An Investigation of Work Environment Characteristics and Work Engagement of Limited-
and Full-Service Hotel Property Front-Line Employees

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AN INVESTIGATION OF WORK ENVIRONMENT CHARACTERISTICS AND
WORK ENGAGEMENT OF LIMITED- AND FULL-SERVICE HOTEL
PROPERTY FRONT-LINE EMPLOYEES

by

Robert Jerald Thompson

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2016
ABSTRACT

AN INVESTIGATION OF WORK ENVIRONMENT CHARACTERISTICS AND WORK ENGAGEMENT OF LIMITED- AND FULL-SERVICE HOTEL PROPERTY FRONT-LINE EMPLOYEES

by Robert Jerald Thompson

May 2016

Today, employee work engagement is viewed as one of the most important issues for corporations, given its influence on individual and organizational productivity and performance (Attridge, 2009; Czarnowsky, 2008). As a result, all organizations desire employees who are engaged, in particular the hospitality industry. As a service-providing sector of the hospitality industry, hotels are reliant on front-line employees to conduct strong customer-employee interactions and provide efficient service delivery while exceeding customer expectations (Kusluvan, 2003). The hospitality industry needs employees who are committed to the organization and one who is passionate, striving to go the extra mile, and offering discretionary effort to satisfy the customer while enhancing the guests’ experience. Despite evidence of the engagement-profit linkage and front-line employee influence on customer quality and service perceptions (Lockwood, 2007; Seijts & Crim, 2006; Wagner & Harter, 2007; Watson, 2002), little is known about employee work engagement within the hospitality workplace. The lack of research-based tools to forge successful work environments leaves in hospitality industry leaders challenged to foster a more engaged workforce to remain competitive in the marketplace.

This cross-sectional, descriptive, non-experimental study investigated whether specific industry work environment characteristics exist as perceived by regional front-
line employees of limited- and full-service hotels. The research found front-line employees of both limited- and full-service hotels are engaged at a high level in their workplace and perceive their work environments favorably. Further, favorable perceptions of hospitality-specific work environment characteristics are linked to higher front-line employee work engagement levels. These engaged front-line employees experience vigor, dedication, and absorption in the workplace, thereby contributing discretionary effort to satisfy customer while enhancing the guest experience. Additional research should focus on replicating the study in different areas to improve the external validity of the study. Future research could also employ both quantitative and qualitative methods for richness and depth as to why no difference, in front-line employee work environment perceptions and work engagement perceptions, between limited- and full-service hotels was found. Research might also be conducted in many cultural settings to strengthen understanding in front-line employee work environment and work engagement perceptions in limited- and full-service hotel properties.
AN INVESTIGATION OF WORK ENVIRONMENT CHARACTERISTICS AND
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PROPERTY FRONT-LINE EMPLOYEES

by

Robert Jerald Thompson

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
and the Department of Human Capital Development
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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DEDICATION

Although neither one of them witnessed this academic journey, I can honestly say I have felt their presence and encouragement every step of the way. This dissertation is, therefore, dedicated to the memory of my beloved and dearly treasured parents, with immeasurable gratitude. My father used to say, “Each milestone in your life is another chapter.” So, here’s to the next chapter. Cheers!
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Human beings, by nature, are complex entities. Understanding personal motivation and commitment can be an arduous undertaking under normal circumstances. In today’s dynamic and demanding workplace, comprehending what initiates employee motivation and fosters employee commitment to forge a more engaged workforce can be a daunting task. As research continues to shed light on the connection between employee work engagement and organizational profits, more businesses are evolving from a mere employee satisfaction mindset to a strategic employee engagement-centric focus (Baumgartner, 2014). Thus, the term employee engagement has increasingly emerged as a topic resonating at the highest levels within organizations. As Kular, Gatenby, Rees, Soane, and Truss (2008) profoundly summarized, this keen interest in the concept of employee work engagement has flourished based on its strategic role for organizations in the areas of work performance, business outcomes, and competitive advantage.

All organizations desire employees who are engaged. The hospitality industry, in particular, is dependent on garnering a fully engaged workforce. As a service providing sector of the hospitality industry, hotels are reliant on front-line employees to conduct strong customer-employee interactions and provide efficient service delivery while exceeding customer expectations (Kusluvan, 2003). Additionally, Winsted (2000) noted that customers yearn for personal and humane encounters with employees during service transactions. Thus, hotel leaders recognize the influence front-line employees have on service quality perceptions and customer loyalty (Chapman & Lovell, 2006). Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault (1990) found in their study of hotel, restaurant, and airline employees that the behaviors of these employees influenced service delivery and resulted
in both satisfactory and unsatisfactory service experiences of customers. Helms and Stern (2001) showed that employees’ perceptions of the work environment influenced work commitment and engagement to the organization. However, little is known about the influence of the work environment characteristics of the hospitality industry on work engagement in the front-line employee workplace. In today’s rapidly evolving and competitive landscape, providing a work environment conducive to fostering an engaged workforce is necessary for organizations to be competitive in their fight for market share (Gostick & Elton, 2006).

Background of the Study

The global marketplace of today, with its constantly changing and evolving landscape, can be more imposing than ever. Although the *Flat World* (Friedman, 2006) has brought about a level playing field, it has also ushered in an era of unprecedented enhanced consumer empowerment, fierce competition, and operational challenges. The resulting hyper-competitive marketplace makes capturing and retaining market share a daunting and arduous task. For organizations, the challenge is to attract and engage customer-focused employees able and willing to service the empowered customer (Cook, 2008). For service sectors, such as the hospitality industry, attracting, capturing, and retaining customer centric employees are essential.

The hospitality industry encompasses a broad array of service entities with the sole purpose of providing lodging, food and beverage, and recreational services. These service industry units include lodging, restaurants, cruises, and theme parks. The hotel industry is classified into two main categories: full-service and limited service (Walker & Walker, 2013), identifying which hotel markets to serve (Rutherford & O'Fallon, 2007). Full-service hotels differentiate themselves from limited service hotels by the variety of
in-house features and amenities provided onsite (Walker & Walker, 2013). The offerings of full-service properties include numerous food and beverage outlets, meeting space, concierge service, bell staff service, health spas, beauty salons, and specialty shops. Full-service hotels pride themselves in the lavish quality of furnishings in the guestrooms and throughout the property. These accommodations may include a liquor cabinet, high thread-count bed linens, and room service. The largest full-service hotels include resort properties offering a wide array of high-end services and features, e.g., spectacular pool settings, lush gardens, lavish accommodations, and more. Full-service hotels, by nature, are more challenging to manage because of the demands of food and beverage operations, numerous onsite revenue outlets, enhanced guest expectations, and sheer volume of business generated. Limited service hotels generally offer reasonably sized and furnished guestrooms without the frills of full-service properties. These properties have limited to no revenue generating streams, such as food and beverage outlets and onsite meeting space; yet, because of these limitations, they also have lower operating costs. Thus, limited service hotels have grown in popularity by streamlining their focus on selling beds rather than meals or meetings (Walker & Walker, 2013).

With customer service as its cornerstone, the hospitality industry is identified as a labor-intensive, service-based industry that relies on the abilities and desires of employees to deliver on organizational initiatives (King, 2010). Hotels, in particular, struggle to provide exceptional service, exceed customer expectations, amass the elusive competitive advantage in the marketplace, and increase market share (Kusluvan, 2003). Increased competition within the sector, in conjunction with the impact of the customer-employee interactions in the delivery of service, has generated a heightened awareness
and appreciation by hospitality practitioners and academics to better understand how to attract, retain, and motivate employees (King, 2010).

In this effort, a renewed focus has emerged on the role an employee plays in customer satisfaction, guest experience, and the overall success of an organization. Employee engagement is important to create a workforce that is firmly committed to the organization offering discretionary effort to satisfy the customer (Cook, 2008). Front-line employees, those who have direct contact with the customer, play an indispensable role in service delivery of hospitality organizations (Henkoff, 1994; Kusluvan, 2003). If engaged, these employees are customer-focused, inspired by their work, care about the future of their employer, and are willing to invest their personal effort to ensure the organization succeeds (Cook, 2008). Further, the commitment and attitudes of front-line employees strongly influence customers’ perceptions of the service quality offering of the hotel and the organization as a whole (Teng & Barrows, 2009). Nonetheless, an estimated two thirds of United States employees are not engaged; disengagement is costing domestic businesses an estimated $350 billion a year and eroding the bottom line of organizations (Bardwick, 2008; Seijts & Crim, 2006). Engagement, according to Sirota and Klein (2013), is a psychological state generated from a heightened emotional bond between the employee and the organization. Employees who withdraw from or have no emotional connection while performing their work roles are categorized as disengaged (Kahn, 1990). Exacerbating low levels of engagement for the hospitality industry is the fact that the sector is widely perceived as a pass-through, pressure cooker, service factory environment with stopgap employment resulting in the standardization of tasks, low pay, high turnover, and an unskilled workforce (Guerrier, 1999; Woods, 1999). Even more so, Zopiatis and Constanti (2007) noted that, “the hospitality industry is
renowned for its ‘pressure cooker’ environment of long hours and high turnover, particularly among front-line staff” (p. 31).

The poor work environment characteristics within the hospitality industry have initiated the popular stereotypes and “image problem” (Kusluvan, 2003) of the industry ranging from low status and the standardization of job tasks to capricious management (Baum, 1996). Poor human resource practices persist in regards to employment conditions in the hospitality industry (Kusluvan, 2003). Some of the prevalent poor conditions are monotonous jobs, long and demanding hours of work, absence of overtime, and poor promotional opportunities (Guerrier, 1999; Simons & Enz, 1995). Thus, hospitality firms are described as unpleasant or poor establishments in terms of places to work (Lucas, 1996). Unfavorable perceptions and pervasive work environment characteristics can deter potential employees as well as influence current workforces. Hospitality workers are often perceived as “uneducated, unmotivated, unskilled and unproductive” (Pizam, 1982, p. 5). An often overlooked and demanding component of the work environment characteristics within the service sector, which differ from that of the production sector, is the service sector’s direct contact with customers and clients (Normann, 1986). Similarly, Tracey and Tews (2005) highlighted that work environment characteristics can be defined as the employee perception of the conditions or practices within an organization that promote or inhibit employee engagement in the workplace. Employment in the hospitality industry has become personified by instability and high unemployment (Kusluvan, 2003). This instability and high unemployment are resulting in one of the modern workplace’s most notable features—its lack of engagement (Pink, 2009).
Initially, the term *engagement* may sound like a soft concept; still, it has deep bottom-line organizational impact (Gallup, 2013). An employee who is committed to the organization, passionate about his or her work, and willing to contribute discretionary effort for the betterment of the organization is referred to as *engaged*. Employee engagement has garnered a great deal of interest, particularly as evidence increasingly indicates an employee engagement-organizational profit linkage (Czarnowsky, 2008). Pandey and David (2013) also made the point that engaged employees are the ultimate goal in the fight for competitive advantage where employees are the differentiator. Further, engagement is the conduit to producing mastery in the workplace, which has become essential in competing in any economy (Pink, 2009). Notwithstanding, an employee’s motivation is a constant influx and evolving, ultimately affecting his or her enthusiasm and engagement (Sirota & Klein, 2013).

Khan (1990) defined *employee engagement* as “the harnessing of organizational members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances” (p. 694). Conversely, employees who are disengaged detach, withdraw, and defend themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally while performing their work roles (Kahn, 1990). Disengaged employees do not have a connection with the organization and have a corrosive impact on the bottom line. Cook (2008) argued that employee engagement in the workplace is more a psychological bond than a physical contract. Simply stated, employee work engagement is a psychological state characterized by a *passion for work* exhibited by the employee to better the organization (Cook, 2008; Truss et al., 2006). Understanding and tapping into this passion for work could enable hospitality firms to garner higher profits, increase employee engagement, and foster a more motivated
workplace and competitive organization than hospitality firms without passionate employees.

Statement of the Problem

For the hospitality industry, employee work engagement is important in creating not only a front-line workforce that is committed to the organization and also a front-line workforce that is passionate, striving to go the extra mile, and offering discretionary effort to satisfy the customer while enhancing the guest’s experience. Nonetheless, employee engagement is declining in the workplace (Bardwick, 2008; Federman, 2009; Gostick & Elton, 2006; Pink, 2009; Rosenbluth & Peters, 2002). Gallup’s extensive research underscored the decline of employee engagement in the United States’ workplaces with more than 50% of employees not engaged and nearly 20% actively disengaged (Gallup, 2013). The cost of this disengagement is projected at $300 billion annually in lost productivity (Pink, 2009). Further, these employees miss 3.5 more days of work each year than their colleagues, resulting in 86.5 million missed days in the workplace (Gallup Organization, 2001). As a result, workplace engagement is emerging as a desired and important attitude for organizations (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). In the current fiercely competitive global marketplace, understanding the characteristics of the workplace environment enables organizations to foster an engaged, committed, and vested workforce in order to be productive, remain competitive, and garner high profits. Gostick and Elton (2006) highlighted, “High-employee-engagement firms report average customer service satisfaction 20 percent higher than their low-engagement peers” (p. 82). Hence, more businesses are recognizing the direct value committed, and enthusiastic employees contribute to their organization not simply in terms of productivity but also customer satisfaction and profitability (Cook, 2008). The term employee engagement
could escalate and resound at the highest levels in organizations. Employee work engagement has emerged as one of the most pressing corporate issues, given its influence on performance and productivity for the individual and the organization (Attridge, 2009; Czarnowsky, 2008). In this effort, organizations need employees who are dedicated, feel vigor, and are absorbed by their work (Karatepe & Olugbade, 2009). The basic needs of these employees (e.g., pay, benefits, and work environment) must be met in order for them to achieve (Gostick & Elton, 2006). Despite evidence of the engagement-profit linkage and front-line employee influence on customer quality and service perceptions, minimal information exists pertaining to employee work engagement within the hospitality workplace. The industry, as a whole, is widely perceived as a pass-through pressure cooker and service factory environment with stopgap employment resulting in the standardization of tasks, low pay, high turnover, and an unskilled workforce (Guerrier, 1999; Henderson, 1965; Kusluvan, 2003; Lucas, 2002; Shames & Glover, 1989; Woods, 1999). Further, the hospitality industry is commonly held and rarely challenged as offering predominantly unskilled or semi-skilled work opportunities (Baum, 1996). Without engaged front-line employees, hospitality organizations often struggle to enhance the guest experience, increase productivity, remain competitive, and garner higher profits (Kusluvan, 2003). Increased competition within the hospitality industry can result in pressure on pricing, thereby resulting in decreased profits and loss of market share. Therefore, industry leaders should actively evaluate the level of engagement in their organizations, determine reasons engagement may be lacking, strive to eliminate those issues, and implement strategic measures designed to forge full engagement (Seijts & Crim, 2006). Without research-based tools to forge successful work environments, leaders in the hospitality industry are left to struggle in their efforts
to foster an engaged workforce, garner a competitive advantage, and be successful in today’s hyper-competitive marketplace.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relation between specific work environment characteristics within the hospitality industry on front-line employee workforce engagement. This researcher investigated whether perceptions of work environment characteristics of the hospitality industry found within literature exist in today’s hospitality workplace as perceived by front-line employees. The researcher analyzed data from front-line employees of limited- and full-service sectors of the hospitality industry to determine whether a relationship existed between the work environment characteristics and employee work engagement. In addition, the researcher investigated whether these work environment characteristics are perceived differently by front-line employees in limited- and full-service hotels.

Significance of the Study

This study has both practitioner and theoretical significance. An organization’s human capital is a source of competitive advantage in an aggressive marketplace and, in many cases, over and above technology and finance (Cook, 2008). Even so, the challenge for organizations is not just retaining talented employees but also fully engaging them to contribute to organizational success (Kaye & Jordan-Evans, 2003). Organizations with engaged employees enjoy higher sales, increased customer satisfaction, boosted productivity, and lower turnover than organizations without engaged employees (Gostick & Elton, 2006). Slåtten and Mehmetoglu (2011) stated, for the hospitality industry, front-line employees are fundamentally important to the guest service perceptions and overall experience. Thus, employees have the capability of
significantly increasing or decreasing an organization’s market share (Gostick & Elton, 2006). The results of the study will help fill the current knowledge gap by providing insight and information regarding front-line employee engagement in the hospitality workplace for hotel administrators and practitioners as well as researchers within the field of hospitality.

Research Objectives

Several research objectives were associated with this study. The following objectives examined the extent to which work environment characteristics of the hospitality industry affect front-line employee work engagement:

RO1: Describe the demographics of the participants in terms of gender, age, pay status, hotel type, and years of employment at the property.

RO2: Determine the work environment of the hospitality industry workplace, as perceived by regional front-line hotel employees.

