RESURRECTING THE DEPARTED – AN EXPLORATION OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION EXPERIENCES OF REHIRED EMPLOYEES

by

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ABSTRACT

JOAN MONDAE OLESON. Resurrecting the departed – An exploration of the organizational socialization experiences of rehired employees.
(Under the direction of DR. LORIL GOSSETT)

This qualitative study conducted within a Fortune 100 corporation examines experiences of employees who leave an organization and then later choose to return for a second round of employment. It examines the communicative processes of employees who leave and the mechanisms by which they maintain and use their network of former co-workers to aid them in returning to the company. This study compares the experiences of returning employees who left voluntarily (e.g., resignation) with those who were forced to leave (e.g., laid-off). The circumstances of exit and return are different for both populations, but the findings of this study suggest common experiences in the organizational re-socialization process.

Findings of this study offer compelling evidence to reconsider prevailing theoretical views of organizational socialization. This research proposes a revised model that conceptualizes organizational socialization as a circular sequence of events, rather than a linear progression of phases. By not only expanding the structure of this model, the concepts outlined in this paper provide insight into the lesser-studied organizational practice of rehiring employees which is gaining popularity in a growing global trend of career mobility.

KEY TERMS: organizational socialization, layoffs, returning employees, boomerang employees, rehires, assimilation, exit, organizational identity, identification, networks, realistic job previews, disengagement

DEDICATION

To my grandparents, John Lewis Bennett and Virginia Lee Bennett, who always remind me that “getting an education” must be a top priority in life.

Also, to my friend, Dan Norton, who encourages and guides me in my professional and academic aspirations. Thanks for always believing in me and “betting the farm” that I would be accepted into the graduate school at UNC Charlotte.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Life-long or long-term employment at a single organization has become a rarity in a global culture where increased career mobility and reductions in workforce have become common in organizational life. However, employees who have chosen to leave or were involuntarily dismissed from an organization occasionally find their way back. This choice that employees make to return to a previous employer prompts the need to reconsider existing academic views of organizational socialization, identification and membership.

At the front of every organization is a figurative door. New employees seek to come in, enter, become veteran employees with tenure and experience, and then eventually exit. Organizational communication scholar, Frederic Jablin (1987, 2001), proposed a model that mapped out the process by which individuals evolve from organizational outsiders to organizational insiders, then return to organizational outsiders upon exiting the company. This model found its roots in the concept of socialization, which Van Maanen and Schein termed in 1979 as the process by which an individual joins an organization and learns the necessary skills and knowledge to be successful. Jablin furthered this theory of the employee's organizational existence by outlining three main processes: (1) before an individual joins an organization (anticipatory socialization phase), (2) when an individual accepts employment and becomes a member of the organization (entry and assimilation phase), and finally (3) when the individual leaves the

organization (disengagement and exit phase). While Jablin (1987, 2001) developed his model as a linear process with one door in and one door out, I propose that organizations have a figurative revolving door, and rehired employees are those who make it spin.

When an employee exits an organization, it doesn't always mean they are gone for good. Sometimes organizations are forced to lay off employees for a period of time, but rehire them when conditions improve or different jobs become available. Sometimes employees voluntarily leave an organization on good terms and are able to return at a later date. These former members sit outside, maybe even periodically passing through other organizations, but ultimately make the decision to return to their previous employer. When these members are rehired, the communicative process starts anew with a fresh phase of anticipatory socialization, then organizational re-entry, a second phase of assimilation, or re-assimilation, and eventual exit. This cycle can be repeated as many times as the employee leaves and returns to a company. It truly ends when they permanently exit the organization and never return.

At the time this paper was written, very little scholarly research has been done on the experiences of organizational returners, particularly from the ethnographic viewpoint of a researcher who has experienced organizational exit and return. This qualitative study seeks to understand the motivations and experiences of employees who leave an organization and then later choose to return for a second round of employment. It also examines the communicative experiences of employees who leave and the mechanisms by which they maintain and use their network of former co-workers to aid them in returning to the company. Organizational exit and rehire events are rich in communication concepts and can be most fully understood through the narratives of those

who have experienced the rehire process at some point in their careers. In this study, I compare the experiences of returning employees who left voluntarily (e.g., resignation) with those who were forced to leave (e.g., laid-off). The circumstances of exit and return are different for both populations, but there is a common reason for these employees' decisions to return and similarities in how they experience the organizational socialization process.

The layoff/rehire phenomena suggests the need to reconsider how the organizational lifecycle is defined by Jablin (1987, 2001). This study offers compelling evidence to consider this lifecycle as a circular sequence of activities, rather than a solid linear progression of phases. By not only expanding the structure of this model, the new context outlined in this paper provides insight into the lesser-studied organizational practice of rehiring employees which is gaining popularity in a growing global trend of career mobility (The Workforce Institute at Kronos Inc., 2015).

This research also adds an additional layer of detail into how this process is experienced by those who live it. By examining employee narratives in the context of this expanded lifecycle model, a richer account of the exit/rehire experience is explored. Much of the previous research related to this topic has been quantitative in nature and does not provide detailed, first-person perspectives from the employee experience. Not only does this study contribute to academic understanding of organizational socialization, it also serves to inform human resources decisions. Human resources professionals could benefit from insight into the experiences of returners to address the unique needs of this incoming population of talent by establishing informed and effective onboarding programs and resources.

Additionally, and possibly most valuable, conclusions drawn from this study shed light on the on the communicative practices that enable the organizational socialization cycle that I am suggesting as a result of this research. Concepts from the field of communication studies such as organizational socialization/assimilation and identity/membership narratives are important artifacts because exploring these tenants of employee behavior provides knowledge and insight to help scholars, human resources professionals and managers understand the needs of rehired employees.

This paper takes a two-pronged approach to examining extant literature relevant to employee exit and return. First, I review Jablin's model to explore the foundations of anticipatory socialization, organizational entry/assimilation, and disengagement/exit. I will focus my literature review on Jablin's original model. In addition to reviewing Jablin's socialization literature, I also examine existing knowledge of organizational identity and how these concepts may play a role in the socialization process of rehired employees. Second, I will discuss the notion of boomerang employees, a human resources term that is becoming increasingly common to describe workers who leave an organization, usually voluntarily, but later choose to return. Since this study will examine two types of leavers – voluntary and involuntary – I consider the different experiential and attitudinal factors that may affect their decisions to return to an organization as well as influence their experiences after re-joining.

After considering the literature, I will outline my research questions and methods of data collection. Then, I present my findings and discuss implications of this research for the prevailing academic view of organizational socialization and human resources perspectives on retaining, or re-obtaining talent. I will discuss theoretical and practical

implications grounded in the findings of this study. Finally, I will outline my recommendations for future research on this topic.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

2.1 The Circle of Organizational Life: Socialization

2.1.1 Anticipatory Socialization. There are two types of socialization that occur leading up to organizational entry – role and organizational anticipatory socialization. Jablin (2001) draws on fundamentals of vocational psychology to suggest that these phases begin long before a potential job applicant considers joining a company (Crites, 1969). The first phase begins in childhood and is often a lifelong experience known as vocational, or role anticipatory socialization, in which individuals observe and collect information about an occupation, constantly filtering it against their own self-concept (Jablin, 2001; Kramer, 2010).

Role anticipatory socialization is a process that draws on multiple sources and experiences. By gathering information from a variety of sources, a person evaluates the attractiveness of the organization against their needs and interests in life. The five information sources originally proposed by Jablin (2001) were later revised by Kramer (2010) to include: family, education, previous organizational experience, peers, and media. While each source is an important factor in overall role anticipatory socialization, I'd like to focus on a couple of key points related to previous organizational experience and peers as potentially related to the decision-making process of returning employees:

- *Previous organizational experience* – a category for role anticipatory information that is limited to a person's knowledge of performing other related, or unrelated,

roles leading up to the new role they are anticipating to begin. While this includes part-time, full-time and volunteer work, it doesn't consider the possibility of an individual literally having past experience working in an organization they are returning to for a second round of employment. This source of role anticipatory information may play a very different role in the scenario of a rehire returning to an organization compared to the experience of a truly new employee. This familiarity may inform a returner's decision to seek re-employment at an organization.

- *Peers* – an anticipatory socialization force that also offers interesting possibilities in the rehire scenario as well. Jablin (2001) and Kramer (2010) define this category as how individuals consult and receive information from peers regarding career or role choices. They assert that individuals are influenced by their peers as they navigate career choices throughout life. If an individual has previously worked in an organization – especially if they have spent several years there – many of their peers with whom they discuss potential career choices are likely still employed at the company. The role anticipatory socialization category as it is traditionally understood is devoid of the possibility of interaction with former co-workers, and leaves a big question mark regarding how this sort of peer contact may affect individuals considering opportunities to return to an organization.

The second phase of socialization, organizational anticipatory socialization, occurs when individuals are planning on – or actively are – seeking a job in the organization of their choosing. In this phase, an individual has identified an organization

that offers roles suited to their skills and matches their values and interests. Primary sources of information aiding in this type of socialization include public information about an organization as well as interpersonal interactions with others such as recruiters, current employees and others close to the organization (Jablin, 2001). Recruitment situations play an important role in the information-gathering rituals performed by a potential hire. Recent studies have corroborated Jablin's (2001) assertion that direct interactions with organizational members allow potential employees to better determine whether the prospective company is a good fit for them, resulting in lasting job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Cable & Parsons, 2001; Cooper-Thomas, Van Vianen, & Anderson, 2004). In fact, person-organization fit has been found to be a key factor in long-term professional relationships between a company and its employees (Bowen, Ledford, & Nathan, 1991; Kristof, 1996). This concept could be considered an antecedent of strong organizational identity, which is addressed later in this literature review. Regardless, person-organization fit theories have historically centered on three important aspects of determining job satisfaction and organizational commitment: values, personality and work environment (Westerman & Cyr, 2004). These characteristics attract individuals to organizations, leading them to seek and accept entry to the company as an employee (Jablin, 2001; Westerman & Cyr, 2004).

Another interesting area of the organizational anticipatory socialization phase as potentially related to rehire situations is the effect of realistic job previews. Organizations often tend to sell the positive features of job opportunities and applicants frequently have high expectations as they make the decision to accept the position in the organization (Jablin, 2001; Kramer, 2010). If realistic job previews are given, employees' expectations

are not as high, therefore better preparing them for the realities of the role (Baur, Buckley, Bagdasarov, & Dharmasiri, 2014; Wanous, 1973). Unrealistic job previews have been shown to result in higher levels of turnover (Wanous, Poland, Premack, & Davis, 1992; Wanous, 1992). Naturally, it is logical to assume that rehires have extremely realistic job previews because they previously worked for the organization, often performing very similar roles to which they are seeking. This presents yet another interesting variation in the traditional organizational anticipatory socialization phase.

2.1.2 Entry and Assimilation. The next phase of Jablin's model is organizational entry and assimilation. This process occurs when an individual accepts employment at an organization and begins trying to navigate and understand the culture at their new workplace through interaction and communication with co-workers (Jablin, 2001; Schein, 1992). This phase involves many communicative activities in which the newbie employee attempts to learn more about the organization and become comfortable with their role (Kramer, 2010; Teboul, 1994). Some of these activities include: orienting, socialization, training, mentoring, informal mentoring, information seeking, relationship development and role negotiation (Jablin, 2001).

Clearly, all of these activities are not necessarily applicable to rehires, particularly when they are placed in a department they are already familiar with. Existing organizational identity and sense of membership may influence how rehires experience socialization phases differently from employees who are completely new to the organization. Consequently, there are likely to be unique assimilation phases that occur for rehires. I posit that organizational returners experience a distinctive socialization phase between exit and re-entry. This gray area of liminality is a phase unexplored by

traditional organizational socialization literature because existing models only examine the first-time employee experience from pre-entry to exit and do not incorporate the possibility that the employee may eventually return.

A strong sense of organizational identity may play a key role in a worker's decision to re-join a company in the future. Organizational identity is the idea that employees attach to some aspect of the company they work for and define themselves based on attributes of the company such as its goals, objectives and values (Barker, 1998). Employees identify with an organization and feel a sense of belonging when there are perceived shared values (Burke, 1959). Organizational identification is a widely studied concept that began to gain momentum within areas of academia including sociology, psychology, and organizational sciences in the 1980s. Burke (1959) explains that identification with an organization is a natural social process in which employees engage, thereby creating a sense of commitment, loyalty and belonging. Albert and Whetten (1985) later developed the concept of organizational identity by studying how companies, as groupings of individuals, come to foster shared beliefs that result in collective values and cohesive behaviors. Ashforth and Mael (1989) theoretically took it a step further by arguing that organizational identification is a very specific type of social identification – an activity that individuals engage in with peers and teammates. The identification process is complex; reasons to identify and unify vary from employee to employee (Gossett, 2002).

Social identity theory has been tied to discussions on organizational identity and how it affects the assimilation process of employees in organizations (Forward & Scheerhorn, 1996; Kramer, 2010). This theory suggests individuals use their personal and

social concepts of self to continually define themselves as either a member or an outsider in an organizational environment (Ashforth, 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). This cognitive process of social categorization has been found to occur during assimilation as employees begin counting themselves among the "we" who make up the organization and align their sense of self to the larger, organizational purpose (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Cheney, 1983). This suggests that employees sometimes actively identify with the organization they work for. Research has been done on how the act of employees negotiating membership amongst each other defines their experience as actors in the organization as well as plays a role in defining the culture of the organization itself (Scott & Meyers, 2010). These perspectives on organizational identity construction should be considered when attempting to understand and define the process of re-entry and re-assimilation for rehires.

2.1.3 Disengagement and Exit. The final phase of Jablin's model is disengagement and exit. Cumming and Henry's definition of disengagement (as cited by Jablin, 2001) is an "individual's decreased association with a group and, simultaneously, the group's decreased demands on and involvement with the individual. As a group expects less from an individual, the rewards of belonging also decrease such that withdrawal from the group becomes a viable option" (p. 785). Disengagement is typically the beginning of the voluntary exit route which Jablin (2001) unpacks as a three-stage process: 1) preannouncement, 2) announcement and actual exit, and 3) post-exit. These three steps are defined by the type of communication that takes place between the exiting employee and others associated with them.

An interesting variation in this phase for involuntarily terminated employees is that there is rarely no opportunity or need for preannouncement, and the exit process begins with announcement and actual exit. Announcement, in this case, may take the form of goodbye emails or phone calls and is accelerated due to the employee's severed status. This process of leave-taking and the ritual of saying goodbye to colleagues has been shown to be integral to the self-esteem, sense of dignity and overall psychological wellbeing of involuntarily terminated employees (Labib & Appelbaum, 1994). Actual exit may begin the psychological disengagement phase for involuntarily terminated employees due to feelings of disownment, betrayl and disappointment (Leana & Feldman, 1992; Noer, 1993). In this case, the disengagement of laid-off workers might begin during the post-exit phase and may play an important role in how employees re-establish themselves in the organization if they are given the opportunity to return.

