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Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

DRIVING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT THROUGH GREATER PURPOSE

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Change

by

Mark R. Gasta

May, 2016

Kay Davis, Ed.D. — Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Mark R. Gasta

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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VITA

EDUCATION

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY, MALIBU, CALIFORNIA
Ed.D., Organizational Change, 2016

UNIVERSITY OF DENVER, Denver, Colorado
Executive M.B.A., 2000

California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, California
B.S., Environmental and Systematic Biology, 1988

ACADEMIC TEACHING EXPERIENCE

UNIVERSITY OF DENVER

Adjunct Professor, Denver, Colorado..... 2000-2001
Daniels College of Business master of business administration professor for high-performance management course.

- Developed curriculum focused on concepts including leadership theory, organizational behavior, communication, organizational culture, human resources management, and employee engagement.
- Earned Diamond Award for excellent personal evaluation ratings from students.

CORPORATE TEACHING EXPERIENCE

A few highlights from 18 years of direct responsibility for all aspects of talent management in corporate organizations. Responsibilities include curriculum design, learning and development, high potential identification and development, executive development, succession management, executive coaching, and organizational development.

- Created enterprise-wide “Higher Ground” leadership development series comprised of fully integrated curriculum leveraging multiple learning modalities. The series was designed proactively to ensure the organization’s talent and leadership pipelines remain full to support the strategic direction of the organization.
- Designed, led, and facilitated multi-year development program for the Executive Committee, resulting in significant growth and performance improvement as individuals, as a team, and as a company.
- Envisioned, designed and led Vail Resorts Leadership Summit, which includes top 600 leaders annually to recognize, develop, and align leaders strategically and culturally.
- Developed and implemented innovative business solutions, including “bullseye”, a self-paced new hire training program that resulted in decreased dependency on platform training, reduced overall program time, increased productivity, reduced turnover, greater employee engagement and higher customer satisfaction.
- Created “Peak Leadership”, high-potential leadership development program designed to balance way of doing, way of being, and business results. Measured return-on-investment of program with reoccurring 360-degree reviews, trending business unit results, employee satisfaction surveys, talent management reviews, and subsequent promotional rates.
- Selected to serve as leadership academy advisor, logistics college instructor, and one of 11 master trainers.
- Certified 360 Degree Feedback Coach.

ACADEMIC ADVISORY BOARDS

University of Denver, Daniels College of Business, Advisory Board MBA Design, 2016 – Present
Colorado State University Master of Tourism Management Advisory Board, 2013 – Present
University of Colorado, Denver Business School, Managing for Sustainability Advisory Council, 2012 – 2014
University of Colorado Leeds’ School of Business Executive Education Advisory Board, 2011 – 2013

CORPORATE EXPERIENCE

VAIL RESORTS

Executive Vice President, Chief People Officer and Chief Sustainability Officer, Broomfield, Colorado2010-present
Serve as leader for human resources (HR), corporate communication (PR), as well as public affairs and sustainability (PAS) for 26,000 employees located in multiple states and countries around the world. Manage HR, PR, and PAS team of 250 employees and \$20,000,000 budget.

- Led the highly successful strategic planning process for organization. Designed and facilitated Executive Committee process that resulted in the development and communication of organizational mission, values, vision, core, competitive differentiation, enterprise-wide goals, integrated/multi-year strategic plan, and metrics to measure progress.

- Identified need and led initiative, resulting in highly successful cultural transformation. Developed programs that enabled organization to maintain local ownership and entrepreneurial spirit while simultaneously capitalizing upon synergies by sharing best practices and helping each employee understand how they fits into the success of larger organization.
- Led HR team to have highest overall employee engagement scores in company 4 years in a row.
- Played key leadership role in over 20 projects from mergers and acquisitions to new properties to additional growth and development. Built repeatable processes from due diligence to post-closing integration. Directed organization through integration and change management to ensure quick realization of synergies. Coordinated all internal/external communication strategies for multiple acquisitions.
- Implemented consumer-driven health plan, resulting in \$2,600,000 positive variance to budget in year one and a \$5,000,000 positive variance in year two. Led design, rollout, and management of new plan, enabling company to achieve Most Innovative Health and Benefits Plan Design Award from Institute for HealthCare Consumerism.
- Led the “Sustainability Vision Team” to create an integrated company sustainability strategy designed to enhance brand loyalty, increase employee engagement, gain greater support from our local communities, preserve the natural environment, and produce a projected \$40,000,000 of value over 5 years.

Senior Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer, Broomfield, Colorado 2008-2010
 Responsible for all aspects of HR, including employee relations, compensation and benefits, organizational development, culture, learning and development, talent acquisition, employee housing, safety, and office services.

