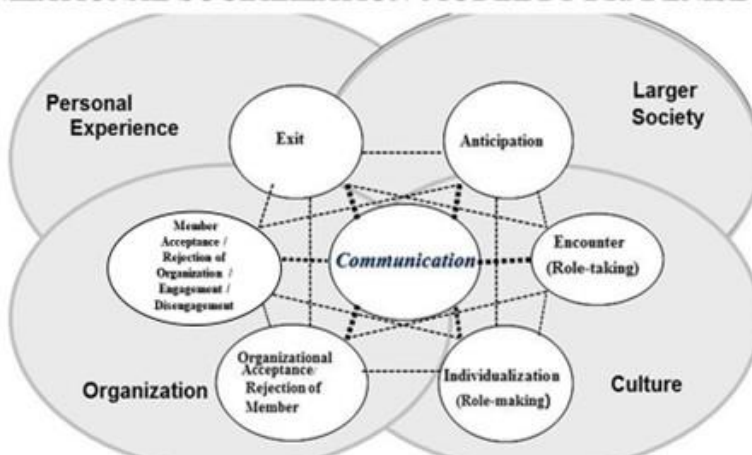
In the organizational socialization model devised by Gates in 2000 but published in 2009, the model contained the following components: 1) Anticipation, 2) Encounter, 3) Individualization, 4) Organizational

Acceptance/Rejection of Member, 5) Member Acceptance/Rejection of Organization (encompasses engagement and/or disengagement), 6) Exit, 7) Communication, 8) Culture (simultaneous influence of personal experiences, larger society, culture, and organization) (Gates, 2002; 2003b; 2009). With communication at the heart of organizational socialization, Gates (2009) attempted, in her model, to account for more of the experiences of professionals from a broader segment of the population. She refers to communication in general, not limiting it to communication between dominant and non-dominant groups unless one believes that all communication consists of interactions between dominant and non-dominant individuals (Gates, 2009). She recognized that many organizations are comprised of heterogenous groups, so she wanted to account for that in her rendition of socialization.

A myopic approach to organizational socialization would be to assume that all organizations are homogeneous and to expect all professionals to experience workplaces exactly the same. Assuming all organizations are comprised solely of monolithic cultures and acting based on that way of thinking, or that paradigm, would be a disservice to all organizational members, especially those from traditionally disenfranchised groups. Gates (2009) was among the scholars urging organizational members to take more than just a perfunctory view at organizational socialization. Gates (2009) hoped to promote or inspire a paradigm shift, a different way of thinking, one whereby the workplace existences and experiences of all people could be encompassed in models on organizational socialization so that a more global approach to the construct emerged.

The purpose of this present paper was to examine employability from the perspective of the organizational socialization model by Gates (2009). How do people experience organizational socialization, and what do they do to remain employed? This research investigated the relevance of extant renditions of organizational socialization as posited by scholars such as Jablin (1982, 1984; 1987, 2001) and Gates (2009). Jablin's 2001 conceptualization of organizational socialization, or assimilation as he calls it, in the publication "Organizational Entry, Assimilation, Disengagement / Exit" was extended by Gates (2009) in the publication "The Managerial Communication Process: Organizational Socialization Model," an award-winning paper published by the Publishing House of South China University of Technology. While still highly respected by many, Jablin's (1982, 1984, 1987, 2001) rendition of assimilation was regarded by some scholars as problematic (Allen, 1995, 1996; Bullis, 1993; Bullis & Stout, 2000; Gates, 2002; 2009; 2023). Critics of Jablin's model argued that he made assumptions about workplace experiences. In the current paper, the organizational socialization model devised by Gates (2009) was applied to the experiences of 140 students and/or professionals to determine if that model was still relevant and applicable today. Scholars and practitioners may benefit from comprehending how professionals perceive that they experience organizational socialization today and from knowing what these individuals do to remain employed.

ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION MODEL BY DR. DENISE GATES

Gates, D. (2009). The managerial communication process: Organizational socialization model. In S. Zhang, D. Gates, C. Nealy, & J. Stark (Eds), *Managerial communication: Theory and application* (pp. 26-58). Beijing: The Publishing House of South-China University of Technology.

ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION MODEL BY DR. DENISE GATES

- **PHASES**
  - Anticipation
    - People anticipate how they will experience organizations based on messages from their environment such as community members, other organizational members, school, media, friends, family, church, colleagues, etc. These messages can shape perceptions about an organization.
  - Encounter
    - When organizational members first enter an organization, their expectations are tested. They experience culture shock when expectations are vastly different from what they anticipated. Realistic job previews can reduce chances of culture shock.
  - Individualization
    - Employees/members can influence organizations. They make their unique marks on organizations.
  - Organizational Acceptance/Rejection of Member/Employee
    - Organizations can embrace or reject employees/members. This is experienced via inclusion, exclusion, gossip, negative experiences, positive experiences, etc.
  - Member/Employee Rejection/Acceptance of Organization / Engagement and Disengagement
    - Employees/members can accept or reject organizations. Regular/poor attendance, sabotage/assist programs. Praise behavior that is appreciated or complain about unwanted behavior.
  - Exit
    - Pre-exit (planning the separation), announcement (giving notice that separation is upcoming) , exit (organizations have to adjust to absence of employee/member). Employees can be fired or voluntarily leave organizations.
- **CONTEXT**
  - Interactions within organizations are shaped by the context of interactants.
    - Personal experience
    - Organization
    - Larger Society
    - Culture
- **COMMUNICATION**
  - Influences all aspects of the process
- **DOTTED LINES**
  - Indirect connection between phases. People experience socialization differently as in-group and out-group members

Gates, D. (2009). The managerial communication process: Organizational socialization model. In S. Zhang, D. Gates, C. Nealy, & J. Stark (Eds), *Managerial communication: Theory and application* (pp. 26-58). Beijing: The Publishing House of South-China University of Technology.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- To what extent does the organizational socialization model devised by Dr. Denise Gates (2009) capture the essence of how individuals experience organizations and/or their professions?
- Based on the lived experiences with organizational socialization, what implications for employability can be gleaned from the narratives shared by participants in this study?

METHODS

To make sense of the socializing experiences that enhanced employability of the individuals in this study, this research encompassed qualitative research methods (Cresswell, 2003). In-depth interviews, focus groups, and open-ended questionnaires were utilized to capture the essence of how 140 individuals experienced their respective workplaces as well as their schools. A total of 71 business students from a midwestern university completed an open-ended questionnaire. Another 56 professionals participated in in-depth, one-on-one interviews by phone and/or Zoom, interactions which lasted from 22 minutes to one hour and a half. The people who participated in the interviews were selected using the snowball technique (Cresswell, 2003; Naderifar, Goli & Ghaljaie, 2017). That means that after each interview, participants were encouraged to submit the names of other professionals who could be interviewed.

In addition to the interviews, 20 people participated in a total of two focus groups. One focus group centered on organizational socialization while the other one focused on employee engagement and human resources management. Because some people participated in interviews as well as focus groups, they could only be counted once as participants in the present study, which means the total number of participants was 140, not 149. Of the 140 participants, 82 were Caucasian, 47 were African American, 5 were Latino, 4 were Asian, and 2 were Greek. A total of 70 of the participants were male, and 70 were female. The interview and focus group participants ranged in age from 27 to 82 years old, with the bulk of the participants being between 32 and 58 years old. The college students who completed the questionnaire were primarily between the ages of 18 and 25.

The educational levels of the 140 participants ranged from doctoral degrees, master's degrees, law degrees,

bachelor's degree, high school degrees, and one high school dropout. Four of the participants in this study admitted to being millionaires. A fifth lady who has been part owner of a thriving bank for over 30 years was suspected of being a millionaire or billionaire, but she has not confirmed her status. Nevertheless, she was regarded as a closet millionaire (or possibility even a billionaire), and she described her financial situation, with a smile, as being "very comfortable." She did admit to managing assets worth in excess of two billion dollars. With the exception of a receptionist and youth center director as well as the students, all of the other participants could be classified as middle to upper-middle class.

College students were given a picture of the organizational socialization model by Dr. Denise Gates (2009) along with a description of the model and all of its components. Then they were asked via a questionnaire to explain the extent to which the model by Gates (2009) captured, or failed to capture, the essence of their workplace experiences. All of the college students were Caucasian business students. They were told that if they had never had jobs, they could focus on any organization they had ever joined, such as a university (Gates, 2009; 2002; 2020; 2023).