Also, exit is a unique situation in Jablin's model for involuntarily terminated employees because they have no control over their exit. It is often immediate and forced – building and system access is revoked as they are swiftly dislodged from organizational life. Any communication between the exiting employee and remaining co-workers is often hurried and emotional. These circumstances make the post-exit phase and ensuing communication a particularly interesting area for research. Jablin (2001) descibes the post-exit phase as a period of uncertainty for both the leaver and those left behind. Uncertainty has been found to be a common emotional reaction to layoffs and is likely a common factor in the post-exit environment (Guiniven, 2001; Reinardy, 2010; Tourish, Hobman, & Bordia, 2004).

2.2 Back Like a Boomerang: Types of Leavers and Experiential/Attitudinal Factors

2.2.1 The Boom in Boomerangs. Individuals who have left an organization but later return have been termed boomerang employees, comeback kids, alumni, and most simply, rehires (Apy & Ryckman, 2014; Kumavat, 2012; Shipp, Furst-Holloway, Harris, & Rosen, 2014). A recent survey of over 1,800 human resources professionals found that organizations are now more likely to welcome back boomerangs than ever before in the past, with 76 percent of those interviewed indicating that they would accept employees seeking a second round of employment with their organizations (The Workforce Institute at Kronos Inc., 2015).

Pros and cons of rehiring workers has been a trending subject in the media and social sciences areas of academia particularly related to psychology and business administration (Apy & Ryckman, 2014; Feldstein, 1976; Kumavat, 2012; McDonnell, 2010; Raj & Hundekar, 2013; Shipp, Furst-Holloway, Harris, & Rosen, 2014). The extant information on whether or not rehiring employees is a good talent acquistition/retention strategy provides no clear advice to human resources professionals weighing these options. Some research suggests that rehiring employees may prove valuable to organizations due to their propensity to stick with the company and demonstrate better job performance than brand new employees (Saks, 1994; Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). This research cites benefits of rehiring employees, including:

- Time and cost savings in seeking candidates and subsequent re-onboarding and training.

- The opportunity to bring fresh vision, skills and developed talents back to the company after the former employee has spent time in other organizations learning new ways of doing things.
- Good company image and reputation for attracting and retaining talent.

Cons or risks of welcoming boomerangs back into the organization include the possiblity that bad habits or poor skills may follow the rehire, as well as the complication of a time lapse due to their absence in which the rehire is unaware of changes in processes, systems or management strategy since they left (Kumavat, 2012).

While academic interest is growing in this population of returning employees, it has most often been studied in the context of those who voluntarily leave the company under their own power. Popular opinion wavers on all different facets of the subject ranging from an organization's ability to successfully reintegrate rehires to whether or not employees are able to forgive and forget potentially negative reasons for separating from the company in the first place (Lublin, 1996; McDonnell, 2010). One study suggested that voluntary leavers who are rehired have higher levels of job survival and coping skills compared to first-time employees (Saks, 1994). This may be partly because rehires have existing social networks in the company they are seeking re-entry to, which makes readjustment to the organization and assimilation to new roles easier, whereas newcomers don't have this benefit. Research in this area is suprisingly sparse, making this opportunity to examine rehires' experiences of great potential value to human resources professionals and organizational communication scholars alike.

2.2.2 Get Me Out of Here: The Voluntary Exit. When attempting to understand a problem, it is always helpful to first consider the root cause. In this case, as part of this

study I seek to understand what communication events or rituals influence individuals return to an organization after they have previously made the decision to leave, thereby returning to the organizational socialization cycle.

There are many reasons why employees choose to voluntarily leave an organization. Lee, Mitchell, Wise and Fireman (1996) presented four paths to voluntary exit. The first path to voluntary exit is described as planned exit related to non-work events. These types of exit can be triggered by life events such as the birth of a child, a need to care for an ailing family member, a personal illness requiring long-term treatment, a geographical relocation or a graduation, after which the employee intends to pause, start or change careers. The date of these events is typically known, therefore allowing the employee to openly plan and communicate their separation with peers and managers (Kramer, 2010; Lee et al., 1996). In some situations, like choosing to care for a child until they reach school age, the worker may plan on eventually re-entering the workforce, possibly even pursuing opportunities at their former employer at a later date.

The second path to voluntary exit involves a sort of "shock" event that the employee cannot overlook or overcome, leading them to a quick decision to leave the company. In this scenario, their personal values or goals are challenged, precipitating the need or desire for a quick exit. Examples of shock events include discovery of immoral or unethical business practices or situations, perceived undesirable organizational changes, a severe disagreement with a superior, or even being turned down for a promotion (Kramer, 2010; Lee et al., 1996).

The third path is similar to the second, but the events leading the employee to consider leaving the company may not be as extreme, allowing them time to mull over

the situation and examine their options. In this exit path, labeled by Kramer (2010) as a "shock event resulting in a job search before quitting" (p. 173), the job or conditions of the job may not be ideal to the employee and many factors weigh on the employee's decision to exit the organization. Lee et al. (1996) differentiate this path from the aforementioned shock events path by the effort made by the employee to locate another job outside the organization prior to quitting. More recent research on employee turnover intentions point out that an individual's personality, existing job markets, cultural experiences and identity are just a few of the factors that add sway to the decision to stay or go (Donnelly & Quirin, 2006; Maertz, Jr., 2004).

The final path leading to employee turnover is disengagement, or overall dissatisfaction with the job. The decision to exit the company is often gradual, with compounding negative experiences or growing feelings of disassociation (Kramer, 2010; Lee et al., 1996). For voluntary leavers, their organizational identity may be affected when their commitment to the company wanes. When this happens, employees disassociate themselves from the *we* of the organization and slowly begin viewing the company and those who still identify with or represent the company as *they*. When employees distance themselves from the organization they work for, they often become increasingly disengaged and dissatisfied. One can reason that employees make decisions to leave the organization, perhaps for a perceived better opportunity and decide to return because the new job or organization did not meet their expectations. This may be true for employees exiting voluntarily as well as those who are laid off – why try something new when you can return to something you already know to be good?

2.2.3 You Are No Longer One of Us: The Involuntary Exit. Workforce reductions, right-sizing, down-sizing and layoffs are common terms to describe an organizational practice in which workers are strategically eliminated from an organization, usually in large groups or planned phases. Layoffs have become increasingly popular as a managerial cost-cutting strategy since the 1980s. Scholarly literature on layoffs reflects surges in academic inquiry in the form of published journal articles aligning to extended periods of recession and heightened unemployment in the United States (The National Bureau of Economic Research, 2010). Much of this literature examines the emotional and financial consequences for layoff victims in how they experience and overcome unemployment (Group Films Media, 1999; Leana & Feldman, 1992; Noer, 1993) as well as how they cope with associated psychological and emotional burdens (Grunberg, Moore, & Greenberg, 2001; Labib & Appelbaum, 1994). Little research has been done on employees who have been laid off from an organization, but later return to the same company as a rehire.

Those fortunate and healthy enough to be gainfully employed spend a large part of their daily lives on the job, occupied by the tasks they are given. Their routines and livelihood revolve around this occupation which results in a paycheck that supports and sustains their lifestyle. Then suddenly, a layoff takes away this stability, familiarity and purpose. The result is a personal and highly emotional crisis. Feelings of anger, betrayal, shock, fear and uncertainty pervade the literature on the emotions related to job loss. The trauma of unexpectedly losing a job has even been compared to experiencing death (Finley & Lee, 1981; Group Films Media, 1999; Guiniven, 2001; Noer, 1993;

Nordenmark & Strandh, 1999; Stankunas, Kalediene, Starkuviene, & Kapustinskiene, 2006).

These emotions have been shown to evoke a shift in laid-off employees' attitudes toward the company that let them go (Blau, Petrucci, & McClendon, 2012). Unwavering loyalty is compromised by feelings of betrayal and abandonment. However, a major factor in how laid-off employees perceive their former employers is how well they believe their layoff was handled. Procedural justice in layoffs is essentially how individuals assess a layoff event to have been conducted fairly for those impacted (Wanberg, Bunce, & Gavin, 1999). Many studies support the notion that procedural justice in layoffs goes a long way to soothe potentially negative emotions in both layoff victims and survivors (Brockner, 1994; Brockner, Konovsku, Copper-Schneider, Floger, Martin, & Bies, 1994; Wanberg et al., 1999). Aspects of this perceived fairness include how the layoff decision was communicated to impacted employees and those remaining in the organization.

Another procedural justice factor is the assistance (or lack thereof) the company subsequently offers to laid-off employees, including severance benefits and job search support. When employees are given complete explanations of how and why layoffs are occurring, they are more likely to accept their layoff as fair and to later endorse the company to others as a desirable employer (Blau et al., 2012; Wanberg et al., 1999). This perception goes beyond the experience of the laid-off worker and shapes the reality of those left behind. Organizational layoff survivors have also been found to more readily accept the layoff of their peers and are least emotionally affected when the events are

perceived as fair (Brockner, 1994; Brockner et al., 1994; Brockner, Grover, Reed, DeWitt, & O'Malley, 1987).

CHAPTER 3: MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Setting the Stage

I have personally lived the experience of organizational exit and return to the same company. In April 2014, I was laid off from the company where I'd worked for eight years – which I'll reference throughout this paper as OceanSpan Financial Corporation. After experiencing the emotional trauma, onset of disengagement and the struggle of job searching, I was finally able to land a new job at my former employer and officially returned in July 2014. While I am interested to learn about how my laid-off peers experienced similar situations, I am also inquisitive about why others voluntarily choose to leave the organization and decide to return at a later date. As the literature review pointed out, there are many reasons for an employee to decide to walk away from a company, but there is still an abundance of mystery around whether rehires have different re-socialization experiences depending on if they left voluntarily or involuntarily. The existing research doesn't provide a consistent and unified answer to whether rehired individuals make better employees, nor does it address how rehires communicatively reintegrate back into the organization.

By simultaneously examining employee experiences where reasons for leaving (voluntary termination vs. involuntary termination) may be drastically different, this study questions whether the reasons for returning may not be as unrelated as we might assume. The process of exit and reintegration presents an opportunity to further develop

Jablin's (2001) framework of organizational socialization phases and presents a wealth of knowledge that could potentially benefit human resources professionals as they plan layoff events and the subsequent decision to re-onboard these embattled boomerangs as well as those who have voluntarily chosen to leave but later express a desire to return.

3.1.1 Research Questions. With this knowledge in mind, I propose the following research questions:

RQ 1 – How do rehired employees experience the socialization process?

a) Is the re-socialization process different from their first socialization experience with the organization? Why or why not?
b) Are there any unique socialization difficulties/opportunities associated with being a returning organizational member?

RQ 2 – Do the circumstances of an employee's exit affect the re-entry process?

a) Are there any differences between voluntary and involuntary leavers?
b) Are there any similarities between voluntary and involuntary leavers?

RQ 3 – How does returning to an organization impact the identity of a member?

a) Do returning employees report feeling any differently about the organization the second time around?
b) Do returning employees report acting any differently within the organization or in their interactions with co-workers the second time around?

3.2 Research Methodology and Design

3.2.1 Research Site. I isolated my research to one company, a global Fortune 100 financial services institution based in the United States – coined OceanSpan Financial Corporation for the purposes of this paper. The reason for focusing the research within

OceanSpan is not only for sampling convenience, but because I am an insider at this organization, having worked there for nearly 10 years, including the brief three-month separation following my layoff. This opportunity affords a rare look inside an organization and a complex communicative situation that the researcher has personally experienced.

3.2.2 Research Methods. I collected data using three research methods: ethnography, semi-structured interviews, and a brief demographic questionnaire.

This study incorporates my own ethnographic experience as an employee who was laid off and subsequently returned to the same company. Ironically, at the time I was laid off in 2014, I was conducting a mini-study for a graduate qualitative research methods class. The project collected thoughts from layoff survivors in two focus group sessions to examine how they employed sensemaking to cope with downsizing in their organization. Since that project dealt with my own ethnographic experiences related to layoffs, I have a record of my impressions of layoffs at OceanSpan leading up to my own layoff and rehire. I have five pages of single-spaced typed notes capturing my thoughts about layoff events during the time I was personally experiencing it, including instant message conversations with a co-worker, personal journaling of reflections on events and discussions, as well as the goodbye email I sent to colleagues at the company hours after I'd learned of my own layoff. In addition, I partially transcribed the 12-minute audio recording of my own termination conversation with a superior and the following 22-minute conversation with my direct manager at the time. I even captured an additional eight-minute discussion with a trusted employee in another department who was unaffected by the layoff. The transcription resulted in 11 pages of single-spaced content

that includes the layoff conversation, the preceding discussion with my direct manager as well as notes and reflections that I captured at the time of transcription.

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary source of data used to explore the research questions guiding this study. In preparation for these interviews, I carefully crafted interview questions (see Appendix D) that would be applicable to how both groups of voluntary and involuntary leavers experienced the socialization process. While the returners' exit experiences were unique depending on whether they were laid off or chose to leave, I designed the eight open-ended questions to elicit responses related to how returners experienced the exit and re-socialization process and their resulting views on organizational identity and membership. Because all eight questions were posed to both groups of participants, it was easier to identify themes and differences in the responses during the coding process. The interview questions correlated to the subject matter of the research questions, which stemmed from gaps I identified in the socialization literature regarding stages and experiences of rehired employees. Before conducting the interviews, I piloted the interview questions on myself. Being an involuntary leaver and returner to OceanSpan, I personally responded to the interview questions without knowing how the study participants would respond. After satisfactorily capturing my own thorough responses to the questions, I conducted 15 interviews which yielded seven hours and 39 minutes of recorded conversation ranging in length from 22 minutes to 44 minutes, with an average interview length of 31 minutes. I personally transcribed each of the interviews which resulted in 135 singled-spaced pages of data for analysis.

Lastly, a short questionnaire (see Appendix E) was completed by all participants to collect background data and demographics. The survey helped identify participant details prior to the interviews, including the number of years each participant has been employed at OceanSpan and the amount of time elapsed between their exit and return. It also served to establish the type of job each employee had prior to their exit and the job they obtained upon return. By collecting this data, I could to make comparisons and inferences about participant experiences when I analyzed the interview transcripts. For example, I looked for trends in interview question responses based on the number of years a participant was employed by the organization.

3.2.3 Accessing the Field. I reviewed my proposed topic of study with leaders at OceanSpan, and received written consent to conduct the research. Reciprocity opportunities for the company in the form of an executive summary of findings was presented as incentive to participate. The knowledge resulting from this study may provide valuable insight to improve staffing decisions at OceanSpan.