- Implemented sophisticated HR tools and processes where none previously existed, including performance management, goal setting, pay-for-performance, 360 reviews, and succession management. Enabled company to achieve consistent goals and performance reviews to ensure people worked in lockstep with company goals and were being evaluated regularly and fairly. Enabled company to identify top performers across company and determine how to differentiate pay based on employee performance. The introduction of these sophisticated tools and processes resulted in a scalable platform enabling the organization to drive and grow business.
- Evolved talent acquisition function to maximize synergies of larger organization, enhance candidate experience, reduce effort of hiring manager, and attract best possible talent. Changed process for staffing seasonal needs of over 20,000 annual hires by rethinking technology, compliance, process, structure, tools, and people.
- Redesigned learning and development function to align better with needs of business without duplicating initiatives across various locations/lines of business. Introduced the “LIFT” (Learning Management System) to create learning culture, coupled with restructuring of team, to better serve needs of partners, achieving impressive enhancements/results.
- Directed implementation of state-of-the-art talent management tools such as Success Factors and Taleo.
- Created and launched employment brand that resonated so extensively with employee population that it was ultimately selected to serve as company’s mission.
- Designed and implemented annual employee engagement survey for organization, with company exceeding Towers Watson Global High Performing Norm on nine out of 10 categories. Exceeded Leisure Norm in every category. Realized year-over-year statistical improvement from six to 11 percentage points as direct result of action planning, execution and communication. Made significant progress in all categories 4 years in a row.
- Envisioned and implemented employee “Street Teams” at all locations designed to ensure employees’ voices were heard. Utilized teams to design and communicate new programs, plan and run employee events, and own the success of culture.
- Created and implemented VR Connections Program, which required all corporate employees to spend at least 1 day per season in operation fulfilling a frontline role to facilitate greater operational awareness, better understanding of how to best serve operation, and deeper professional relationships.
- Envisioned and launched first all employee meetings called “Inside Edge.” live meetings conducted semi-annually where CEO and other key leaders provided insights into strategy and current priorities and provided direct, candid responses to employees’ questions.

COMCAST COMMUNICATIONS

Corporate Vice President, Organizational Development, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 2007-2008
 Served as company’s organizational development lead for 90,000 employees. Responsible for planning and executing on organization-wide strategies designed to increase organization effectiveness and enhance organizational performance and health through development and empowerment of teams and individuals.

- Led development of company’s enterprise-wide pay-for-performance program.
- Directed “Comcast Talent” initiative, a fully integrated performance management program designed to empower employees at all levels to take charge of their career development in order to share in success of company.
- Provided managers and supervisors with intuitive, easy-to-use tools to support employee development and performance; as well as link compensation directly to performance results.
- Integrated program components, including competency-based career, talent, and learning management; cascading goal-setting process; performance management progress and system; and rewards and recognition directly linked to individual and business success.

Divisional Vice President, Human Resources, Denver, Colorado 2002-2007
Established cutting-edge human resources and learning and development (L&D) team for \$5.6B division employing 15,000 employees. Responsible for all related functional areas and leading staff of 300 HR and L&D professionals located throughout eight western states.

- Designed and led organizational change initiative to define desired future state of organization; developed cross-functional/cross-divisional plans to operationalize vision; positioned organization to meet future competitive challenges of environment.
- Created “EmployeeFirst” program based on value profit chain research, which indicated that employees drive customer satisfaction directly, which in turn fuels value for investors.
- Developed and implemented frontline annual bonus program, “GAIN,” designed to create ownership culture where employees understand business goals and their role in achieving those goals, and are rewarded based upon their direct contribution.
- Crafted and implemented organization-wide leadership development strategy, including talent review, high-potential identification/retention planning, individual/organization development strategies, diverse leadership development, critical gap identification, and succession planning.
- Increased overall employee satisfaction by 13% in 2003 as indicated by “CredoSpeak” (Employee Satisfaction Survey), resulting in positive employee culture and in decertification of six bargaining units within division. Achieved 2004 and 2005 ESS scores significantly above corresponding scores for Comcast Cable as a whole in eight of 12 and 12 of 13 categories, respectively.
- Developed and implemented HR measurement system to ensure all HR initiatives had desired impact and to demonstrate direct linkage between human capital and financial performance.
- Led six of seven major regions of responsibility—Bay Area, Colorado, Oregon, Sacramento, Utah, and Washington—to be named as one of the “best places to work” in local markets.
- Directed front-line leadership job design analysis, resulting in redesign of roles and enabling leaders to focus on less administrative tasks and more on coaching and developing employees.
- Led development of division initiatives adopted enterprise-wide, including talent management process, front-line bonus program, self-paced new hire program, employee satisfaction survey, and EmployeeFirst brand.

Corporate Labor Relations Director, Denver, Colorado 2000-2002
Partnered as labor relations consultant responsible for developing strategies, objectives, metrics, and specific action plans associated with organizing campaigns and labor contract negotiations for an organization of 40,000 employees. Responsible for developing and implementing management training programs to promote effective labor relations and application of labor laws.

- Developed and facilitated comprehensive strike planning process to ensure organizational preparedness.
- Served as labor relations consultant for multiple organizing campaigns, resulting in success ratio of 4 to 1.25 while under constraints of neutrality. Exceeded academic research predicted success rate for neutrality-controlled campaigns of 33%.
- Led development of organization’s post-neutrality labor strategy, “Employee-Informed Choice.” Trained organization’s 4,000 leaders on new strategy within three-month period.
- Served as corporate representative during national negotiations with Communications Workers of America.

A D D I T I O N A L E X P E R I E N C E

LEXIS-NEXIS

Human Resources Director, Colorado Springs, Colorado 1999-2000

- Integrated three newly acquired companies into Lexis-Nexis business portfolio.
- Identified as strongest human resources business partner within Lexis Publishing when quantitatively assessed by executive leadership of the organization, taking into account technical competency, business acumen, and demonstrated leadership ability.