RO3: Determine whether the work environment of the hospitality industry differs between limited- and full-service hotels, as perceived by regional front-line hotel employees.

RO4: Determine whether employee work engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption) levels differ between limited- and full-service front-line hotels, as perceived by regional front-line hotel employees.

RO5: Determine the relationship between the work environment and employee work engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption), as perceived by regional front-line hotel employees.
Conceptual Framework

Mouton (2002) stated that a conceptual framework provides a systematic representation of a research phenomenon by bringing to light relationships, patterns, and regularities to conceptualize the phenomenon of interest. This researcher developed a conceptual framework from existing literature on employee work engagement in the hospitality industry workplace and provided an analytical overview of this investigation. The foundation of the conceptual framework includes four key theories or pillars that impact employee work engagement (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Conceptual model.
Human needs, the first pillar of the conceptual framework, was based on Maslow’s (1943a) hierarchy of human needs. This psychological model is widely considered the foundation for understanding human motivation and development. Maslow (1943a) found that needs can be physiological or psychological deficiencies that a person feels compelled to satisfy. Unfulfilled, these needs can cause tensions that influence an individual’s behavior and attitudes (Burton, 1990). Furthermore, according to Burton (1990), these unmet human needs can cause conflict.

The second pillar of the conceptual framework, motivation, was built upon the works of Herzberg (1943) and McClelland (1988). Herzberg (1943) presented two sets of factors that affect motivation in the workplace. Herzberg called the first set of factors hygiene factors. These factors included the employee because pay scale varies between one employee to the other, conditions in the workplace, job security, colleague and supervisor interactions, and organizational policies. The second set of factors is satisfiers or motivators. These factors include responsibility, achievement, growth opportunities, and recognition, all of which influence job satisfaction and workplace motivation. McClelland’s (1988) theory centered on acquired needs (achievement, affiliation, and power) on the job which people prioritize. These needs shape employee motivation in the workplace.

Commitment, the third pillar, centered on an employee’s psychological attachment to the organization (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001) where Meyer and Allen (1991, 1997) found that this attachment has three components: (a) desire (affective commitment), (b) need (continuance commitment), and (c) obligation (normative commitment).
The fourth and final pillar encompasses the theoretical findings highlighting employee engagement as a passion for work (Cook, 2008). These findings as follows: (a) “work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002, p. 74) and (b) an increase in productivity as well as satisfaction and reducing turnover (Khan, 1990).

As a service sector industry, the hospitality workplace needs engaged customer-centric front-line employees who are committed to the organization in order to remain competitive in the marketplace (Kusluvan, 2003). However, research shows employee disengagement is deepening (Gallup, 2013). For the hospitality industry, literature suggested specific work environment characteristics may shape its workforce. Even so, little is known about the hospitality industry work environment and employee work engagement in the hospitality workplace (Seijts & Crim, 2006). This study investigated specific hospitality industry work environment characteristics and examined the relationship between front-line employee work engagement of limited- and full-service hotels.

Research indicated that employee engagement is declining; yet engaged employees are needed in the hospitality workplace of both limited- and full-service hotels for hoteliers to be successful in the marketplace (Kusluvan, 2003). Dickson (2008) stated in an experience economy, front-line employees play a significant role in the service delivery and overall quality perceptions of a brand. Comprehending the work environment characteristics that foster and hinder employee work engagement for front-line employees will provide tools for hoteliers to foster workplace engagement as well as add to existing literature.
Definition of Key Terms

The following key words and phrases utilized in this research were defined to provide a better understanding of the researcher’s topic under study.

*Front-line employees.* Those employees who had direct contact with the customer. These individuals play an indispensable role in the service delivery of hospitality organizations (Kusluvan, 2003).

*Employee work engagement.* A “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74).

*Employee disengagement.* Employees who disconnect, withdraw, and defend themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally while performing their work roles (Kahn, 1990).

*Motivation.* This internal drive (e.g., a need, desire, or want) serves to activate or energize behavior giving it direction (Kleinginna & Kleinginna, 1981).

*Commitment.* “A force that binds an individual to a course of action that is of relevance to a particular target” (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001, p. 301).

*Full-service hotels.* These “hotels offer a wide range of facilities and amenities . . . multiple food and beverage outlets including bars, lounges, and restaurants; both formal and casual dining; and meeting, convention, and catering services” (Walker & Walker, 2013, p. 73).

*Limited service hotels.* Accommodation properties that have limited to no revenue-generating food and beverage outlets and meeting space onsite. These hotels offer “reasonably sized and furnished rooms without the frills of full-service hotels” (Walker & Walker, 2013, p. 73).
Human needs. These needs are considered “psychological drivers” and the starting point for motivational theory (Maslow, 1943a).

Work environment characteristics. The perception of the condition or practices in an organization that are likely to promote or inhibit employee engagement in the workplace (Tracey & Tews, 2005).

Summary and Organization of the Study

This chapter, by providing the purpose and direction of the study, laid the foundation for research examining employee work engagement of front-line employees within the hospitality workplace. Given the linkage between work engagement and an organization’s bottom-line and the direct impact front-line employees have on customer quality and service perceptions for service organization, understanding how to forge a more engaged workforce is essential to remain competitive in today’s marketplace. The chapters to follow provide additional insight into this study. Chapter II provides a thorough review of the pertinent literature in the realm of employee engagement as it relates to the hospitality industry workplace. Presented in Chapter III are the design and methodology utilized for this research study. Chapter IV consists of analysis of findings related to the study, and Chapter V provides the research results along with recommendations for future studies.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In research a review of literature is necessary to gain insight and develop an understanding of the topic being studied. A literature review can be defined as “a summary of a subject field that supports the identification of specific research questions” (Rowley & Slack, 2004, p. 31). Conducting a thorough investigation of historical finds aids in familiarizing one with existing concepts and conclusions. This current state of knowledge can provide a foundation from which further research can be built. Additionally, a review of literature can serve to advance knowledge of a particular phenomenon by highlighting what is known and identifying what is not known (Epp, 2008). Epp (2008) examined employee engagement within the hospitality industry workplace. Specifically, the study assessed the existence of negatively perceived work environment characteristics and their relationship on the employee work engagement of front-line workforces within the limited- and full-service hotel sectors. As a first step in this effort, it was essential to examine and consider current knowledge in regard to employee workplace engagement as described in empirical and theoretical literature.

The new global economy has opened the door to unprecedented opportunities. However, this economy has also ushered in massive restructuring, downsizing, rightsizing, and layoffs causing a psychological recession. Workforce low productivity, retention problems, and increased absenteeism negatively impact the bottom line (Bardwick, 2008). Similarly, “layoffs, bankruptcies, bail-outs, foreclosures and going-out-of-business signs have become the new landscape of business” (Gostick & Elton, 2006, p. xiv). The psychological recession resulting from this new landscape, according to Bardwick (2008), inhibits creativity and innovation in business by creating deep
pessimism, fear, uncertainty, and a general sense of doom that discourages employees from making any extra effort at work. Similarly, Cook (2008) asserted that employee work engagement is more of a psychological contract than a true physical contract.

Siroti and Klein (2013) highlighted that, “The focus in discussions of engagement is on the psychological aspects of work—such as communications, recognition, and teamwork—since, after all, engagement is a psychological state, a heightened emotional connection” (p. 80). In the workplace, negative employee emotions, such as anxiety, depression, and a feeling of being powerless, are a corrosive mix (Bardwick, 2008). Such behavior can stifle an employee, impacting customer loyalty, the reputation of the business, and the organization’s performance (Heady, 2004).

The recent business landscape has also brought about heightened consumer expectations, distinctly targeted market segments requiring unique products and services, and fierce competition, forcing hospitality organizations to seek means to excel in service delivery, customer quality perceptions, operations, and performance (Kusluvan, 2003). Additionally, the global, information-based, interconnected economy has businesses and individuals competing against the world’s best (Colvin, 2008). As a result, Ulrich (2013) highlighted that

employee contribution has become a critical business issue because in trying to produce more output with less employee input, companies have no choice but to try to engage not only the body but the mind and soul of every employee. (p. 125)

Relevance of Topic

The most notable feature in the modern workplace may be its lack of engagement (Pink, 2009). “After years of downsizing, outsourcing, and a cavalier corporate attitude that treats employees as costs rather than assets, most of today’s workers have concluded
that the company no longer values them” (Bardwick, 2008, p. 13). As a result, employee work engagement is on the decline and deepening among employees in the workplace (Bates, 2004; Pech & Slade, 2006; Richman, 2006). Hochschild (1983) defined employee disengagement as disengagement from work roles and withdrawing cognitively and emotionally. Disengagement is a phenomenon in which employees are present in the workplace; as a result, their contribution is minimal (Pech & Slade, 2006). As many as two thirds of United States employees are either not engaged or disengaged (Bardwick, 2008; Meere, 2011). Employee disengagement is primary to the lack of commitment and motivation in the workplace (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004). Disengaged employees are often actively seeking new jobs or merely going through the motions (Bardwick, 2008).

Further, according to Robbins and Judge (2009), “a recent Gallup Poll which found that a majority of US employees—55 percent to be exact—have no enthusiasm for their work. Clearly this suggests a problem, at least in the United States” (p. 170). Surprisingly, “most leaders of people have no idea about the unhealthy state of their workplaces” (Gostick & Elton, 2006, p. xviii).

Today, leaders seem focused on employee satisfaction and company loyalty although employee loyalty and satisfaction do not necessarily bring about employees engaged who offer discretionary effort (Cook, 2008). The following literature review is a source of reference regarding employee workplace engagement for industry leaders, human capital managers, hospitality owners, and operators interested in comprehending the consequences of employee disengagement in the hospitality industry workplace and its impact on the service delivery, performance, and success of the organization.
Work Engagement Theories

Bakker and Schaufeli (2008) remind that organizations need vigorous employees who are dedicated and absorbed in their work. Understanding how to foster employee engagement requires a review of motivational, commitment, and engagement theory in the workplace. By examining existing theory, one can obtain a foundation regarding the antecedents of employee engagement and thus comprehend its impact on workplace performance and the overall success of an organization.

Needs-Based Theory

The psychology of human motivation is tremendously complex. Needs-based theory derives from the concept that all motivation comes from an individual’s compelling need to fulfill a need. Abraham Maslow (Maslow, 1943b), in his pioneering research to comprehend personal motivation, found that fundamental human needs are an essential component. Maslow (1943a) was the first to develop a theory of motivation (see Figure 2) based upon a consideration of basic human needs: physiological, safety, social interaction, ego, and self-actualization. Although classical theorists primarily ignored the aspect of employee motivation and behavior, the importance of Maslow’s theory provided a conceptual framework in relation to employee engagement by highlighting the necessity of fulfilling basic human needs. The apex of the pyramid indicates that higher needs are obtained less frequently.

Maslow’s (1943a) seminal theory indicates that before an individual can advance to a higher level of needs, he or she must first satisfy the more basic needs of the lower levels. According to Maslow, individuals must satisfy their basic needs, such as warmth, safety, and security, in order to progress to personal growth and development.
Adopting Maslow’s concept and applying it to conflict theory, Burton (1990) perceived human needs from a different perspective. Burton (1990) viewed human needs as an ongoing collection of human essentials that all individuals strive to satisfy. These essentials far exceed basic needs, such as food, water, and shelter, but include physical and nonphysical aspects for human growth and development. Contrary to Maslow’s (1943) Hierarchy of Needs, Burton contested that human needs do not have a hierarchy of order but rather are sought out simultaneously in a fierce and unrelenting manner. Human needs theorists such as Burton argue that one of the main reasons for lingering conflict is an individual’s unyielding quest to appease unmet needs on an individual, group, and/or a societal basis. In this effort to fill unmet needs, individuals will either use the system or function as a reformist or possibly a revolutionist.

Both Burton (1990) and Maslow (1943a) agreed that these basic needs must be met before motivation can occur although it is important to note satisfied needs are no
lingered considered a sole motivator. Therefore, understanding the complexities of personal motivation once basic human needs are met is necessary.

Motivational Theory

Even though human needs, according to Maslow (1943a), are a window into human behavior, motivational needs are complex and often unconscious desires. In 1966, Frederick Herzberg developed the motivation-hygiene model of management. The model shows that employee motivation is gained through challenging enjoyable work when responsibility, achievement, and advancement are promoted and recognized. Herzberg (1966) segmented motivation into two factors: motivators and hygies. Hygiene or extrinsic factors are external. Poor lighting, insufficient ventilation, bad working conditions, low pay scale and benefits, along with relations with the supervisor cultivate job dissatisfaction. These external factors are factors whose absence can motivate but whose presence has no perceived effect. Motivators or intrinsic factors are internal. Achievement, recognition, and advancement cultivate overall job satisfaction. The absence of intrinsic factors does not necessarily cause dissatisfaction; at the same time, however, the absence of these factors fails to motivate. Thus, hygiene factors determine dissatisfaction, and motivators determine satisfaction. The motivation-hygiene theory proposes that the work of an employee must be enriching to the individual and successfully utilized by the organization in order to motivate personnel. Critics of the Herzberg theory found that his concept assumes a link between employee satisfaction and performance; yet, this link was not measured or proven.

McClelland (1988) developed an acquired-needs motivation theory through strong empirical data relating to management. The motivational model consists of three sets of needs: achievement, affiliation, and power. The human relations side of management is
strategically important in dealing with employee motivation. Although “the essentials of human motivation have changed very little over time” (Sirota & Klein, 2014, p. 64), Maslow’s (1943a) hierarchy of needs theory and contemporary theories, such as Herzberg’s (1966) and McClelland’s (1988) theories, have significantly enhanced understanding of motivational influences and factors. That said, in order to forge high satisfaction and performance, employee motivators, recognition, opportunity for organizational advancement, and personal growth must be present (Herzberg, 2003). Contemporaries such as Shanks (2006) highlighted that motivation can be illustrated by the concept of providing motive, which serves as the impetus for an individual to act. Motivation provides the “why” of individual behaviors. People have to decide, either consciously or unconsciously, whether to act. No one can make an individual motivated. Ultimately, it is up to the individual as to whether he or she is going to be motivated and committed to the organization.

*Commitment Theory*

Research shows that commitment, much like motivation, is a difficult concept to define. Meyer and Allen (1997, 1991) and Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) assembled a list of definitions along with the similarities and differences between *commitment* and *motivation*. The similarities of the two terms served as the cornerstone of their definition or core essence of commitment. Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) noted that commitment is a force that binds an individual to a certain course of action which is of relevance to a specific target. Based on the differences between commitment and motivation, they derived that commitment can take different forms. However, three distinguishable themes emerged: (a) attachment to the organization, (b) obligation to stay, and (d) perceived cost of leaving the organization. Meyer and Allen (1997, 1991) referred to
these themes as affective commitment, normative commitment, and continuance commitment, all of which have very different implications on employee behavior.

Research indicates that affective commitment to the organization has the clearest direct correlation on job performance, organizational behavior, and attendance, followed by normative commitment with continuance commitment unrelated or negatively related to these behaviors (Herscovitch, & Meyer, 2002). An essential development in commitment theory has been the comprehension where commitment can be focused on various targets (e.g., the organization, the job, a supervisor, the team, customer interactions, and the union), thus affecting workplace behavior (Becker, Randall, & Riegel, 1995; Bishop & Scott, 2000; Morrow, 1993; Neubert & Cady, 2001; Reichers, 1985). Commitment ensures that the organization has the employee’s buy-in, but it does not guarantee that the individual will be engaged.

Engagement Theory

One of the most overt issues regarding employee engagement is the lack of a clear, concise, and agreed upon academic definition. Kahn (1990) defined the concept of work engagement as “the harnessing of organizational members’ selves to their work roles” (p. 694). Again, Kahn (1990), who was richly influenced by motivational psychologists and sociologists of his time and the first to coin the term engagement, argued that psychological, physical, and emotional resources are necessary for employee engagement in the workplace (Shuck & Wollard, 2009). Further, Kahn (1990) highlighted that, “people can use varying degrees of their selves, physically, cognitively, and emotionally, in the work they perform” (p. 694).

Conversely, Schaufeli et al. (2002) view employee engagement as, “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and
absorption. Rather than a momentary and specific state, engagement refers to a more persistent and particular object, event, individual, or behavior” (p. 74). Schaufeli et al. (2002) grouped work engagement into three distinct dimensions. The first work engagement was *vigor*, which is perceived as high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one’s work and persistence even in the face of difficulties. Secondly, *dedication* was described as “a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge” (p. 74). The final dimension of engagement, *absorption*, which was portrayed by being deeply engrossed in one’s work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties detaching oneself from their work” (Schaufeli, et al., 2002, p. 77).