I used the snowball sampling method to identify participants. Snowball sampling is an effective method to identify obscure populations that are inherently difficult to locate (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). I quickly discovered that rehired employees were a minority population at the company and required me to exercise my professional network to locate individuals who fit my criteria for the study. This method proved helpful in locating participants for my study because rehire experiences aren't casually spoken about or immediately obvious in normal day-to-day interactions with co-workers. In effort to locate participants in my target sample size of 15-20 employees, I sent three formal emails to different groups of co-workers requesting referrals to connections who

fit eligibility criteria for desired participants. The recruitment emails were sent to 66 individuals within my network at OceanSpan. In addition to word-of-mouth recruiting, I identified 28 possible participants, 21 of which were employees who experienced a layoff and returned. I selected the first eight involuntary leavers whom I received referrals to, and continued my search for an equal number of voluntary leavers. The voluntary leaver/returner population was even more difficult to locate, with seemingly so few individuals within the company having this experience. It took three months to locate eligible participants, with only seven employees who fit the criteria after I extended eligibility for time elapsed between exit and return from three years to 10 years.

In sum, I located 15 participants – eight who experienced a layoff and returned, and seven who voluntarily left and returned. All but two of these participants were identified by first degree contacts. The other two participants were identified by second degree contacts.

3.2.4 Defining the Participants. There were two groups of individuals selected to be participants in this study – employees who were laid off and rehired, and employees who voluntarily chose to leave and were later rehired. Participants were employees of OceanSpan Financial Corporation at the time of this study who exited for a variety of reasons, but all were subsequently re-employed. A majority of these employees experienced an exit/rehire event less than three years in the past. The timeframe for this experience was expanded for voluntary leavers/returners because so few employees recently had this experience. I did not include myself among the participants, nor did I code my interview responses along with this group. Prior to data collection and coding, I only had a documented ethnography of my own experiences, which I regarded as a means

to later triangulate the interviews. During data collection and coding, similarities and contradictions began to emerge which influenced deeper understanding of my ethnographic data.

3.2.5 About the Participants. Of the participants who experienced a layoff, excluding myself, five were female and three were male. Most returned to OceanSpan after being laid off for less than a year. Of the eight, half had 6-10 years' experience at the company. One had 1-5 years' experience, one 16-20 years, another 26-30 years and the other had 30+ years with the company. Half were between the ages of 46-56. One person fell within the 26-35 age range, another two were 36-45 and the other was older than 56. All but one Asian/Pacific Islander participant self-identified as White. All participants had at least some college experience, achieving no more than a bachelor's degree.

Of the participants who voluntarily left OceanSpan, six were female, one was male. Half returned to the company approximately one year after choosing to leave. The others returned after 4, 6 and 10 years, respectively. Two had 1-5 years' experience with the company. Another two had 6-10 years' experience. An additional two had 11-15 years' experience, and the seventh participant had been with the company for 21-25 years. All but two were between the ages of 36-45. The remaining two were 26-35 years old. Four of the participants in this category reported earning a master's degree, with the remaining participants holding a bachelor's degree. Five were White, one Black and one Multi-racial. For a more detailed look at participant demographics, see Appendix G.

3.2.6 Data Collection. I followed these steps to engage study participants and gather data:

1. Invitation: eligible individuals were invited to participate in the study via an invitation sent to their work email in which the purpose of the study and extent of participation was explained.
2. Materials provided: individuals expressing willingness to participate were emailed the informed consent form and questionnaire with instructions to return the completed documents prior to the scheduled interview.
3. Interviews scheduled and conducted: participants were sent an email invitation for a one-on-one 30-minute semi-structured interview in a public location. Most interviews took place at a coffee shop or common area near the participants' work location. Participants who were located in other geographic locations within the United States were invited to participate in phone interviews, using webcam meeting technology. Video interviews were not recorded (but the audio from the session was recorded, as were the face-to-face interviews). Webcams were used to observe interviewees' body language and gestures, and to aid in building rapport between the interviewer and interviewees with a more personal form of interaction than a telephone conversation alone. All participants were reminded that the meeting audio would be recorded and that they may choose not to answer questions if they felt uncomfortable doing so. Prior to turning on the recorder, all participants were informed that the recorded audio would be used to generate transcripts of the conversations for analysis as part of the study. A uniform set of questions were used to examine participants' experiences as boomerang employees. Each of these questions were posed to the participants with variation in regards to order and wording to facilitate smooth conversation.

3.2.7 Transcription and Data Analysis. As data were collected, audio files were transcribed and loaded to NVIVO coding software for analysis. The software was used to help identify and organize themes that occurred across all interviews. The initial phase of coding was open coding using etic methodology to seek overarching themes in the data that support and further Jablin's (2001) socialization model. Using this method with guidance outlined by Saldana (2013) and Lindlof and Taylor (2002), I identified themes and similarities in the participant responses, establishing eight parent nodes and 85 child nodes (see Appendix F for codebook). During the initial coding process, I identified emerging themes in the participants' experiences related to the socialization process as well as their expressed motivations and means for leaving and returning using an etic lens to consider existing research on organizational socialization.

The second phase of coding, also guided by Saldana (2013) and Lindlof and Taylor (2002) followed the process of theming the data using an emic approach to focus specifically on the emerging themes unique to this study. My objective for this round of coding was to group excerpts of the interviews into thematic categories that were refined from the initial coding phase. Prior to the second round of analysis, a codebook was developed to guide the second round of coding (see appendix F). This resulted in four core parent nodes: entry experience and identity maintenance, factors of role fulfillment, networks, and realistic job previews. Additionally, 14 child nodes were established to further organize the data. Two additional parent nodes were created to capture memorable quotes and suggestions for improvement to the rehire experience.

Late in the coding process, I began comparing the participants' responses to my original responses to the interview questions and the ethnographic information I compiled

prior to beginning the interviews. I purposefully waited to examine my ethnographic data until the interview transcription and coding was complete – I did not want to potentially cloud my interpretation of the data with opinion, but rather allow it to organically emerge based on the similarities and differences present in the participants' interview responses. Because of this, I mindfully questioned whether the themes emerging in the interview data during coding were true similarities, or forced symbolism based on personal opinion. I approached the holistic analysis of data with the understanding that having real-life experience of the phenomena I was studying might subconsciously introduce a natural bias in the interpretation of the data. Prior to the coding the interviews, I simply regarded my ethnographic responses as personal opinion and individual experiences, but after the interviews with the participants, it became clear that there were strong correlations and triangulation between my responses and the responses from the participants. Many of the themes that are outlined in the findings section are apparent in my ethnographic data as well as the interviews. By keeping my ethnographic data separate from the interview results until coding the interview transcripts was complete, I was able to triangulate data from two distinct sources gathered at different points in time during the research process.

The data yielded from the questionnaires provided pertinent background information that correlated to the coded interview themes based on demographic or experiential factors. During the coding process, I considered whether age, gender, education level, years employees spent at the company and the amount of time spent away from the company might have influenced themes in the participants' responses. I compared experiences and responses of similarly situated participants and analyzed

responses of contrasting participants, noting interesting and substantial trends that either supported or refuted the emerging codes.

At each conclusion of the two rounds of interview transcript coding, my thesis advisor was consulted on theoretical implications of emerging findings.

3.2.8 Ethical Considerations and Data Protection. No physical, legal, or economic harm was foreseeable in this study. In the unlikely event of breach of confidentiality, study participants would not likely incur any reputational or professional risk. All participants in this study were reminded throughout the process that their participation was voluntary. There were no direct benefits to the participants, but their participation in this study may yield information that could help organizations improve employee retention and rehire onboarding practices if this study is published.

Care was taken to ensure the data collected (including audiotapes, transcripts and survey responses) did not contain identifying information or any link back to participants in this study. The following steps were taken to ensure this confidentiality: participants' names were not written down anywhere but on the consent form; the completed consent forms were saved separately from the audiotape and transcripts; names were not used when transcribing the data.

Transcripts, audio files, field notes and completed surveys were stored on a password protected computer on a secure network with data encryption enabled. I alone have access to these documents. Participants' names were not included in transcripts and a number and pseudonym was assigned to each participant to protect their identities. The list of participant identifiers was stored on a separate computer than the transcripts, which was also password protected. These documents will not be shared with third parties, or

the organization within which this research was performed. The tape recorder was kept in a locked cabinet when not in use. Audio files on the tape recorder were deleted after they were saved on the secure computer.

3.2.9 Funding. This research was completed as part of a master's thesis, so project funding was not sought. Inducements or rewards for face-to-face participants included a cup of coffee or other non-alcoholic beverage purchased for them at the time of the interview and was covered in full by the researcher. This is the only cost, aside from researcher and participant time, associated with this study. Each participant also received a hand-written thank you note after their interview was completed.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1 Organizational Exit

4.1.1 My Experience. Around 8:30 A.M. on April 23, 2014, I was invited to a last-minute phone call with a senior manager. His shocking first words sent me scrambling to turn on my audio recorder just in time to capture the purpose of the phone call:

> **"**I want to talk to [you] personally, because these reductions will affect you. Your employment with [OceanSpan] will end May 6… which means today is your last working day at [OceanSpan]… So again, after this conversation, you're really – you're – your essential work time ends." (*Former senior manager*)

In less than 15 minutes, a career I'd worked so hard to build for eight years abruptly came to a screeching stop. That day was one of the most emotionally painful I've experienced in my life. Although, I have to laugh at it now because looking back, I was battling raw emotion with academic knowledge. At the time I was laid off, I was writing a graduate course paper on layoff survivor sensemaking. Being familiar with the literature on layoffs, I expected the emotions that would come. I fully noted the lack of procedural justice in my experience. And, I can honestly state that the literature comparing the emotional scale of layoffs to experiencing death – that feels about right. I cried until I had no more tears. I didn't sleep for two days.

Now, I must also make it clear that this is the first time I'd been laid off. It was also the only company I'd ever been employed by, aside from a couple odds and ends employers in high school. Most importantly, the job I was "let go" from was the first official and fairly long-lasting role that actually matched my professional and career aspirations: I was a communications consultant! This is what I'd spent every ounce of energy working toward since the day I consciously decided that I wanted to do corporate communications as my career. This was a role I could, and did, strongly identify with.

Instead of growing my career at a company I'd become very familiar with, I was suddenly unemployed. No longer an employee of the company, but still a communications professional – without a job. The most important thing to me at that moment was maintaining my professional identity and composure. I respectfully thanked my former senior manager for the career opportunities and professional development experiences I'd gained during my tenure. After we hung up, I allowed myself a few moments to panic, and then immediately called my former direct manager. We'll call him John, for the purposes of this narrative.

We talked about the layoff. We vented. We got all of the details aside, and began trying to figure out what to do about it.

> "But, you know – you're gonna be fine. And I will tell you, if you're interested, um, I've got a – my old manager, he's a good friend, he's over at [competitor], and they're hiring all the time. And, he's in the marketing area. And they need good writers," said John.
>
> "I mean that's why I'm hopeful – and – I posted for something in HR last week [at OceanSpan]. Its associate engagement and communications. I didn't say

> anything because, I mean, I don't know. I just don't really believe that I'll get it…" I confessed.

We continued our conversation about how I could possibly return to the company. John ended the call with hope:

> "So, but, I will definitely keep you posted. If I hear of anything, if I'm able to get another job, or something and hire, you know, I will – you'll be the first person I reach out to. I promise."

After talking with John, I called my long-time friend and professional advisor at the company. We talked about the layoff conversation that'd just occurred and my unfortunate employment status. He encouraged me to make the most of the final hours that I had access to the company's network. Since I worked from home, I had the advantage of staying connected to the email systems and employee directory for a few more hours that day until my access was revoked. He advised that I reach out to existing connections in communication-related jobs at the company and email my connections to let them know that I was leaving, but open to new opportunities within OceanSpan.

> "You never know when they are gonna cut – they're gonna just sever your connection. So I kind of feel like we wanna, you and I need to keep talking, but I almost feel like there is a sense of urgency to get some of these things done before your [connection] gets disconnected," he advised.

We hung up and I went to work, the first thing I did was draft an email to inform everyone I could think of who I'd ever worked with at the company I had been laid off, but was seeking opportunities to return:

> From: Oleson, Joni
> Sent: Wednesday, April 23, 2014. 12:13 P.M.
> Subject: Goodbye for now
>
> Friends – I was informed this morning that my position at [OceanSpan] is being eliminated. Over the past eight years, I have developed some very special relationships with each of you. I absolutely hope to find myself in another role at [OceanSpan] very soon, but in case I find myself going in another direction, I wanted to say goodbye for now. Thank you for being a part of my wonderful experience with the company. I will sincerely miss each of you.
>
> Please keep me in mind for anything you hear of that might become available that would be a good fit for me. I'm open to anything that may be a good fit for my communications and associate engagement background.
>
> I've attached my resume, in case you know of any areas that are looking. I also would humbly appreciate it if you could take a moment to endorse me and provide recommendations on my LinkedIn profile.
>
> My personal email is xxxxxx@gmail.com and my personal cell phone number is xxx-xxx-xxxx.
>
> Please keep in touch!

I received an outpouring of responses from my former co-workers. Many of them expressed surprise, anger and sympathy; vowing to keep in touch and to inform me of job opportunities.

The second thing I did that day was email myself past assignments and files that represented writing samples that I thought I could use on the impending job hunt. In my last hours of connectivity, I accessed the employee directory and wrote down the emails and phone numbers of contacts who might come in handy as I searched for my next role.

After about five hours frantically sending emails and offloading information, I stepped away from my computer to breathe. To take a moment to let it all sink in. When I returned, I discovered that I was locked out. My access had been revoked and I was

unable to log in. In that moment, it felt official – I'd been involuntarily forced to exit the organization. As a teleworker, being unable to access company systems and use employee email and instant messaging was the true symbolic break with organizational life at OceanSpan. An invisible wall stood between me and the company, and my entire network of peers. Twenty-four hours prior, I was giving the company my all, and suddenly I felt like all had been taken away.

4.1.2 The Involuntary Exit. As expected, most participants in the study who were also laid off recounted similar experiences to mine. Not surprisingly, many of the participants described the experience of being laid off as a negative one, reporting feeling shocked and surprised – regardless of how their layoff was handled or how much of a notice period they were given.

> "I think for me it was pretty shocking… I had just celebrated my fifteen-year anniversary in February and then, then the summer is when they told me I was laid off and it came as a shock… And, so when they told me, I was a little surprised." (*Tara, involuntary leaver*)

> "So, it was – I don't even know if I have a word… shocking… surprising, you know, disappointing. You know, I think it was probably just more, you had to let it sink in. It took a while to sink in." (*Marta, involuntary leaver*)

Only two of the laid off participants reported low emotional affect. Interestingly, both of those participants had experienced layoffs before; one of which had been laid off from OceanSpan once before as well as from another financial institution previously.