The focus groups were comprised of 16 African Americans, two Latinos, one Greek, and two Caucasian participants. Eight of the focus group participants were male, and 13 were female. The focus group findings were utilized to inform the interviewing processes. In other words, the insight gleaned from the focus groups was followed up on during the interviews. During the first focus group, the professionals were shown an organizational socialization model by Gates (2009) and asked to discuss each component of the model. They also were given another document that explained the socialization model. Then participants were instructed to indicate how closely the model captured or failed to capture the essence of how they experienced the workplace. During the second focus group, participants discussed human resources management and employee engagement, particularly as it related to changes resulting from Covid19. They spoke about how they were experiencing socialization and human resources management differently due to Covid.

The final method of data collection was interviews. A total of 56 professionals were selected for interviews, utilizing the snowball technique (Cresswell, 2003; Naderifar, Goli & Ghaljaie, 2017). After each interview, participants were asked to provide the names of other professionals who could participate in the study. This technique gives researchers access to people and networks to which researchers may not otherwise have access (Naderifar, Goli & Ghaljaie, 2017). Multiple snowballs were started so the study would encompass a wide variety of professions. The professionals who were interviewed were Caucasian, African American, Latino/a, Asian, and Greek. They were from Indiana, Texas, Utah, Nevada, Ohio, Missouri, Arizona, Illinois, Michigan, Oregon, Tennessee, Florida, New York, Pennsylvania, Maine, Connecticut, Alabama, Georgia, California, Washington, Virginia, Washington, D.C., Maryland, North Carolina, and Arkansas.

Phone and/or Zoom interviews were conducted with the 56 professionals from a wide range of careers ranging from fortune 100 leaders, bankers, mortgage loan officers, factory workers, university deans, university professors, university presidents, government workers, military workers, case managers, pastors, construction workers, business consultants, business owners, pharmacists, politicians, company presidents, chief operating officers, receptionists, financial services agents, youth program directors, real estate professionals, general managers of a radio station, etc. With the permission of the participants, the interviews were tape-recorded and analyzed numerous times until no new themes emerged.

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to make sense of the organizational socializing experiences of the individuals in this study. It examined the extent to which the organizational socialization model devised by Dr. Denise Gates (2009) captured, or failed to capture, the essence of how professionals experienced the workplace and/or their professions as it related to employability. It illuminated the strategies and tactics employed to

improve employability, and it sought to identify the implications for human resources management as those implications pertained to socializing individuals and making them more employable.

Results revealed overwhelming support for the organizational model devised by Gates (2009), and the findings also substantiated claims of a variety of workplace betrayals impeding employability. Those workplace betrayals were: 1) Racism, 2) Sexism, 3) Sexual Harassment, 4) Pay Disparities, 5) Threats to Safety, and 6) Harassment Via False Accusations or Unjustified Disciplinary Actions. More details about these findings will be addressed in the following three areas: 1) Socialization, 2) Managing Human Resources, and 3) Employability.

SOCIALIZATION

In this section, the organizational socialization model devised by Dr. Denise Gates (2009) is applied. Participants helped make sense of their socializing experiences by comparing them to the framework created by Gates (2009). All 140 of the participants indicated that the organizational socialization model formulated by Gates (2009) captured the essence of how they experienced the workplace. Moreover, their narratives revealed strategies enacted to enhance employability as many participants struggled to remain employed when work climates were hostile.

Speaking about the organizational socialization model by Gates (2009), an African American female pharmacist in her 40s from Missouri, said:

> I think it captured the essence very well. I like how you noted the interplay on all of the different factors. So sometimes when you see a model like this, it's very simplistic…our lives and careers never follow such a direct path, so looking at your model with interconnected circles and all the lines that go in between, it's very accurate…all of these different things you've noted play a huge part in how we navigate.

Echoing the same sentiment, a 60-year-old African American woman who is co-owner of a bank in the Midwestern part of the United States, said, "I think it [the socialization model by Gates (2009)] offers something that we can look toward to, as far as, you know, keeping employees aware of what's going on in organizations." This executive, who has an MBA, went on to say: "I think this is something you would have for managers. How will you keep employees motivated?" The aspect of the model by Gates (2009) that encompasses motivation is acceptance/rejection of organizations by organizational members. During this phase, a member's degree of acceptance and rejection of an organization will be gauged, perhaps, or shaped by their level of engagement. When organizational members embrace their organizations and are engaged, they are expressing acceptance of their organizations. When members reject their organizations, they may become less engaged, and their disengagement may be a sign that they are rejecting something about their respective organizations.

Member acceptance and rejection of organizations is the part of the model where managers may be challenged to devise strategies to keep employees engaged. This is a crucial part of socialization that needs to start with making the right hiring decisions and ensuring that superior-subordinate professional relationships are healthy (Gates, 2021). When organizations plug people into the right positions, they are selecting employees who have values and business practices that are congruent with those values espoused by organizations. Therefore, employees may be more inclined to be motivated to do their jobs when they have achieved satisfactory organizational fits. When values are not aligned, the level of engagement may suffer. Once the right fit is secured, organizations can help retain employees by keeping them challenged, showing them how important their roles are to organizations, cultivating healthy workplace interactions devoid of racism, sexism, sexual harassment, traumatic workplace betrayals, violence, debilitating stress levels (Gates, 2023; 2011), cultivating and maintaining healthy interactions with supervisors (Gates, 2021), giving them opportunities to advance, showing them they are valued, promoting equity in pay, etc. (Gates,

2023).

To summarize some of the remarks about the model by Gates (2009):

- One 27-year-old African American business consultant from Missouri with a doctoral degree said, I find that this model is a great depiction of my own experience through the workplace, and how the organizational model is established…[the model] mimics almost to the tee what I havegone through in my own history.

- A 60-year-old Greek business owner and multi-millionaire from Florida said, she supported the model by Gates (2009). "It went over just about everything in my workplace."

- A Latino, female, marketing executive in her 60s, said the model fits "very closely. I just love what you said and how you work with individuals."

- A 51-year-old, African American, MBA-level, female healthcare consultant from Texas said, "It's a very inclusive model."

- A Caucasian, male, City Manager and Dean of Students, from Indiana said, "I think you've done a great job of capturing it."

- A 58-year-old African American, male president of a company from Alabama said, when asked if the model captured the essence of his workplace experiences: "It does. It's fascinating to walk through the journey using your model."

- A 72-year-old Caucasian, male engineer who resides in Arizona said, "In looking at every aspect of your model, I would say it shapes how my career has advanced."

- A 48-year-old African American pastor and financial services executive from Utah said, I think this model has captured my personal experiences perfectly. I would assume that this model would capture anyone's experience perfectly because I think you have covered all of the different dynamics that an individual would face when approaching any organization to work with them or to serve them in some capacity. I think you have done a very good job ofpresenting us with a panoramic view of how people experience the workplace.

The participants in this study unanimously agreed that the model by Gates (2002, 2009) adequately captured the essence of how they experienced the workplace, and during the narratives participants conveyed how they remained employed.

MANAGING HUMAN RESOURCES

The lived experiences articulated by the participants in this study revealed several implications for human resources management and employability. Many participants shared stories indicative of a need to create more welcoming workplaces. While some participants felt that they had mentors in their respective organizations or professions that assisted them in making sense of the workplace, others desired more support. Onboarding programs, designated mentoring programs, informal mentors, and/or supportive bosses assisted professionals in learning the ropes of their respective organizations. However, some said they were not supported by human resources personnel. "They have not done anything to help me," one African American professional in his late 50 with a doctoral degree said. He felt like he was not supported within his organization and did not stay there long. His employability presumably was not highly regarded by his team.

Other professionals in this study recalled changes that resulted due to Covid19 as they relied more heavily on computer-mediated communication such as Zoom, Skye, and other platforms. They also noticed more

remote work opportunities, which saved them on the commute to work. However, when it was time to return to the office, some professionals, according to an African American co-owner of a bank, who managed employees, wanted to find roles that more closely matched who they were today. She said, Covid19 gave people time to reassess their lives and to determine if they were moving in the direction they wanted to go. Some people wanted more pay. Some people wanted better benefits. Others wanted a new profession all together.

This same professional also noticed that burnout was causing people to rethink their career choices or at least their workdays. "Burnout is an issue. I think after we came out of the pandemic, it's been difficult for people to get back into the groove of working that 8-hour-day. Working at home allowed people to find a way to be more efficient and condense the workday," she explained. The issues of work-life balance came into play when professionals were expected to return to work after being home with their families, especially their children, during the pandemic. "There was this mass burnout of people, burnout from things that happened because of the pandemic, burnout because of being at the office or wherever you were 8, 9,10 hours," she said. "You just needed your brain to relax some," she went on to say. The pandemic had taken its toll on some professionals, and any support offered to them was much needed.