Employee work engagement is commonly perceived as a passion for work (Cook, 2008; Truss et al., 2006) where employees give discretionary effort (Erickson, 2005; Towers-Perrin, 2003), giving it their all (Berthal, 2004) in the workplace. Thus, engaged employees exude high levels of energy, are enthusiastic about their work, and are often so immersed in their roles that they lose track of time (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Schaufeli et al., 2002). On the contrary, Bates of *Human Resources* magazine indicated that roughly half of the United States workforce simply “show up, do what is expected of them but do not go the extra mile” (Bates, 2004, p. 44). Thus, *employee engagement* is most often defined as emotional and intellectual commitment to the organization (Bardwick, 2008; Richman, 2006; Shaw, 2005) or the amount of discretionary effort given by the individual in the workplace of the organization (Bardwick, 2008; Cook, 2008; Sirota & Klein, 2013). Similarly, Federman (2009) viewed employee engagement as “the degree to which a person commits to an organization and the impact that commitment has on how profoundly they perform and their length of tenure” (p. 22). For
the service industries, employee engagement is embodied by the passion and energy employees exude to serve the customer and contribute to the success of the organization (Cook, 2008). These individuals, according to Cook (2008), “feel inspired by their work, they are customer focused in their approach, they care about the future of the company and are prepared to invest their own effort to see that the organization succeeds” (p. 3). Gallup (2013) showed that engaged employees (a) execute at high levels, (b) work with passion, (c) are creative, (d) are willing improve to exceed the customers’ evolving needs, and (e) are receptive to change, challenges, and opportunities. It is important to note that research also indicated a connection between employee engagement and the employee’s health (Bardwick, 2008; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Further, Crabtree (2005) found that employees at all three levels of engagement (engaged, non-engaged, and actively disengaged) felt their job influences their psychological well-being—both positively and negatively.

In summary, engagement is a positive, rewarding, work-related state of mind embodied by an employee’s vigor, dedication, and absorption of work (Cascio, 2011). As a result, engaged employees are motivated and committed, and they work with enthusiasm and passion while also having a profound connection with their company (Saks, 2006). This seems to infer that these individuals ignite creativity and drive innovation, which moves the organization forward, ultimately making it more competitive (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). As Cook (2008) highlighted, today, employee engagement is keenly important to create a workforce that is not simply satisfied and committed to the organization but also strives to go the extra mile and offer discretionary effort to satisfy the customer. Ultimately, when analyzing employee engagement, one must focus on the willingness and the ability of the employee to provide sustained
discretionary effort in order to help the organization succeed. Engagement exceeds
simple employee satisfaction with the work arrangement or basic loyalty to the
employer—characteristics that most companies have measured for many years.

“Engagement, in contrast, is about passion and commitment—the willingness to invest
oneself and expend one’s discretionary effort to help the employer succeed” (Erickson,
2005, p. 14). As Charles H. Watts, a principal of consulting firm Towers Perrin in
Boston, asserted, “it ultimately comes down to people’s desire to give discretionary effort
in their jobs . . . employees are reminding us that the heart is a tougher battleground than
the mind” (as cited in Bates, 2004, para. 1). Thus, the key is emotions because they
determine how people act (Bardwick, 2008). An engaged employee must be committed
to the organization and willing to exert discretionary effort at work. As the Corporate
Executive Board (Council, 2004) verified, employee engagement is the depth to which an
employee commits to something or the organization and the length of time he or she
remains with the organization because of that commitment.

Employee work engagement is a complex concept. To broaden understanding of
the dynamics of employee work engagement, it is necessary to turn to theory. Needs-
based, motivation, commitment, and engagement theory aid in understanding why people
behave in the manner that they do. These theories can be utilized by practitioners in the
workplace to shed light on why some employees are willing to work harder than others,
while some employees simply do just enough work to avoid being terminated.

Applying Theory to the Workplace

Bardwick (2008) argued that commitment and engagement echo emotional states,
rather than rational, logic-based states. Additionally, according to Bardwick (2008), no
single ploy has the power to forge commitment and engagement for an entire group of
people. Pinder (1998) defined motivation as a set of energizing forces, and Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) described commitment as a force that binds an individual to a course of action. This description implies that motivation is a vast concept beyond commitment where employee commitment is among a set of infusing forces contributing to motivated workforce behavior. Thus, applying commitment and motivational theory to the workplace is not a straightforward and simple task. Consequently, because of the complexities of employee engagement, managers tend to have misconceptions and encounter challenges as to how to motivate employees. Morse (2003) noted managers are not as astute at evaluating employee motivation as they might think. As Simons and Enz (1995) stated, managers often seek means to motivate their employees to provide excellent, efficient service, yet fail to realize that not all employees want the same thing from the work that they perform. This assumption is often incorrect, leading managers into making poor judgements while striving to motivate their workforce (Simons & Enz, 1995). Some of the mistakes—and their sources—are as follows:

- **Employer.** According to Argyris and Schon (1974), when a person joins a workforce, the management practices of the organization often keep the employee from maturing because the employee is given minimal control over his or her environment and is encouraged to be passive, dependent, and subordinate.

- **Work environment.** McIntosh (1999) asserted that an employee’s ambition will fall if there is not enough work to do.

- **Failure to see each employee as an individual.** Not every employee sees his or her job in the same way. Hamill (2005) found that each generation views
work differently, such as an obligation, an adventure, a challenge, and even a necessity.

- **Belief that money alone will motivate.** The Hawthorne Studies (1924-1932), summarized by Mayo (1945), indicated that employees are not motivated solely by money. Additionally, Refermat (2007) found that money is not a prime motivator and that nothing kills an employee's enthusiasm like a manager who micromanages. As a result, recognition programs are considered to be more effective than cash in achieving improved employee attitudes, increased workloads, and workplace productivity (Dessler, Cole, Sutherland, & Goodman, 2005).

Motivated Employees: A Profile

Getting employees to do their best in the workplace can be a daunting task. Research continues to show the importance of human capital that drives and supports organizational objectives (Sullivan, 2004). However, deciphering employee motivation in the workplace has long been a challenge. Therefore, it is advantageous to perceive the characteristics and benefits of a motivated employee.

The onboarding period is an important opportunity to align the employee and organization together. “Most people enter a new organization and job with enthusiasm, eager to work, to contribute, to feel proud of their work and their organizations” (Sirota & Klein, 2013, p. 39). Conversely, “employees can be proactive and engaged or, alternatively, passive and alienated” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 68). Thus, understanding the psychology behind employee motivation is critical to the success of any organization. Cook (2008) noted that forging employee motivating others and building trust will carve a clear competitive advantage. Therefore, to be successful in today’s competitive global
and rapidly evolving marketplace, companies must make employee motivation and job satisfaction top priorities because ultimately satisfied employees improve the bottom line of the organization (Bardwick, 2008; Czarnowsky, 2008; Farren, 2008; Gallup Organization, 2001; Lockwood, 2007; Sirot, Mischkind, & Meltzer, 2005).

Motivation is an internal drive (e.g., a need, desire, or want) that serves to initiate or energize behavior and gives it focus (Kleinginna & Kleinginna, 1981). Simons and Enz (1995) stated that, “Motivation is the force that compels people to choose a particular job, to stay with that job and to try hard” (p. 2). Motivation can also be defined as the psychological process that provides purpose and direction to behavior (Kreitner, 1995). Higgins (1994) viewed motivation as an internal quest to quench an unsatisfied need. Chang (2000) went on to say that all employees need to be motivated and inspired to feel they belong and in order to have a clear objective in everything they do. DeCenzo and Robbins (1995) found motivation to be one’s willingness to exert high levels of effort to acquire organizational goals, while satisfying an individual need. Additionally, Pritchard (1976) ascertained motivation is a set of independent and dependent relationships that explain the focus, magnitude, and persistence of an employee’s behavior, while maintaining the effects of competency, skills, understanding of a task, and constraints existing in the work environment. Roy (2001) viewed employee motivation as a process to energize an employee to work toward a goal through a specific path.

Haudan (2008) noted employees want to know that their contributions in the workplace make a significant impact. Furthermore, employees want their jobs and work contributions to matter to the organization (Gratton, 2000). Haudan (2008) provided an example: “The hotel employee who sets up the breakfast bar believes that she’s helping the businessperson prepare for a successful day” (p. 25). With this in mind, McIntosh
(1999) found that ambitious and resourceful employees place more value on self-achievement than all other additional incentives. Thus, meaningful work is essential to motivating an employee and forging commitment. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) stated that low levels of meaning have been linked to apathy at work, resulting in low work satisfaction levels. Conversely, Linder (1998) stated that motivation is the drive that compels individuals to achieve personal goals as well as organizational goals. Not surprisingly, a positive association exists between front-line employees' motivation levels and their job satisfaction (Paswan, Pelton, & True, 2005). Although engaged employees are consistently found to be more productive, healthier, safer, and less likely to leave their current employer than unengaged employees (Fleming & Asplund, 2007; Wagner & Harter, 2007) and despite continuous findings of linkages to positive business outcomes (Lockwood, 2007; Seijts & Crim, 2006; Wagoner & Harter, 2006; Watson, 2002), employee engagement continues to decline (Bardwick, 2008; Czarnowsky, 2008). Even so, organizations continue to retain disengaged individuals. Pech and Slade (2006) wrote that, “A colossal 83 percent of employees are on the job drawing salaries and benefits, while their energy is unavailable to the organization” (p. 21).

Employee Disengagement to the Organization

The psychological condition of a workforce can be and generally is overlooked. This oversight is surprising because empirical evidence indicates that employee emotions are fundamentally aligned and essentially drive bottom-line success in an organization (Bates, 2004). Therefore, the psychological condition of disengagement within a workforce could significantly undermine the operation of an organization. Heady (2004) highlighted that the hidden cost of employee apathy in the workplace is potentially enormous to organizations. Fox (2010) stated that, “disengaged workers cost U.S.
businesses as much as $350 billion a year” (p. 36). Not surprisingly, then, many of today’s operators view instilling commitment, enthusiasm, and engagement among staff members as a major challenge: “87% of C-Suite executives recognize that disengaged employees is one of the biggest threats to their business” (Bolchover, 2011, p. 2).

Likewise, Kyriakidis (2013) pointed out that a sustained focus on workplace engagement and employee retention is a key driver for customer satisfaction, directly impacting the bottom line and enabling companies to forge a competitive advantage. To achieve organizational goals of profitability, growth, customer satisfaction, and innovation, the organization needs employees who care (Gostick & Elton, 2006). Simply put, every workplace needs committed and engaged employees to bring energy and even passion to what they do for the organization (Bardwick, 2008; Gostick & Elton, 2006; Shanks, 2006; Thomas, 2000).

Consistent evidence supports the existence of a linkage between employees’ motivational levels and their subsequent individual performance (Bardwick, 2008; Lockwood, 2007; Wagoner & Harter, 2006; Watson, 2002). Pink (2009) argued that employees today do not understand or see how their work contributes to and drives the business, thus causing a form of disengagement. Employees who are “emotionally disconnected from their workplaces are less likely to be productive” (Raguž-Bojčić & Temiz, 2013, p. 7). Conversely, companies with highly engaged employees have shown an almost 52% gap in operating income over those companies with predominantly low engagement scores (Seijts & Crim, 2006). Thus, Sweeney (2005a) stated that in the 21st century economy, the people or an organization are all that separates the organization from their competition.
The hospitality industry is defined by and dependent on the service delivery it provides along with exceeding guest expectations. In this effort, engaged employees are more likely to provide exceptional service to customers and clients than employees who are not engaged (Cook, 2008). Similarly, Peters and Waterman (1992) argued that customer relations invariably mirror employee relations. Case in point, Karl Fischer, Regional Vice President of Human Resources for Marriott International, reported at the 2007 International Hotel/Motel and Restaurant Show that higher employee engagement for their organization means a 12% higher revenue per compensation dollar and a 9% higher house profit margin. In addition, Fischer highlighted that effective employee engagement for Marriott means 9% of their guests are less likely to encounter a problem at a hotel, and 11% are more likely to return to a Marriott property (Wellins, Bernthal, & Phelps, 2005). Further, Wellins et al. (2005) indicate that highly engaged employees achieve 12% more of their goals than employees with low engagement. Twelve percent of an employee’s salary of $35,000 equates to $4,200. When considering the impact on an organization with 10,000 employees, the “value of engagement can yield a major impact” (Baumruk, Gorman, & Gorman, 2006, p. 2). To be successful, organizations must be able to forge engagement for the individual as well as the organization. Baumruk et al. (2006) highlighted that,

Companies in which 60 percent (or more) of the workforce is engaged have average five-year total returns to shareholders (TSR) of more than 20 percent. That compares to companies where only 40 to 60 percent of the employees are engaged, which have an average TSR of about six percent. (p. 24)

Unrestrained, employee disengagement threatens not only to erode the service delivery, guest experience, and the profitability of an organization but also
undermine the hospitality industry as a whole. Comprehending the antecedents and consequences of employee disengagement and determining the best means of confronting it are imperative. The December 2002 Herman Group survey found nearly 40% of employees are actively disengaged in their work. Rosenbluth and Peters (2002) cited cries from the corporate world lamenting a lack of loyalty and motivation in the workplace are resulting in increased apathy, absenteeism, turnover, and lethargy, thus dragging down productivity and making companies less competitive. Additionally, Gostick and Elton (2006) warned that, “the word on the street is that it's not going to get better any time soon” (p. xvi). In service sectors, such as the hospitality industry, employee engagement is intricately linked to guest service perceptions and customer satisfaction.

Confronting Employee Disengagement

Employee disengagement may spike during times of trouble; however, it also occurs in the workplace even during normal conditions and, if unchecked, can spread throughout an organization (Heady, 2004). Therefore, confronting disengagement is a continuous and challenging task in order to foster engagement, heightened performance, and organizational success. Gibbons (2006) indicated that, “Employee engagement is a heightened emotional and intellectual connection that an employee has for his/her job, organization, manager, or co-workers that in turn influences him/her to apply additional discretionary effort to his/her work” (p. 5).

Similarly, Kahn (1990) described engagement as the “harnessing of organizational members” (p. 694) to their work roles, during which engaged employees express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally in the workplace. Furthermore, Cook (2008) highlighted that,
Employee engagement is personified by the passion and energy employees have to give of their best to the organization to serve the customer. It is all about the willingness and ability of employees to give sustained discretionary effort to help their organization succeed. (p. 3)

Non-engaged employees have simply checked out from their job and the organization (Bardwick, 2008). Essentially, these individuals are sleepwalking through their workdays. They put in their time; however, they do not approach their work with energy or passion. Actively disengaged employees are more than merely unhappy at work. These employees are busy acting out their unhappiness and, on a daily basis, impair the accomplishments of their engaged counterparts. Even more alarming, a small hard core of the most disengaged corporate terrorists would undermine their current organization (Barwick, 2008). Furthermore, employees who are actively disengaged can undermine their colleagues and erode an organization’s bottom line (Penna, 2007).

Managers must strive to promote employee engagement in the workplace. Herzberg (2003) asserted that some of the ways in which managers can motivate their employees include the following: (a) reducing time spent at work; (b) spiraling wages; (c) participating actively on the job, (d) ensuring in two-way communication, and (e) offering fringe benefits, human relations training, sensitivity training, and employee counseling. Getting employees to buy in is critical to success, and maximizing human capital is no longer optional (Sweeney, 2005b). Employee motivation factors of job content include achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibilities, and advancement and growth possibilities. Motivation factors of job context include company policies and procedures, supervision, relationships with colleagues, salary, influences of personal life, relationship with subordinates, position status, and job security.
Lee (2007) argued that employee disengagement may be impeded. According to Lee (2007), employees may reduce disengagement by the following actions: (a) altering the organization’s strategic plan as market conditions change/arise, (b) encouraging employee involvement, (c) assessing the management team to ensure the necessary talent is in place to perform critical functions, (d) keeping the staff informed, and (e) designing a bonus compensation plan to reward key employees for achieving both individual and team goals. Similarly, Bardwick (2008) highlighted that, “How companies treat their employees determines how committed and engaged the employees are” (p. 91) to the organization.

Argyris (1958) found that traditional, paternalistic organizations foster employee detachment and disconnect from their employers. The most commonly mentioned causes linked to employee disengagement are unrecognized or unused skills, bad working conditions, lack of delegation, discouragement of workplace social interactions, lack of job security, conflict issues, and burnout (Bardwick, 2008; Heady, 2004). In today’s workplace, the ultimate challenge is turning indifferent workers into enthusiastic employees (Thomas, 2000). There are significant benefits to having a motivated and committed workforce (Locke & Latham, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Pinder, 1998); however, managers struggle to find effective means of motivating their employees to achieve organizational goals. The difficult challenge derives from meeting the needs of the individual while achieving the goals of both the employee and the organization (Shanks, 2006).