Despite the flurry of emotion surrounding the circumstances of their unexpected organizational exit, all eight of the employees who were laid off mentioned having some form of interaction with co-workers immediately after learning of their termination. In their final hours with the company, many of those who experienced immediate severance with no notification period raced to notify co-workers and maintain connections directly following their layoff announcement. Teleworkers have a slight advantage in being able to take more time to announce their exit and say their goodbyes because it generally takes three to five hours for their systems access to be removed. Although they are instructed to immediately log off at the time their severance message is delivered, many of the teleworkers I spoke with indicated that they used the time to send final messages and generally wrap things up. The final moments for physical site workers involved in sweeping layoffs that include numerous employees are even more short-lived – they are often escorted from the building immediately after their severance message is delivered. For the physical site workers participating in my study, most received a phone call – some were offsite with their company-issued laptops still in their possession, others were onsite and were instructed to shut down their computers and promptly exit the building. Despite the scenario, departing employees made a point to let others know they were leaving.

> "Right after it happened, you know, I went through and started getting everyone's email address and right then and there just started emailing everyone what happened and I needed another job… and just kinda started my networking that day." (*Lauren, involuntary leaver*)

> "But there was a little time after that to, you know, reach out, to peers and business partners, and, and say goodbye. Or, just let them know that, you know, I was leavin' and if they had any opportunities, to pass my resume along." (*Marta, involuntary leaver*)

The two participants who received a notification period, or early awareness that their position would be eliminated at a future date, also took action to connect with peers in hopes of locating a new job within the organization. Notice periods are more frequently given to employees who are involved in a broad departmental layoff when a significant number of jobs are being eliminated. This usually occurs when the work that a department does is no longer required, but experienced employees are still needed to wind down operations and figuratively close up shop.

> "I had 90 days to still do my job and then pound the pavement every day as hard as I possibly could trying to find something. So, I networked, I networked, I networked…You go into, like, hunting mode. Um, and sending emails and updating your resume, number one. Immediately! And really just reaching out to everybody you know. Any manager that you've worked for that you still have a good connection with. Um, setting up coffees and lunches ad nauseam to try to re-network with people and re-connect to people." (*Elise, involuntary leaver*)

4.1.3 The Voluntary Exit. In contrast with employees who were laid off, voluntary leavers had planned and deliberate exits. They passed through Jablin's traditional exit phases including pre-announcement, announcement, and actual exit. They cited an assortment of reasons for leaving the company including dissatisfaction with

managers, the choice to care for young children, solicitation/competitive offers from other companies, and avoidance of potential layoffs or terminations.

Like the laid-off employees, the voluntary leavers reported maintaining relationships with former co-workers and supervisors, although not always immediately following their separation. Unlike the frantic efforts to network that many of the involuntary leavers reported, many of the voluntary leavers casually maintained the connections with former co-workers and reported that any effort they made to re-connect occurred after a reasonable period of time had passed following their exit from the company.

In two unique cases, the leavers accepted jobs at consulting firms which then placed them on assignments working as contractors within the company where they'd formerly been employees. This allowed them to maintain relationships within the company as if they'd never left, although not officially holding the status of being an employee within the organization.

Whether the voluntary leavers were working at another organization or working within the home, they all eventually faced the decision of returning to OceanSpan. The involuntary leavers also found themselves considering this same scenario. I will refer to this experience of being in-between organizations as liminality. By way of formal definition, liminality can be understood as the phase between exit and re-entry into an organization.

4.2 Liminality

At this phase of the organizational socialization process, voluntary and involuntary leavers found themselves at a crossroads. Despite the circumstances of their

exit, both groups found themselves on the threshold of returning to the organization where their networks, identity factors and familiarity with the company all played a role in their decision to return.

4.2.1 My Experience. After my involuntary separation from OceanSpan, I unknowingly began to experience the socialization phase of liminality. I was sad and bitter when I returned my laptop the day after my layoff. In the weeks that followed, I explored opportunities at other companies with nervous excitement. I applied to 45 different jobs. I meticulously tracked each job I applied for in a spreadsheet enthusiastically entitled "opportunity tracker", complete with a column that I assigned a "love rating" to indicate how much I liked the attributes of each job – nearly all of them were communications, public relations or marketing-related. All of the jobs were local – which is where I planned to stay. Leaving my home was not an option, so I focused my job search to the surrounding area. I wasn't desperate enough yet to pick up and move to another city in search of a new job.

4.2.2 Disengagement, or not? The phase of liminality calls into question when disengagement actually occurs in the organizational socialization process. Jablin posited that disengagement is part of the exit process, where employees communicatively disentangle themselves from the organization and its remaining members. Based on the findings from my conversations with the participants in this study, I suggest that disengagement isn't always a permanent state. Also, it can occur post-exit, especially for involuntary leavers. Engagement is often measured on a scale from low to high. Exiting an organization may result in former employees sliding further down the scale toward lower engagement but does not always mean than they are always irrevocably

disengaged. My findings also support that disengagement is not a reason for permanent separation from the company, no more than it is a natural reaction to separation from an organization.

In the case of the employees who were laid off, they were not planning for – nor were expecting – the sudden organizational exit. Therefore they did not experience the formal exit phase of pre-announcement. In Jablin's model, pre-announcement is preceded by disengagement. Since the involuntary leavers in my study were not planning on exiting the company, in many cases, they did not begin disengaging until after they were shut out from OceanSpan. Some even reported never disengaging at all.

Aside from being physically removed from the organizational environment, most involuntary leavers reported that the layoff had an effect on their organizational identity, and as a result, began to psychologically distance themselves from the company. After their layoffs, six of the involuntary leavers reported feeling more like a number, or a resource to OceanSpan, rather than an individual who contributes to the success of the organization.

> "You know, it seemed like our groups were always really needed. Um. But, once I got hit with a layoff – because I thought I was needed, it was a critical role, then all of a sudden you're gone on a Friday afternoon. Um, that changed my perspective… I think we're a number that, you know, is eventually scheduled for termination at [OceanSpan]… I was angered too because I was an exceeds/meets. You know, and I was like, how can they fire an exceeds/meets? And how can they fire somebody who puts in 12-18 hours a day plus weekends? I know I'm compensated, but the dedication I have to the company, it seems like it doesn't

> matter anymore. And that's the reality of it. If [OceanSpan] decides to fire an exceeds/meets, you know, who doesn't work a normal 40 hour week, then really what value are you? You must be a number." (*George, involuntary leaver*)

> "I look at things very differently. I know now that you can be really good at your job – that you can be the best at your job, but at the end of the day, it doesn't matter. If you make too much money and they need to cut numbers. They're gonna cut numbers… I don't love the company because of the way that things ended." (*Lauren, involuntary leaver*)

The other two involuntary leavers who experienced another layoff prior to this most recent layoff cited this sense of dis-identification as an existing understanding and they approached their impersonal employment status at the company much more cheerfully than the first-time laid-off employees did:

> "And it's nice to share that knowledge [about overcoming layoffs] with others who many have experienced the first time – they've never been laid off before. They feel like it's a personal thing and it's not! It's business. It's the way the company stays viable." (*Bonnie, involuntary leaver*)

> "It's corporate America. Uh, you know, I mean, I've been in and out of some of the largest corporations. I've been in and out of a lot of Fortune 100s, and I mean, it's just corporate America… By the end of the day, the way we cycle people in and out, you're absolutely just a resource… Nobody in this building is not replaceable." (*Nate, involuntary leaver)*

Similar to Bonnie and Nate, six out of seven of the voluntary leavers nonchalantly cited casual feelings of disengagement from the company.

> "I think I always felt like a number here. Um, I just accept that it's a huge company. It doesn't bother me. I do think I'm a number. I think a lot of us are numbers. So, it's okay. It's part of working at a company this size." (*Jasmine, voluntary leaver*)

> "I don't know that I care as much… It's a job. I guess. So, I'm not as attached to it anymore, because, I know that [OceanSpan] can survive without me. And, I know I can survive without them." (*Lana, voluntary leaver*)

Although both groups of involuntary and voluntary leavers cited disengagement from the company, all of them made it clear that it didn't affect their commitment to performing well in their roles. Some reported a decrease in discretionary effort. But overall, most participants expressed the need to uphold quality job performance in order to maintain professional and/or personal identities as their most important priority upon return.

4.3 Organizational Identity versus Professional and Personal Identities

In this liminality phase, both groups of voluntary and involuntary leavers weighed the implications of their new situations, whether it was unemployment or employment at another organization, against their ability to uphold aspects of their personal and professional identities. It was these identities that ultimately drove their decisions to return to the company, not some sense of organizational identification – which, based on extant literature, I expected to be an important factor when I began this study.

The interview question that elicited most of these responses was related to participants' perceptions of how their organizational identity may have changed upon their return to the company. Rather than speaking about organizational identity or dedication in response to the organizational identity question, participants placed an equally higher value on aspects of their professional and personal identities and offered these viewpoints unsolicited throughout the interviews.

4.3.1 Professional Identities. All 15 participants collectively made a total of 50 references to intrinsic values like professional goals, beliefs and aspirations when explaining their reasons for returning to the company. They spoke about the things that were important to their professional development, including the ability to grow their careers, perform work that matched their skills and interests, and they shared how they viewed employment, particularly in reference to jobs at the company. Rather than referencing identification or aligning with the mission, values and brand of the company, they expressed aligning to their own standards of work and professional agendas.

The aspects of professional identities that participants spoke about the most were their work ethic and commitment to performing their jobs to the best of their ability. Elise, an involuntary leaver, spoke about how her professional identity and her approach to always performing quality work transcends the challenges she was experiencing at OceanSpan after her return:

> "I feel like the game, that game, the circus whack-a-mole when they just grab the mallet and they bang on the heads and your head's been banged down the hole. I feel like the whack-a-mole kinda hit me back down a couple more pegs in February. And then I'm just kind of status quo now. And I come in and I do my

> job. I think I do it very well. I'm very efficient and proficient in what I do. I don't slack at my job. But, I don't have super passion about it. But I do it well and I'm proud of it. Just because I – I live my life as a Christian. I hold myself to a different standard – and maybe other people do too in the department – I don't know. It's – you don't really kinda talk about Jesus in a corporate setting, but I feel like I have someone higher looking at me and watching me work and who's gonna judge me ultimately one day. My executive isn't, but Jesus will. And I want to be able to look him in the face and be like, I did a good job. I may not have been super thrilled about it, but I did a good job." (*Elise, involuntary leaver)*

Meredith, a voluntary leaver, echoed Elise's sentiment as she talked about making empowered decisions to alter the direction of her own career:

> "I've personally always just been someone who believes in taking charge of your own career and so if there's something you're dissatisfied with in terms of the work or the [compensation], for better or worse, maybe I'm not the most patient person, so the idea of waiting that through for another two or three years didn't seem like an option for me." (*Meredith, voluntary leaver)*

Other participants, like Ken and Bonnie placed more emphasis on the importance of enjoying and identifying with the type of work that they performed in the organization.

> "Because, you know, you're – individually your job is part of you. You know, if you identify with your job. And I did. And I still do." (*Ken, involuntary leaver*)

> "I enjoyed the work. And I enjoyed that we did – that we spanned so much geography. We were across the U.S. and I loved that part of it… I mean, I just, I

> love that line of work and that field and it's just, I've done so many different aspects of it… So, it's kinda neat to be back into something I'm kinda comfortable with." (*Bonnie, involuntary leaver*)

Participants' frequent responses regarding their professional identities suggest that they place an importance on person-job, rather than person-organization fit. While it is almost always helpful for an individual's mission and values to align with that of the organization they are employed by, the ultimate decision to leave, stay – or in this case, return – is heavily driven by how employees envision themselves as a professional performing a job that they identify with and excel at.

In my narrative at the beginning of this section, I mentioned that nearly all of the jobs I applied to were within my field of interest and matched my skills and abilities. I also mentioned assigning a "love rating" value for each job that I applied to. The higher the love rating – essentially based on my perceived person-job fit – the more effort I put into pursuing the opportunity. For OceanSpan, it is important to note that many of the jobs within the organization are very niche and specialized due to the nature of the financial services industry. The participants' experiences, the type of work they identified with and the ability to advance their careers in an environment they were familiar with influenced their career decisions and ultimately resulted in their return to the company primarily because of person-job fit, rather than a motivation to return to the organization for factors solely related to identification with the company itself.

4.3.2 Personal Identities. Equally important to participants was their sense of personal identity. Remarkably, just like in the professional identity category, all 15 participants also collectively made a total of 50 references to personal identity factors

such as their role in being a supporter of their family or the importance of maintaining their lifestyle. References to this category were coded based on participants citing career decisions that were related to supporting their children and/or spouse, obtaining higher compensation or valuable benefits provided by the company and aspects of the job that supported a healthy work/life balance or comfortable work arrangements.

The most powerful personal identity story offered by any of the participants came from Elise, an involuntary leaver who learned on a Monday that she was being laid off after having a miscarriage just the Friday before. Despite this heartbreaking setback, Elise and her husband were determined to have another child and recognized that the company offered competitive parental leave benefits. With this in mind, she aggressively pursued open positions at OceanSpan and was encouraged and relieved when she finally received an offer:

> "I think it was a sign. 'Cause, again, it was just, it was where I was in my personal life. We really wanted to try and have more children and I thought maybe, you know, this is, and I'm kinda talking a lot about signs, but it is what it is. Um, you know, is this – am I here because, you know God-willing, I'll be able to take advantage of this [parental leave] program again? You know, is this my sign we'll be able to have another child? I knew we were gonna keep trying to have another child. Whether successful or not. And I said, um, I know that [OceanSpan] supports this." (*Elise, involuntary leaver)*

Like Elise, voluntary leavers also placed an emphasis on supporting their families as part of the reason for their return to the company. Two of the voluntary leavers who left to fulfill professional aspirations of being traveling consultants both came to the realization

that returning to the company would allow them to have a more flexible work/life balance and afford them the ability to spend more time with their kids. Daisy revealed that while the consulting firm job she'd taken was a better fit for her professional identity and interests, the most important thing to her was being present for her children:

> "And, [consulting firm] would be, and always will continue to be, my favorite job out of all of them. Um, because I liked the idea of traveling, and seeing different clients and having a project that's a set period of time. You build the relationships. You kind of keep them. You are expanding your relationships all the time. The only issue is, when you have a family and kids. That just becomes a lifestyle that you can't really maintain without jeopardizing your home life. Other than that, I'd be at [consulting firm]. Hands down." (*Daisy, voluntary leaver)*

When asked why she decided to return to the company, Lydia also shared her experience of relinquishing her consultant job in order to create a stable environment for her family. She left the consulting firm, raised her young children as a stay-at-home mom for three years and then returned to OceanSpan knowing that the work/life balance would allow her continue to spend time with her family:

> "It was work/life balance. I got to the point where I was promoted to a manager, um, at [consulting firm] and then I had kids... It was just, it was really more of a, um, a lifestyle. I didn't want to travel as much with two young children. I had two boys. 14 months apart. Looked like twins. And didn't feel it was the right thing to do for a family perspective to be on the road as much because I would have had to, um, or change industries… And so, it just didn't feel right. It didn't feel right

> to stay. And so, I made the decision to leave that company." (*Lydia, voluntary leaver)*

While the ability to financially support and spend time their families were the top themes in the personal identity category, participants also frequently spoke about returning to the company because they had the ability at that time to participate in OceanSpan's work from home program. Five participants cited that being able to work from home was one of the reasons they returned. This benefit also factors into work/life balance values that the participants expressed were important to them. Voluntary leaver, Lana, was lured away from the company to work for a competitor earning substantially higher compensation. Prior to leaving to work for the competitor, Lana was in the work from home program at OceanSpan. After several months of commuting to the office at the new company, she found that hiring nannies to care for her children was not the right solution for her family. So, she pleaded with her former manager to allow her to return to OceanSpan so she could again work from home and care for her kids:

> "And so I called [him] back – my now boss – and said hey, you know, is that job still available? He's like, [Lana], you've gotta be – like, we're meeting today – we're interviewing people. What are you talking about? And I was like, well, and I told him what was going on, and told him that I really, you know, I need to work from home. My kids will be in school, but I need to be here. Like, this is what my family needs." (*Lana, voluntary leaver)*

When faced with the decision of choosing to work for a competitor versus returning to the company, participants' personal and professional identities played a large part in in why they gravitated back to OceanSpan. Working at the company provided an

opportunity to uphold the leavers' personal and professional identities, regardless of how they came to exit the company. To uphold these identities, they pursued re-entry to the organization – with a little help from their friends.