However, a salient theme that emerged from analysis of the workplaces experiences of the 140 participants in this study had to do with traumatic workplace betrayals or activities that implied or perhaps resulted in rejection or a lack of support from organizations. Participants spoke of a variety of disturbing experiences that compromised employability such as: 1) Racism, 2) Sexism, 3) Sexual Harassment, 4) Pay Disparities, 5) Threats to Safety, and 6) Harassment Via False Accusations or Unjustified Disciplinary Actions. While organizations tended to contribute in meaningful ways to the success of employees by offering onboarding programs, mentors, training and development, etc., the participants in this study required more support managing issues related to the following: 1) Racism, 2) Sexism, 3) Sexual Harassment, 4) Pay Disparities, 5) Threats to Safety, and 6) Harassment Via False Accusations and/or Unjustified Disciplinary Actions. These themes will be addressed below.

Racism

Racism was a prevalent concern for participants who were African American, Asian, and Latinos. A Latino lawyer from Utah said he was treated unfairly. "I have felt minimized and sometimes overlooked until they actually realize I have skills…I generally have to do something above and beyond." Pressure to overachieve in order to just be accepted is a common theme that emerged in the experiences of Latino/a and African American workers (Gates, 2021). Other Latinos felt abused as well. A Latina employee in her 60s said she was devastated when her team accused her of aggression when in fact she was just being herself and doing her job. Her normal way of talking was perceived by her Caucasian colleagues as anger and aggression even though that was not her intent. Had their observations stopped there, the offense may have been easier to digest. However, racial tension escalated when they proceeded to remove her from the office due to alleged aggression. She said marginalization for her manifested as an unwarranted punishment, which she was adamant had resulted due to her race. She had to contend with negative perceptions of her communication that would have been deemed fine in reasonable organizations.

An Asian man also felt marginalized. "The marginalization happened in the management consulting world," said an Asian, male, chief operating officer who resides in the D.C. area where he does policy and system reform. "If you understood the culture better, you were plugged in more. I didn't have that. Without having that, you sort of get marginalized in some ways. You're not at the table. You're not included for those water cooler conversations or hallway conversations," advised this participant who said he once worked for President Obama. He said he was constantly subjected to stereotypes about his race in a previous role working as a consultant in the D.C. area. One stereotype in particular had to do with young Asian men buying Honda Civic cars and customizing them. He was teased about this in addition to being subjected to

racial slurs he didn't think his colleagues realized were racial slurs.

> I have experienced blatant racism, but it did not impact my relationship with this individual. I don't think he was aware that he was saying racist statements. Um, and I'm still friends with his boss, and I think he's a great person. He would say things like, um, you know, do you like tolice out your car. You know young Asian men, a lot of them, you know, buy those HondaCivics and they modify them, right, they put those loud mufflers on them and whatever…And I guess 'lice it out' is a term that they use, but um he would say things like that without really knowing that it could be construed as racist.

This professional said this same man also teased him about his last name. He made jokes about the pronunciation of his name, etc. This Asian professional talked to the man about his behavior, and the offending party was very embarrassed and sorry. "I really don't think he realized that it could be construed that way," the Asian man added.

Similarly, one African American female professional from Missouri said she was appalled by an encounter with a lady at her job. She said, "I needed the code to get in the restroom, and the older Caucasian woman on duty asked me if I was there to clean the bathroom." This woman who has a doctoral degree held a leadership role in her profession, but her colleague treated her like she was the janitor. While it is possible for people with doctoral degrees to scrub toilets, that was not in the job description of the professional at this fortune 100 company. Demeaning comments and actions in the workplace were regarded as microaggressions, a term coined by Harvard University psychiatrist Chester Pierce, to "describe the insults and dismissals he regularly witnessed non-Black Americans inflict upon those of African American descent" (Johnson & Johnson, 2019, p.2). Microaggressions can create a hostile work environment and leave organizational members feeling marginalized (White-Goyzueta, Gates-Mayweathers, & Nance-West, 2023).

Sometimes community members subjected professionals to marginalization when they were on assignment or perhaps traveling on business. For instance, an African American journalist with a doctoral degree said she was called the "N" word while covering a story. Known for her resilience, she ignored the derogatory comment and kept working. She had that "I'm not about to let anything come between me and my money" attitude about her which allowed her to dismiss attempts to marginalize her. Similarly, an African American university dean who worked for a predominately Caucasian school, said, "I've been pulled over a couple of times [by the police] in the city of [name of her town] for no reason, you know, it's the color of your skin." Therefore, the climate in the community can shape how educators, students, and other professionals experience universities. This suggests that even when the participants in this study were in organizations that treated them well, they still had to contend with marginalization within their respective communities on the way to or from work. Both women attributed the abuse they endured to racism. However, they were determined to rise above it.

While Caucasian participants may enjoy privilege due to their race, a Caucasian news anchor and journalist from the Northeastern part of the United States said he recalled hearing racial slurs in the workplace targeting African Americans. He said he heard his colleagues refer to African Americans as "jigaboos" early in his career. Sometimes he ignored the remarks which made him uncomfortable, and in other instances when it was safe to complain, he would discourage such infractions. He didn't want to be associated with the negative terminology used to describe African Americans. He also recalled how the stations were being pressured to diversify the news teams, resulting in African Americans inadvertently being placed on air prematurely. They didn't have enough experience to be on air, yet there they were, he added. "They died on air," he said, of the new talent who lacked the skills to cut it in that particular workplace. Unfortunately, many of those fast and certain failures were African Americans trying to get into the news business. Perhaps the problem also had to do with entitlement. A Caucasian engineer said some people feel entitled to certain jobs and pay because they have these degrees; however, some of them lack the experience and capacity to

perform those jobs well. Some people look great on paper, but they can't perform in the workplace, he suggested. Regardless of the reason, racism seemed to be a common theme across races and genders.

A distinguished African American professor with a doctoral degree in physics who has served on committees in Washington, D.C. with President Barack Obama said he left a prominent school in Massachusetts due to racism. "They weren't treating Black students right, and I didn't want to be a part of the fraud," he asserted. He was disturbed by the hostile environment and the microaggressions he endured personally. However, what unnerved him most was the abuse he witnessed being inflicted upon African American students. As faculty at a university with a stellar reputation, one of the strongest academic brands in the United States, this physics professor was disappointed in the lack of support for African American students and faculty, he maintained. He resigned and has enjoyed a rewarding career at other reputable schools before relocating to a university just outside of Washington, D.C.

This scholar also shared strategies to overcome obstacles to his success. For example, he recalled the time when one of his colleagues tried to steal his research. He said his colleague was heard presenting at a conference the very ideas this African American professor had shared with his male counterpart during a private conversation the night before the scheduled speech. The offending colleague deviated from the topic of his abstract and began to share ideas that were not his own. The offending colleague was essentially stealing the intellectual property of the professor who participated in this study. Consequently, the African American interviewee said he strategically published a paper on the topic with the offending professor who tried to steal his ideas because he wanted his name on his work, even if it meant co-authoring a paper with the offending party. This strategic partnership enabled him to get credit for his work. Many people may have taken a different approach to resolving the matter, but this interviewee essentially partnered with a man he didn't particularly like, so he could achieve an important academic goal.

Further substantiating the prevalence of racism, an African American president of a successful organization recalled vividly how he was subjected to discrimination. "I've seen people galvanize to try to marginalize me. Organizational members tried to perpetuate a false narrative…I can get my own narrative," said an African American president of a company in Alabama. Originally from Detroit, Michigan, this participant said, "Something about them caused them to think they could marginalize me." This professional prided himself on never compromising his values for a job. "If I lose a job, then I lose a job, but I will never lose myself in the process of working for somebody," he cautioned. Integrity mattered to him. He spoke about standing in his own power and not falling victim to marginalization. He resisted pressures to assimilate to the dominant culture. "It's dangerous for your mental health to not be who you are," he said. The ability to be genuine and authentic in the workplace seemed to matter to the African American professionals; however, many suggested that they "Couldn't keep it 100 at work," all of the time for fear of being fired. This meant that some employees kept up the pretense that all was well in the workplace even when it was not. In other words, they didn't feel safe sharing 100 percent of what they either thought or what they experienced because they didn't trust how it would be construed by others, especially when communicating across cultures.