TARGET CORPORATION

Human Resources and Development Senior Manager, Pueblo, Colorado 1997-1999

- Improved employee satisfaction survey results by 18% and 23% in 1997 and 1998 respectively, comprising the largest year over year improvements in the company.
- Implemented several departmental programs to include onsite B.S. and M.B.A. programs and formal executive development program.
- Identified as high-potential leader during semi-annual personnel planning review.

M I L I T A R Y E X P E R I E N C E

UNITED STATES ARMY

Commissioned Officer and Aviator, United States, Germany, Italy 1988-1997

- Communicated and negotiated with international governments/organizations while living and operating in multiple foreign nations throughout Europe.
- Gulf War veteran.
- Earned six “top block” ratings on officer evaluation reports.
- Honor graduate of executive management course, executive staff leadership course and leadership/management course.
- Earned George C. Marshall Leadership Award, top military cadet, reserve officer training corps.
- Distinguished military graduate, commissioned as number one cadet, reserve officer training corps.

ABSTRACT

A significant challenge for growing businesses is maintaining the culture that made them successful. An organization's culture is manifested through rewards systems, values, rituals, stories, and celebrations. Vail Resorts' mission is simple: to create the experience of a lifetime for their employees so they can, in turn, provide exceptional experiences for their guests. Vail Resorts faces a challenge: how to grow without becoming disconnected from the heart and soul of skiing and disenfranchising those that have joined the industry for the same purpose-driven reasons upon which the company was founded. This case study explored the specific actions taken by Vail Resorts to help its 24,000 employees identify how their own individual sense of purpose was directly aligned with the organization's greater purpose. Employee survey data (EES) gathered over a 5-year period was examined along with various organizational artifacts in determining which processes and efforts were effective in driving employee engagement through the establishment of greater purpose.

The 5-year analysis highlights strong and consistent positive movement with regard to driving employee engagement through creating greater purpose by all measures. The eight EES questions considered in the research increased 7.1% during the 5-year period, on average. Through a triangulation process of quantitative data and analysis of organizational artifacts, four conclusions were reached. First, purpose engages employees. Second, answers for engaging employees are found within the system. Third, an integrated, holistic, systemic approach is needed to create organization change. Lastly, employees must take ownership of their own sense of purpose as well as the organization's purpose and mission. Implications and recommendations for practitioners are presented to help others in key positions within their organizations enhance employee engagement while also strengthening the organization's sense of purpose. A final

recommendation suggests that organization executives need to take the time to compile, review, and reflect upon all of the workforce data available to them in order to make fully informed decisions. Employees want to believe in their organization and that they are part of something bigger; employers have a unique and powerful opportunity to capitalize upon this potential.

Chapter One: Study Introduction

Pete Seibert, member of the famed 10th Mountain Division (ski troopers) during World War II, had a clear purpose. Upon his return from the war he was on a mission to build a world-class ski resort. He enlisted the help of Earl Eaton, a local Coloradan employed in the ski industry. Between Seibert's vision and passion for skiing, and Eaton's knowledge of the local area, they were able to pinpoint the ideal location, a mountain worthy enough to be shared with the world. Vail opened for its first ski season during the winter of 1962 (Seibert, Johnson, & Killy, 2000). More than 50 years later, Vail Resorts (the organization) continues to build upon Seibert's original purpose of sharing his love of the sport and passion for the mountains with the world.

Statement of the Problem

As Vail Resorts headed into 2009, the Executive Committee (EC) was very aware of how the dramatically landscape in front of them had changed. Over the second half of 2008, they had done a good job making the right short-term course corrections to ensure the company was prepared for the new external reality. Despite the fact that they were right at the peak of their 2008/2009 ski season, Rob Katz, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer (CEO), thought that it was critical that they start to plan what steps, if any, the company should take as a result of their current external reality. With the Dow Jones hitting a 12-year low point of 6547.05 (Twin, 2009) and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012) reporting unemployment at 9.5% and climbing, it was very difficult to predict what was coming their way. However, there certainly seemed to be enough signs of shifts that could have a material impact on the business.

Consumers were once again rethinking how and where they would travel. Corporate travel was being severely curtailed and luxury travel spending was considered by some to be

unseemly. There were questions about the resort real estate business and many travel competitors were struggling with too much debt. Business models that were executed successfully over the previous 5 years might not work the same over the next 5 years.

These challenges could have been viewed with doom and gloom. However, the CEO firmly believed that they offered real opportunity. He felt that the travel industry would go through some dramatic changes over the next few years, and although some organizations would fail and others might merely survive, some would excel. Over the previous 5 years, they had seen wholesale changes in the use of the Internet to market travel, the creation of the fractional and vacation club business, ultra-luxury experience, and eco/green travel. The CEO felt that there were completely new ideas and concepts in the travel industry that would be the winners over the next 5 years and might be perfectly suited to the company's strengths. The CEO challenged the EC to seize the unique moment and be sure they were ready to capitalize on the opportunities that would undoubtedly present themselves while also looking to invent some new ones. Mr. Katz proclaimed that with the organization's financial strength, they had options and needed to make sure that they made the most of them (R. Katz, personal communication, December 30, 2008).