4.3.3 Network Maintenance and Exploration of Options to Return. As participants grappled with their professional and personal needs, they maintained contact with their former co-workers at the company. Since Jablin introduced his organizational socialization model, there have been enormous developments in how employees stay in touch with each other by using the Internet. Jablin's 2001 model assumes that after an individual exits an organization, all communication ceases between the ex-employee and former co-workers. Since 2001, there have been substantial advances in how individuals use the Internet to create and maintain relationships by using social media. For example, the professional networking site, LinkedIn®, particularly plays a huge role in how people build and maintain networks with co-workers and others who share professional experiences and backgrounds. In my goodbye letter to colleagues, I provided the hyperlink to my LinkedIn profile and asked them to connect with me and provide recommendations for me.

During my liminality phase, I kept in touch with co-workers, exchanging InMail® and building my profile by actively inviting all of the former co-workers I could find to connect with me on LinkedIn. While the involuntary leavers referenced using LinkedIn twice as much as voluntary leavers – participants from both camps generally agreed that it was a good tool for staying connected. References to LinkedIn naturally arose during the interviews and were not elicited as part of the planned interview questions.

The advent of ex-employees using LinkedIn and other online professional networking resources as a medium for staying connected to organizational life challenges Jablin's ideation of traditional organizational exit. This concept of remaining connected to ex-co-workers after ending employment at a company suggests that exit is not always the end of organizational membership. In fact, this ability to easily remain connected resulted in nearly all participants finding an in-road to return to the organization.

4.4 Anticipatory Socialization

Returners experience the anticipatory socialization phase differently than they did the very first time they encountered the organization. Unlike their first time, they have very realistic job previews, having worked within the organization before; and in most cases, doing very similar jobs. For the returners in this study, their recruiting source was frequently a former manager – and occasionally former peers – who notified them that a job was available or helped them enter the hiring process with a recommendation or a direct connection to the hiring manager. Participants weren't asked about the selection interview, but a couple offered information that suggested interviews were more casual, centering on common knowledge about the company or experiences that the interviewer and interviewee shared.

In this section, I discuss the second anticipatory socialization experience with the company as it relates to the participants' decision to pursue re-entry to OceanSpan. It also examines the role of realistic job previews and the role peer networks play in helping them return.

4.4.1 My Experience. During my job search, I was invited to interview with other companies. I turned down half of them. The other companies I'd interviewed with

decided to pitch the jobs to other candidates. With no quality job offers coming in, I reluctantly began paying more attention to OceanSpan's career site. When I applied to jobs at OceanSpan, I felt like I knew what I was getting into. I was familiar with the company. Familiar with the work. Familiar with the people.

Although I had a rough experience with the layoff, I'd come to terms with the fact that it wasn't personal. I was a top performer at the time I was laid off – and my direct manager didn't even know it was happening until that day. People who worked with me were not involved in the decision. It was purely a business move by the company to save money. So why not play the game? Make my own business move to try to return so I could regain steady income and focus on getting my career back on track.

Putting the hard feelings aside for good, I began applying to anything on OceanSpan's Web site that fit my background and interests. To increase my chances of rising above other applicants, I researched every job I applied to on LinkedIn. My strategy was to locate individuals with similar jobs within the company and send an email to anyone in my existing network who was a mutual connection in hopes they had a tie to the open position. I asked my former co-workers if they knew anything about the job requisitions and who the hiring managers might be.

When I found a job at OceanSpan that aligned with my professional and personal identities, I assigned it the highest "love rating" and added a note that it would be "everything I would want to do and be good at." Little did I know, this was the same job I mentioned to my former manager, John, that I'd applied to prior to being laid off – and again immediately after I'd lost my job! I was declined for the position two times (it was

removed and later re-posted on the company's career site). I didn't realize this until I transcribed the conversation with my former manager and reviewed old field notes.

I persistently pursued the job, knowing it would be a good match for my skills and interests. After applying to the job for the third time, I turned to LinkedIn in an attempt to locate the hiring manager. I found someone with a job description that matched very closely to the position I'd applied for. I sent her an email. I really wanted this job. So, for good measure, I emailed a mutual connection, a former senior manager (not the same one who delivered the layoff message) hoping to gather more details. The close-job-description woman turned out to be the hiring manager. My former senior manager contacted her and provided a recommendation. Soon, I was invited to interview for the job. I was confident. In the interview, I talked about past experiences with other roles at the company and how that familiarity would translate well to the new role. Experience, perseverance, and help from peers paid off – three months after my layoff, I accepted the offer to return to OceanSpan.

4.4.2 Realistic Job Previews. Of course, anyone returning for a second round of employment at a company with which they are familiar will have extremely realistic job previews. Study participants not only talked about having realistic job previews, but stressed that aspects of these previews – familiarity with the company and the job – played an integral role in their decision to return to the organization.

On 42 total occasions, each of the 15 participants referenced familiarity with the company and culture as one of the factors that influenced their return. They translated their familiarity with the environment as a factor that allowed for an easy transition. When asked what influenced his decision to return, involuntary leaver, Ken, explained

that the role he was considering actually dealt with a technology system internal to the company that he helped create in a past role. But to him, although feeling unhappy about his layoff experience, there were more familiarity factors at play that helped to weigh his decision in favor of returning:

> "I know [OceanSpan]. I know the people, you know, I know the systems, so all of those factors. The benefits. The familiarity with [OceanSpan], with the systems, with all that stuff – really weighed heavily." (*Ken, involuntary leaver)*

Recently, I had the opportunity to see the value of this from a hiring manager's point of view. When fielding and interviewing candidates for an open position on my team, an individual applied who had previous experience working for OceanSpan in another department, but had been recently laid off. The role my team was hiring for had a short ramp-up time, with the project beginning to deploy in the next month or so. Because of her experience, our team quickly singled her out as a top candidate because she would require less training and formal socialization; so we offered her the job.

Other participants noted that their familiarity with the culture and the pace of the work were factors that attracted them to return.

> "Our culture at [OceanSpan] is special... We're definitely more fast-paced, um, when it comes to change. Not as formal in the sense, um, very, I think, open to, um, you know, flexible work arrangements, um, trying to be a leader in work/life balance. Et cetera. I think, um, a lot of people have to adapt to that culture." (*Daisy, voluntary leaver)*

> "It's just a very different culture... You know, I think [OceanSpan] has a very strong focus on, um, employees and um, you know, that – well, they do focus on work/life balance and things like that, a lot… There's just a lot more, you know, seems like it's a lot faster pace, even though we have fast pace here, a lot too, I know. It was just different. Very different." (*Ken, involuntary leaver)*

Lana, a voluntarily leaver, humorously noted that she preferred the very direct style of getting things done that is engrained in OceanSpan's culture as opposed to the round-about way of doing things at the competing organization that she left to work at for several months:

> "They're very passive-aggressive and I'd laugh and say, well at least at [OceanSpan], if someone's gonna be a jerk, they're gonna do it to my face, so it's good! [Employees at the other organization were] excruciatingly polite, but there's some undercurrents to it. Where here, like I said, people are very, very blunt… Very straightforward. You know where you stand with everyone. It's not a huge mystery. Um, and I guess I kinda like that better. 'Cause I don't have to guess." (*Lana, voluntary leaver)*

For better or for worse, the familiarity with the company, culture and the jobs prevented the returners from having inflated expectations of the jobs they were accepting to return to the organization. The value in having very realistic job previews allows employees to cope with the more mundane or unpleasant aspects of their jobs, which according to the realistic job preview literature results in longer tenures and reduced turnover. Eleven of the participants specifically talked about the comfort that came with being familiar with

the jobs they were pursuing at the company. Many of the returners in this study shared similar realistic job previews:

> "You know, the big difference you have anytime is the first day you're walking in the door and you're still – you have no pre-set ideas about how the organization works, how it runs, how it does all the rest of that. You know, having that sort of gives you – even if you are as jaded as I am – it still gives you a little bit of optimism that maybe it's not as crazy as other places. Um, when you're coming back in the door, you, at least to an extent, know from a macro level how the company works, how things work and you know, it's both good and bad. Because from a good standpoint, you know, you're coming back in to almost a comfort zone. 'Cause at least organizationally, there's a lot of things that won't be a surprise." (*Nate, involuntary leaver)*

> "What I eventually got hired for in [the department] was the same thing. Highly technical, um, managing platforms, um, bringing data in, um, managing timelines and money. It was almost identical to what I was doing... So it's very comfortable coming back here." (*George, involuntary leaver)*

Another aspect of familiarity that participants cited was their existing networks within the organization. While not particularly a traditional realistic job preview factor, it is important to note that participants considered their peer group as part of the fabric of the organization that influenced their return. Voluntary leaver, Jasmine, summed up what many participants expressed regarding taking comfort in the familiarity with their network in this sentiment:

> "My entire network was here. Um, and my entire experience of working was here. It's what I knew. So, in some ways, it was actually a little bit more comfortable for me to come back because I knew what I was getting into." (*Jasmine, voluntary leaver)*

Many participants spoke about the importance of having an existing network within the organization – after exiting, they missed their established peer groups and acknowledged that by returning, they wouldn't have to begin the arduous tasking of building a network at a new organization from scratch.

> "It was the easiest thing to do because that's where my network was. You know, everyone that I'd ever worked with… and I just, it was just sort of the path of least resistance, so, that was really the only reason why [OceanSpan] was at the top of my list. I definitely applied to positions at [local competitor] and even healthcare places. I mean, everywhere I was putting my resume in. Um, but my best chance at getting a job because of my network was at [OceanSpan]." (*Lauren, involuntary leaver)*

> "I missed my network of people. And I had known the same people just for years and years. Um, and I missed interacting with them on a daily basis. Literally, even the people you don't work with, you still become friendly with, and keep up with… I knew like, like I said, I had my network in place, so I knew that I would be able to move around when I wanted to. Um, so I felt like that would have been easier than starting over at a new company." (*Jasmine, voluntary leaver)*

4.4.3 Decision to Return – With a Little Help From Friends. For most participants, their networks proved to be the ultimate recruiting source and played a direct role in their return to the organization. For eight of the participants, someone still employed at the company either offered them a new position, or tipped them off about an open position that fit their interests.

> "I ran into my mentor on the trolley one day. And she asked me if I was ready to come back to [OceanSpan]. And if so, she had a role on her team." *(Daisy, voluntary leaver)*

> "My former boss… called me that day when [the layoff] happened and was like – I'm so sorry. And I was like, it happens – what're you gonna do? You know, and so, he was like, if there is anything I can do… Well, a few days later he calls me and says, hey, I know [peer] has got stuff that is bubbling that'll happen in January, he says, but I talked to [other peer] – one of our business partners could use a *you*. And I said, okay, I'll talk to anybody, um, so, I'm always happy to talk and we had a couple of conversations and I wound up coming back in the door." (*Nate, involuntary leaver)*

In all but two of these instances, the person initiating the leavers' pull back into the organization were former managers. Voluntary leavers were influenced to return more frequently (five times) than involuntary leavers (three times). Five of the involuntary leavers were left to proactively connect with former colleagues to seek open positions and request recommendations.

> "When I found this job, because I had been in sales process design before, I – I said, ok, let me reach out to my network to see if they know where this is coming from and who this is coming from. And so, I did that and while I was waiting for a response, I said, you know, I'm just gonna post. What, are – it's not hurting me – either, you know, they're gonna look at it and it's gonna be somebody that perhaps knows me, or sees my experience and gives me the opportunity. So, I posted anyways before my network – I reached out to a couple people and one got back to me and said, hey, I know where this position is." (*Marta, involuntary leaver)*

> "I know up to and including this role, I think I applied to 100 [jobs]. It went actually to 100 jobs… Um, but a friend actually knew someone who had worked just a little bit with someone on this team and I've had [related job] experience before. I guess, the, uh, co-worker had written a decent, just a paragraph reference. And that may or may not have helped. I think it did." *(Gary, voluntary leaver)*

Level of education is an interesting factor that may explain the inequity of voluntary leavers being more likely to be influenced to return to the organization by former colleagues versus involuntary leavers seeking their own route back in. Of the voluntary leavers, four held master's degrees and the other three held bachelor's degrees. Five involuntary leavers had achieved a bachelor's degree and the remaining three had completed some college. While there is not enough data to substantiate this claim, it is an observation that may warrant future inquiry into factors that may make a former employee a valuable or more sought after rehire.

Regardless of re-hire reason, networks and relationships with colleagues proved to be an important dynamic in each returners' experience. Whether rehires were taking advantage of strong ties or weak ties within the organization, either managers or peers, these connections had an influence on former employees' decisions to return and in most cases, provided a means to return. Voluntary leaver, Daisy, shared her thoughts on the power of relationships in career mobility:

> "I tend to follow people. I realize. I'm pretty much of a people person much less than a company person. Companies come and go. That's not a big deal. I mean, you can get compensation. That comes. The relationships that you build, are what makes you come into work every day. Either you like who you work with, or you like the work that you're doing – or you don't. That's kind of the way I am about it." (*Daisy, voluntary leaver)*

4.5 Organizational Re-entry

4.5.1 My Experience. I was excited that I had the opportunity to return to OceanSpan. I felt a sense of triumph at the fact that I'd been dismissed from the company, yet fought hard to find a way back in – and landed in a role that offered significantly higher visibility and compensation. I'd won the battle back in, but still felt burned. Not able to direct these feelings to anyone in particular, I felt more guarded and less emotionally attached to the organization.