Double consciousness (Du Bois, 2007/1903) caused some of people in this study to be cognizant of the unique perspectives the world tended to have of them while they also had their own perceptions of themselves. Perhaps they felt like they had more than one identity as they wrestled with fully being seen and appreciated in the workplace. To be successful, some said they had to negotiate how much of their authentic selves they could reveal in the workplace; they assessed their respective workplace cultures and determined how authentic, or forthcoming with information, they could be. The participants who were happier in the workplace did a better job of securing roles in companies that espoused values that were congruent with their personal values. When people could not be authentic at work, they tended to exert more psychological energy, looking for strategies to be successful and making sense of encounters whereby they felt marginalized. An ideal existence was one in which a workplace and employee had mutual respect, one in which employees felt their respective companies embraced their identities and values. The participants in

this study determined how to garner greater workplace acceptance based on the cultures of their respective workplaces. They knew when to keep it 100 and when to keep it 75 or 80, according to one African American politician from Georgia, who explained the degree of authenticity he expressed in the workplace. Essentially, race was a salient theme in this study, but participants had strategies to manage it if they wanted to remain employed.

Sexism

Sexism was another salient theme discussed primarily by women who were African American, Caucasian, Latino/a, Asian, and Greek. A 47-year-old current doctoral student and academic consultant said her boss directly told her he wanted a man to work in a particular leadership role at his school, a role she'd contemplated pursuing. "He said he didn't want to put the comment in an email, but he told her face-to-face that he wanted a man for that job." He didn't think a woman could handle the disciplinary issues required of anyone in that role. This student also said she didn't think the leaders of her school understood the plight of students, yet they were making choices about students. Some of the leaders had never been educators and had no clue how to teach, she said. However, these leaders continued to make choices that rendered both students and educators marginalized.

Similarly, an African American general manager for a radio station said her male subordinate gave her grief. "I just don't think he wanted to report to a woman," she said. He had a history of giving her problems without provocation, and he would sabotage her by taking things off of her desk that she needed for work. She surmised that he didn't think she deserved to be in the role of general manager or leader. Men made it clear that women should not hold certain roles, and this perspective adversely shaped how decisions were made in the workplace.

In another situation, a pharmacist said she could be standing in her lab coat with her name tag clearly displayed only to have people walk up to her subordinates, particularly male subordinates, and ask questions that only she could answer. "They didn't expect me to be the pharmacist," she said. "The expectation is that my white male student was the pharmacist…I have encountered that throughout my career." She was not presumed to be the pharmacist, nor was she expected to know how to do her job. Treated by clients and colleagues like she was invisible, this pharmacist said she had to interrupt conversations to address questions her subordinates should never have been asked in the first place. This encounter was not unlike what a leader from a fortune 75 company in Texas said she encountered. She, too, said her male subordinates did not want to have a female boss. "He didn't want to work for a woman," she proclaimed.

On the other hand, a Caucasian military leader in her late 50s, however, noticed how some women took advantage of their roles as women. They utilized the stereotypes to their advantage by exaggerating their need for help. They would pretend not to be strong enough to carry out some of their duties. She remembered women pretending not to be strong enough to carry paper. "You will get that paper over there even if you have to carry it one sheet at a time," she instructed the ladies. Women tried to exaggerate their weaknesses to reduce their workloads, but it didn't work in the military, at least not on this leader's watch. Ultimately, however, sexism tended to be the perpetuation of stereotypes of gendered roles.

Caucasian men tended to agree that sexism was prevalent in the workplace, and they admitted to enjoying a certain amount privilege as Caucasian men. A college president in his 70s said he knew his privilege as a Caucasian man opened doors for him. Similarly, a Caucasian, male consultant, also in his 70s, spoke of the expectations of success. In the fifth grade, the consultant said his teacher told him he didn't need to worry about learning how to spell correctly because when he grew up and started working, his secretary would type all his papers for him. He received messages early in life from his community informing him that he was expected to be successful. In another instance, a Caucasian, male engineer echoed similar sentiments.

He admitted to enjoying the benefits of being a Caucasian male. Overall, sexism marginalized women and rendered men, especially Caucasian men, more powerful and in some cases more successful.

Another significant theme regarding Caucasian men was that when they endorsed or supported traditionally marginalized groups such as African Americans or members of the LBGTQ community, they encountered resistance. One consultant from Chicago said his contracts went away "almost overnight" when he published a paper in support of people who are gay. He had to prematurely retire and pursue other streams of revenue. In a comparable situation, a Caucasian professor from Indiana spoke of recruiting African Americans students for his university, and he recalled the awkwardness he experienced from dominant group members. He also said that when he supported gay students on campus, some people frowned upon it. A third Caucasian businessman from Florida and Indiana reported similar experiences when he supported the LBGTQ community as well as Latinos/as. All three of these men were affiliated with their respective religious institutions, and that may have accounted for some of the resistance. Ultimately, Caucasian men risked retaliation when they supported non-dominant group members, such as people who are African American, Latino/a, and/or gay. They either lost their jobs or were subjected to other social penalties. Overall sexism was a prevalent theme for the people in this study. When not managed well, sexism had its social penalties that compromised employment.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment was another workplace betrayal. Sexual harassment was more prevalent among younger female professionals of all races. A Latino man from Utah who was in charge of adjudicating sexual harassment claims maintained,

> In the organization I was in, it [sexual harassment] occurred more to the younger women, but they were too intimidated to do anything about it. The women that were older and had master's degrees and had confidence in the ability to find another job said, you know, [said] 'I'm not putting up with this. I'm going to report it.

He explained that "the women that stood out the most were all very accomplished, very intelligent." So, a woman's decision to report sexual harassment was contingent on her confidence level as well as her belief that she could secure another job if she did not prevail during the grievance process. Another woman from Indiana said her decision to report sexual harassment was strongly correlated to her perceptions about whether she thought her employer would believe her.

Similarly, a 47-year-old Caucasian female production supervisor at a factory recalled several instances in which she was subjected to severe sexual harassment. "I was sexually harassed a lot," she said. "I didn't know, I didn't know better. In your early 20s, you just think that's acceptable behavior. In your late 40s, not so much," she maintained. "If you report those kinds of things, you get harassed until you quit or they find a reason to fire you," she explained. Essentially, women who resisted sexual harassment in the workplace could expect retaliation if they complained. Having dropped out of high school to enter the workforce, this woman didn't know how to combat sexual harassment. Perhaps she was still honing her organizational skills and developing greater emotional intelligence. She recalled an encounter whereby she was subjected to unwanted touch from her supervisor. "So, I was bending over to fill up my water bottle…and my boss came behind me and put his foot in between my legs and touched my vagina with his foot," she explained. Her employability was influenced by her unwillingness to contend with sexual harassment. Leaving was her strategy to maintain her sanity.

That particular factory worker recalled the emotional encounter as though it were yesterday. She left this job

and others due to unrelenting sexual harassment. Another factory worker, a man in his 30s, in the same county substantiated the claim that sexual harassment was prevalent in the manufacturing industry. He said, "the guys will cat call when beautiful ladies walk into the factory." He also said he's seen sexual harassment go both ways, revealing that women were known to flirt, too. However, the more pervasive abuse entailed men sexually harassing women and abusing their power over them. The factories were predominately male, and women, more frequently than men, were the targets of abuse.

The military was no different. A Caucasian military officer said she had seen and heard more than her share of complaints about sexual harassment, and the typical survivor of abuse was female. The women often entered the military very naïve, she recalled. They often came there telling people they had boyfriends at home. "Now you have 200 boyfriends," she warned them. The younger women were the ones struggling the most to manage unwanted sexual attention. However, an African American man in his 50s said that when he was in the military, another man propositioned him. He told his abuser: "Dude, I'm straight. I'm good." Then he called his sister-in-law, another enlisted military staff, for support. Family support reportedly helped professionals survive sexual harassment and workplace stress (Gates, 2023; Malik & Bjorkqvist, 2019).

An Asian woman in her 30s articulated the trauma of being sexually harassed by her boss's friend, someone she had previously respected.

> When I was working at the restaurant, there were a couple of VIP clients that were 100% inappropriate. I was young at the time. I think I was maybe around 24 years old, so that's kind of me just entering the workforce after finishing college. And I did experience that from a client being completely inappropriate to me, asking whether or not I was married yet and then saw me out in public, and I recognized him and um he was completely inappropriate. He was touching me and groping me in the wrong areas where I had to get up and I had to excuse myself to go to the bathroom. I was completely uncomfortable. I didn't know what to do. I was so young. He was so much older. I really thought that he was actually a really great client and someone that, you know, really valued me as a person and didn't see me as an object, but unfortunately when it was taken out of the workplace and we saw each other just down the street from the restaurant, it was a completely different interaction. And um it really jarred me.

She didn't tell her boss because she didn't feel safe to do so because the offender was a close friend of her employer. "I didn't feel supported. It was every, you know, everyday it was something else that was my fault, so if this was another opportunity for something to be my fault, then I would rather have avoided it, and that's what I did," she explained. Because the climate at her job was already hostile, she was uncomfortable sharing concerns with her direct supervisor. The environment was not conducive to divulging sensitive information, so she decided to quit. "I hit a breaking point, and I realized, you know, this is just not worth it, and I had to resign." The abuse, coupled with the lack of support, compelled her to leave. This woman feared that a complaint against her supervisor's friend and client would compromise her ability to retain that job. Therefore, her strategy was to leave on her own terms in search of better employment.