Fostering Motivated Employees

Self-achievement affects self-esteem and ultimately how one views herself or himself. Key influences of self-esteem are recognition, respect, distinction, attention,
importance, and appreciation. Achievement goals can affect the way a person performs a task as well as his or her desire to show competence (Harackiewicz, Barron, Carter, Lehto, & Elliot, 1997). Management must utilize any opportunities to foster employee self-esteem. Without self-esteem, a worker develops a feeling of inferiority, which brings about discouragement (McIntosh, 1999).

Vroom (1964) asserted that people’s behavior results from conscious choices among alternatives. Every individual is unique; therefore, every person perceives motivation factors differently, thus influencing employee job satisfaction differently (Lee, 2007). Motivation fuels the persistence needed to maintain sustained effort on a task. Korpinen and Nápravníková (2007) concluded, “Motivation is on the input side of a process, which goes on in individuals’ minds and the job satisfaction and well-being are on the output side” (p. 52). As a result, people are unlikely to change a behavior or do something different unless they are motivated to do so. Motivation is an emotional force so compelling that it is acted upon (Gorman, 2007). Similarly, Green (2000) wrote that motivation is like the fuel for performance, and it is what makes an employee perform well. Thus, there is evidence supporting the existence of a linkage between employees’ motivational levels and their subsequent individual performance (Thomas, Clark, & Gioia, 1993).

Shanks (2006) found that motivation is the act or process providing impetus causing a person to take a particular action. Employee motivation, according to Jackson and Carter (2000), “is the ability to get someone to do something that they do not particularly want to do” (p. 76). Motivation depends not only on how much a person wants something but also on how likely they are to get it (Vroom, 1964). Conversely, at the far left of motivation is amotivation. *Amotivation* is defined as the lack of intention to
act resulting from a lack of valuing or feeling of competence for the activity (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Therefore, an individual’s motivation is constantly in flux. Gaining an accurate understanding of human motivation along with comprehending what workers want is necessary to fostering employee engagement in the workplace.

Employee Investment

Generally financial needs drive individuals to work in order to meet those needs. Haudan (2008) highlighted the following:

People work because they have to. That’s why they call it ‘work.’ But people engage only when they want to. And the core of unlocking that desire is recognizing the role that leaders, managers, and organizations play in artfully tapping into the discretionary efforts of human beings. (p. 29)

According to Lockwood (2007), “The challenge today is . . . fully engaging them, capturing their minds and hearts at each stage of their work lives” (p. 1). Gostick and Elton (2006) pointed out that, “3 out of 10 people in the workplace are not only uncaring about their jobs, the quality of their work, or giving you their best ideas and energy, but are actively recruiting others in their dissent” (p. xix). Additionally, Bardwick (2008) indicated one of the biggest challenges affecting management over the last half century was earning subordinates’ respect and trust. Thus, for organizations getting an employee’s buy-in is critical to success (Sweeney, 2005b).

To forge engagement, Herzberg (2003) encouraged continuous job enrichment to motivate employees while Sweeney (2005a) advised that the best way to boost productivity is to invest and reinvest in employees. The employee/organization connection must be present, yet the relationship between an employee and the immediate supervisor should not be overlooked. “Employees are far more likely to make a
commitment to the organization if they like and respect their boss and feel they are liked and respected in turn” (Bardwick, 2008, p. 79). It is important to note that according to Cook (2008), highly engaged employees feel that they positively affect the quality of their organization’s products and services as well as positively contribute to the customer service provided. These employees believe that their work is unquestionably connected to making a difference in the lives of their customers (Haudan, 2008). Carol Kinsey Goman, author, speaker, and president of Kinsey Consulting Services in Berkeley, California, asserted that, “Employees want to commit to companies, because doing so satisfies a powerful and basic human need to connect with and contribute to something significant” (as cited in Bates, 2004, p. 46). Employee work engagement is personified by “employees being committed to the organization, believing in what it stands for and being prepared to go above and beyond what is expected to deliver outstanding service to the customer” (Cook, 2008, p. 3). As pointed out by Bains (2007), meaningful work “can and will give businesses a genuine competitive edge” (p. 5). Ultimately, when looking at employee engagement, the willingness and ability of employees to contribute sustained discretionary effort in an effort to help their organization succeed are essential (Cook, 2008).

Research consistently indicates that employee engagement predicts employee outcomes, customer satisfaction, recruitment, retention, turnover, and the overall performance success of an organization (Cook, 2008; Czarnowsky, 2008; Farren, 2008; Federman, 2009; Gallup Organization, 2001; Holbeche & Springett, 2003; Lockwood, 2007). Moreover, “organizations that value and involve their employees have higher levels of growth, market value, return on assets, and returns to shareholders” (Bardwick, 2007, p. 45). Nonetheless, the most significant challenge for leaders in developing their
firms is not introducing a revolutionary strategy to the organization, but engaging
employees in executing their strategy (Gostick & Elton, 2007). Therefore, the challenge
for organizations is to forge engaged employees who are committed to the organization’s
direction, strategy, and goals. Even so, surprisingly, research is lacking across all
industries in the area of employee engagement (Robinson, Perryman, & Hayday, 2004).

Employee/Employer Relationship

Former Campbell’s Soup Chief Executive Officer Doug Conant once said, “To
win in the marketplace you must first win in the workplace” (Kruse, 2012, para 7). In
this effort, “The real challenge is to turn indifferent workers into enthusiastic workers”
(Thomas, 2000, p. 2). Be that as it may, according to Federman (2009), “for a while now,
the employer/employee relationship has been deteriorating” (p. 3). Today, employees do
not feel appreciated, respected, included, or heard. Although offering a competitive
salary and benefits package is important, letting people know they are appreciated will
garner their commitment and ignite their passion (Gostick & Elton, 2006). Basic
employee motivation factors of job content range from achievement, recognition, the
work itself, responsibilities, advancement, and growth possibilities. Motivation factors of
job context are company policies, supervision, relationships with peers, salary, personal
life, relationship with subordinates, status, and job security. Moreover, Herzberg (2003)
encouraged continuous job enrichment to motivate employees, while Kotler (1991)
concluded that, by satisfying internal customers, both the employees and the organization
as a whole may better satisfy external customers’ requirements. Bowen (1996) advised
that service-oriented organizations should treat front-line employees as partial customers,
i.e., with respect and deserving treatment similar to that which management wants
extended to customers.
Employees do not understand how their work performance contributes to the organization as a whole nor do they feel as though they are part of the team. Real engagement, according to Sirota and Klein (2013), “is born when the responsibility for solving business challenges or puzzles shifts from the makers of the strategy to the implementers of strategy” (p. 123). Employees want to feel valued and empowered. Refermat (2007) advised, programs that keep employees enthusiastic are oftentimes a top-down approach not dependent on commissions, compensations, or contest. Ultimately, “Employee engagement only develops with top-down commitment and constant follow-through by senior managers” (Cook, 2008, p. 187). In addition, relaying some level of financial information regularly to employees makes them feel connected to the business and can foster team building (Lockwood, 2007). Doing so tends to generate a more engaged and mindful employee concerned with how his or her actions ultimately affect the bottom line (Bardwick, 2008). As a result, these employees believe their work efforts are actually making a difference. At this point, it is important to garner a deeper understanding of the hospitality industry and how employee work engagement affects the hospitality organizations.

The Hospitality Industry

Woods (1999) highlighted that, “hospitality has long been a ‘pass-through’ industry” (p. 454). Thus, employment in the hospitality industry “is characterized by instability and a high rate of labor turnover” (Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007, p. 5). Likewise, Renk and Oakley (2007) asserted that the majority of employees in the hospitality industry consider their jobs as stepping stones to a more permanent position. Furthermore, the Incentive Research Foundation (2002) found workers often consider the hospitality industry as temporary or stop-gap employment eventually leaving for what
they consider to be greener pastures. Woods (1999) noted that most hotel employees do
not have career structure and perceive their jobs as dead-end which can negatively impact
hotel employee recruitment. Additionally, Pizam (1982) pointed out that, “the low status
of jobs in the tourism and hospitality industry is also transferred to its workers,
culminating in the perception that the tourism employee is often uneducated,
unmotivated, unskilled and unproductive” (p. 5). As a result, the hospitality industry has
become recognized for low-paying, often temporary positions (Dickson, 2008). This
instability can forge uncertainty, ultimately fostering insecurity and fear in the workplace.
Federman (2009) indicated that fear and uncertainty stifle, which limits trust and
increases insecurity. Bardwick (2008) wrote that fear stifles energy, trust, teamwork,
innovation, and courage. Similarly, Federman (2009) stated that fear causes individuals
to go inward and take fewer risks. “What most executives fail to recognize is the link
between feelings (both employees and customers) and the organization’s bottom line”
(Bardwick, 2008, p. 35).

For hospitality organizations, employees are one of the most, if not the most,
important resources or assets in their endeavor to provide excellent service delivery and
heightened guest experience as well as exceed consumer expectations and achieve
competitive advantage and exceptional performance (Kusluvan, 2003). Similarly,
Dickson (2008) cited that employee engagement is correlated with customer satisfaction
and retention as well as corporate performance. On the negative side of the spectrum,
employees can be loyal to an organization and even satisfied with their jobs but may not
demonstrate pride, passion, and energy to contribute more on behalf of their organization
(Cook, 2008). Gostick and Elton (2006) highlighted that, “one problem is called
presenteeism . . . now absenteeism is easy to spot, but presenteeism describes workers
who show up every day, but who really aren't there” (p. xv). This scenario is a workforce with an apathetic mindset whose primary focus is to work just hard enough to support their lifestyle and not get fired (Cleland, 2013).

Zopiatis and Constanti (2007) stressed that, “The hospitality industry is renowned for its ‘pressure cooker’ environment of long hours and high turnover, particularly among front line staff” (p. 31). Insight into how hospitality operations might be hindering employee job commitment can be found in the findings of Lovelock (1988). The findings highlighted the pervasiveness of the service factory environment in the industry as a cause for employee work apathy. Furthermore, Lovelock (1988) argued that this approach has been popular with the hospitality industry because it allows for standardization of job tasks, centralized decision-making, and utilization of “unskilled, inexpensive workers who require only limited training to perform highly routinized tasks” (p. 351). These hospitality jobs “tend to be characterized by long, irregular and unsocial working hours, low pay, absence of overtime payments, heavy workloads, routine work, low job security, low promotion opportunities, and unprofessional management of employees” (Kusluvan, 2003, p. 12). Even though this approach has been linked to many negative outcomes, such as “employee apathy, high staff turnover, low productivity, service inconsistencies, and unsatisfied customers” (Shames & Glover, 1989, p. 196), this practice has long been the industry norm. Likewise, Riley (1996) estimated the following: (a) approximately two thirds (64%) of hospitality jobs are unskilled or semi-skilled, (b) 6% are managerial, (c) 8% are supervisory, and (d) only 22% are skilled. Schlesinger and Heskett (1991) cited four core assumptions of the service factory approach: (a) reliance on technology rather than people, (b) front-line jobs designed to be as simple and narrow as possible, (c) employee pay kept as close to
minimum wage as possible, and (d) focus on sales promotions and marketing to produce sales (as opposed to satisfied, repeat, and loyal customers). These assumptions indicate that for years many hospitality operators have taken their employees for granted by working the individuals long hours without sincere appreciation or true compensation. Not surprisingly, these employees may feel used, taken for granted, and even abused rather than respected, appreciated, and included (Federman, 2009). Further, Federman (2009) suggested that these factors could contribute to employee disengagement in the workforce as well as the overall perception that the hospitality industry is simply a job rather than a career and, hence, not worthy of an employee’s commitment and active engagement. Bains (2007) asserted that when employees are in fear of losing their job, “career commitment is replaced by career ambivalence, at best—career apathy at worst” (p. 52). Similarly, Bardwick (2007) highlighted that the opposite of employee commitment is employee apathy. Unaddressed, an apathetic mindset of disengaged employees in the workplace can silently ruin a business (Heady, 2004).

Cook (2008) asserted that organizations with disengaged staff can be spotted by high absenteeism, high turnover, high stress levels, political in-fighting, and a lack of effective communication. Likewise, Dean, Brandes, and Dharwadkar (1998) highlighted the dangers of rising levels of employee cynicism generated from frustration, a belief that their organization lacks integrity, economic uncertainty, trust issues, hopelessness, contempt for the manager, disillusionment, and disparaging and critical behaviors of the organization. A feeling of not belonging, being, or being on the outside can fester into something much worse than disengagement (Haudan, 2008). Even more so, Penna (2007) warned that a small hardcore of the most disengaged corporate terrorists would undermine the current organization. These actively disengaged employees can erode an
organization’s bottom line while bringing down the morale of colleagues in the process (Penna, 2007). Ultimately, as Gostick and Elton (2007) pointed out, employees can either build up or pull down the market share of an organization. According to Baumruk et al. (2006,

Companies in which 60 percent (or more) of the workforce is engaged have average five-year total returns to shareholders (TSR) of more than 20 percent. That compares to companies where only 40 to 60 percent of the employees are engaged, which have an average TSR of about six percent. (p. 24)

Summary of Chapter

Today, the hospitality industry is faced with fierce competition, unprecedented customer empowerment, and workplace challenges. As hospitality organizations strive to retain and capture market share, front-line employees, through their immediate contact with customers, contribute extensively to customer satisfaction, guest experience, and the overall success of the organization. However, these employees can be proactive and engaged or alternately passive and even alienated (Ryan & Deci, 2000). As a result, in recent years the topic of employee work engagement has captured the attention of the hospitality industry because the industry as a whole centers on the service delivery to its customers and the subsequent guest experience.

Employees are the touch-point conduit through which an organization administers its service delivery. For the hospitality industry, the service delivery provided employees embodies the overall hospitality extended to the guests. Front-line employees, by the nature of their work role, have daily or regular contact and interactions with customers. The success of service organizations such as the hospitality industry is often dependent on the behaviors, engagement, and performance of its front-line employees (Bardwick,
Therefore, the challenge for hospitality organizations is creating a workforce that is not simply satisfied and committed but also willing to contribute discretionary effort to satisfy customers and help the organization succeed (Cook, 2008). Regrettably, the industry as a whole is widely perceived as a pass-through, pressure cooker, and service factory environment with stopgap employment resulting in the standardization of tasks, low pay, high turnover, and an unskilled workforce (Guerrier, 1999; Woods, 1999). Little is known about how the negative perceptions of the hospitality work environment influence employee work engagement—in particular among front-line employees. Without engaged front-line employees, hospitality organizations often struggle to enhance the guest experience, increase productivity, remain competitive, and garner higher profits (Kusluvan, 2003).

Although research in recent years has shed light on the connection between employee work engagement contributing to business outcomes and organizational success, Maslow (1954) pointed out that employees yearn to become everything they are capable of becoming, an understanding of employee engagement within the hospitality workplace is limited. In particular, research is lacking in the specific area of employee engagement within the hospitality work environment of limited- and full-service sectors. On the other hand, this gap within literature offers opportunities for further research in this area. This study contributes to existing literature by extending research in the realm of employee engagement within the hospitality workplace—in particular limited- and full-service hotels. The analysis is beneficial to industry leaders in their effort to foster a more engaged workforce, garner a competitive advantage, and be more successful in today’s hyper-competitive marketplace. The following chapter discusses the research
design, objectives, population, data collection instrument, validity and reliability of the instrument, data collection plan, and the analysis that was utilized in this study.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research is the systematic quest for knowledge. Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2007) defined research as the process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting information in a systematic manner to produce new knowledge. Further, Cozby (2012) highlighted that, within research, methodology plays the most significant role. Thus, Chapter III shows in detail the research strategy, methods, and procedures for the study. The chapter presents and explains the methodology deployed in the collection and analysis of data. Included in this chapter are the research design, population and sample, instrumentation, and procedures for data collection, and analysis of this research. A discussion on the validity and reliability of the measurement instrument is also provided. This chapter concludes with a summary overview of the research design and methodology utilized in this study.

Research Objectives

The following research objectives examined the extent to which hospitality industry specific work environment characteristics affect front-line employee work engagement:

RO1: Describe the demographics of the participants in terms of gender, age, pay status, hotel type, and years of employment at the property.

RO2: Determine the work environment of the hospitality industry workplace, as perceived by regional front-line hotel employees.

RO3: Determine whether the work environment of the hospitality industry differs between limited- and full-service hotels, as perceived by regional front-line hotel employees.
RO4: Determine whether employee work engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption) levels differ between limited- and full-service front-line hotel employees, as perceived by regional front-line hotel employees.

RO5: Determine the relationship between the work environment and employee work engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption), as perceived by regional front-line hotel employees.

Institutional Review Board Approval

The researcher submitted the proposed study to the University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. Submitted in the application packet was a list of the participating hotel properties, e-mail communications to the participating hotel general managers, a copy of the survey instrument, and the informed consent form. Approval for this research was obtained from IRB (see Appendix B) to conduct the study. After approval was secured the data collection process began.

Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional, descriptive, non-experimental research design to examine front-line hotel employee work engagement within the hospitality industry workplace. A study is cross-sectional when a phenomenon is examined at a fixed point in time (Fink, 2003a). Descriptive research is used to describe the characteristics of a population (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 2003). Both descriptive and cross-sectional studies produce informative data on a population or preexisting phenomenon (Fink, 2003a). Pretesting, commonly called pilot testing, was necessary to evaluate the face validity of the instrument. Data collected from the final survey were analyzed to shed light on the hospitality industry work environment, as perceived by regional front-line employees of both limited- and full-service hotels. In addition, data
were analyzed to create a work environment score to determine whether a relationship exists between the work environment characteristics and employee workplace engagement. Finally, both limited- and full-service hotels were evaluated to determine whether employee work engagement differs between the two hotel service segments.

Validity

With any research, a main concern is the validity of the study. Research can be affected by different factors which, although unrelated to the research, can invalidate the findings (Seliger, Shohamy, & Shohamy, 1989). Shadish, Cook, and Campbell (2002), in their seminal work in the area of experimental design, explained that the term validity is used to refer to the property of inference. Further, validity is the degree to which conclusions drawn from research are robust and sound (Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006). Validity of the study is comprised of two distinct types of validity, internal and external, along with threats associated to both. Shadish et al. (2002) highlighted that, “threats to validity are specific reasons why we can be partly or completely wrong when we make an inference about covariance, causation, constructs, or whether the causal relationship holds over variations in persons, settings, treatments, and outcomes” (p. 39). Further, Cook, Campbell, and Day (1979) emphasize four key components of validity as (a) internal validity, (b) construct validity, (c) statistical conclusion validity and (d) external validity.

Internal Validity

Internal validity has been defined as “the approximate validity with which we infer that a relationship between two variables is causal” (Cook, Campbell, & Day, 1979, p. 37). The concept centers on the degree to which one can infer the existence of a causal relationship between two variables when measured (Shadish et al., 2002). For this study,
instrumentation is a potential threat to internal validity due to “the nature of a measure changing over time” (Shadish et al., 2002, p. 55). Participants in this study were able to stop the survey and return at a later time to resume participating. This ability to start, stop, and resume the survey at another time could have an impact on the results of the study if the feelings of the participant changed over time. Another potential threat to internal validity is selection bias, especially in terms of a purposive sample (Shadish et al., 2002). To minimize this risk at each step of the process, the selection of participants was randomized to every possible extent. For example, the administering of paper surveys during participating hotel property visits ensured a wide range of front-line employee participation was obtained. This procedure helped provide a more representative and valid sample (Shadish et al., 2002).

**Construct Validity**

Construct validity are “inferences about the constructs that research operations present” (Cook, Campbell, & Day, 1979, p. 20). In other words, does the instrument measure what is intended. The survey instrument is an effective tool utilized to obtain accurate data from respondents (Fink, 2003b). Prior to instrument activation, the face validity of the questionnaire was assessed through feedback from a panel comprised of hotel owners, operators, and front-line hotel employees similar to the research population. Each member of the panel evaluated the instrument to ensure clarity of directions, concepts, and definitions as well as appropriateness of each survey item. Feedback provided by the panel contributed to the efficiency and validity of the questionnaire. The pilot test panel consisted of 32 front-line hotel employees from both limited- and full-service hotels in a similar, yet smaller, marketplace. The pilot test was necessary to ascertain any difficulties in understanding the instrument as well as test the functionality
of the questionnaire in order to implement any necessary changes prior to the deployment of the actual survey. Feedback obtained through the pilot testing was incorporated prior to the survey launch and data collection period.

Shadish et al. (2002) highlight experimenter expectancies as a plausible threat to construct validity due to participants attempting to guess the way in which the researcher would like them to respond. To combat this potential threat, the researcher minimized contact with the participants and provided survey guidelines articulating how the results of the research would benefit the industry. In addition, reactivity to the experimental situation (Shadish et al., 2002) is a potential threat in this research because human beings are capable of interpreting the environment in which the survey takes place and it may affect their reactions to the survey. As a result, the participants may attempt to react based on their interpretation of what they believe the researcher is studying. Therefore, the researcher reduced the possibility of this threat by maintaining limited interaction with the participants of the study and by assuring all participants of anonymity and confidentiality of this research.

*External Validity*

External validity examines the extent to which the research results, obtained through a selected sample, can be generalized to the wider population (Bless, Higson-Smith, & Kagee, 2007). To increase the external validity associated with the participants, the study was extended to front-line employees of limited- and full-service hotels ranging in various sizes, who were association members of the MBCVB. The aggregated data from the two groups, limited- and full-service hotel front-line employees, helped in providing a solid basis from which to analyze. However, generalizations to broader populations beyond the MBCVB properties cannot be made.
Population and Sample

In an effort to define the population within the hospitality community, the current researcher contacted a regional hospitality and tourism nonprofit association by telephone and through a follow-up email (see Appendix B). The Mobile Bay Convention and Visitors Bureau (MBCVB) is a destination marketing organization promoting tourism within the Mobile, Alabama, metropolitan area. The tourism entity serves its membership by (a) sharing resources, (b) fostering cooperation, (c) networking, (d) providing continuing education, (e) conducting cooperative marketing and consumer outreach, (f) providing advice and consultation, and (g) regulating governmental affairs (Walker & Walker, 2013). According to the MBCVB their membership consist of accommodations (i.e., hotels, resorts, and bed and breakfast properties), restaurants, and attractions (e.g., museums, festivals, events, and celebrations) as well as sports and meeting facilities in the Mobile, Alabama, metropolitan area. Limited- and Full-service hotels which are members of the MBCVB were contacted for participation in the research. Front-line employees, those who have direct impact with the hotel guests, of MBCVB member properties electing to participate in this research comprised the population of the study.

This study utilized a sample survey of front-line employees of limited- and full-service Mobile, Alabama hotels who participated in this research. Front-line employees, because of their direct contact with guests, have a key role in successful quality perceptions and the service delivery of an organization. In both limited- and full-service hotels, these employees can be found in the front of the house, back of the house, and exterior of the property. Because full-service hotels provide food and beverage outlets, additional front-line employees are necessary to service these locations. The Mobile
metropolitan area was selected for this study because of the substantial mix of limited- and full-service hotels in the area and the lack of gaming and unionized hotel facilities. Unionized hospitality organizations, as well as those that provide, or are affiliated with, gaming entities, often provide higher wages, increased employee benefits, and enhanced work environments (Walker & Walker, 2013). Therefore, because of their uniquely enhanced working environments, gaming entities and unionized hotel properties were excluded from this study.

Phase One

The membership listing consisting of MBCVB 65 hotels was provided to the researcher by the Director of Partnership Marketing. The general manager of each MBCVB member property, both limited- and full-service, was contacted to inform them of the research being conducted and ask for their participation. Eleven limited and three full-service hotel properties participated in this study making their front-line employees eligible to respond to the survey. The total sample of front-line employees within the participating eleven limited and three full-service hotel population was 276 employees.

Phase Two

The survey was forwarded to 276 front-line employees of the participating properties through the general manager, the primary source of contact at each participating hotel. Telephone communication about the study was initially provided by the researcher to the general manager of each limited- and full-service hotel to reach all of the front-line employees at the participating properties. Prior to the survey launch, an email (Appendix D) from the researcher was sent to the hotel general managers of the targeted population to (a) explain the research, (b) encourage participation, (c) provide a link to the online questionnaire (see Appendix D), and (d) furnish a promotional flyer
(see Appendix E) detailing the study for distribution in the employee breakroom, near the
timeclock, or on a bulletin board. This flyer, targeting the hotel front-line employees for
participation, provided details regarding the purpose of the study, how the findings were
to be used, and the confidentiality of the research. Provided on the flyer were the survey
link, as well as a QR (Quick Reference) code for capturing the survey address via mobile
device and accessing the questionnaire at a convenient time. One week prior to the
survey deadline, a reminder email communication (see Appendix D) was sent from the
researcher to each participating hotel general manager advising of the pending survey
closing date.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument used in this research obtained perceptions of the work
environment and measured engagement levels of front-line employees of limited- and
full-service hotel employees. Surveys are tools for gathering information pertaining to
people as a means of describing, comparing, or explaining their knowledge, attitudes, and
behavior (Fink, 2003a). In recent years, self-administered questionnaires have rapidly
been adapted to electronic media as effective methods of collecting data (Fink, 2003b).
Klassen and Jacobs (2001) suggested that web-based surveys broaden distribution,
improve the accuracy of data, and reduce survey turnaround times at lower costs.
Surveys allow for the measure of attitudes and opinions toward an issue and the
summarization of the characteristics of different groups (Arya, Jacobs, & Razavich,
2002). One of the key criteria of research is whether a clear conclusion can be drawn
from the collected data. The ability to accomplish this was “determined largely by the
clarity with which you have posed your initial research questions” (Saunders et al., 2007,
p. 30). A survey map (see Table 1) was utilized to ensure alignment between the research objectives and the survey instrument statements and questions.

Table 1

*Survey Map*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research objectives</th>
<th>Survey questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RO₁ Describe the demographics of the participants in terms of gender, age, pay status, hotel type, and years of employment at the property.</td>
<td>Q₁, Q₂, Q₃, Q₄, Q₅</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RO₂ Determine the work environment of the hospitality industry workplace, as perceived by regional front-line hotel employees.</td>
<td>Q₆, Q₇, Q₈, Q₉, Q₁₀, Q₁₁, Q₁₂, Q₁₃, Q₁₄</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RO₃ Determine whether the work environment of the hospitality industry differs between limited and full-service hotels, as perceived by regional front-line hotel employees.</td>
<td>Q₆, Q₇, Q₈, Q₉, Q₁₀, Q₁₁, Q₁₂, Q₁₃, Q₁₄</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RO₄ Determine whether work engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption) levels differ between limited and full-service hotels, as perceived by regional front-line hotel employees.</td>
<td>Q₁₅, Q₁₆, Q₁₇, Q₁₈, Q₁₉, Q₂₀, Q₂₁, Q₂₂, Q₂₃</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RO₅ Determine the relationship between the work environment and employee work engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption), as perceived by regional front-line hotel employees.</td>
<td>Q₆, Q₇, Q₈, Q₉, Q₁₀, Q₁₁, Q₁₂, Q₁₃, Q₁₄, Q₁₅, Q₁₆, Q₁₇, Q₁₈, Q₁₉, Q₂₀, Q₂₀, Q₂₂, Q₂₃</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To obtain perceptions from the front-line employees of participating hotel properties, an anonymous, Internet-based, self-reporting survey was created in Qualtrics, an online survey platform, and utilized as the primary data collection method in this study. A 24-item survey instrument (see Appendix F) was utilized to collect data for this research. According to Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2009), survey participation increases if the instrument is sufficiently succinct and easy for the respondents to complete. The instrument employed Likert scales, a common rating format for surveys whereby participants evaluate and rank statements. Prior to taking the survey, participants were required to give their informed consent (see Appendix G). Participants were informed prior to taking the survey that their responses would not be shared with the owners or operators of their respective hotel(s). This consent, given by the subjects, certifies they are participating in the research with full knowledge of the risks and benefits (Fink, 2003a). The questionnaire utilized to conduct this research consisted of (a) 5 questions to extract descriptive data relating to the participants, (b) 9 statements extracted from literature to acquire the employee perceptions of work their environment, (c) the 9-item version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9; Schaufeli, Baker, & Salanova, 2006), and an open-ended question soliciting additional comments.

The first section of the questionnaire extracted demographic information about the participants, including age, gender, pay basis, length of employment, and type of hotel property where they work. Sections II and III of the survey consisted of the work environment statements and workplace engagement questions in a Likert-scale format as a “technique for measurement of attitudes” (Likert, 1932, p. 55). Section II centered on the employee’s work environment, using a 1 to 5 Likert scale with anchors of 5 for Strongly agree and 1 for Strongly disagree. The items in this section focused on the
perceptions of the work environment (advancement opportunities, appropriate pay, good boss, job tasks, skills required, and turnover within the hospitality industry extracted from literature. These work environment statements were used to obtain the front-line employees’ perceptions of the workplace in the limited or full-service hotel where they work.

Section III contained questions regarding how the front-line employees of limited- and full-service hotels felt while at work. Utilizing the UWES work engagement scale, the most widely used work engagement instrument for human resources and organizational research (Jeung, 2011) participants shared their perspectives of how they felt in their workplace. The UWES-9 (see Appendix H), available at no charge for noncommercial scientific research (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010), is a condensed version of the 17-item and 15-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scales to measure levels of work engagement. Some research supports the use of the shortened 9-item version of the UWES to reduce the likelihood of survey abandonment (Seppälä et al., 2009). The UWES-9 is comprised of three theoretically based and highly interrelated work engagement dimensions: “Physical Component, or vigor (e.g., at my work, I am bursting with energy); Emotional Component, or dedication (e.g., I am enthusiastic about my job); and Cognitive Component, or absorption (e.g., I am immersed in my work)” (Attridge, 2009, p. 3). The UWES-9 provides a clear and compelling assessment of work engagement levels at a specific point in time was utilized with permission from the author to measure employee work engagement for this study (see Appendix I). Questions Q15, Q16, and Q19 measure vigor; questions Q17, Q18, and Q21 measure dedication; and questions Q20, Q22, and Q23 measure absorption based on the UWES-9. Participants responded using a 7-point Likert scale (i.e., 0 = Never, 1 = A few times a year or less, 2 = Once a
month or less, 3 = Once a month or less, 4 = Once a month, 5 = A few times a week, 6 = Every day) to ensure the construct validity of the UWES-9 employee work engagement scale. Finally, Section IV of the survey, respondents were asked an open-ended question to solicit any additional comments respondents were willing to share.

During preliminary data analysis, an additional factor analysis was conducted to assess construct validity. Factor analysis is a method to “reduce the complexity of a data set” (Huck, 2009, p. 479). It is an effective tool for investigating the underlying relationship or association of observed variables, particularly variables that are not easily measured to identify the dimensions of a test (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). A factor analysis was calculated using SPSS to combine the multiple work environment variables into a single score to measure the loading. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Factor Constructs</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q8</td>
<td>At the hotel where I work, I feel as though I am under a lot of pressure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q13</td>
<td>At the hotel where I work, my boss is a good manager.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q12</td>
<td>At the hotel where I work, there is opportunity for advancement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9</td>
<td>I am paid well for the position I hold at the hotel where I work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6</td>
<td>I consider my position at the hotel where I work to be temporary until I find another job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7</td>
<td>My position at the hotel where I work is respected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q14</td>
<td>At the hotel where I work I am required to do the same Task the same way every day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q10</td>
<td>My position at the hotel where I work requires special skills in order to perform the job well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q11</td>
<td>Employees do not stay employed very long at the hotel where I work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The factor analysis highlighted the two work environment factors: favorable perceptions (Q7, Q9, Q11, Q12, and Q13) and unfavorable perceptions (Q6, Q8, Q10, and Q14). The unfavorable perceptions are not included as part of this study. An examination of validity and reliability of the instrument is provided below.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

A survey instrument is considered valid if it measures what it is “intended to measure based on the research objectives” (Phillips, Phillips, & Aaron, 2013, p. 123). The term validity refers to “the appropriateness, correctness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of any inferences” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p. 158). Additionally, “validity is the extent to which the interpretations of the results of a test are warranted, which depends on the particular use the test is intended to serve” (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008, p. 22). Further, predictive validity is established when a future event is predicted by an attitude measure (Zikmund, 2003). In this study, predictive validity was the extent to which the constructs of the work environment were perceived to affect employee work engagement in the hospitality workplace. Schaufeli et al. (2006) highlighted that the UWES-9 had good construct validity and can be recommended in future research, because the core structure of the UWES-9 version is relatively unchanged from the 17-question UWES-17 instrument. This condensed “nine-item measurement tool is based on over two dozen studies with data from over 14,000 employees in ten different countries” (Attridge, 2009, p. 3). In order to obtain workplace perceptions of hospitality work environment characteristics by front-line hotel employees, workplace statements were extracted from the current literature. To ensure content validity of the work environment section of the questionnaire, a panel of experts reviewed each question, and a pilot test was conducted of both limited- and full-service front-line employees in an alternate
marketplace. A pilot study is used as a “small scale version or trial run in preparation for a major study” (Hungler, Beck, & Polit, 2001, p. 467). The pilot testing was conducted to evaluate the terminology and functionality of the instrument in order for participants to provide accurate responses prior to launching the actual survey. No problems with the instrument were detected during the pilot test phase or the panel of experts’ review.