While being a top performer was still a top priority, that drive to be successful and effective felt like it sprung from more personal and professional development reasons, rather than a means of contributing to the success and advancement of the company. I also felt less committed to the company. I was committed to my job because of those

personal and professional reasons, but definitely not as committed to the organization like I was before the layoff. Whereas before the layoff, I was hard-pressed to seek or consider offers from other organizations. After returning, I keep closer tabs on the job market and more frequently wonder what it would be like to work for a different company – not because I have intentions or reasons to leave, but because I'm simply more open to new opportunities and feel a desire to make sure I'm keeping my skills current should I find myself suddenly unemployed again.

Despite these feelings, I was very happy to be able to announce my return and re-connect with colleagues. I sent an email to the same people I'd sent my goodbye letter to only months before, sharing the big news that I'd returned. In that email, I thanked everyone for their support and acknowledged the role many of them played in keeping me motivated and helping me to return to the company.

Overall, my return was anticlimactic. I received the standard new hire folder and an onboarding packet from my manager that contained important details about the job, hyperlinks to frequently-used team resources and a list of teammates to meet with so I could learn more about their roles and how we'd work together. Teammates treated me as if I'd transferred from another department with acknowledgement of my previous organizational experience, rather than treating me as if I was an incoming outsider or someone who had previously been on the outs with the company. I returned to organizational life – picking up my career where I'd left off. It was a new team and a new beginning at OceanSpan.

4.5.2 Relationship Development and Maintenance. Many participants reported spending time reconnecting with former teammates during the first days after their return

to the company. Like me, many of them made a point to send an email announcing their return and instant messaged teammates they were close to prior to their exit. A few participants, like involuntary leaver, Tara, even described the experience as returning home to family:

> "It felt like coming back home to family. So for me, it was a – a – comforting fit in terms of being back on the floor and then, people to, oh, I see you're back! You know, so it was nice to see some familiar faces back here." (*Tara, involuntary leaver)*

Others, like voluntary leaver, Gary, reported setting up coffee or lunch dates to catch up.

> "And then keeping in contact with individuals from, uh, the last job. I'm having lunch today with, um, a former manager – I'm having lunch today with that manager at 11:30. Um, and this is an older gentlemen and we've kept in contact. So yeah, having lunch with him." (*Gary, voluntary leaver)*

While keeping previous relationships alive, the returners also focused on expanding their network by building relationships with their new teammates and engaging mentors to continue their professional development.

4.5.3 Orienting and Non-committal Approaches to Work. The realistic job previews and overall familiarity with the company and the jobs led 11 of the participants to collectively reference expectations of returning a total of 29 times during the interviews. One of the top expectations that participants discussed was actually one that they set for themselves – the ability hit the ground running with their new job right away. For many participants, they felt that they should be able to pick up where they left off, even if the jobs they were performing were different. Both voluntary and involuntary

leavers alike experienced hurdles to quickly re-assimilating and being productive right away. In addition to difficult onboarding and training experiences, some returners experienced delays in getting access to computers and systems needed to begin their work, and some learned that their job was drastically different from the position they'd applied to.

Some returners expressed frustration with having to wait for system access to be fully restored. As former employees, they knew exactly what applications and systems they needed in order to perform their jobs and were irritated in the instances they found that they couldn't dive into their work right away because they were waiting on approvals to be processed and technology partners to get them fully set up. Although this frustration is unique to the returning employee experience, it was not surprising to the participants because this was the norm whenever a new teammate came onboard.

As discussed in the latter part of section 4.2.2. regarding the liminality phase returners experience, many of the employees, especially involuntary leavers, talked about feeling like numbers or resources to the company after their exit. These realizations color their organizational re-entry experience. Onboarding activities did not seem to help improve their perceptions.

Due to the company's efforts to cut costs in recent years, OceanSpan has adopted a very low engagement approach to onboarding employees. In the past, the company hosted formal in-person orientation for new members that included an overview of OceanSpan's mission and values, as well as an introduction to local leaders. It provided an opportunity for employees to make connections with other newcomers and tenured peers on their very first day and afforded the opportunity to get answers to their questions

about benefits and general operations. Some of the more veteran participants in this study reminisced on this experience and wished that a more formal orientation could have been offered when they returned to OceanSpan. All 15 participants reported receiving little day one instruction or introduction to their new jobs. Most learned their jobs by working side-by-side with a teammate, or by asking questions to whomever was available to assist them.

> "There was really no training protocol or process in place. You kind of like were a hot potato in the department. Um, passing around from person to person. Whoever kinda had time. There was nothing formal in place." (*Elise, involuntary leaver)*

Despite the less-than-helpful experience on day one, returners seemed to expect the hands-off approach to orientation and simply made the best of it.

> "That's not dissimilar to a lot of peoples' orientation. We do not do onboarding well. And, I didn't obviously need to learn about [OceanSpan], or, you know, I didn't need, like, welcome-new-employee type training or anything like that. So, um, and the fact that all my learning was on the job, didn't faze me. I was used to that." (*Jasmine, voluntary leaver)*

Making the best of their new situations appeared to become a mantra for these returners, with 13 of them essentially expressing that they viewed their job as simply a job. Nine of them shared that this way of thinking began after they returned to the organization. This fresh viewpoint seems to have inspired a more non-committal approach to work. Again, as suggested in the findings from the liminality phase, feeling like numbers or resources didn't necessarily seem to affect the quality of work that employees were producing. This non-committal viewpoint suggests that returners may not be as willing to commit as

much discretionary effort to their jobs, unless doing so has a positive impact on their personal or professional identities.

> "I look at all these people who kill themselves who are working the 90 hours a week, because they're afraid of losing their job and I just want to shake them and say – at the end of the day, dude: Doesn't. Really. Matter. It's totally a numbers game and they don't – they don't care. They don't know you as a person. They don't know the kind of work that you do. And they don't care. So I have this, like, I didn't know that before. Now I know that. So, I definitely view my role in [OceanSpan] differently." *(Lauren, involuntary leaver)*

> "My perspective changed a little bit… I think I'm just in a different place mentally than I was when I left. Was pretty type A and um, work-obsessive. And I'm not anymore. 'Cause I work really, really hard to make sure I have a balance. Work really hard… I think I just, I see the people who are just spinning their wheels so hard and I just, I hope that they're doing it for the right reasons. I really do. Whereas before, I probably would have tried to keep up with them. And now, I, almost – um, I feel sad sometimes. Watching what people do to themselves." (*Jasmine, voluntary leaver)*

Perhaps this viewpoint allows returners a sense of self-preservation. By not allowing themselves to give all of their energy to their jobs or worrying about work-related matters, they protect themselves from burnout due to overwork. Even the participants who expressed that they already approached their jobs in this manner made comments that suggest they are quicker to calmly adapt to change.

4.6 Disengagement, Inevitable After all?

By all accounts, it appears that returners experience this phase of the socialization process according to Jablin's original model. While this study suggests that disengagement can occur post-exit, or even not at all, it is still possible for employees to experience disengagement while they are employed at the organization prior to an official exit event, regardless of whether it is voluntary or involuntary.

Some participants in this study expressed feelings of disengagement after post-re-entry factors caused them to re-assess their relationship with the organization. This is not to be confused with expressions of decreased commitment. As discussed earlier in the findings, employees can feel non-committed to the company, yet still engaged because they appear to be driven by professional and personal motivations.

It is also important to note that disengagement from a job or a role is more likely to occur before total disengagement from the company itself. Four participants, voluntary and involuntary leavers alike, mentioned that they were actively seeking other roles either within the company or outside the company. All four expressed dissatisfaction with either the job itself or some aspect of their team dynamic, causing them to seek opportunities that they feel would eliminate these dis-satisfiers. They were looking for new opportunities to fulfill their personal and/or professional needs, regardless of where they ended up working. All four of these participants had been in their positions for over two years. Most of the expressed dissatisfaction seems to stem from job expectations not being met, or the inability of the job to fulfill some aspect of their personal or professional needs. In fact, three of the employees expressing dissatisfaction were affected by departmental re-organizations shortly after they returned to the company.

Cora, a voluntary leaver who has spent over 20 years at the company, shared her viewpoint of how the organizational culture has changed over time. She left OceanSpan in 2013 to work for a smaller financial institution because she was moved into a role that she didn't choose with the purpose of helping to wind down operations in a department that would undergo several rounds of layoffs in effort to downsize. When she returned, she found that her 20+ years of service were not recognized: if an employee is separated from the company for six months or more, their tenure is not bridged. She also expressed how her dissatisfaction with being moved into a role that she did not choose has prompted her to be on the lookout for new opportunities:

> "I'm always looking. Because, you know what, I technically only have two years in, so – what's to stop me? I have no pension. They didn't bridge me. I feel even more free now than I did in 2013... I know how easy it is. I can do it again. There's no fear. So guess what, I know how easy it is to switch 'em… I just got moved into a role that I didn't pick. I didn't pick!" (*Cora, voluntary leaver)*

The other three employees who shared that they were feeling disengaged or otherwise seeking new opportunities were involuntary leavers. With nearly half of the involuntary leaver participants feeling disengaged, it prompts the question of whether these employees are more inclined to separate from their jobs, or the company altogether, due to their previous layoff experiences. Another factor that may influence their feelings of disengagement is that many of the involuntary leavers expressly returned to the company to end their unemployment, nearly all within less than a year. The two involuntary leavers who spent more time away from the company – one worked at another organization for a couple of years and the other decided to be a stay-at-home-mom for four years –

expressed the most satisfaction with their new jobs and OceanSpan overall than were the other involuntary leavers. The third disengaged voluntary leaver, George, expressed that the fear of being laid off again has prompted him to seek a new job in another department. Responding to my question about whether his approach to work has changed because of his layoff experience, he shared that he was on the hunt for a new job:

> "Here in May there's a bunch of cuts and we're kind of feeling a little bit of pressure right now as to we may get hit. So, which is actually prompting me to go out and find another job, so… Um, it's not 100 percent but, its 99 percent... The writing is on the wall. So, I mean, to think about it. I think I'm ultra-sensitive. I may be ultra-sensitive to it now, that if I see signs. A whole lot of org change within our division, which has been happening and we have managers saying, what you're seeing now is not gonna be the same in six months, that has prompted me to go out and start looking elsewhere. To make sure that, you know, I have a job by the time that six months is here." (*George, involuntary leaver)*

The other eleven participants in the study did not express any feelings of disengagement, but it's important to note that all but four of them had only just returned to the company within the past two years. Disengagement may be a process that takes time, or compounds over a series of shock events.

The significance of this is that returners, although having a unique exit/re-entry experience, may eventually follow Jablin's traditional disengagement phase. It is also important to note that of the four returners who were already looking for another position either within or outside OceanSpan, three of them were originally involuntary leavers. This suggests that returners who once left the organization involuntarily may become

disengaged more quickly than returners who were voluntary leavers or employees who have never left the organization at all.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study suggest a new perspective on the organizational socialization processes originally defined by Jablin (1987, 2001). The minimal amount of existing organizational exit/rehire literature does not address how and why employees choose to return to a company or how they experience these events. This research adds valuable insight into how this process is experienced by those who live it and provides compelling evidence to consider organizational socialization as a circular occurrence of activities, rather than a linear progression of stages. By not only expanding the structure of the socialization model, the new context provides fresh perspectives into the lesser-studied organizational practice of rehiring employees. Concepts from the field of communication studies such as organizational socialization/assimilation and identity/membership narratives haven proven to be important artifacts to help human resources professionals and managers understand the needs and experiences of rehired employees.

In this chapter, I'll answer the research questions set forth earlier in this paper and address the theoretical and practical implications for concepts of organization socialization.

5.1 Addressing the Research Questions and Theoretical Implications

RQ 1 — How do rehired employees experience the socialization process? The findings from this study strongly suggest a need to re-define the organizational

socialization phases that Jablin (1987, 2001) originally outlined. The existing structure of the organizational socialization process does not take into account the possibility of employees returning to an organization and sets up the socialization experience as one that occurs as a linear chain of events. Returning employees, both voluntary and involuntary leavers alike, experience the socialization process as a cycle.

Figure 1 and Figure 2 illustrate the difference between Jablin's original concept of organizational socialization and my proposed model of organizational socialization based on the possibility – and ever-increasing probability – of employees returning to an organization for a second (or more) round of employment. These illustrations present a high level representation of socialization phases. In Jablin's model, the phases of socialization occur in a linear progression with a set beginning and end, suggesting that after an employee leaves an organization, their experience with that particular company is permanently over. In my model, I suggest that the organizational socialization experience is cyclical and is based on the concept that organizations are entities comprised of networks that employees truly never exit throughout their careers.

The main difference in Jablin's model and my own is that I suggest disengagement can occur before or after organizational exit, or not at all. If post-exit disengagement occurs, it is present within a new phase – liminality. In this phase, the individual grapples with personal and professional identity factors as they make the decision to return to an organization they previously exited, or begin anew at another organization. Within this liminality phase, individuals experience the anticipatory socialization phase which includes interacting with a recruiting source, creating realistic

job previews, completing the selection interview and pre-entry ideation of what it might be like to work at a particular organization.

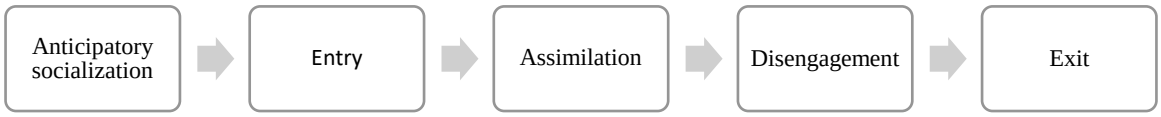

FIGURE 1 – JABLIN'S MODEL OF ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION

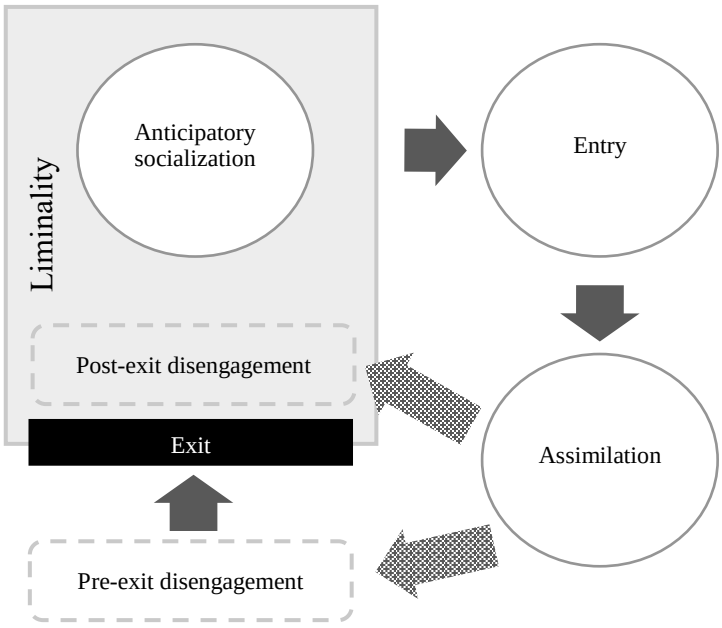

FIGURE 2 – OLESON'S MODEL OF ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION

RQ 1.A – Is the re-socialization process different from their first socialization experience with the organization? Why or why not? For returners, the phases of anticipatory socialization prior to re-entering the organization are experienced in

remarkably different ways than their first socialization experience. In their effort to return, they use their networks as their primary recruiting source since they have both strong and weak ties with individuals they previously worked with who are still within the organization. The same networks that serve to inform them of job openings also seem to be a draw for ex-employees to return, as most participants in this study expressed finding comfort in returning to the familiarity of established networks. Returning employees also have extremely realistic job previews. They not only have spent time inside the organization before, but they likely have worked in similar roles, performing similar tasks. Because of this, they require less post-entry onboarding and expect to begin actively contributing to their team's goals and objectives sooner.