When the men in this study spoke of sexual harassment, they typically were sharing stories of how women in the workplace were being sexually harassed. However, one African American mortgage loan officer and business owner in his 50s recalled a situation in which a woman brought only donuts and coffee for a male subordinate. "It was so obvious that she liked him." While the male subordinate never objected to the unwanted attention from his superior, his colleagues complained, and the female superior quietly left the Arizona company.

The ways in which organizations managed sexual harassment seemed to vary. One interesting trend was that

women who were accused of sexual harassment left companies whereas when the perpetrator was male, he tended to stay in the company and simply be punished. Women left companies when they suffered sexual harassment as well as when they were accused of sexual harassment. Men stayed in some companies even after being found guilty of sexual harassment. These findings suggest inequitable consequences to women when they endured sexual harassment as the target of abuse as well as when women were accused of it. According to narratives shared in the present study, men tended to have less severe outcomes or consequences when accused of sexual harassment. Future research could determine if this finding is prevalent among male-dominated industries or in general.

Overall, sexual harassment appeared to be more prevalent among female professionals, particularly when they were younger in age or new to their respective professions. Perhaps that is when these professionals had the least societal power or were too afraid and naive to stand up for themselves. The ones with confidence in their abilities to find other jobs were more inclined to report abuse. However, some survivors of abuse just left without bothering to complain because their work environments were so hostile. This especially was the case when offenders were family members and/or close friends with the owners of companies or when offenders maintained close ties to the supervisors of the survivors of abuse. Unfortunately, sexual harassment remained on the menu at many of the companies represented in this study. However, savvy professionals didn't contend with it long before they either complained or resigned.

Pay Disparities

Pay disparities were prevalent. All of the Latino/a participants as well as many of the African American professions and the women maintained that they were paid unfairly. A Latino factory worker resigned when he discovered that all of his coworkers had higher salaries than he had, particularly given that his colleagues were doing less work. This professional asserted that he generated business for his factory and was more productive than the other employees. He was baffled by the inequities. Therefore, he asked for a raise, and when it was declined, he promptly resigned. Similarly, a Latino lawyer said he was treated unfairly. "I did the work, but I was never given the title," he explained.

One woman admitted that her salary was lower than that of her male counterparts, but she took responsibility for the disparity. She was a Caucasian woman in her late 50s who had served as a banker, business owner, board member, and politician. She asserted that part of the reason she tended to have lower salaries than men in comparable roles was because she didn't negotiate well. She took responsibility for her shortcoming and said that society did a better job of preparing men to negotiate well in the workplace. She said, "Women accept whatever salary they are offered." They don't know if they should counter, or they are uncomfortable making a counteroffer. Another Caucasian woman, a factory worker making approximately $60,000 annually, complained about the pay gap. She stated:

> Still in 2023, women are grossly underpaid compared to men for the same jobs…We're still treated very differently even though we're doing what most would consider a male job. We don't get the same benefits as most men doing the same jobs. So I think that's kind of sad in 2023.

This insight suggests that pay disparities continue to decrease workplace morale for some women.

Disparities in pay tended to surface more in the private sector, not the public, because in the public section pay was determined by a standardized calculation. As a result, differences in pay resulted because marginalized groups were not allowed to have access to higher paying jobs. Therefore, while the pay for all the people in a given job was the same, an African American fire chief as well as an Asian chief operating

officer said some people were not permitted to obtain higher paying jobs, which tended to be leadership roles. The Asian executive elaborated,

> There's definitely pay disparity, I noticed, in the consulting environment. Um in the government environment much less so because obviously all of those salaries are public, and it's much more difficult. All of their salaries are standardized…People of color typically were not considered to be on the management track, so they were expected to just bill a lot of hours. There were differences in pay and billing expectations. Consequently, some participants were denied access to higher paying jobs even though they were qualified to do them.

An Asian woman had a similar experience. She said in one of her jobs she was always paid hourly and that even when she was promoted to manager, she did not enjoy the same salary and benefits as the male manager she replaced. Therefore, she resigned. She suggested:

> I was being taken advantage of, you know, I was running myself into the ground trying to continuously prove my value [to her previous employee]. With this company [her present job which she likes], I don't have to prove my values because I'm already valued. As a result, I just continue giving and doing more.

Her strategy in subsequent jobs has been to keep building her skills, so she's in a better position to ask for more money, if she finds that necessary. She ultimately said a welcoming and safe culture mattered more to her than money. Consequently, she was happy with the money as long as she was relatively comfortable and safe.

A second Asian female professional working as a consultant resigned from a job after her salary was manipulated from well over $215,000 to less than $175,000. A single mother in her 30s, this professional felt that changes had been made to her responsibilities because she'd been outspoken about certain workplace matters. She'd also asked the company to accommodate her need to work from home as a single mother, so she could care for her small child. After making her wishes known, she noticed that her accounts slowly started to disappear. Those accounts had been re-assigned to men who were less qualified and less skilled. She ultimately resigned due to negative differential treatment and secured a more lucrative consulting role in another firm.

Similarly, an African American female dean of students in her 50s recalled having her title demoted to director. "They demoted my position as dean, and made it director," she explained. When a man had the same job prior to her, he enjoyed a higher salary and a better title. She was doing the same work for less money and a less impressive title than her male counterpart. The participants in this study definitely noticed discrepancies in pay and sometimes in title.

Pay disparities were problematic for the people who experienced it. The most frequent outcome was resignation. When professionals discovered that they were being underpaid, they often quit, sometimes on the spot. The mere thought of being treated unfairly didn't go over well with some professionals. Many would give their organizations an opportunity to correct problems, but in each instance, in which that was the case, requests for raises were denied. The most prevalent response to being undervalued was to seek employment elsewhere. The bottom line was that the professionals in this study did not respond well to managers messing with their money or paying them less than what they deserved. To remain employed with an organization, employees needed to perceive that they were being paid fairly.

Safety

Issues regarding safety tended to come from women in this study, and women indicated that they considered safety when electing to accept jobs. A church worker from Oregon in her 40s who had once worked in the

fast-food industry recalled being called a bitch at work by her colleague. It was a common occurrence that she and her female counterpart experienced. She said she'd been cursed out before by colleagues and occasionally by customers. She could understand the frustration customers may experience when, on occasion, their orders were wrong, provoking an irate customer to respond with disdain, but she drew the line at the use of pejorative remarks from colleagues. She quit for safety reasons because the climate was so hostile that she feared violence might ensue. Similarly, a Caucasian, female, factory worker in her 40s abruptly resigned from her job after the business owner's son utilized derogatory language to describe her. "The owner's son called me a BITCH to my face," she revealed. This high school educated employee said she didn't report the offense because "there's nobody to report to if it's the owner's son." She didn't waste time with the grievance process because she didn't think she would prevail in a complaint against the owner's son. She did, however, have her older brother come up to the factory and confront her abuser before she promptly quit. This example suggests that employability was contingent on the ability to manage hostile work environments and to contend with heightened workplace stress.

Actual or perceived threats of violence compelled other professionals to quit. A 60-year-old Greek business owner closed her jewelry store when she and her co-owner husband were robbed. "My husband was beaten up," said the business owner. Robberies have a unique way of inspiring professionals to rethink their career choices. These business owners decided to try their luck in the travel industry where they have amassed more than $200 million in business over a 20-year period.

Threatening the personal safety of another professional in her 40s inspired the employee to switch companies, although she stayed in the same industry. She said she worked alone at a third-shift job and would go hours without seeing anybody. Her fear was that if something were to happen to her, such as a robbery, nobody would be around to help. At the time she resigned, she said robberies in her area had been on the rise. She left as a precaution. Other women echoed the need to feel safe. An Asian woman added, 'If I'm in a comfortable position, and I feel safe in my environment, that's what makes me happy." People want to be safe.

Similarly, a multi-racial woman from a large and reputable corporation in the Midwestern part of the United States said her colleague overheard another worker plotting to fight her. The woman's colleague thought the professional was in imminent danger, so that colleague, trying to help, informed the Human Resources Department. In lieu of resolving the conflict between employees, the organization offered the victim of the threat a severance package, equivalent to one year's salary, and terminated her after seven years of employment. This white-collar employee explained:

> When I was let go, someone told me I should go put in an EECO claim because they let me go without cause. I think it was more retaliatory because I complained about my supervisor, and I think it was between her or me. This is somebody that I had a discrimination claim about…When Covid happened, they made her my supervisor. I don't know why they did that because they already knew how she thinks about me. She shouldn't have been my supervisor in the first place…Her kids started working there, and I [was assigned] to be their trainer. Anytime I gave any advice to the kids, I guess they would go home and complain to the mom. Her kids would go home at night and complain about me to her, she would come back into the office and retaliate against me…And then one day she was talking to someone else about me, and she said she wanted to punch me in the face. I heard her talking, but I didn't know she was talking about me. This new girl heard her say she wanted to punch me in the face, so she went to HR and complained, you know. I did not know the lady went to HR.