Vail Resorts was entering into the economic crisis very well prepared. They had a strong balance sheet, a committed loyal customer base, irreplaceable assets, and passionate employees. However, change was in the air, and they felt that they needed to make the most of it. To that end, they created a new effort within the company called Vail Resorts Vision (VRV). The goal of VRV was to do their best to see everything that was coming down the road and adjust their efforts accordingly. Prudent strategies over the previous 5 years allowed them to raise their sights to the future, as they were not fighting for their day-to-day survival.

VRV was composed of the EC and a selection of senior individuals from different parts of the company. Although reviewing cost structure was part of this effort, VRV was about something much bigger. It was about further strengthening the best parts of their business and making inroads into new areas that would become the winning strategies in travel coming out of the nation's financial crisis (R. Katz, personal communication, January 21, 2009).

The Organization

With a market capitalization of \$3.62B, revenue in excess of \$1B, and over 24,000 employees, Vail Resorts operates in hundreds of disparate locations throughout the world (Vail Resorts, Inc., 2014). Because of the organization's unique scale, they have been able to hire and retain leading industry experts and build a corporate entity containing deep subject matter expertise in areas like marketing, finance, legal, and human resources. This depth of expertise is unique to the industry, and both of these factors contribute significantly to the company's competitive differentiation and past success.

A significant factor enabling the organization to attract this level of subject matter expertise is their focus on corporate social responsibility. Vail Resorts understands that in order to have a sustainable business they must simultaneously focus upon all of their key stakeholders including employees, guests, shareholders, the communities in which they operate, and the environment (Vail Resorts, Inc., n.d.). They also understand that in order for their guests to enjoy the experience on any one of the mountains they must enjoy their experience in the community. The mountain experience and the community experience are inextricably linked; one cannot succeed without the other. Finally, they understand that their product is the outdoors, and they have a deep commitment and responsibility to preserve and protect the environment in which they operate.

In order to maintain this differentiation of deep subject matter expertise and retain that talent, a key priority identified by the VRV team was ensuring that the organization's employees were fully engaged, as employee engagement was determined to be critically important to long term success and scalability. The challenge for the organization was continuing to grow without becoming disconnected from the heart and soul of the sport and disenfranchising those that have joined the industry for the same purpose-driven reasons upon which Mr. Siebert originally founded the company. The opportunity was to maintain the passion for the sport, an environmental ethic, community commitment, an entrepreneurial spirit, local ownership, and relationship-based culture while simultaneously capitalizing upon the synergies and subject matter expertise of the larger organization.

In order to capitalize upon these synergies, the VRV team identified the desire to fully engage the workforce not only in the specific task at hand, but also in the success of the larger company. This case study explored how Vail Resorts attempted to drive employee engagement by further connecting employees to a larger organizational purpose.

In 2009, Vail Resorts' mission statement was Extraordinary Resorts, Exceptional Experiences. One could argue that this concept did theoretically tie Vail Resorts' diverse operations together. However, the mission statement unfortunately did not have the desired effect on the workforce. Most employees could not remember the mission statement or confused the words and their order.

At that time, the company was not functioning as a cohesive whole. Instead it was a decentralized organization in which each operation, for the most part, operated independently. In many cases, employees loved their jobs, but stated that they hated the company. The corporate

enterprise was considered by many to be disconnected from the passion for the sport, and many employees saw it as concerned only with making money.

Vail Resorts was starting from a place of decentralization where little to no synergies were being realized across the organization. At this point in time, there were few—if any—enterprise-wide processes. Not only were the distinct resorts not working together, but also they were actually competing against one another: competing for both employees and guests. Ultimately, the individual resorts were making short-term decisions that may have allowed them to win individual battles but hampered the larger organization's ability to compete effectively and win the war. The bottom line is that the organization was not aligned and was missing out on the synergies of working together as a larger, more cohesive entity.

The leadership of Vail Resorts realized that they could not continue to work this way, especially in the midst of a recession, and also reach their full potential as a business. The goal was to find a way to allow each resort to maintain its local brand, experience, and entrepreneurial spirit while maximizing the potential of the organization by leveraging the synergies of all the resorts working together in critical areas, such as sharing best practices, leveraging buying power, and moving talent around the organization.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this case study was to determine if employers can drive higher levels of employee engagement by helping employees to identify a greater sense of individual purpose in the workplace. While employers “cannot produce meaning within an employee,” they “can create supportive environments that foster opportunities for producing meaning” (Shuck & Rose, 2013, p. 352). The study reviewed specific actions taken by the employer to help employees identify how their own individual sense of purpose is directly aligned with the organization's

greater purpose and determine whether or not these actions resulted in higher levels of employee engagement. For the goals of this case study, creating greater individual purpose was pursued by focusing on organizational mission, values, community, and environment. The participants in the study were defined as Vail Resorts' approximately 5,000 full-time, year-round employees.