In addition to validity, it is essential to establish reliability of the research instrument. Reliability refers to the consistency of an instrument (Fink, 2003a) and denotes the degree to which instrument scores obtained are consistent measures of what the instrument measures (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Additionally, “reliability estimates evaluate the stability of measures, internal consistency of measurement instruments, and interrater reliability of instrument scores” (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008, p. 22). The reliability of the Likert scale was measured using Cronbach’s alpha: “a general formula for estimating internal inconsistency based on a determination of how all items on a test relate to all other items and to the total test” (Gay & Airasian, 2003, p. 386). Cronbach’s alpha (1951) is the most common measure of scale reliability, and was used to test the reliability of the instrument for this study. Schaufeli and Bakker (2002) provided Cronbach’s α for the UWES-9 work engagement instrument. Cronbach’s alpha for each construct measured were Vigor = 0.84, Dedication = 0.89, and Absorption = 0.79 (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). To evaluate the reliability of the Work Environment section of the instrument, Cronbach’s alpha was calculated. Prior to running a reliability analysis for the work environment statements, reverse coding was used on negatively-worded questions (Q6, Q8, Q10, Q11, and Q14) so that a high value indicated the same type of response on all questions asked pertaining to the work environment characteristics of the workplace. Both the factor analysis and Cronbach’s alpha test of the instrument
accentuated key findings. The results of the factor analysis indicated two key work environment factors yielding both favorable and non-favorable results. Cronbach’s α values exceeding .70 are generally accepted as preferable (Aron & Aron, 1999). Table 3 provides the results of Cronbach’s alpha instrument analysis.

Table 3

*Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficients of the Measuring Instrument*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument section</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>No. of items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Favorable Work Environment&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.779</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Engagement&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.843</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>Q7, Q9, Q11, Q12, Q13.  <sup>b</sup>Q15, Q16, Q17, Q18, Q19, Q20, Q21, Q22, Q23.

Combining the favorable perceptions of the work environment enabled the researcher to group and treat the Likert scale data as interval data. The practice of treating ordinal data as interval-level data is widely used in social science (Zinn & Andelt, 1999). An overview of the data collection procedures is provided below.

**Data Collection**

Web-based surveys have grown in popularity due to their cost effectiveness, ability to reach targeted markets, and the ability to capture the data in an electronic format (Fink, 2003b). Another benefit of Web-based survey tools reach targeted populations across geographical areas and have the benefit of being able to obtain responses quickly (Dillman, 2000a). Further, electronic surveying is often perceived as environmentally friendly based on the online format’s nonuse of paper (Yun, & Trumbo, 2000), a factor which may help foster a higher participation rate. To aid in
communicating the availability of the survey to the front-line employees of the participating hotels, a promotional flyer was provided via email to the general managers of each participating hotel. Additionally, to boost participation, three reminders (pre-launch email, launch email, and one week prior to closing email) were sent to the general manager of each participating hotel property. An overview of the procedures for data collection is provided in Table 4.

Table 4

*Data Collection Procedures*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-survey</td>
<td>Solicitation email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Requested and confirmed IRB approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Built and tested the instrument.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participation email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>Launched the survey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sent email notifying general managers of survey launch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reminder emails to participating hotel managers one week prior to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the survey closing deadline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>On-site person-to-person survey solicitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey close</td>
<td>Closed the survey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collected, managed, and analyzed the data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Random distribution of gift cards to participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shared data set with Dr. Schaufeli.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Proper survey administration was crucial to obtaining an adequate number of responses (Dillman, 2000b). The first encounter with participants was an email sent to the participating hotel property managers reminding them of the purpose of the study, informing them of the survey launch date, and providing the survey link for participation.
by their front-line employees. The flyer explaining the purpose of the research and how to take the survey was emailed to each participating hotel manager (Appendix E). The second encounter was a reminder email about the survey launch from the researcher to the general managers with an overview of the research study encouraging sharing of the study to their front-line employees. The importance of the research was communicated to the general managers and the URL to access the survey was provided. An electronic version of the promotional flyer was also provided detailing the purpose of the study.

**Confidentiality**

Participant responses to the questionnaire were anonymous by utilizing the *Anonymize response* option within Qualtrics’ survey options. The survey data were confidential, password-protected, and stored within the computer of the researcher. Further, confidentiality of the research was noted in the survey instructions and all communications. An identical informed consent, to the one provided online, was administered as the first page of the paper survey with approval required prior to completion of the survey. Instructions detailing the incentive, awarding, and distribution of the gift card were provided at the conclusion of the paper survey. To improve the response rate during the data collection period, the researcher visited the participating hotels in person and distributed paper surveys to front-line employees. The survey, both online and in person, was administered to all subjects in the same manner to ensure consistency throughout the target audience. All participants were introduced to the online survey with a brief overview outlining the informed consent, such as the following: (a) purpose and description of the study, (b) risks, (c) data collection and management procedures, (d) confidentiality, (e) assurances that participation was anonymous and voluntary, and (f) researcher and institution contact information. Prior to
accessing the survey, both electronically and in person, participants were required to acknowledge and confirm their consent to participate in the research (see Appendix G).

To bolster higher response rates, Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2009) encouraged the use of a token or cash incentive promoted at the time of the survey request. The use of financial enticement (Dillman et al, 2009), along with multiple contacts (Fink, 2003a; Scott, 1961), has been found to promote the completion of surveys by participants, thereby increasing the response rate. Therefore, prior to taking the survey, the consent form explained that the participants had the opportunity to qualify for a drawing for one of four $100.00 gift cards or one of two $50.00 gift cards. Details regarding the gift card drawing opportunity were also provided in the research promotional flyer emailed to the hotel general managers (see Appendix E). Upon completion of the survey, the participants could take advantage of the opportunity to participate in a gift card drawing. Survey participants electing to enter in the drawing were given the researcher’s email address to notify of their opt-in decision for the gift card drawing.

One week prior to the closing of the survey, a third and final email was sent to the hotel managers encouraging participation of front-line employees at their hotel who had not completed the survey. This email contained an overview of the research study being conducted along with the following information: (a) embedded survey link, (b) web questionnaire instructions, (c) explanation of the gift card prizes to be awarded once the data collection was complete, and (d) encouragement to allow employees Internet access through hotel technology, such as a business centers’ computer or the property management system. Instructions detailing the incentive, awarding, and distribution of the gift cards were provided at the conclusion of the survey. To become eligible for the
drawing, participants, at the conclusion of the survey, sent an email to the researcher of their gift card distribution opt-in decision. The survey closed at midnight on the final evening of the two-week data collection period. The names of all participants who opted-in for the gift card opportunity prior to the designated deadline were entered into the prize drawing. Two weeks after the survey closing date, the drawing was made and gift cards were sent to the winners. All collected data from the survey were compiled and analyzed to gain insight into front-line employee work engagement within the limited- and full-service hospitality industry workplace.

Data Analysis

Descriptive non-experimental research primarily centers on describing a phenomenon or the characteristics thereof (Fink, 2003a). The data obtained in this study falls in three categories: nominal, ordinal, and interval. This quantitative research utilized descriptive statistics, independent samples t tests, and Pearson’s product-moment correlation to analyze the research objectives of the study. Nominal data were derived when categorical data have no numerical value (Fink, 2003a). Data to be measured are ordinal when defined by categories or a special rank (Huck, 2009). Boone and Boone (2012) assert Likert scale data are measured at the interval measurement scale. Additionally, Carifio and Perla (2008) highlight treating the data from Likert scales as simply ordinal in character prohibits using powerful methods of analysis and prevents benefiting from a richer and deeper understanding. Data collected for this research were compiled, sorted, and analyzed using SPSS Version 21.0 for Windows software. Table 5 provides an overview of the data analysis and shows the data category for each research objective, along with the statistical tests used in the analysis of data. Additional study findings and interpretation are detailed in Chapters IV and V.
### Table 5

**Data Analysis Plan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research objective</th>
<th>Data category</th>
<th>Statistical test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RO₁ Describe the demographics of the participants in terms of gender, age, pay status, hotel type, and years of employment at the property.</td>
<td>Nominal, Ordinal</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics to describe the population.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RO₂ Determine the work environment of the hospitality industry workplace, as perceived by regional front-line hotel employees.</td>
<td>Interval</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics to describe the work environment characteristics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RO₃ Determine whether the work environment of the hospitality industry differs between limited and full-service hotels, as perceived by regional front-line hotel employees.</td>
<td>Interval</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics to describe the data and gain insight into the population. <em>t</em> test to compare the two groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RO₄ Determine whether employee work engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption) levels differ between limited- and full-service hotels, as perceived by regional front-line hotel employees.</td>
<td>Interval</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics to describe the data and gain insight into the population. <em>t</em> test compare the two groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RO₅ Determine the relationship between the work environment and employee work engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption), as perceived by regional front-line hotel employees.</td>
<td>Interval</td>
<td>Pearson’s product-moment correlation to determine the strength of the relationship.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary of Chapter

This cross-sectional, descriptive, and non-experimental study examined work environment perceptions of the hospitality workplace and investigated their relationship with employee work engagement in limited- and full-service hotel workplaces. Favorable perceptions of these work environment characteristics by front-line employees were reviewed to determine whether a relationship existed with employee work engagement within limited- and full-service hotel properties. Front-line employees of both limited- and full-service hotel properties who were members of the MBCVB and participating in this study responded to a survey. Data collected were compiled, sorted, and analyzed using SPSS software in order to obtain a greater understanding of employee work engagement within the limited- and full-service hotel workplace. The following chapters provide a thorough overview of the data analysis of this study and implications for future research.
CHAPTER IV
ANALYSIS OF DATA

An organization’s human capital is a source of competitive advantage in the aggressive business environment of today (Cook, 2008). A linkage exists between employee work engagement and the organization’s bottom line (Attridge, 2009; Czarnowsky, 2008). With a direct impact, front-line employees contribute to customer perceptions for service delivery, understanding workforce engagement can assist hospitality organizations in remaining competitive and garnering higher profits in the marketplace. Yet, within the hospitality industry, research is limited in examining the relationship between work environment characteristics and workforce engagement of front-line employees. This study investigates five research objectives pertaining to their hospitality industry-specific work environment characteristics and their relationship to employee work engagement as perceived by front-line hotel employees of limited- and full-service hotels. Chapter IV presents results of the study’s research objectives, analyzes the collected research data, and provides a summary of the results. Prior to analyzing the results of the research objectives, an examination of data collection is provided.

Data Collection Results

The sample for this study consisted of 276 front-line employees of participating MBCVB member hotel properties. Thirty-four electronic and 37 paper surveys were completed for a total of 71 surveys yielding a response rate of 25.7%. The results of the data analysis are presented in the following section.
Results

Findings of the five research objectives undertaken in the study are discussed below:

Research Objective 1 (RO₁)

Research Objective 1 sought to describe demographics of the survey participants. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the respondents and provide a demographic profile. Initially, the participants were asked to select the hotel type where they work. Table 6 provides an overview of the type of hotel where respondents are employed.

Table 6

Type of Hotels Employed Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of hotel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>40.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-service</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 71 respondents, one third ($n = 24, 33.8\%$) were full-service front-line employees, and 29 (40.8\%) indicated that they were front-line employees of limited service hotel properties, sixteen (23.2\%) of the respondents did not provide their hotel type electing to select “other,” and two respondents did not respond to the statement. Additionally, participants were asked demographic questions regarding gender, age, pay
scale, and years worked at their current hotel. The results of the demographic questions are provided in Table 7.

Table 7

*Demographic Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Cumulative percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age (years)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-33</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34-44</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>66.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>88.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-65</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>98.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66 and older</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pay scale</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hourly</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>70.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salary</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years at the hotel</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>66.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>87.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>91.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>91.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although the hospitality industry is traditionally considered male-dominated (Masadeh, 2013), the majority of the respondents \((n = 50, 70.4\%)\) identified themselves as female, while twenty-one respondents \((29.6\%)\) indicated they were male. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 66 years or older. Almost two thirds \((n = 44, 62.0\%)\) reported themselves as being in the 25-44 age bracket, and 16 \((22.5\%)\) indicated an age range of 45-54. Further, seven \((9.9\%)\) reported in the range of 55-65, with one \((1.4\%)\) individual reporting their age of 66 years or older. Nearly three quarters \((n = 50, 70.4\%)\) of the respondents reported that they were paid on an hourly basis, and 21 \((29.6\%)\) indicated they were salaried employees. When asked about the length of employment with their current hotel, half \((n = 36, 50.7\%)\) of the 71 respondents indicated they have been employed at their current hotel for 1-5 years, and one out of five \((n = 15, 21.1\%)\) have been employed with their current hotel for 6-10 years. Three \((4.2\%)\) indicated they have been employed at their hotel for 11-15 years. Even though literature showed the hospitality industry as plagued by high turnover levels and stop gap employment (Guerrier, 1999; Henderson, 1965; Kusluvan, 2003; Lucas, 2002; Shames & Glover, 1989; Woods, 1999), nearly 9% \((n = 6, 8.5\%)\) of the respondents shared they have been employed at their current hotel property for over 20 years. Fifteen percent \((n = 11, 15.5\%)\) indicated employment at the current hotel for < 1 year.

Research Objective 2 (RO2)

Research Objective 2 asked front-line hotel employees about their perceptions of their hospitality industry-specific workplace to determine the work environment of the hospitality workplace. The participants were asked to respond to a series of statements relative to advancement opportunities, appropriate pay, job tasks, position respect, skills
required, employee turnover, and if they had a good boss. A Likert scale (1 to 5) was used with anchors of 5 for *Strongly agree* and 1 for *Strongly disagree*. The responses were used to create a work environment score to evaluate the perceived work environment characteristics of the front-line hospitality workers. The score for each of the five statements by front-line employee was added together and divided by five to obtain the favorable responses. The work environment score brought together in one measure an average of the perceived work environment characteristics for front-line employees of limited- and full-service hotels.

Factor analysis and Cronbach’s alpha were used to determine the relationship between the work environment characteristics statements, and the tendency toward favorable work environment perceptions. By combining analyses of the multiple work environment characteristics a single score was derived yielding the tendency of the respondents toward a perceived favorable work environment. Descriptive statistics summarized the variables. For each work environment characteristic perception, the range, mean, and standard deviation were calculated. The minimums and maximums of this research objective will be discussed later. The results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8

*Work Environment as Perceived by Regional Front-line Hotel Employees*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$N$</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Favorable</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>.860</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8 indicates the tendency of the respondents to perceive a favorable work environment. The front-line employees rated their perceptions of statements regarding their work environment on a 5-point Likert scale (i.e., 1 = *Strongly disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, 3 = *Neither disagree/nor agree*, 4 = *Agree*, 5 = *Strongly agree*). The mean is helpful in interpreting data that provide a sense of the central tendency toward a favorable work environment. To interpret the data, the mean of ≥ 3 was used to denote agreement while < 3 was used to denote disagreement, utilizing the grounded neutral or middle choice of the survey Likert scale indicated by 3 (*Neither disagree/nor agree*). Simply put, the closer to 5, the more favorable the perception of the work environment, and the closer to 1, the less favorable the work environment. The favorable work environment mean of 3.71 shows a tendency toward favorable perceptions of the work environment by the front-line hotel employees of both limited- and full-service hotels. The results indicate that, on average, front-line employees agree with the work environment statements demonstrating a tendency toward a perceived favorable work environment.

*Research Objective 3 (RO3)*

Research Objective 3 sought to determine whether industry-specific work environment characteristics were perceived differently by limited- and full-service hotel front-line employees. Full-service hotels are larger properties providing a wide array of features and facilities, while limited service hotels are smaller properties offering no revenue generating food and beverage outlets (Walker & Walker, 2013).

Limited- and full-service front-line employees responded to individual statements mapped to industry-specific work environment characteristics. A Likert scale from 1 to 5 was used for each statement, with anchors of 5 for *Strongly agree* and 1 for *Strongly disagree* for front-line employees to rate perceptions of their industry-specific work
environment characteristics: advancement opportunities, appropriate pay, employee turnover, position respect, skills required, and whether they had a good boss. To determine whether these industry-specific work environment perceptions differ between front-line employees of the limited- and full-service hotels, a comparison of the work environment score was conducted using an independent samples t-test comparing the two groups. Statistical measurement of two intact groups using an independent samples t test is appropriate to evaluate the difference between the two groups (Charles & Mertler, 2002). The t-test, an efficient statistical test to compare the means of two small sample sizes (Fink, 2003a), allowed for the examination of the differences between the means of the work environment score between the limited- and full-service hotel groups and was found to be significant. The results of the statistical analysis are shown in Table 9.