Ultimately, this professional ended up having a conversation with her Human Resources Department. They made no attempts to resolve the conflict. They simply offered her a severance package. However, her termination may have been expedited by the fact that she threatened to sue the company if they didn't give her a raise and enhance the climate. Her concerns were legitimate, but the fear of being sued may have compelled her employer to act quickly. When operating in a litigious society, all threats of being sued are taken seriously. Companies aren't keen on the idea of having employees coming to work each day, covertly collecting evidence against them for a lawsuit. The one-year severance package was appreciated, but this professional preferred to have her job. Ultimately, safety seemed to be more prevalent among women in this study. While one woman said her husband was hurt at work, she was the one who made the decision to get out of the jewelry business for safety reasons. The participants in this study said safety could dictate whether they accepted or remained employed with their respective organizations.

Harassment Via False Accusations or Unjustified Disciplinary Actions
The final theme which emerged in this study had to do with unwarranted complaints and false accusations. Professionals were being subjected to bogus and/or unfair disciplinary actions as a strategy to harass them. A Latina employee from the Midwest said her colleagues unfairly asked her to leave work for the day because she was too aggressive. She was excited about work and doing her job when a colleague accused her of scaring her. She said the Caucasian colleague expressed concern that the lady may someday come "and hurt her children or something." The Latina worker was offended as she had no plans to hurt anyone. A co-worker had expressed concern for her safety even though the Latina employee posed no threat to anybody's safety. The allegation that the Latina professional might become violent was unfounded. Sometimes marginalization is so complex that it can simultaneously be classified into multiple categories. Consequently, according to this participant, the unjust punishment was racially motivated. "That was racism. Let's call it what it is," she said. She was made to go home for the day and calm down even though she was not upset and saw no need to leave work that day. She essentially needed to walk on eggshells and speak in a whisper so as not to upset her colleagues. She felt like they were looking for excuses to complain about her, meticulously pushing her out of her job with each fraudulent complaint.

A Caucasian man from Indiana recalled being forced to abandon his job as Dean of Students, which disappointed him. Loved by students, he couldn't understand the president's decision to suddenly replace him with a younger man who was Latino, a man who had less experience. The Caucasian dean said he was regarded as being too radical for the culture of his campus when he took harsh actions to combat sexual abuse (and rape) of students on campus, students who primarily were women. He went on to become City Manager in another area and recovered from the termination well. On the other hand, a Latino Dean of Students from Texas, who is in his 50s, felt marginalized by his employer when they rejected his efforts to eradicate racism. He was conflicted as to whether the rejection was due to his race or his classification as a gay man. However, he felt his removal from the leadership role was unjustified. He said he did not realize that sharing his views about race would be characterized as a "fire-able offense." He went on to explain:

> Addressing issues of race and racism in society had become something that was very important to me…I did so when I was a faculty member, so when I became dean of this college, I wanted to bring that work to the forefront. For the past seven years I focused very strongly on racism and racial justice.

However, his campus did not reward him for the ways in which he enacted or individualized his role. Sadly, he said, "Um, well, I ultimately got fired about three months ago for it." His termination came as a shock to him because he hadn't realized that he was deemed as not complying with workplace policies. Or perhaps the policies only emerged when dominant group members decided they didn't like what he was doing.

While he may have felt like he was fired, he was actually demoted from dean back to the role of professor, which enabled him to continue collecting a salary. The loss of status felt like a punishment, but it was better than standing in a long unemployment line.

Other professionals who participated in this study complained of unfair punishment or false accusations as well. An African American man in his 50s worked as the fire chief in his community. His organization has a policy whereby employees could borrow tools and equipment from the fire station. Like other employees, he borrowed a lawn mower from the fire station when his lawn mower at home stopped working. He followed the protocol at his job for borrowing the loaner mower only to be accused of stealing it by a city leader. He was shocked by the accusation that he would steal. He had not stolen anything. Therefore, he was not disciplined for theft. However, he was subjected to harassment from a city official for doing something he was well within his rights to do. The allegation that he had stolen something could have diminished his good reputation.

In another instance, a 32-year-old Asian from California, who now resides in Alabama where she works as a marking executive, recalled being constantly harassed by her boss in her previous job in the restaurant industry. She spoke about not wanting to check her text messages because he would "constantly berate me." Her boss created a hostile work environment that extended into her personal life because he'd text her even when she was not in the office, harassing her via email and text message, about minute workplace matters that could have waited until she was back at work. Ignoring the messages until she was back on the clock didn't seem like a viable option if she wanted to remain employed.

In a comparable situation, a Latino American lawyer, in his 50s, from Utah indicated that he was unfairly investigated. He felt that tax dollars were wasted on a baseless investigation of his business practices because his colleagues did not fully comprehend the scope of his work. The investigation initially suggested that he had "some culpability," he indicated. But the complaint did not prevail when the investigators realized what his actual responsibilities were. He essentially asserted that he had done nothing wrong. He felt that he was not given the benefit of the doubt, and his reputation may have been unfairly tarnished by the probe. Fortunately, his mentor added a note to his file to explain the mishap and to inform others that he was not guilty of any wrongdoing. Completely removing the illegitimate complaint from his file was not in his mentor's sphere of influence. Advancing a similar claim, an African American man in his late 50s maintained that his organization unfairly "took away some of my responsibilities," as a strategy to harass him, spurring this professional to quit that job.

In a similar situation, a 51-year-old healthcare consultant from California recalled the stress she endured due to an investigation spanning six to eight months. She felt like the allegations were unjustified, but she still had to go through the process. She was dismayed that someone she'd worked with closely failed to follow protocol when filing a complaint against her. The normal practice was to talk directly to a person if you had a problem. Given that she talked to and interacted with the person on a regular basis, she was perplexed by her colleague's decision to circumvent the grievance process. She said, "This particular peer [who filed a complaint against me with the executive team]…for a complaint to bypass me and go to the executive level, I could only take it personal." She spoke of the immense stress she felt having to defend herself for months.

Equally concerning was the experience of an Asian woman in her 50s who worked as a chief executive officer for a higher education nonprofit. She said, "I come from a mindset that there will be challenges, but they are not personal…I don't take these things incredibility personally." However, she recalled the time when an African American woman accused her of racism.

Somebody did bring a workplace discrimination claim against me" she said. "Yeah, that felt

unfair. The person was frustrated. She thought my feedback was born out of racism. It was about her performance. It was not a racially-charged comment…She thought I was choosing to be critical because of her race.

The executive said the African American woman ultimately asked to be moved to another work team, and the educational company accommodated her. Being accused of racism could have compromised the Asian woman's employment, but she found a viable solution to the problem.

Similarly, a Caucasian man working as a sex therapist and pastor with a doctoral degree suffered the social penalties of complimenting an African American woman in the workplace on her hair. The employee, who was in his 60s, thought he was being friendly and nice to his Atlanta colleagues, not realizing that his actions were characterized as microaggressions. He was oblivious to the fact that his conduct was construed as singling out African American women and possibly marginalizing them. That was not his intention. He touched their hair and commented on their unique hair styles as a strategy to connect with his colleagues, not to harm them. He struggled to find effective communication tactics with the African American women in his office because they regarded him as violating them even though he did not perceive that he was. He learned very quickly to keep his hands to himself. During the interview for the present paper, he ascertained that entire dissertations have been written about hair and body politics, keeping society abreast of workplace expectations regarding touching a woman's hair or commenting on it in the workplace. The rule of thumb is to refrain from doing it. However, the backlash from what he regarded as a simple infraction was so pervasive that he left the company in embarrassment.

Another shocking complaint against a different employee who participated in this study surfaced in Rhode Island. A 42-year-old executive from that state with a doctoral degree said he was disciplined for doing what he saw his boss doing. His boss didn't like the way he handled a certain procedure; however, this particular business practice was typical for their workplace, something he'd seen his boss do many times. He eventually left that job. "When you no longer feel valued, it's time to go," he said. Employees don't enjoy devoting time to organizations where they are not appreciated.