Research Questions

This research case study centered on examining the specific actions taken by Vail Resorts between 2009 and 2013 to drive greater purpose within the organization (as evidenced by a review of the researcher's field log and associated artifacts) and the impacts of those actions on the corresponding 5 years of Employee Engagement Survey (EES) data. Specifically, this research explored the following questions:

1. How has the organization's creation of a renewed mission statement (Experience of a Lifetime) and the efforts to align the organization's culture around this statement further engaged the employee population?
2. How has the organization's creation of redefined values and the efforts to align the organization's culture around these redefined values further engaged the employee population?
3. How has the organization's focus and resulting actions in the area of community had an impact on employee engagement?
4. How has the organization's focus and resulting actions in the area of the natural environment had an impact on employee engagement?
5. How has the organization's focus and resulting actions in the area of employee communication, as it relates to aligning individual sense of purpose with organizational purpose, had an impact on employee engagement?

Conceptual Foundation of Study

Employers have a unique opportunity to optimize the performance of their organization and gain sustainable competitive advantage without incurring significant expense by helping employees find greater purpose in their work. Employees want to know that they work for an organization that is making a positive difference and their role in contributing to the same (Hansen, Dunford, Boss, Boss, & Angermeier, 2011). In this case study the researcher explored the possibility of achieving both of these goals by driving employee engagement through establishing greater purpose. Two key conceptual foundations were explored in this study: employee engagement and establishing individual and organizational sense of purpose.

Employee engagement. Employee engagement can be described as a “deep and broad connection that employees have with a company, as well as their voluntary and enthusiastic commitment to its success” (Gebauer, Lowman, & Gordon, 2008, p. 2). By tapping into employees’ discretionary performance, employers can leverage them as a sustainable competitive differentiator to meet the immediate and future challenges of the external environment. According to Jeffrey Hallett (1987), author of the book *Work Life Visions*:

Eighty percent of what any organization does today can be done equally well by any other organization choosing to compete because access to the information, knowledge, raw materials and technologies needed to do the core, repetitive aspect of any task, is available to anyone who wants it. Therefore, organizations will succeed or fail based upon their ability to utilize the other twenty percent, and the other twenty percent is all people. (p. x)

Hallett’s philosophy implies that an organization’s only sustainable competitive advantage is its people. This is especially important, given that, according to a Gallup Organization study of 80,000 people from 400 different companies:

You can divide any working population into three categories: people who are engaged (loyal and productive), those who are not engaged (just putting in time), and those who are actively disengaged (unhappy and spreading their discontent). The U.S. working

population is 26% engaged, 55% not engaged, and 19% actively disengaged. (LaBarre, 2001, p. 4)

The findings of this study demonstrated that the American workforce is only working to roughly one third of its potential. Therefore, significant opportunity exists if organizations are able to tap into even two thirds of their potential.

Driving employee engagement makes sense on multiple fronts for sophisticated leaders looking to build sustainable businesses. Equating employee engagement with customer engagement, the potential return on investment becomes even clearer. The connection to a larger purpose drives employee engagement, which in turn drives customer satisfaction, likely resulting in revenue growth (Gallup, 2001). Gallup's employee engagement research has consistently shown a connection between employee engagement and customer engagement. Engaged employees are far more likely to find creative ways to solve customer problems or involve their customers in creative service innovations (Krueger & Killham, 2006). Research has also shown that "fully engaged customers deliver a 23% premium over the average customer in terms of share of wallet, profitability, revenue, and relationship growth" (Fleming, Coffman, & Harter, 2005, p. 111). Creating an engaged employee workforce is the right thing to do both for employees and for employers.

Sense of purpose. Belief in a greater purpose helps employees feel that they are working for more than merely a paycheck. As Herzberg's (2003) theory implies, pay does not necessarily serve as a motivator.

Motivation does not come from perks, plush offices, or even promotions or pay. These extrinsic incentives may stimulate people to put their noses to the grindstone – but they will likely perform only as long as it takes to get the next raise or promotion. (p. 2)

At some point in most individuals' lives, they wake up wondering what life is all about. Many contemplate why they do what they do and what it is all adding up to. Are they making a real

and lasting positive difference today and will they ever do so? What legacy will they leave? Too often this introspective contemplation only occurs after a life-changing event, such as the death of a loved one, a life threatening disease, a serious accident, the loss of a job, a divorce, or the like. These unfortunate events have a way of waking one up to the reality and corresponding purpose (or lack thereof) of one's life. This awakening often times leaves individuals wanting more; to know that their efforts are not for nothing; to know that the company they work so hard for day-in and day-out is making a positive difference in the world and that they are playing a role in that; and hoping that when their life comes to an end, they will have left the world a better place than they found it.

This *wanting* is the desire for greater purpose in one's life. This desire is becoming more and more prevalent as baby boomers age and as younger generations demand a more socially responsible world. One sign of this trend is that compensated engagement (paid employment) is decreasing while uncompensated engagement (volunteerism) is increasing. Across all age groups, more and more individuals are spending their discretionary time volunteering (Pink, 2009). This fact alone provides significant opportunity for employers, and an individual's place of employment becomes a prime place for employees and prospective employees to seek purpose. Business leaders now have the unique opportunity to find ways to "infuse mundane business activities with deeper, soul-stirring ideals" (Hamel, 2009, p. 91).

The resulting opportunity for employers in attracting, retaining, and engaging talent is significant. In a survey conducted by Johns Hopkins University of 7,948 students at 48 colleges, they asked students what they considered *very important* to them. Sixteen percent of the students identified "making a lot of money," whereas 78% said their first goal was "finding a purpose and meaning to my life" (Frankl, 1984, p. 100). Indeed, the opportunity for employers to tap into and

capitalize upon this wanting is real and the time to do so is now. A unique and powerful opportunity exists to help employees fulfill this individual sense of wanting through defining and aligning employees with the greater purpose of the organization.