Table 9

Comparing Favorable Work Environment Between Limited- and Full-service Hotels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work Environment</th>
<th>Hotel Type</th>
<th>Limited</th>
<th>Full-Service</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorable</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>.945</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>.869</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To further compare for favorable work environment perceived differences between limited- and full-service hotels, the Levene’s test of variance was used. Levene’s test for equality of variances, within the t-test results, report the F ratio and a p value of the two factors (Field & Graham, 2003). A large F ratio signifies large differences between two group variances, and small F ratio indicates little difference between variances. Levene’s test with a p > .05 indicated the variances between the
limited- and full-service front-line employee groups were not significantly different. The t-test results with df = n1 + n2 - 2 indicated a favorable tendency toward work environment perceptions between limited- and full-service hotels, \( t(50) = -.355, p = .724 \) using an alpha level of .05. No significant difference in the tendency toward favorable work environment perceptions was found between the front-line employees of limited- and full-service hotels.

*Research Objective 4 (RO4)*

Results from Research Objective 4 determined whether perceived work engagement (vigor, dedication, absorption) levels differ between front-line employees of limited or full-service hotel properties. To gain insight into the two groups, a t-test analysis was used to compare employee perceived work engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption) between the two hotel types. The respondents were asked to rate their perceptions of several statements regarding how they feel while at work, and how often, if ever, their behaviors were characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Using the valid and reliable UWES work engagement instrument, front-line employees indicated how they felt at work using a 7-point Likert scale, (0 = *Never*, 1 = *A few times a year or less*, 2 = *Once a month or less*, 3 = *Once a month or less*, 4 = *Once a month*, 5 = *A few times a week*, 6 = *Every day*). The t test was used to compare the perceived difference of employee work engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption) between the front-line employees of participating limited- and full-service hotels and whether any perceived difference in their work engagement was significant. The findings of the statistical analysis are shown in Table 10.
### Table 10

*Comparing Work Engagement Between Limited- and Full-service Hotels*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Hotel Type</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>n</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>4.94</td>
<td>1.520</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>.722</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Vigor</td>
<td>5.05</td>
<td>1.550</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>1.470</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>5.06</td>
<td>1.740</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.52</td>
<td>.877</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Absorption</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>1.680</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.97</td>
<td>.898</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The results of the survey yielded an overall mean for perceived work engagement as well as means for vigor, dedication, and absorption. The overall mean score for work engagement was 4.94 (SD = 1.52) for limited service hotels and 5.18 (SD = .722) for full-service hotels. The work engagement means of vigor, dedication, and absorption for limited service hotels were 5.05 (SD = 1.55), 5.06 (SD = 1.74), and 4.70 (SD = 1.68), respectively, while the full-service hotel work engagement scores for vigor, dedication, and absorption were 5.07 (SD = .722), 5.52 (SD = .887), and 4.97 (SD = .898), respectively. These work engagement scores, based on the UWES Preliminary Manual, indicated that the front-line employees of both limited service and full-service hotel properties perceived their work with vigor, dedication, and absorption “a couple of times a week or daily” (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 34). Compared to findings from other studies utilizing the UWES-9, the workforce engagement scores for vigor, dedication, and absorption for both limited- and full-service hotels were considered a high level of perceived work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).
To continue with the analysis, an independent samples $t$-test and Levene’s test were used. The Levene’s test assumption for equality of variances report the $F$ ratio and a $p$ value of the two factors (Field & Hole, 2003). The $F$ ratio for work engagement was 6.62, $p = .013$ the $F$ ratio for vigor was .413, $p = .524$, the $F$ ratio for dedication was 6.24, $p = .016$ and the $F$ ratio for absorption was 4.57, $p = .038$. Levene’s test with a $p > .05$ indicated the variances were not significantly different with $df = n1 + n2 - 2$. Therefore, appropriate equal variances are assumed. The $t$-test results for work engagement was $t(49) = -.706, p = .484$; Vigor, $t(49) = -.044, p = .965$; Dedication, $t(49) = -1.154, p = .254$; and Absorption, $t(49) = -.689, p = .494$. No significant difference was found when comparing perceived work engagement of front-line employees between limited- and full-service hotels.

*Research Objective 5 (RO5)*

Research Objective 5 sought to determine the relationship between perceived work environment and perceived front-line hotel employee work engagement characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Pearson’s product-moment correlation measures the degree to which values of two variables are proportional to each other. Thus, Pearson’s product moment correlation procedure was used to determine the strength of the relationship between favorable work environment characteristics and work engagement characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. The correlation coefficient may take on any value between +1 and -1. Results of the Pearson’s product-moment correlation (Table 11) yielded strong correlation between work environment, favorable work environment, work engagement, vigor, dedication, and absorption ranging between .264 and .869.
Table 11

*Correlation of Favorable Work Environment Perceptions and Work Engagement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Favorable</th>
<th>Work Engagement</th>
<th>Vigor</th>
<th>Dedication</th>
<th>Absorption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Favorable Work Environment</td>
<td>.428*</td>
<td>.449*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vigor</td>
<td>.418*</td>
<td>.870*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>.439*</td>
<td>.934*</td>
<td>.819*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absorption</td>
<td>.228</td>
<td>.747*</td>
<td>.377*</td>
<td>.558*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .01, two-tailed.

In each instance, a positive, direct relationship between work environment, work engagement, vigor, dedication, and absorption existed. As favorable work environment perceptions increase, perceived work engagement levels increase simultaneously.

To test this objective alpha was set at .05. The correlation coefficient exceeded the critical value resulting in a 95% confidence level, a relationship between perceptions of favorable work environment characteristics and work engagement was found. The results were interpreted as $r > 0$, indicating a positive correlation and a direct relationship, and below the 0 indicates a negative correlation and an indirect relationship (Huck, 2009). A correlation coefficient close to 0 indicates a weak relationship between an employee’s perceived work engagement and work environment perceptions, and a correlation coefficient of 0 would indicate no correlation, or relationship, between the two variables. A positive correlation coefficient occurs when the values of both favorable work environment perceptions and perceived work engagement increase together. Further, according to Sprinthall (2007), a correlation value between 0.2 and 0.4
indicates a small but definite relationship. Table 11 shows the Pearson correlation coefficient, the significance value for each variable.

The results of the Pearson product-moment correlation analysis showed perceived work engagement among the 71 respondents is positively and significantly correlated with favorable work environment perceptions. There was a strong positive correlation between work environment perceptions and perceived work engagement, which was statistically significant, $r(69) = .449, p < .05$. A positive direct relationship between work environment perceptions, $r(70) = .428, p < .05$; vigor, $r(69) = .418, p < .05$; dedication, $r(69) = .439, p < .05$; and absorption, $r(69) = .228, p < .05$, was shown to exist with the hospitality-specific perceived work environment. In other words, when front-line hotel employees perceive their work environment as favorable, they perceived vigor, dedication, and absorption in the workplace increases. Absorption, however, is not significantly correlated to favorable work environment perceptions.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceived work environment of the hospitality industry workplace and the perceived relationship between the hospitality industry work environment and employee work engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption) as perceived by regional front-line hotel employees. A well-documented, valid, and reliable instrument was used to measure perceptions of work engagement characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption of front-line employees of limited- and full-service hotels. Additionally, statements to evaluate perceptions of specific industry work environment characteristics were tested and found to be valid. The research instrument was administered both electronically and face-to-face to the target population.
of 276 front-line hotel employees. The combined delivery strategies resulted in 71 participants and a response rate of 25.7%.

Based on data, perceived front-line employee work engagement levels, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption, were high at both limited- and full-service hotels. Further, no difference was found in perceived work engagement levels between limited- and full-service hotel types. Additionally, the correlation calculation showed a significant and positive relationship between the perceived work environment and work engagement perceptions exist for this study’s participants. As positive work environment perceptions increase, perceived work engagement (vigor, dedication, absorption) levels increase. The final summary and conclusions of this study will follow in Chapter V. Implications and recommendations for further study will also be discussed and presented.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

This study utilized five research objectives to explore awareness of work environment perceptions and employee work engagement, as perceived by front-line hotel employees of limited- and full-service hotels. The findings and conclusions related to the research objectives are discussed in Chapter V. Also, included in Chapter V is a discussion of how the findings relate to research and existing literature with a general discussion of the study’s implications for practitioners and recommendations for future research.

The purpose of this study was to determine the existence of specific work environment characteristics in the hospitality industry and their relationship with work engagement as perceived by regional front-line hotel employees. The study also determined whether work environment perceptions differ between limited- and full-service hotels and whether a perceived relationship exists between specific work environment characteristics and employee work engagement between limited- and full-service hotels.

The UWES-9, a valid and reliable instrument (Schaufeli et al., 2006), was used to measure work engagement of regional front-line hotel employees. Participants were asked to determine how often, if ever, they felt and exhibited workplace behaviors while at work. A total of 71 respondents self-reported their feelings while at work using a 7-point Likert type scale ranging from *Never* to *Always*. Participants were asked how often they exhibited behaviors at work characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. The degree of influence of their perceptions was measured for responses to the nine questions in the UWES-9 instrument. Data were collected online via Qualtrics and face-to-face
with the use of paper surveys and then analyzed using SPSS. The findings, conclusions, and recommendations derived from the study are discussed in the next section.

Findings and Conclusions

The following summary includes an overview of the findings based on the statistical analysis presented earlier. The findings of this research provide insight into front-line employee work environment perceptions and work engagement in the hospitality workplace of limited- and full-service hotels. In addition to the findings, conclusions derived from the findings and suggestions of recommendations are presented.

*Employee Work Environment Perceptions*

The perception of the condition or practices within an organization that are likely to promote or inhibit employee engagement in the workplace is referred to as work environment characteristics (Tracey & Tews, 2005). These workplace characteristics can be perceived by employees in a positive or negative manner. Work environment characteristics that are perceived positively foster employee work engagement in the areas of vigor, dedication, and absorption. For service sectors, such as the hospitality industry, understanding how the work environment characteristics are perceived by front-line employees is critical due to the influence front-line employees have when in direct contact with the customer and play an indispensable role in service delivery of hospitality organizations. Employees who perceive a positive work environment tend to offer positive service to their customers (Liao & Chuang, 2007).

*Findings.* In this study, front-line employees of limited- and full-service hotels shared their perceptions of specific industry work environment characteristics, sharing their perceptions relative to how they engage in the hospitality workplace. The results of
this study indicated, for front-line hotel employees, the work environment is perceived favorably. Additionally, no significant difference was found in perceptions of limited- and full-service hotel employees regarding their work environment.

**Conclusion.** Previous research indicates a positive work environment contributes to work engagement (Bledow et al., 2011), motivating employees to create satisfaction in their job situation (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011). The statements on the survey pertaining to perceptions of the work environment were extracted from literature with the results highlighting the tendency for hotel employees toward favorable work perceptions. This study emphasized the perceived relationship between specific industry work environment characteristics and front-line hotel employee work engagement. Work environment characteristics perceived favorable were significantly correlated with higher levels of front-line employee work engagement perceptions. The more likely work environment characteristics are perceived favorably by front-line employees of both limited- and full-service hotels, the higher the perceived level of front-line employee work engagement in the workplace portrayed by increased employee vigor, dedication, and absorption while at work.

**Recommendation.** For hospitality organizations, there is an engagement-profit linkage with front-line employees influencing the customer quality and service perceptions (Cook, 2008, Gostick & Elton, 2006). Hospitality industry leaders should develop and nurture work environments perceived favorably to foster employee work engagement in the workplace. Favorable work environment initiatives could include actions such as forge employee respect, provide adequate pay to the employee for the position held with opportunities for advancement, and promote employee longevity and managers perceived as a good boss. These efforts might aid in elevating favorable
workplace perceptions by hospitality industry front-line employees. Additional research could be conducted on whether a relationship exists between industry-specific work environments of the “front of the house” and “back of the house;” further investigate why work environments in limited- and full-service properties do not differ, according to the front-line participants in this study, and if work environment characteristics of unionized and casino-affiliated hotels’ work differ from nonunion hotel properties.

**Employee Work Engagement**

The concept of employee work engagement is difficult to define; however, it is often described as “Work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). For the hospitality industry, employee work engagement is directly related to customer experience since engaged workers feel that whatever they are doing is unquestionably connected to making a difference in the lives of others (Hauden, 2008). Additionally, these employees contribute to the organizational success by treating the customer well and their colleagues better (Federman, 2009), thus, enhancing the environment of the entire workplace.

**Findings.** The results of the study indicated that front-line hotel employees of limited- and full-service hotels are engaged in their work. The employees associated work with vigor and dedication “a couple of times a week or daily” (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 34). In regard to absorption in their work, both the limited- and full-service hotels associated absorption to work engagement “once a week” (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 34). Consistency among the components of work engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption) was found in the hospitality workplace. The study found front-line employees of both limited- and full-service hotels perceived high energy while at work, are dedicated to their jobs, and become engrossed in their work. Conversely, the
study finds employee perceived work engagement levels decrease when specific work environment perceptions are unfavorable. In other words, when work environments are perceived unfavorably, work engagement levels decrease in the areas of vigor, dedication, and absorption.

**Conclusion.** Front-line employee work engagement increases when work environment is perceived favorably. As a result, front-line employees work engagement, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption, is enhanced. For service sectors, such as the hospitality industry, employee work engagement is even more important given the engagement-profit linkage and front-line employee contribution in shaping customer quality and service perceptions. As more light is shed on the linkage between employee work engagement and an organization’s bottom line as a result of the direct impact front-line employees contribute to customer perceptions, understanding workforce engagement can benefit hospitality industry leaders in forging positive work environments to enhance the service delivery by front-line employees.

**Recommendation.** A goal to improve the work engagement levels from high to very high should be set to enhance the service delivery at the hotel properties. This improvement could be done by reducing workplace stress, the standardization of tasks, and employee turnover with providing adequate pay to the employee for the position held. Hospitality leaders should also offer opportunities for employee advancement and promote employee longevity, while ensuring managers are perceived by their front-line employees as being a good boss. Hospitality industry leaders should conduct in-depth research on employee work engagement. Follow-up research in alternate accommodation segments, other than limited- and full-service hotel properties, could be conducted.
Implications

The hospitali

ty industry is widely perceived as a pass through, pressure cooker, and service factory environment with stopgap employment resulting in the standardization of tasks, low pay, high turnover, and an unskilled workforce (Guerrier, 1999; Henderson, 1965; Kusluvan, 2003; Lucas, 2002; Shames & Glover, 1989; Woods, 1999). Contrary to literature, the respondents of this study perceive their work environments to be favorable. As a result, the perceived work engagement levels of front-line employees of limited- and full-service hotels increase.

Intriguingly, the number of respondents for this study indicating employment at their property for multiple, and in some cases extensive years, runs contrary to findings from literature regarding employment longevity in the hospitality industry. Prior research was lacking in regard to hospitality industry-specific work environment characteristics and their relationship between front-line employee work engagement. A deeper understanding of the perceived relationship between the specific hospitality industry work environments and their relationship to employee work engagement was needed. This research should be considered an initial step to broaden understanding and expand this dialogue.

Employee work engagement is perceived as a “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Shaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). It is “an employee’s willingness and ability to contribute to company success—the extent to which they put discretionary effort into their work, and contribute more of their energy, creativity, and passion on the job” (Berger & Berger, 2010, p. 366). As a service sector industry, the hospitality workplace needs engaged front-line employees to enhance the service delivery enabling the organization to remain
competitive and garner higher profits (Kusluvan, 2003). However, “an employee’s perception of the work environment influences behavior and that behavior leads to performance” (Ripley, Hudson, Turner, & Osman-Gani, 2006, p. 43). Employee perceptions of the work environment characteristics can be favorable or unfavorable. Comprehending factors that shape a favorably perceived work environment will enable hospitality leaders to foster a more engaged workforce to be more productive, remain competitive, increase customer loyalty, and garner higher profits.

Discussion

The findings of this study assert work environment characteristics, as perceived by regional front-line employees, are viewed favorably. This perception does not differ between limited- and full-service hotels. When front-line employees of both limited- and full-service hotels perceive their work environment favorably, perceived work engagement levels increase. This study found a correlation between the favorably perceived work environment perceptions and perceived employee work engagement of front-line workforces of limited- and full-service hotels; however, it is imperative not to generalize the results. Although this study highlights evidence of a relationship, correlation does not imply causation. Additionally, no significant difference was found between the perceptions of front-line employees of limited- and full-service hotels on either the favorable work environment characteristics or comparing the work environment with perceived levels of work engagement in the hospitality workplace.

Limitations and Delimitations

This research study was limited to front-line employees of limited- and full-service hotels in a mid-size market in the southeastern United States. Based on self-reported survey data, this cross-sectional, descriptive, nonexperimental research
investigated the relationship between hospitality-specific work environment characteristics and employee engagement as perceived by regional front-line hotel employees. The study also analyzed perceptions of industry-specific work environment characteristics by front-line workforces of both limited- and full-service hotels. The survey statements pertaining to the work environment perceptions were derived from literature, and analyzed through Factor Analysis and Cronbach’s alpha for validity and reliability. Additionally, the researcher utilized the well-researched and widely accepted UWES-9 instrument was used to assess a comprehensive view of workplace engagement based on the established internal consistency and test-retest validity of the instrument (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).