Professionals in this study felt like their organizations harassed them with unjustified complaints, causing unnecessary stress and undermining their employment. Even when the investigators of the complaints ruled in each of their favors, these professionals had to endure the stress and embarrassment of being investigated, which normally concluded with a note in their personnel files. That meant that future promotions in said companies might be limited as their reputations had been compromised. Moreover, the time expended carrying out unwarranted investigations created corporate waste. Imagine what could have been accomplished with the time and other resources allocated to baseless complaints.

Unfounded complaints compromised employment and served to undermine the trust that professionals had in their respective organizations, requiring more psychological energy (Gates, 2023, Malik & Bjorkqvist, 2019; Teo, Nguyen, Trevelyan, Lamm, Boocock, 2021) to process workplace matters because psychological contracts had been breached (Savarimuthu & Rachael, 2017). Unmerited complaints are an abuse of power and a waste of resources because that time could have been utilized for more pressing workplace matters. Unnecessary complaints don't add to a company's competitive advance. It takes away from it as professionals begin to stop trusting their colleagues. Consequently, organizations must create workplaces in which all organizational members can thrive (Teo, Nguyen, Trevelyan, Lamm, Boocock, 2021). Organizations can optimize their talent by plugging people into the right jobs and facilitating their successful socialization.

EMPLOYABILITY

Based on the narratives shared by the participants in this study, what can be gleaned about employability? It appears that people were more employable if they could manage or devise strategies to overcome traumatic workplace betrayals such as: 1) racism, 2) sexism, 3) sexual harassment, 4) pay disparities, 5) threats to safety, and 6) harassment via false accusations or unjustified disciplinary actions.

Some of the participants in this study were separated from their jobs for a variety of circumstances. They lost their jobs or voluntarily left their jobs due to traumatic workplace betrayals, particularly 1) pay disparities, 2) threats to safety, 3) sexual harassment, 4) sexism, 5) racism, and 6) fraudulent complaints and/or unfair disciplinary actions. In many cases in which organizational members discussed traumatic workplace betrayals, the employees revealed that they were asked to leave (terminated), involuntarily demoted, or quit voluntarily via constructive termination whereby the environment was so hostile that organizational members were forced to leave voluntarily.

Sexual harassment was a prevalent workplace betrayal that resulted in a separation between employees and organizations. People were either terminated, or they quit. For instance, a male employee in a white-collar job noted that a female vice president in his office was found guilty of sexually harassing her male subordinate, and this executive left the Arizona firm quietly after the victim's colleagues reported the abuse. The allegation was that the vice president only brought coffee and donuts to work each day for her male subordinate. When men were found guilty of sexual harassment, which most often was the case, the men tended to stay in companies and to be punished. As Asian executive spoke of how a man on his team kept commenting on the dating status of his female colleague whom he found attractive. The offending organizational member shared his thoughts about her appearance. He made unsolicited remarks about his female colleague's partner, which made her uncomfortable. However, this offender was not fired. He was disciplined, and then he returned to work.

However, women who were sexually harassed often quit organizations due to the hostile work environment. Perhaps men remain in organizations after they sexually harass others because their victims are the ones who leave organizations after being abused. The narrative shared by a female factory worker exemplifies this. She said she left numerous factory jobs due to cumulative and unrelenting sexual harassment that was taking a toll on her psychologically. Working in a predominately male industry, she rarely got a break from the men harassing her on the factory floor. Future research could investigate the employability of women who frequently resign from organizations after enduring unrelenting sexual harassment.

Threats to safety also caused separation from employment. Threats were taken seriously and usually resulted in immediate termination. However, sometimes the victims of threats were fired. Perhaps it's easier to keep employees safe if they don't work for their respective organizations. A white-collar employee recalled being fired unfairly due to a threat to her safety that was reported by a third party, someone who witnessed a boss making the threat. The innocent bystander went to the Human Resources Department and reported that a supervisor was heard threatening to punch a subordinate in the face. The aggressor was angry about how the intended victim was training her teen children who worked for the same firm. In lieu of resolving the conflict and creating a more collegial environment, the company offered the intended target of the threat a severance package and terminated her. She had done nothing wrong. She was the victim of abuse. However, she still had to go. Her termination may have been expedited by the fact that she threatened to sue the company due to a hostile work environment. She was convinced that her Caucasian supervisor got to stay because she was perceived as adding greater value to the company. The offending supervisor had a more impressive repertoire of skills than her multi-racial victim, and the threat may have been regarded as an isolated event. However, allowing someone with a temper to remain in the workplace is risky. The

supervisor could be a liability if she hurts someone in the workplace in the future, and the company is discovered to have neglected to take action against her when she previously was reportedly making threats to harm her subordinates. Any supervisor who makes a credible threat to punch a colleague in the face should be fired or disciplined in some fashion.

In other instances, some organizational members, who were subjected to abuse that may have stemmed from race, gender, or the intersection of the two, initiated leaving because they no longer felt valued. Others spoke of being demoted and/or terminated. In a unique situation, an African American, male professional left his job when he was asked to train the Caucasian woman who was going to become his boss. He was more skilled than the newcomer, yet the company wanted him to train the person who was making more money than he was. It seemed illogical to him. The more reasonable approach, in his mind, would have been for them to promote him, not make him train his incompetent boss. He quit almost immediately.

Two deans said they were demoted or terminated from what may have been race-related matters. A Latino dean was helping students address race-relations on campus when his superior demoted him for those efforts. Perhaps he needed to warn his boss that he was going to help students organize a protest on campus about the very controversial topic of race.

Another dean, a Caucasian man, said he was fired and replaced by a much younger Latino man because the Caucasian dean was deemed too radical in his attempts to combat the growing problem of sexual harassment and sexual assaults on campus. The dean said he was standing up for women, but those actions were not very highly valued at that campus. The dean said he didn't fully know how to make sense of his termination. His privilege as a Caucasian male didn't seem to be helping him on that college campus. Perhaps it was his age, or was he being punished for helping abused women? Had he done something else that wasn't appreciated. The new female president at his campus may have just wanted a new leader given that he was terminated shortly after she took office. Maybe she just wanted more diversity on her campus. The bottom line is that he was let go and replaced by a Latino dean with much less experience. At the time, it hardly seemed fair. He was heartbroken until he secured a job as mayor of a small town, utilizing more of his leadership skills.

Finally, an African American, male executive recalled being fired for what he thought was racism although he also indicated that he voluntarily left other jobs for this type of marginalization as well. He indicated that they kept taking responsibilities away from him as a strategy to punish him or undermine his employment. He felt like he was being targeted because of his race. It was evident that he didn't fit the culture of the company comprised predominantly of Caucasian employees. Cultural compatibility was the salient factor impeding his perceived employability, so he left. He found a good cultural fit with another organization where he is now thriving.

Organizational members tended to resign when pay disparities were unresolved. The most frequent response to being underpaid was to voluntarily quit, sometimes on the spot. An Asian female consultant noticed that her male counterparts who were less competent made more than she was paid. She eventually found another job and resigned. Similarly, a Latino factory worker left his job when he discovered that his colleagues made more money and were doing much less work than he was. When his requests for a raise were declined, he left. Many companies conceal salaries to avoid these kinds of disputes.

Nobody reported fraudulent complaints as a primary cause for termination, but these complaints did compel employees to leave. One African American man who had gone to school to learn how to repair heating and cooling systems obtained a job as a maintenance man. However, he was fired, rehired, and then fired again by the same company. He was subjected to numerous complaints, which seemed frivolous. Therefore, after firing him the first time, the company called him and invited him back to work. Shortly thereafter, they fired him again. The employee didn't get along with a man at his job, and sometimes the petty complaints created a hostile work environment, resulting in the disgruntled employee leaving. The man said he had been fired

so many times in his career that he stopped working for other people. To sustain himself, he started buying real estate and earning money from numerous rental properties. He now utilizes his skills in a more lucrative role maintaining his own properties in Chicago.

Another African American man from Rhode Island said he resigned because he no longer felt valued when his company disciplined him for exhibiting business practices that were commonly utilized by his supervisors and others at his job. He said he followed the same procedures modeled for him by his superiors and mentors. However, when certain organizational members learned of his procedures, they disciplined him. He was perplexed. The disciplinary action was confusing because others who engaged in the same practice were not punished. The company didn't fire this professional, but the negative differential treatment compelled him to leave voluntarily. When you no longer feel valued, it's time to go.

A third African American male, a fire chief, said a city official tried to undermine his employment by accusing him of stealing a lawn mower. The fire chief retained his job because he was within his rights to borrow the lawn mower. The city official may not have realized the fire station had a policy in place whereby employees could sign out tools and supplies if they promised to return them. The fire chief was not fired. However, the accusation compromised the trust he had in the city official.