The Case Organization and Setting

Vail Resorts was founded as Vail Associates, Ltd., in 1962. After a series of different ownerships, Vail Associates finally merged with Ralston Resorts in 1996, forming Vail Resorts. In 1997, Vail Associates was renamed Vail Resorts, Inc., with the company conducting an initial public stock offering in the same year (Moran, 2011).

Today, Vail Resorts has approximately 24,000 employees (full-time, part-time, and seasonal) operating in three segments: mountain, lodging, and real estate development. The mountain segment owns and operates eleven ski resorts: Vail, Beaver Creek, Breckenridge and Keystone mountain resorts in Colorado, Heavenly Ski Resort, Kirkwood and Northstar-at-Tahoe Resort in California, Park City and Canyons in Utah, Afton Alps in Minnesota, and Mount Brighton in Michigan. Vail Resorts Hospitality owns and/or manages a portfolio of luxury hotels under the RockResorts brand, a number of hotels and condominiums located in proximity to their ski resorts, three destination resorts at Grand Teton National Park, and several golf courses. The real estate development segment, Vail Resorts Development Company, holds, develops, buys, and sells real estate in and around their resort communities. In addition, the organization also includes a transportation business, approximately 200 specialty retail outlets, and a media segment, which, together, allow for full vertical integration designed to optimize the guest experience (Galpin, Joufflas, & Gasta, 2014).

The researcher's role within Vail Resorts during the time of this research was Executive Vice President, Chief People Officer, and Chief Sustainability Officer. In this role he was

ultimately responsible for all aspects of human resources, employee communication, public affairs, community affairs, and sustainability within the organization. All actions taken within the organization in an attempt to drive purpose and ultimately engagement were at the direction of the researcher. Because of the potential for bias, the conclusions reached were based upon quantitative data and were validated by several colleagues.

Significance of the Case Study

The researcher was of the opinion that aligning the organization's people through purpose would result in greater employee engagement, which in turn would drive the business strategy. In *Execution*, Larry Bossidy and Ron Charan (2002) captured the spirit and intent of the current researcher:

The people process is more important than either the strategy or operations processes. After all, it's the people of an organization who make judgments about how markets are changing, create strategies about those judgments, and translate the strategies into operational realities. To put it simply and starkly: If you don't get the people process right, you will never fulfill the potential of your business. (p. 141)

However, creating sustainable change takes time and in today's business environment, and most people initiatives are derived from a perceived need for a problem to be fixed immediately. Organizational leaders typically respond by creating a process or program that addresses the presenting symptom. However, leaders must take the time to consider a complete, long-term understanding of the business to create sustainable change. They must take the time to consider: why the organization exists, what the organization believes in and how the members of the organization will behave, what the organization aspires to be, what the organization's competitive game plan is, and how the organization will monitor and implement that plan (Collis & Rukstad, 2008). Robert Quinn (2004) captured this propensity toward action at all cost in *Building the Bridge as You Walk On It*:

In the corporate world, we often become addicted to action. We develop organizational cultures that carry the expectations that people will come in early and leave late. We reinforce the compulsive patterns of type A personalities. In this distorted world where we have institutionalized the split of action and reflection, we are trapped in the vortex of slow death. People often recognize the problem but lack the courage to do anything about it. They choose slow death over deep change. (p. 99)

Despite the possible immediate gratification of short term wins, such band aid approaches are often not well integrated or sustainable, let alone aligned with business strategy. In this research, the researcher conveys his attempt to avoid these pitfalls by applying selected guiding principles to develop and execute enterprise-wide people solutions focused on greater purpose in a holistic, integrated way.

Although it is well established that employee engagement has many possible positive benefits for organizations, there exists a gap in the literature as to how to further engage a workforce through enlisting employees in a greater purpose. Through this case study research, the researcher hoped to establish the benefit of galvanizing employees around purpose, which is an abstract concept in the concrete world of organizations. This abstract quality makes taking action elusive. Most leaders intellectually understand and agree that the concept of engaging employees via greater purpose is important and valuable; however, taking the idea from concept to reality is where things traditionally break down. This is where the researcher focused his efforts: translating the abstract concept of purpose into specific actions and measureable outcomes.

The researcher believes that greater employee engagement is a competitive differentiator for employers and that greater purpose is one significant way to drive employee engagement within a workforce. He also believes that his research will benefit researchers and practitioners alike by providing concrete, specific actions from the researcher's field log related to driving employee purpose and the resulting outcomes as measured by the organization's annual EES.

All will be shared in a way to allow the reader, should they so desire, apply similar concepts and strategies in other organizations.