RQ 1.B – Are there any unique socialization difficulties/opportunities associated with being a returning organizational member? Because returners have such realistic job previews, many of the participants expected to "hit the ground running" right away and be immediately productive. This expectation is also shared by hiring managers and peers on the returners' new teams, often resulting in a skinny version of the already emaciated onboarding routines at OceanSpan. Compounding frustrations, the returners' ability to immediately jump in was sometimes delayed by having to wait on system access to be fully restored. Others had job expectations that had to be reconciled by overcoming challenges of learning their new job, which was typically similar to what they'd done in the past, but was in reality very different in how their new team completed the work. All participants reported receiving no formal orientation or welcome. They overcame the information gaps by working with peers to learn their new role and navigate changes to the organization structure and culture that occurred after they left. Many of the returners

were set-up with peers for job shadowing and initial training, but the responsibility of learning the new job and assimilating to their new team was placed squarely on the returners. While this seemed to be the case for the returners, it is likely that employees transferring from one department to another may have a similar experience assimilating to their new team. Brand new employees generally receive a more high-touch onboarding process because more effort from their peers and managers is required to introduce them to the organization, the systems and the processes.

Other employees reported returning to a different work arrangement. Some had previously worked from home prior; and when they returned, they found that their new role required them to work in a physical office location. Participants who experienced this change in work style reported having a more difficult time re-assimilating due to changes in their routines. For example, someone who previously worked from home begins working at an office location must rise earlier, combat traffic, pack or plan lunches, arrange childcare (if necessary) and of course, will be submerged in situations where face-to-face interaction is the norm rather than the occasion. This represents major lifestyle changes and can be challenging to assimilate to, especially if the employee has worked from home for a number of years.

RQ 2 – Do the circumstances of an employee's exit affect the re-entry process? The circumstances of the participants' exits seemed to have an affect on their re-entry process, specifically in the anticipatory socialization and re-assimilation phases. RQ 2.A and RQ 2.B ask whether voluntary and involuntary leavers have differences or similarities in their experiences. By answering the overarching question for RQ2, I'll

address the differences and similarities in experiences by providing evidence related to the re-entry experience.

Although both groups remained in contact with former co-workers post-exit, the biggest difference between the voluntary and involuntary leavers in their re-entry experience is how they re-engaged their networks prior to their return. Voluntary leavers tended to have less contact with former co-workers after exiting the organization – they had no reason to proactively maintain relationships since they'd moved on to work for another company. Contrary to the participants who left the organization voluntarily, involuntary leavers reported making the most effort to stay in contact with organizational members and pro-actively engaged former co-workers in their job search.

The voluntary leavers had less contact with remaining organizational members post-exit and reported having former colleagues, usually managers, reach out to them to inform them of open positions and influence their return. As mentioned in the findings section, it is interesting to note that voluntary leavers all held either master's or bachelor's degrees, whereas some involuntary leavers had bachelor's degrees with the rest having completed some college but did not hold degrees. This seems to suggest that leavers with more desirable skills and educational backgrounds may be more likely to be tapped by a former manager for an opportunity to return, even if they voluntarily separated from the organization. A future study with a larger sample of rehired employees would be helpful to validate this possibility.

A similarity between voluntary and involuntary leavers is that they all experienced a period of liminality following their separation from the organization. Liminality can be understood as the phase between exit and re-entry into an organization.

During this phase, all of the participants in this study ultimately decided to return to the company because they each came to the conclusion that returning to the organization would maintain important aspects of their personal and professional identities. All participants put their personal and professional identities first when it came down to deciding where to work. Despite the circumstances of their exit, both voluntary and involuntary leavers found value in making a return to the organization, whether it was because the company offered a better work/life balance, possibilities for career advancement or an increase in compensation.

RQ 3 – How does returning to an organization impact the identity of a member? At the start of this research, the literature suggested that organizational identity plays a role in employees' choice of employer and I believed that I would find evidence of this in the participants' motivations for returning. However, the findings suggest that it is actually personal and professional identities that influence employees' decisions to return to the organization, as well as their decisions to exit in the cases of voluntary leavers. All 15 participants cited personal and professional identity-related motivations for returning to OceanSpan. The findings in this study suggest that even employees who were strongly identified with the organization prior to their exit do not necessarily return to the company due to some sense of organizational identity. Personal and professional identification factors proved to be one of the primary reasons to return.

As the literature pointed out, organizational identification is often measured by engagement. Many of the participants expressed a less committed approach to their work after they returned in terms of the discretionary effort they put forth. Again, this is not to be confused with the quality of their work – their work represents their professional

and/or personal identities and that is uncompromised by their leaving/returning experiences.

RQ 3.A – Do returning employees report feeling any differently about the organization the second time around? Nearly all participants shared some degree of dis-identification from the company following their return. They generally viewed their jobs as just a job, regardless of the organization they were performing it in. The job is simply a means to uphold personal and professional identities. Six of the eight involuntary leavers expressed that the layoff changed their perspective of how they view their relationship with the company. They reported feeling more like a number or a resource to the organization, something they had not felt prior to the layoff. Interestingly, most voluntary leavers also expressed dis-identification with the company, although a little more casually than the involuntary leavers did. They looked at their employment status objectively – again, a means to fulfill their personal and professional identities.

RQ 3.B – Do returning employees report acting any differently within the organization or in their interactions with co-workers the second time around? Possibly as a result of the advent of dis-identification discussed above, members of both groups reported having more non-committal approaches to work as returners to the company. Leaving and returning, despite the circumstance of exit, seems to result in employees putting forth less discretionary effort although simultaneously maintaining a sense of pride and a desire to perform satisfactorily in their jobs. This might indicate that returners seem to develop a mechanism for self-preservation. Whether they were laid off or voluntarily left to spend time outside of the organization, participants seem to return to the company wiser – they develop an approach to their jobs that may prevent them from

burnout due to overwork. This was observed in the interviews with the employees who indicated that they felt like a number or a resource to OceanSpan upon their return. Voluntary and involuntary leavers alike felt that they were there to do a job which they regarded as an extension of their personal and professional identities. If they asserted extra effort in their jobs, it was because it supported these identities, not because it would benefit the company or be interpreted as a means assure their job security.

Despite taking a different approach to their work, employees did not report acting differently toward co-workers. Many of the participants reported spending time reconnecting with former colleagues after their return, but the way they approached their relationships with others within the company did not change.

5.2 Practical Implications for Organizations

The findings of this study may be unique to the organization in which the research was conducted. Organizations inherently differ in their approaches to layoffs and onboarding employees. With that said, there are many practical implications that emerged in this study that may benefit other organizations regarding the socialization experience of their employees.

- First, organizational identification is not the biggest factor in attracting returners, no matter how strong the company's culture or brand appears to be. Ex-employees decide to return for personal and professional reasons. Work/life balance, benefits, and opportunities for advancement are key motivators for rehires. Person-job fit seems to be more meaningful to returners than person-organization fit.
- Second, peer networks are integral to the organizational socialization experience for returning employees. Managers and human resources professionals aiming to retain

top talent – even after they have physically left the organization – should actively use peer networks to re-engage former employees. Employees use their networks to find an in-road to a new beginning at the company.

- Third, organizations should aim to keep employees engaged with peers to minimize turnover. By focusing on helping employees build relationships with co-workers, it helps them grow their network within the company. Nurturing strong peer relationships and encouraging mentorship supports employees to develop within their roles and achieving their professional aspirations.
- Just because employees leave, they are not gone for good. Organizations should ensure exiting employees who could potentially return in the future leave feeling appreciated and valued. This is important whether they are leaving voluntarily or involuntarily – this positive procedural justice could influence their decision to return in the future.

CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

The findings in this study suggest many opportunities to learn more about the organizational socialization experience. The information discovered in this small study should be amplified in a larger study with more participants. In that vein, it is important to note that future researchers may consider conducting similar studies at smaller companies since the findings of this study may only apply to large organizations.

Additional research is needed on the topic of organizational identification and employee values. As I analyzed the data and discovered that employees seemed to align more with their personal and professional identities, I began to wonder if the returners were actually more aligned with the organization values and culture than they realized. Having previously worked at the company, they essentially lived those values for a number of years – could they have made their decision to return by subliminally aligning with the organization and what it stands for? At the point of their return, they would have already adopted the values as former employees and may have internalized them as their own. This is not to downplay the importance of personal and professional identities and aims – employees certainly based their decision to return on these factors – but it is important for scholars to examine organizational identity more closely to understand if values can become so engrained by exposure that it can be internalized.

Also, I suggest that more research should be done on the differences in how involuntary and voluntary leavers use their networks to return to the organizations. This

study discovered that involuntary leavers tend to take a more active role in maintaining their connections with former co-workers and have to work harder to locate their in-road to a new job at the organization. Voluntary leavers were more distant, but were most often invited to return to the organization by a former managers. Do former managers associate a stigma to laid-off employees, or do they place more value on employees with higher education or the propensity to make big career moves and take risks to advance?

Of course, this study was conducted in vivo with native and in-alterable variables. To help substantiate the findings in this study, it is recommended that future similar studies are conducted with random samples of organizational leavers and returners at a variety of different companies, including those outside of the financial services industry. Future studies may also consider taking specific variables into account, like the amount of time an employee spends away from an organization or how the level of participants' education or experience might affect the study findings. Quantitative surveys could also be used to examine these variables in more detail and isolate trends based on many different aspects of the employee experience. In this study, it was difficult to locate voluntary leavers who returned within three years of their exit. While this may be interpreted as a finding regarding the likelihood of voluntary leavers to return to the same organization, it is not improbable that many of them do eventually return. Perhaps in some organizations, their separation from the organization is a shorter period of time for variables that may differ from those influencing employees to return to OceanSpan. Understanding the voluntary leaver/returner experience is certainly valuable knowledge for companies seeking to re-obtain talent.

Finally, I recommend that a series of studies examine the employee experience at each phase of my organizational socialization model. Researchers could identify participants at each socialization phase and focus very specifically on that point-in-time experience. By conducting research at targeted phases, researchers will be able to learn more about the communicative activities that occur at each phase. In particular, researchers may find particular value in focusing on the re-entry experience and examining unmet expectations among returners. When employees leave an organization, their experiences and knowledge of the organization and its culture are essentially encapsulated as memories at that point in time. After returning to the company, their expectations based on their previous experience often conflict with the new situation they encounter at the company because the organization and its culture may have changed significantly from the point in time that they exited. A closer look from this perspective may yield interesting knowledge regarding how employees communicatively deal with unmet expectations, surprises and overall resocialization strategies. This study broadly asked participants about their entire experience between leaving the company and returning, which may have resulted in skewed answers based on the participants' most recent experiences or memories. To substantiate, or even advance this model of organizational socialization, scholars must study each phase as a separate event; and examine voluntary and involuntary leaver experiences in separate studies to allow more focused analysis on each situation. Longitudinal studies that follow employees throughout their career could provide the fullest picture of the organizational socialization lifecycle.

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APPENDIX A

Telephone invitation script
Phases and experiences of rehired employees

<Salutation> My name is Joni Oleson. I work in corporate communications here at the [company], but I am also a student in the Communication Studies Master's program at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

I am doing my Master's thesis on the experiences of employees who left and were later rehired at the [company]. One of your co-workers thought you might have had this experience. Is that correct?

<IF AFFIRMATIVE> Great! And so you know, this happened to me too, so I am sure we have some stories in common! I was hoping you'd be interested in helping out as an anonymous participant in my study.

I'm hoping you might be able spare 30 minutes to meet me for a one-on-one informal interview with me over coffee at a later date to talk about your experience.

Would you be interested and willing to participate?

<IF AFFIRMATIVE> That's wonderful! Thank you! I am going to send you an email with an attachment that will give you more information on the study. I'll also include a consent form and a brief questionnaire to gather background information. You can bring these with you when we meet for our interview. <IF INTERVIEW WILL BE COMPLETED VIA PHONE: Please complete these materials and email them to me before our scheduled interview.>

I will send you an Outlook meeting invite confirming the details of our one-on-one meeting. Just a reminder that email (personal or company account) is not confidential. As such, information provided to me via email cannot be guaranteed absolute confidentiality. In addition, if you choose to use company-provided email, phone or meeting services to communicate with me during the study, just know that these channels are always subject to internal monitoring for compliance reasons and confidentiality of content cannot be guaranteed. With that said, would you like me to send these to your company email or your personal email?

Thanks – I will use that address to correspond with you throughout the duration of the study. Again, I really appreciate you doing this.

Do you have any questions for me? Thanks again! I'll send over that email shortly. Have a great day!

APPENDIX B

Email recruitment confirmation/consent form and questionnaire delivery
Phases and experiences of rehired employees

<Salutation> It was a pleasure speaking with you on the phone. Thank you again for helping with my study on the experiences of rehired employees.

I've attached the consent form that will give you more information on the study and your rights as a participant. Also attached is the questionnaire. This is a short questionnaire that will allow you to provide some background on your experiences and demographic data. You can bring these with you when we meet for our interview.

<IF INTERVIEW WILL BE COMPLETED VIA PHONE> Please complete these materials and email them to me before our scheduled interview. As a reminder – email (personal or company account) is not confidential. As such, information provided to me via email cannot be guaranteed absolute confidentiality. In addition, if you choose to use company-provided email, phone or meeting services to communicate with me during the study, just know that these channels are always subject to internal monitoring for compliance reasons and confidentiality of content cannot be guaranteed.

If you have any questions as you are reading through these documents, feel free to reach out.

Thank you!

APPENDIX C

Informed consent form
Phases and experiences of rehired employees

Project Title and Purpose
You are invited to participate in a research study titled "Phases and experiences of rehired employees." This study intends to examine the experiences of organizational members who exited, but were subsequently rehired by the same organization.

Investigator
This study is being conducted by Joni Oleson, a graduate student of the Department of Communication Studies at the University of North Carolina (UNC) – Charlotte. This research will be conducted under the supervision of Dr. Loril Gossett and an academic advisory committee consisting of faculty from the department of Communication Studies.

Description of Participation
This research investigation will gather information using a brief questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. All interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. You may choose to participate in a face-to-face interview, or an interview conducted with WebEx to allow for webcam interaction.