Overall, employability was influenced by the ability of organizations and employees to manage: 1) Racism, 2) Sexism, 3) Sexual Harassment, 4) Pay Disparities, 5) Threats to Safety, and 6) Harassment Via False Accusations or Unjustified Disciplinary Actions. While unfair, organizational members may increase their employability when they are savvy enough to manage or overcome these barriers. Perhaps organizations could seek to eradicate workplace betrayals rendering organizations untenable.

DISCUSSION

The employability of the participants in this study was revealed as they shared their lived experiences of learning the ropes of their respective organizations during socialization. A key to their success and employability was learning the culture of their respective organizations, which essentially was the organizational socialization process. The organizational socialization model devised by Dr. Denise Gates (2002; 2003a; 2009; 2023) was unanimously supported in this study. All 140 participants indicated that the model captured the essence of how they experienced their respective workplaces and professions, and those narratives revealed tactics utilized to remain employed or to manage terminations.

A salient component of the model by Gates (2009) had to do with organizational acceptance or rejection of employees, which has implications for employability. Many of the participants recalled instances in which organizations either did not communicate acceptance or created uncertainty and ambiguity about acceptance. Acceptance seemed to spur greater engagement, and engagement influenced productivity. Therefore, employees who didn't feel valued or accepted within organizations either left those jobs, or they stuck around and compromised performance and other workplace outcomes (Gates, 2023; Guo, Qiu, & Gan, 2022). Performance may be in jeopardy due to incivility in the workplace (Guo, Qiu, & Gan, 2022) or microaggressions (Johnson & Johnson, 2019). Because employees tend to be less productive when they are not engaged, perhaps organizations can examine how all employees experience workplaces, illuminating strategies that enhance workplace encounters. Clearly, improving the psychological environments for employees may enhance workplace interactions (Hussain & Mubarik, 2021; Johnson & Johnson, 2019) and inspire more rewarding experiences with organizational socialization and employability (Gates, 2009; 2021; 2023).

Cultivating climates that are more conducive to employees achieving excellence should remain a primary goal of human resources professionals who desire to enhance employability. Organizational leaders might

be able to help employees overcome traumatic workplace betrayals, such as: 1) Racism, 2) Sexism, 3) Sexual Harassment, 4) Pay Disparities, 5) Threats to Safety, and 6) Harassment Via False Accusations or Unjustified Disciplinary Actions. Systems that promote healthy professional interactions, inspire greater engagement, and enhance productivity may succeed in reducing turnover and promoting greater employability.

IMPLICATIONS

This paper has implications for people entering organizations as well as professionals who are already in the organizations that are reflected in this study. It also has implications for how these participants experience their existing firms. A disturbing trend that emerged in this study was that non-dominant groups continue to endure marginalization and microaggressions (Johnson & Johnson, 2019) in organizations, as revealed in the work of White-Goyzueta, Gates-Mayweathers, and Nance-West (2023). This reality is indicative of the need for organizational members to know how to manage racism, sexism, sexual harassment, pay disparities, safety issues, harassment resulting from unwarranted disciplinary actions / bogus complaints, etc. if they want to remain employed. These traumatic workplace betrayals shape experiences and perpetuate marginalization.

Organizations that wish to remain in compliance with laws governing workplace interactions may want to assess their organizations and devise strategies to promote cultures that have no-tolerance policies for abuse. Leaders should implement strategies to get into compliance and offer ongoing training to ensure that policies are comprehended and upheld at all levels of their respective organizations. This objective is not merely an agenda to appear politically correct, but leaders must fully grasp the magnitude of the importance of compliance as it is the lawful thing to do. Moreover, organizations benefit when there is synergy among work groups, inspiring efficiency and greater innovation. People who collaborate and value strategic partnerships may add value to their organizations as well. The increased productivity resulting from happier employees working together more proficiently is good business.

Organizations can help professionals overcome challenges stemming from traumatic workplace betrayals by preparing in advance. They can develop greater emotional intelligence to better comprehend how to handle themselves in challenging situations. They can maintain high self-confidence and high self-esteem so that when bullies try to diminish their self-worth, they can withstand the challenge. They can hone their skills and keep striving for excellence, so as to reduce the chances that others will take issue with their competence. They can familiarize themselves with organizational policies, procedures, and laws governing their organizations. This knowledge may help ensure that organizational members comply with standards and reduce the likelihood of people filing fraudulent complaints against them. When they know their rights, organizational members may be less of a target for marginalization.

Another strategy to overcome marginalization would be for these organizational members to find mentors. They may want to consider internal and external mentors (Gates, 2019). Mentors within organizations can help people understand the organization's culture, and mentors outside organizations can help people navigate the industry. External mentors also can help answer questions organizational members are uncomfortable posing in the workplace. For example, organizational members may be reticent about asking questions that would cause them to appear incompetent, especially given that some organizational members already treat them like they are. Consequently, that double-consciousness (DuBois, 2007) might be enough to compel some orrganizational members to be strategic about asking questions. Mentors and other organizational leaders can help by creating safe spaces for employees to ask questions. The right questions can change the direction of a project and help teams overcome ineffective group dynamics such as groupthink. Good mentors can help pave the way for organizational members and change the trajectory of struggling careers.

Organizations can support all organizational members by implementing policies to help eradicate racism, sexism, sexual harassment, pay disparities, safety violations, harassment resulting from unwarranted disciplinary actions / bogus complaints, etc. Organizational leaders can't be complacent during these tumultuous times. They must examine organizational cultures and take steps to root out any negative elements rendering people marginalized. They can implement training programs that promote the desired, and legal, outcomes. They can consider other ways to socialize organizational members by pairing them with conscientious mentors and offering other opportunities for people to learn and grow. Ultimately, socialization is an ongoing process that people and organizations must constantly seek to enhance. Effective socialization may help organizations draw the greatest value out of people, gaining a competitive advantage with organizational members. Professionals who embrace or encourage effective organizational socialization may become more employable as they learn to secure roles that are in alignment with their values.

Systems that promote healthy professional interactions may inspire greater engagement and curtail attrition. Boon, Hartog, and Lepak (2019) suggested that a greater emphasis needed to be placed on systems, not people, because systems shape individual experiences, and healthy workplace climates tend to inspire engagement and greater productivity (Parnell, 2021).

Employability can be enhanced when competent workers engage in effective organizational socialization. This means that organizations need to make smart hiring decisions, selecting people who share their values. Getting the people part right is imperative to organizational success. Ultimately, organizations that learn how to draw the greatest value out of people can gain a competitive advantage with their organizational members. Individuals who comprehend the organizational socialization model by (Gates, 2009) can devise strategies to be more intentional about their socializing experiences. In conjunction with efforts to enhance organizational socialization, employability is heightened when organizational members can manage or overcome traumatic workplace betrayals that often impede sustained employment.

CONCLUSION

This paper explored the lived experiences of 140 professionals as they made sense of their respective experiences with organizational socialization, and it offered insight into their various levels of employability. In conjunction with supporting the notion that people are more employable when they fit their workplace cultures, findings revealed support for the current rendition of organizational socialization model by Gates (2002; 2003a; 2009; 2023). This work has implications for employability and human resources management more broadly as experiences conveyed in the present study were indicative of traumatic workplace betrayals manifesting as racism, sexism, sexual harassment, pay disparities, safety issues, harassment resulting from unwarranted disciplinary actions / bogus complaints, etc. These workplace betrayals compromised the employability of the participants in this study when not managed well.

Some of the participants in this study lost their jobs or voluntarily left their jobs due to traumatic workplace betrayals, The inability to cope with: 1) Racism, 2) Sexism, 3) Sexual Harassment, 4) Pay Disparities, 5)Threats to Safety, and 6) Harassment Via False Accusations or Unjustified Disciplinary Actions can leave people unemployed or cause them to switch jobs frequently. Future research should determine if these findings are supported in other populations.

This study may help scholars and practitioners better understand organizational socialization and employability as a large part of employability is about ensuring cultural compatibility. It's imperative to get the people part right because employees can help organizations gain competitive advantages. Overcoming the challenges articulated by the professionals in this study could help their respective organizations decrease

turnover and enhance socialization, which may improve long-term employability.

Leaders who comprehend the process of organizational socialization (Gates, 2009) could devise strategies to be more intentional about how their teams are socialized. They could devise tactics for organizational socialization that will augment efforts to enhance the overall employability of organizational members. When organizational socialization is effective, organizational members tend to sense an alignment with the cultures of their respective organizations, and these organizational members perpetuate those cultures with their own actions. The ability to actively facilitate the processes of organizational socialization and to overcome traumatic workplace betrayals may improve employability in organizational members. Future research could continue to explore the relationship between employability and organizational socialization.

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