Chapter Summation

Vail Resorts has created an organization that epitomizes the quality of being responsible to both external and internal stakeholders. This study explored how helping employees align their individual sense of purpose with the greater purpose of the larger organization drives employee engagement. Two key conceptual areas, sense of purpose and employee engagement, are explored and presented in a discussion of the literature.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Productivity, efficiency and excellence are subjects that have motivated the writings of economists, organization theorists, management philosophers, financial analysts, management scientists, consultants, and practitioners alike. Although over a century of research on the management and design of organizations exists, the empirical research has not resulted in the development of a universal theory of organizational effectiveness (Lewin & Minton, 1986). For the most part, models of organizational effectiveness have taken a macro approach, focusing on such organization-wide variables as profit and productivity. However, a great opportunity exists to further explore the dynamic relationships between individual behavior and organizational effectiveness. The purpose of this literature review is to create a common understanding of the conceptual foundations of this study that include employee engagement and sense of purpose. The following sections review the history, definitions, drivers, and the power of both employee engagement and purpose within a workforce. The chapter concludes with a discussion of sense of purpose and its role in shaping and influencing employee engagement and ultimately impacting organizational effectiveness.

Employee Engagement

According to Saks (2006),

Employee engagement has become a hot topic in recent years among consulting firms and in the popular business press. However, employee engagement has rarely been studied in the academic literature and relatively little is known about its antecedents and consequences. (p. 600)

The reason employee engagement has been a hot topic with consulting firms and the popular business press is because research demonstrates that employee engagement is at an all-time low. Gallup (2013) reported that only 30% of U.S. employees are engaged at work and only 13% of employees worldwide are engaged. The employee engagement challenge is not a new one, and

the evolution of employee engagement has not been a linear path. This path was forged by individuals who believed in the humanistic organization (R. A. Martinez, personal communication, October 21, 2005) and were passionate about doing the right things for people, organizations, and the world at large. The founders of the humanistic movement believed in the joint optimization of sub-systems, that inclusion is better than exclusion, that collaboration will provide better answers to organizational challenges, and that commitment is better than coercion (E. Kur, personal communication, October 17, 2005).

History of employee engagement. Individuals choose how to show up in the workforce; “people can use varying degrees of their selves, physically, cognitively, and emotionally, in work role performances, which has implications for both their work and their experiences” (Kahn, 1990, p. 692). Since the Hawthorne studies of the 1920s (“George Elton Mayo,” 2002), researchers and practitioners alike have recognized that employee involvement increases both productivity and motivation. Argyris (1989), Beckhard (1975), McGregor (1960), Lewin (1951), Likert (1979), Schein (1992), Tannenbaum (Tannenbaum, Weschler, & Massarik, 1961), and many others (i.e., French, Bell, Raia, and Margulies) showed how managers who treated people as adults, involved them appropriately in the tasks for which they are accountable, and created conditions so employees could obtain good feedback and monitor their own performance were more effective than those who did not (Schein, 1996).

This progressive thought can be tracked back to the desire—through better human engineering—to rationalize the way work is done and the way the workforce is utilized to increase output (Grievess, 2000). This rational scientific approach to management began largely as a result of the work of Fredrick Winslow Taylor, an American engineer who pioneered what is known as *scientific management*. Although Taylor was one of the most maligned and criticized

of all classical theorists, he was also one of the most influential. His scientific approach called for detailed observation and measurement of even the smallest tasks (i.e., time-in-motion studies). This reductionist thinking was shared by Taylor and others (i.e., Weber, Gilbreth, and Gantt) and led to rapid advances in mechanized efficiencies through standardization and bureaucratization leading into the industrial revolution. This time period, the early 1900s, included clearly defined roles and even more clearly defined authority (Metzgar, 2004). Taylor (as cited in Morgan, 1997) was infamously noted to have said to employees, “You are not supposed to think. There are other people paid for thinking around here” (p. 25).

From these scientific approaches emerged the true beginning and exploration of employee engagement emphasizing humanistic interventions in social systems. This human relations approach resulted in the work environment beginning to become focused on employees’ social needs and ways of meeting them to increase motivation and organizational productivity (Grieves, 2000). Among others, some of the first generation contributors include Douglas McGregor (1960)—human motivation, Warren Bennis (1999)—leadership and management theory, and Edgar Schein (1992)—organizational culture. The foundational work of these minds began the humanistic movement that was defined by contributions to a theory of practice through intervention strategies and team development, as well as a proliferation of training approaches to personal growth and empowerment through self-directed learning (Grieves, 2000).

Employee engagement is a compilation of sciences and practices on which the principles of the conceptual area is based. Key figures in the early history of employee engagement were

Influenced by concepts and experiences from a wide variety of disciplines, including social psychology, clinical psychology, family group therapy, ethnography, military psychology and psychiatry, the theater, general semantics, social work, systems theory, mathematics and physics, philosophy, psychodrama, client-centered therapy, survey methodology, experimental and action research, human resources management,

organizational behavior, general management theory, and large conference management. (French & Bell, 1999, p. 53)

In his article, “Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work,” William Kahn (1990) asserted that engagement theory has its roots in the theories of Goffman, who “suggested that people’s attachment to and detachment from their roles varies. Behaviors signifying a lack of separation between people and their roles indicate role embracement, and behaviors pointedly separating them from disdained roles indicate role distance” (p. 694). This implies that employees consciously decide how to show up on-stage, and unless organizations are able to engage the whole person, employees are likely to show up at work in a superficial way: just punching the clock, going through the motions, doing the minimum necessary, and counting the minutes until the end of their shift when they can go home and get on with their lives. What they fail to recognize is that life is what is happening while they are busy making other plans (Saunders, 1957). These individuals are missing their lives while waiting for something more. They essentially separate themselves from their work, treating it more like a necessary evil instead of a valuable endeavor in which they are aligned with their skills and passion and contributing to something greater than themselves: something they understand and for which they believe they are making a real and lasting positive difference. They are literally working for the weekend; unfortunately, life is passing them by while they are waiting for the weekend to come. Work is about a search for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor: in short for a sort of life rather than a Monday to Friday sort of dying (Terkel, 1974).