Length of Participation
The questionnaire should take around 10-15 minutes to complete. The interview is scheduled for 30 minutes. Follow-up interviews will be scheduled if needed to continue discussion and/or clarify information.

Risks and Benefits of Participation
There are no known risks to participate in this study. However, there may be risks that are currently unforeseeable. There are no direct benefits to you, but the benefits of participating in this study may help organizations better plan programs and resources to improve rehire onboarding practices if this study is published. This project benefits the aforementioned investigator, because this study is part of a master's thesis project.

Volunteer Statement
You are a volunteer. The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. If you decide to be in the study, you may stop at any time. You will not be treated any differently if you decide not to participate or if you stop after you have started. The information you provide will not affect your job in any way. Taking part of this study is completely up to you, and even if you decide during the interview that you no longer want to participate you can just let me know, and you can cease participation immediately.

Confidentiality
The following steps will be taken to ensure confidentiality: your name will not be written down anywhere but this consent form; the consent form will be kept separate from the audiotape and transcripts; names will not be used when transcribing the videotape. Personally identifying information will not be shared with third parties.

Transcripts, audio files, notes and completed surveys will be stored on a password protected computer on a secure network with data encryption enabled. Only the researcher will have access to these documents. Audio files will be deleted after research has concluded and they are no longer needed.

Please be aware that email (personal or company account) is not confidential. As such, information provided to the researcher via email cannot be guaranteed absolute confidentiality. In addition, if you choose to use company-provided email, phone or meeting services to communicate with the researcher during the study, please be advised that these channels are always subject to internal monitoring for compliance reasons and confidentiality of content cannot be guaranteed.

Fair Treatment and Respect
UNC-Charlotte wants to ensure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the University's Research Compliance Office at 704-687-1871 or Dr. Loril Gossett at 704-687-0763 if you have any concerns about how you are treated as a study participant. If you have any questions about the project, please contact Joni Oleson, Department of Communication Studies, UNC-Charlotte, 9201 University City Blvd., Charlotte, NC 28223, 980-683-1418, JHarbott@UNCC.edu.

Participant Consent
I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that my participation in this study will occur using my own, personal time.

I am at least 18 years of age, and have agreed to participate in this research project. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form after it has been signed by me and the principal investigator.

_____	_____	_____
Participant Name (PLEASE PRINT)	Participant Signature	DATE

_____	_____
Investigator Signature	DATE

APPENDIX D

Semi-structured interview questions
Phases and experiences of rehired employees

These questions were used to facilitate discussion. Actual questions varied and additional probing questions were used, but the conversations centered on these topics.

1. Why did you decide to return to the company?

2. Can you describe the orientation/training/socialization process you went through when you returned as a rehire? Was it any different than when you first joined the company?

3. What impact (if any) did your prior experience with the company (previous position, reasons for leaving the first time, etc.) have on your return to the company?

4. Do you think you identify with the company more or less than you used to prior to when you left? Why?

5. What do you think the biggest differences are about being a newcomer in the organization compared to someone who is returning?

6. If you had a chance to do it over again, would you still decide to return to the company?

7. What advice would you give to HR to help returning employees?

8. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

APPENDIX E

Questionnaire

Phases and experiences of rehired employees

INSTRUCTIONS: Please answer each question by entering text or selecting a checkbox. You do not have to provide answers if you are uncomfortable with doing so. All responses are strictly confidential.

1. **How many years (total) have you been employed at [the company]?**
   Click here to enter text.

2. **When did you exit the company?**
   Click here to enter a date.

3. **What is your main reason for exiting the company? (check one)**
   - ☐ Birth, adoption or need to care for a dependent or family member
   - ☐ Beliefs or values were challenged
   - ☐ Job relocation (self or spouse)
   - ☐ Layoff/downsizing
   - ☐ Personal illness
   - ☐ Pursuit of a different career
   - ☐ Pursuit of a different job
   - ☐ Unhappy with organizational changes
   - ☐ Other: Click here to enter text.

4. **When did you resume employment with [the company]?**
   Click here to enter a date.

5. **Were you employed by another organization during your break in service?**
   Click here to enter text.

6. **Did you… (check one)**
   - ☐ Actively seek re-employment with [the company] after you exited the organization
   - ☐ Receive a reassignment offer from [the company]

7. **What was your job title and band level (if applicable) at the time of exit?**
   Job title: Click here to enter text.
   Band: Click here to enter text.

8. **What was your job title and band level (if applicable) at the time of rehire?**
   Job title: Click here to enter text.
   Band: Click here to enter text.

9. **What is your current job title and band level (if applicable), if different from above?**
   Job title: Click here to enter text.
   Band: Click here to enter text.

Questions in this section are for demographic purposes only.

10. **What is your age? (Check one)**
    ☐ 18-25 ☐ 26-35 ☐ 36-45 ☐ 46-55
    ☐ 56 +

11. **What is your gender? (Check one)**
    ☐ Male
    ☐ Female

12. **What is the highest level of education you have completed? (Check one)**
    ☐ Grammar school or less
    ☐ High school or equivalent
    ☐ Vocational/technical school
    ☐ Some college
    ☐ Bachelor's degree
    ☐ Master's degree
    ☐ Doctoral degree

13. **How would you classify yourself? (Check one)**
    ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander
    ☐ Black
    ☐ Caucasian/White
    ☐ Hispanic
    ☐ Latino
    ☐ Multi-racial
    ☐ Other: Click here to enter text.

APPENDIX F – CODE BOOK

Short description	Detailed description	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Realistic job previews (RJPs)	**A realistic understanding of all facets of the job including role requirements and related tasks, knowledge of the company and how it operates. Expressed expectations are evidence of RJPs.**	**Expressed familiarity with the job and its requirements as well as knowledge of the company, culture and how things get done.**	**Excludes RJPs related to other organizations the employees either considered working for or actually worked for during their break in service.**
Familiarity with job	An operational understanding of how the job works including related tasks and requirements.	Includes references to: - Tasks/ activities/ functions - Requirements - Systems - Departments - Procedures	Excludes roles related to the job. I.E. - manager, director, team leader. Excludes references to the overall company and culture.
Familiarity with company and culture	An operational understanding of the values, purpose and goals of the company. A general sense of how things get done at the company and how employees are expected to perform/interact.	Includes references to: - Values - Purpose - Goals - History with the company - How things get done - Employee interactions	Excludes references to specific jobs and roles; RJPs.
Expectations of returning	RJPs form expectations of what returning to the company might be like. This is essentially how the employee envisions their experience of returning to the company (or not).	Includes references to concepts and ideals of: - The onboarding experience, including orientation and job-learning - Picking up where they left off - Satisfaction with job and benefits - Expected working arrangements	Excludes: - Comparisons to experiences at other organizations - Specific references to being familiar with the job itself

Entry experience and identity maintenance	**This category covers what employees experience after they return to the company. Items in this category may not fall within the timeframe of entry/post entry, but will still be coded within this category because they may speak to role maintenance regardless of timeline of events.**	**This includes factors of how they identify with their roles, their relationship with the company and whether or not RJP expectations were met.**	**Excludes:** **- RJPs** **- Narratives of exit experience**
Role identity - personal	The role of being a supporter of their lifestyle or family.	Includes references to: - Family (spouse, children) - Self - Beliefs - Lifestyle, including work/life balance factors like home location preferences, commuting, work arrangements	Excludes: - Org/role career identification - Job details and tasks - Compensation and benefits
Role identity - professional	Professional goals, values and plans.	Includes: - Benefits and compensation - Career mobility/development - Goals - Values - Job preferences - Approach to work/employment	Excludes: - Self/familial identification - Job details and tasks - Self-performance evaluations
Job is a job (sub-coded as new realization or not)	The viewpoint that a job is simply a means to maintain a role. The organization exists to make money and employees performing jobs are a means to that end.	Includes: - References to company as a for-profit entity or business - Feels like a number - A big company - Changes in how they approach their work or their outlook on their role at the company	Excludes: - Job requirements or tasks

Factors of role fulfillment	**Circumstances after entry that indicate whether the job situation is satisfactorily fulfilling a personal or professional role.**	**Includes:** **- RJP expectations fulfillment** **- Post-entry events**	**Excludes:** **- Events internal to the employee's locus of control/ things they did after returning**
RJP expectations met (Positive/negative)	Employees return with expectations based on their RJP. This category codes for whether or not Positive/negative the expectations were met.	Includes… Positive sentiments: - They felt like returning home/returning to family - Expressed satisfaction with job - Satisfaction with onboarding process Negative sentiments: - Negative onboarding experience - Immediate re-org upon return - Dissatisfaction with onboarding process	Excludes: - Experiences occurring after initial return/re-orientation
Post-entry experiences that affected outlook on role(s)	Experiences occurring after initial return/re-orientation.	Includes: - Experiences occurring after initial return/re-orientation - Transitions into different jobs - Performance reviews post-re-entry - Current team/manager/job situations	Excludes: - Experiences occurring outside of the company, either personal or professional - Experiences occurring immediately at time of rehire

Networks	**Employees create and maintain networks throughout the socialization process. Networks are connections with individuals within the company.**	**Includes:** **- Co-workers/peers** **- Managers** **- Employee networks** **- Maintaining networks** **- Network contact resulting in rehire**	**Excludes:** **- References to networks outside of the company**
Maintaining network after exit	The act of interacting with network members after exiting the company. This category specifically focuses on how the employee interacted with their network after leaving the company.	Includes: - Instances of contact with network members obtained through employment with the company post-exit - All means of contact including virtual and face-to-face conversation	Excludes: - References to networks outside of the company
Catalyst for rehire	Specific mention of a network member being directly involved in the employee's rehire.	Includes: - The event where interacting with a network member directly resulted in their rehire	Excludes: - General mention of interaction with network members that did not directly lead to rehire
Maintaining network after return	The act of interacting with network members after returning to the company. This category specifically focuses on how the employee interacted with their network after returning to the company.	Includes: - Instances of contact with network members obtained through employment with the company post-return - All means of contact including virtual and face-to-face conversation - Efforts to expand network or strengthen network upon return	Excludes: - References to general conversations with co-workers/peers
Network was a reason to return	Familiarity with network or references to the value of being able to work with the same co-workers.	Includes: - Expressed desire to work with familiar people - Statements about the individuals networks being primarily located within the company	Excludes: - Specific examples of peers being catalysts for return

APPENDIX G – PARTICIPANT DETAILS

Name	Gender	Total years at company	Exit year	Re-entry year	Time lapsed	Employed by other org during break in service	Employee type	Actively seeked reemployment with org after exit	Exit band level	Entry band level	Current band	Agre range	Education	Race
Bonnie	Female	1 to 5	2014	2016	2 years	Yes	Involuntary	Yes	6	7	7	36-45	Some college	White
Lauren	Female	6 to 10	2014	2014	1 year	No	Involuntary	Yes	5	5	5	26-35	Bachelors	White
George	Male	6 to 10	2014	2014	Less than 1 year	No	Involuntary	Yes	4	4	4	46-55	Some college	White
Nate	Male	6 to 10	2015	2015	Less than 1 year	No	Involuntary	Unassigned	5	5	5	46-55	Bachelors	White
Ken	Male	26-30	2015	2015	Less than 1 year	No	Involuntary	Yes	4	4	4	46-55	Bachelors	White
Marta	Female	30+	2015	2016	1 year	No	Involuntary	Yes	not provided	not provided	not provided	56+	Some college	White
Elise	Female	16-20	2014	2014	Less than 1 year	No	Involuntary	Yes	4	5	5	36-45	Bachelors	White
Tara	Female	11 to 15	2010	2014	4 years	No	Involuntary	Yes	5	5	5	46-55	Bachelors	Asian/pacific islander
Meredith	Female	1 to 5	2015	2016	1 year	Yes	Voluntary	No	4	4	4	26-35	Masters	White
Jasmine	Female	11 to 15	2013	2014	1 year	No	Voluntary	No	4	4	5	26-35	Bachelors	White
Lana	Female	6 to 10	2014	2015	1 year	Yes	Voluntary	Yes	5	5	5	36-45	Bachelors	White
Cora	Female	21-25	2013	2014	1 year	Yes	Voluntary	Yes	4	5	5	36-45	Masters	White
Gary	Male	1 to 5	2011	2015	4 years	Yes	Voluntary	Yes	5	not provided	5	36-45	Masters	White
Daisy	Female	16-20	2000	2010	10 years	Yes	Voluntary	Yes	4	4	4	36-45	Masters	Multi
Lydia	Female	11 to 15	2000	2006	6 years	Yes	Voluntary	Yes	6	5	4	36-45	Bachelors	Black
(Joni) Researcher	Female	6 to 10	2014	2014	Less than 1 year	No	Involuntary	Yes	5	5	5	26-35	Bachelors	White

APPENDIX H – INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

UNC CHARLOTTE
Research and Economic Development
Office of Research Compliance
9201 University City Blvd, Charlotte, NC 28223-0001
t/ 704.687.1876 f/ 704.687.0980 http://research.uncc.edu/compliance-ethics

Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Research with Human Subjects

Certificate of Approval

Protocol #	**16-03-09**		
Protocol Type:	**Expedited** 7		
Title:	**Organizational Exit and Re-assimilation: Stages and Experiences of Re-hired Employees**		
Initial Approval:	**3/23/2016**		
Responsible Faculty	**Dr. Loril**	**Gossett**	**Communication Studies**
Investigator	**Ms. Joni**	**Oleson**	**Communication Studies**

After careful review, the protocol listed above was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Research with Human Subjects under 45 CFR 46.111. This approval will expire one year from the date of this letter. In order to continue conducting research under this protocol after one year, the "Annual Protocol Renewal Form" must be submitted to the IRB. This form can be obtained from the Office of Research Compliance web page http://research.uncc.edu/compliance-ethics/human-subjects.

Please note that it is the investigator's responsibility to promptly inform the committee of any changes in the proposed research prior to implementing the changes, and of any adverse events or unanticipated risks to subjects or others.

Amendment and Event Reporting forms are available on our web page at: http://research.uncc.edu/compliance-ethics/human-subjects/amending-your-protocol.

M. Lyn Exum 4/4/16

Dr. M. Lyn Exum, IRB Chair Date

VITA

Joan (Joni) Mondae Oleson was born in Jacksonville, Florida on February 7, 1988, the daughter of Eva Jane Harbottle and Jeffrey Eugene Harbottle. She is the older sister of one sibling, Jeremy David Harbottle.

After completing high school at Frank H. Peterson Academies of Technology in 2006, Joni earned her associate of arts degree from Florida State College at Jacksonville in 2008. She earned her bachelor of science in communication degree with a concentration in public relations, and a minor in business administration from the University of North Florida in 2011.

After moving to North Carolina with her husband, Zachary Kenneth Oleson, she entered the University of North Carolina at Charlotte in 2013. Joni has been employed full-time in the financial services industry since 2006. At the time this thesis was written, she worked at the research site as a communications manager supporting the human resources department.