A key limitation of the study was the use of an online survey. As a result, participants were limited to those who have access to technology. Additionally, the answering process of online participants was unmonitored with no oversight of the completion process, no verification as to whether the respondents were currently functioning in the role of front-line hotel employees, or if they relinquished control of the questionnaire to someone other than themselves. Although the survey was communicated as anonymous and confidential, there is no guarantee that the respondents were truthful in their responses. Furthermore, the survey was provided only in English. The specific demographics of the front-line employees were not available prior to the survey launch to determine the primary language spoken or the necessity for providing the survey in multiple languages. For these reasons, there was slight concern that the response rate could have been reduced, giving rise to nonresponse sampling bias affecting the results. A second limitation was the restricted focus on only limited- and full-service hotels and their front-line workforces.
Delimitations for this study included the requirement that participants must be front-line employees at limited- and full-service hotels and the exclusion of non-frontline employees. Moreover, this study did not recognize ethnicity, nationality, cultural differences, position, or pay scale, and there was no consideration whether or not the hotel was a franchised or independently owned property. Further research could be conducted incorporating these variables and examining their relationship on employee work engagement within the hospitality industry.

Summary

Employee work engagement continues to garner attention and gain in importance as organizations strive to compete and succeed in the fiercely aggressive environment of today. For service sectors, such as the hospitality industry, greater emphasis is placed on the engagement-profit linkage and front-line employee contributions to shaping customer quality and service perceptions. As more insight is gained into the linkage between employee work engagement and an organization’s bottom line, work engagement will continue to garner attention. With the direct impact front-line employees contribute to customer perceptions, understanding employee engagement in the workplace and work environment perceptions can aid hospitality industry organizations in fostering a more favorably perceived work environment to enhance the service delivery of the organization.

This study examined industry-specific work environment perceptions of the hospitality industry and their perceived relationship between front-line employee work engagement of limited- and full-service hotels. The findings of this study show, for front-line employees of both limited- and full-service hotels, favorable perceptions of hospitality-specific work environment characteristics are linked to front-line employee
work engagement levels. When front-line hotel employees perceive their work environment characteristics favorably, they perceive vigor, dedication, and absorption in their hospitality workplace. Further, the study found that front-line employees of both limited- and full-service hotels perceive they are engaged at a high level in their workplace. This study suggests front-line hospitality employees perceive they are passionate, strive to go the extra mile, and offer discretionary effort on a weekly and daily basis. As front-line employees have the tendency toward favorable perceptions of their work environment, they perceive themselves to be enthused, energized, and compelled to contribute a higher effort—“give it their all.” When these employees, by having direct contact with customers, perceive a favorable work environment and consider themselves engaged in the workplace, service delivery improves, customer perceptions are enhanced, and the hospitality organization can increase a competitive advantage in the marketplace. The challenge for hospitality industry leaders is to consciously, and continuously, forge favorably perceived work environments; thereby, enhancing front-line employee work engagement levels to enhance the organization’s service delivery and bottom-line.
APPENDIX A

PERSONAL COMMUNICATION TO MBCVB REQUESTING PERMISSION TO USE MASLOW’S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS DIAGRAM

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs diagram

Thank you so much, Dr. Cheek! I greatly appreciate it.

Robert J. Thompson, Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Economic Development and Tourism
118 College Drive, #3021 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406
Tel: 601.296.6377 | Email: r.j.thompson@usm.edu
LinkedIn | ResearchGate | Twitter | Vitae

Nihil sine magno labore - Nothing without great effort

No problem, Robert. Good luck with the dissertation

Brad

On 11 Aug 2015, at 23:20, Robert Thompson <rj.thompson@usm.edu> wrote:

Hello Brad,

I am writing to ask permission to use your Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs diagram in my PhD dissertation. Would it be possible to use your graphic?

Best regards,
APPENDIX B

PERSONAL COMMUNICATION TO MBCVB

Thanks, Robert!!

Al Hutchinson
President & CEO
PO Box 204, Mobile, AL 36602
1 S Water St, Mobile, AL 36602
Office: (251) 208-2004
Cell: (251) 518-0796
ahutchinson@mobile.org
www.mobilielcv.org
https://www.facebook.com/VisitMobileAl

MSN named Mobile the 10th Hottest City for 2015

Robert Thompson

To help protect your privacy, some content in this message has been blocked. To re-enable the blocked features, click here.

To always show content from this sender, click here.

Mr. Hutchinson,

It was a true pleasure to speak with you today. Please know, I greatly appreciate you taking time out of your day, as well as your interest in my research study. I am confident the findings will be beneficial to the MBCVB.

Thank you again.

Robert
Robert J. Thompson, M.B.A., CHA, TMP
APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
113 College Drive #3147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Phone: 601.266.5997 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/research/institutional.review.board

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board
in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 21, 111), Department of Health
and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following
criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data
  collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to
  maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must
  be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported
  to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.
  Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 15091805
PROJECT TITLE: Forging Employee Engagement within the Hospitality Workplace: Investigating
Work Environment Characteristics and Work Engagement of Limited and Full-Service Hotel Property
Front-Line Employees
PROJECT TYPE: New Project
RESEARCHER(S): Robert Thompson
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Science and Technology
DEPARTMENT: Human Capital Development
FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Exempt Review Approval
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 09/22/2015 to 09/21/2016

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board
APPENDIX D

COMMUNICATION TO MBCVB MEMBER HOTEL PROPERTIES

Participation Solicitation Email

Dear MBCVB Hotel Manager,

I am a PhD candidate conducting a workforce study of hotel employees in the Mobile, AL area for completion of my doctoral degree.

The survey for my research
  ▪ Consists of only 25 questions.
  ▪ Takes approximately 10 minutes to complete.
  ▪ Responses are completely anonymous and confidential
  ▪ Offers the opportunity for participants to win one of four $100 gift cards or two $50 gift cards.

Once the online survey is built, would you be willing to share the link to the survey with your employees for inclusion in my research?

Best regards,

Participation Acceptance Email

Dear MBCVB Hotel Manager,

It was a true pleasure to speak with you this morning regarding my workforce study of front-line hotel employees in the Mobile, AL metropolitan area for completion of my doctoral degree.

Once I receive IRB (i.e., Institutional Review Board) approval and the survey is built online, I will forward the link for sharing with your front-line employees (approximately 44 employees per the MBCVB) at your hotel.

Again, the survey for my research
  ▪ Consists of only 25 questions.
  ▪ Takes approximately 10 minutes to complete.
  ▪ Responses are completely anonymous and confidential.
  ▪ Offers the opportunity for participants to win one of four $100 gift cards or two $50 gift cards.
As promised, attached is the **preliminary** survey solicitation flyer for your review. I will provide the final updated solicitation flyer once all approvals are obtained and the survey is live. This should take approximately one month to finalize.

Thank you, again, for your willingness to participate in my study.

Best regards,

---

**Survey Launch Notification Email**

Dear MBCVB hotel manager,

Thank you for your participation in my dissertation study to obtain my PhD in Human Capital Development at The University of Southern Mississippi. Again, the study centers on employee work engagement of front-line hotel employees, and results of my study should provide valuable insight regarding employee work engagement in the hospitality workplace.

The questionnaire is available now until October 15, 2015, and all responses will be **anonymous and confidential**.

To access the survey simply click the following link.
https://usmuw.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_5j8ocsJLXsAmVOl

Please communicate this survey link to your hotel employees and encourage their participation. Employees who complete the survey will be eligible to receive one of **four** $100 gift cards or **two** $50 gift cards. Attached to this email is a flyer for posting on your property (e.g., over the timeclock, on the employee bulletin board, in the employee breakroom, etc.) explaining the study for your employees. If needed, an email for sending to the staff is also attached.

Thank you, again, for your participation and interest in my research.

Best regards,

---

**Survey Reminder Email**

Dear MBCVB Hotel Manager,

Thank you for your participation in my dissertation study to obtain my PhD in Human Capital Development at The University of Southern Mississippi. Again, the study centers
on employee work engagement of front-line hotel employees and results of my study should provide valuable insight regarding employee work engagement in the hospitality workplace.

The questionnaire is available now until October 15, 2015, and all responses will be anonymous and confidential. To access the survey simply click the following link. Please communicate this survey link to your hotel employees and encourage their participation. Employees who complete the survey will be eligible to receive one of four $100 gift cards or two $50 gift cards.

Attached to this email is a flyer for posting on your property explaining the study for your employees.

Thank you for your participation and interest in my research.
APPENDIX E

PROMOTIONAL FLYER FOR MBCVB MEMBER HOTEL PROPERTIES

YOUR OPINION MATTERS

Win one of Six gift cards!

Would you like to win one of four $100 gift cards, or one of two $50 gift cards?

Your opinions are needed for a research study being conducted by Robert Thompson, a PhD candidate at The University of Southern Mississippi, as part of the requirements for his doctoral degree. Participation is voluntary, and the survey should take only 10 minutes to complete. Please know, all responses are anonymous and confidential. No personally identifiable information is captured unless you voluntarily offer personal information in the comment field.

What is the purpose of the survey?

The purpose of the study is to determine the relationship between work environment characteristics and employee engagement on front-line employees of limited and full-service hotels.

How will the survey results be used?

The Study’s results will provide insight on employee engagement within the hospitality industry workplace. All results will be provided within the researcher’s dissertation in summary form. No specifics relating to any employee or the hotel will be shared.

Will my responses be shared with my hotel owners or operators?

No. Your specific answers will not be connected to you, as all survey responses are anonymous. Your personal responses are confidential. You will not provide your name during the survey and you will not be associated to the responses you provide, in any way. There will be no link between your survey responses and you personally.

This is a great opportunity to have your opinions heard. Act now, the survey will close on Oct. 15, 2015.

To take the survey, visit: https://umsuw.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?lid=6V_5B0csciLXsAmVO

Are you a Smartphone user?
Scan with your mobile device the QR code box to the right to access the online survey.

If you have any questions or concerns about this survey, please contact
Robert Thompson, PhD candidate, @ r.t.thompson@ums.edu or (601) 296.6877.

Your feedback is greatly appreciated.
APPENDIX F
SURVEY INSTRUMENT

SECTION ONE

Q1 At what type of hotel property do you work?
- Service with no food and beverage area such as a restaurant, bar, etc.
- Full-Service with food and beverage areas such as: restaurant, bar, café, etc.
- Other

Q2 What is your gender?
- Male
- Female

Q3 What is your age?
- 18-24
- 25-33
- 34-44
- 45-54
- 55-65
- 66 or older

Q4 Is your pay on an hourly or salary basis?
- Hourly
- Salary

Q5 How many years have you worked at this hotel?
- Less than a year
- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- More than 20 years

SECTION TWO

Q6 I consider my position at the hotel where I work to be temporary until I find another job.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
Q7 My position at the hotel where I work is respected.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Q8 At the hotel where I work, I feel as though I am under a lot of pressure.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Q9 I am paid well for the position I hold at the hotel where I work.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Q10 My position at the hotel where I work requires special skills in order to perform the job well.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Q11 Employees do not stay employed very long at the hotel where I work.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Q12 At the hotel where I work, there is opportunity for advancement.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
Q13 At the hotel where I work, my boss is a good manager.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Q14 At the hotel where I work, I am required to do the same task the same way every day.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

SECTION THREE

Q15 At work, I feel bursting with energy.
- Never
- A few times a year or less
- Once a month or less
- A few times a month
- Once a week
- A few times a week
- Every day

Q16 At my job, I feel strong and vigorous.
- Never
- A few times a year or less
- Once a month or less
- A few times a month
- Once a week
- A few times a week
- Every day

Q17 I am enthusiastic about my job.
- Never
- A few times a year or less
- Once a month or less
- A few times a month
- Once a week
- A few times a week
- Every day
Q18 My job inspires me.
- Never
- A few times a year or less
- Once a month or less
- A few times a month
- Once a week
- A few times a week
- Every day

Q19 When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.
- Never
- A few times a year or less
- Once a month or less
- A few times a month
- Once a week
- A few times a week
- Every day

Q20 I feel happy when I am working intensely.
- Never
- A few times a year or less
- Once a month or less
- A few times a month
- Once a week
- A few times a week
- Every day

Q21 I am proud of the work that I do.
- Never
- A few times a year or less
- Once a month or less
- A few times a month
- Once a week
- A few times a week
- Every day

Q22 I am immersed in my work.
- Never
- A few times a year or less
- Once a month or less
- A few times a month
- Once a week
- A few times a week
- Every day
Q23 I get carried away when I’m working.
- Never
- A few times a year or less
- Once a month or less
- A few times a month
- Once a week
- A few times a week
- Every day

Q24 Are there any additional comments, which you would like to share?
APPENDIX G

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN SURVEY RESEARCH

Information About this Study

Purpose
This research project is being conducted by Robert J. Thompson, PhD candidate at The University of Southern Mississippi. As part of my PhD dissertation workforce study, please answer the following questions relating to workplace characteristics and behaviors, as well as few demographic questions.

Description
There are no known potential risks or benefits to the participants for completing this survey. This voluntary survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. All responses will be compiled electronically in a spreadsheet and statistical software. Please know, your responses will not be linked to you or your hotel property. All data will be stored in a password protected electronic format. All records are kept private and confidential.

Appreciation
Upon completion of the survey, you may choose to be entered in a drawing for one of four (4) $100 gift cards and two (2) $50 gift cards. Winners will be chosen randomly. You may also choose to receive a copy of the results. Finally, your email address will be kept separate from your responses.

Participation
This research project has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of Southern Mississippi. The IRB ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the IRB at 601.266.5997. Participation in this project is completely voluntary and participants may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

Contact
If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at r.j.thompson@usm.edu.

By clicking the "arrow" button below, you acknowledge that you have read the information regarding the research and agree to participate in this research. You are free to withdraw your participation at any time, without penalty.
APPENDIX H

UTRECHT EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SURVEY SHORTENED VERSION

(UWES-9)

Work and Well-being Survey (UWES) ©

The following 9 statements are about how you feel at work. Please read each statement carefully and decide if you ever feel this way about your job. If you have never had this feeling, write “0” (zero) in the space preceding the statement. If you have had this feeling, indicate how often you feel it by writing the number (from 1 to 6) that best describes how frequently you feel that way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Almost never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Very often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Never | A few times | Once a | A few times | Once a | A few times | Every |
|------|            | month or less | a month | week | times a | day   |

1. ______ At my work, I feel that I am bursting with energy
2. ______ At my job, I feel strong and vigorous
3. ______ I am enthusiastic about my job
4. ______ My job inspires me
5. ______ When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work
6. ______ I feel happy when I am working intensely
7. ______ I am proud of the work that I do
8. ______ I am immersed in my work
9. ______ I get carried away when I’m working

© Schaufeli & Bakker (2003). The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale is free for use for noncommercial scientific research. Commercial and/or non-scientific use is prohibited, unless previous written permission is granted by the authors.

______ Supervisor’s Unique Identifier
APPENDIX I

PERSONAL COMMUNICATION TO USE UWES INSTRUMENT FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES

Schaufeli, W.B. (Wilmar) <w.schaufeli@uu.nl>
Wed 2/25/2015 2:43 PM

To: Robert Thompson;

- To help protect your privacy, some content in this message has been blocked. To re-enable the blocked features, click here.
- To always show content from this sender, click here.
- You replied on 2/25/2015 2:46 PM.

Yes,
Wilmar Schaufeli

Wilmar B. Schaufeli, PhD | Social and Organisational Psychology | P.O. Box 80.140 | 3508 TC Utrecht, The Netherlands |
Tel: (31) 30-253 8993 | Mobile: (31) 6514 75784 | Fax: (31) 30-253 7842 | Site: www.wilmarschaufeli.nl

Op 25 feb. 2015, om 21:39 heeft Robert Thompson <rj.thompson@usm.edu> het volgende geschreven:

Dr. Schaufeli,

Do I have permission to use your instrument?

With fingers crossed,

Robert
PhD Student
The University of Southern Mississippi
Thank you!

You have completed the survey. Please know your participation is greatly appreciated. If you would like to be entered in the drawing of four (4) $100.00 gift cards and two (2) $50.00 gift cards, please forward your name and address to r.j.thompson@usm.edu by the designated survey closing deadline. These prizes will be awarded one week after the deadline date, at which time all winners will be notified via email.

If you have any questions about this survey or the research project, please contact:

Robert J. Thompson, PhD Candidate
The University of Southern Mississippi
Tel: 601.296.6377
Email: r.j.thompson@usm.edu
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