Figure 1 visually depicts the conceptual foundations upon which employee engagement theory has been built. The first scholarly article on engagement at work was published by

William Kahn in 1990 in the *Academy of Management Journal* (Schuck & Wollard, 2013).

Kahn's research included

Two qualitative, theory-generating studies of summer camp counselors and members of an architecture firm were conducted to explore the conditions at work in which people personally engage, or express and employ their personal selves, and disengage, or withdraw and defend their personal selves. (Kahn, 1990, p. 692)

Kahn's (1990) conceptualization of personal engagement at work would be the first piece of empirical research on employee engagement published until early 2001, when Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) focused on why employees develop job burnout. Kahn and Maslach et al. provided the two earliest theoretical frameworks for understanding employee engagement (Saks, 2006). Ultimately May, Gilson, and Harter (2004) study validated Kahn's findings, determining that his work was "important in determining one's engagement at work" (p. 30). Despite the research to date, there is still very little empirical research that explains the process through which engagement develops (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009).

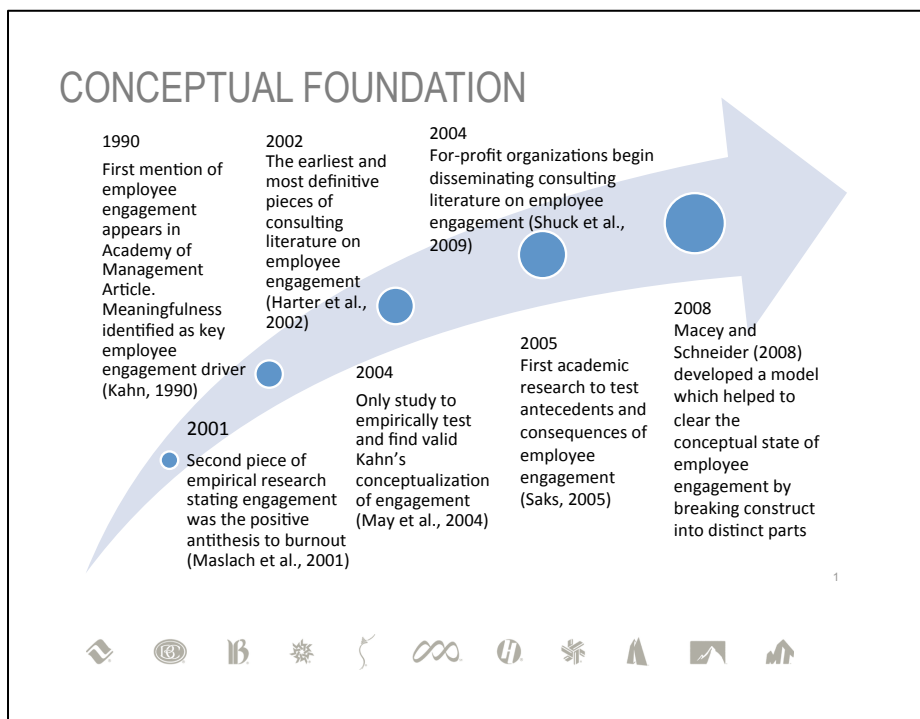


Figure 1. Conceptual foundations of employee engagement.

Definition of employee engagement. While employee engagement has emerged as a recent business driver of organizational success (Lockwood, 2007), employee engagement is still an emerging theory and does not lend itself to being defined as a concise science with clear delineations of what it encompasses. “Several definitions of employee engagement exist. Although each represents unique perspectives of the time and field, the disjointed approach to defining employee engagement has lent itself to the mischaracterization of the construct and the potential for misinterpretation” (Schuck & Wollard, 2013, p. 137). While there is no one universally accepted definition of employee engagement, many definitions can be found in both the practitioner and academic literature. From an academic standpoint, William Kahn (1990) provided what was perhaps the first formal definition of employee engagement: “the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (p. 694). Kahn went on to define personal engagement as “the simultaneous employment and expression of a person’s ‘preferred self’ in task behaviors that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence, and active full role performances” (p. 700). Other prominent researchers’ definitions include Maslach et al.’s (2001) “a persistent, positive affective-motivational state of fulfillment in employees characterized by high levels of activation and pleasure” (p. 417). Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes’s (2002) proposed that “employee engagement refers to the individual’s involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work” (p. 269). More recently, after a structured review of the literature, Wollard and Shuck (2011) defined employee engagement as “an individual employee’s cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state directed toward desired organizational outcomes” (p. 103).

From a practitioner standpoint, Towers Watson's (as cited in Prasad, 2012) framework for engagement consists of three components. According to their model, in order to be engaged, employees must have: a rational understanding of the organization's goals, values, and how they contribute (Think); emotional/affective attachment to the organization, their job and their work (Feel); and motivation and willingness to invest discretionary effort to go above and beyond (Act).

Within all of these definitions and models much commonality exists and while

The definition and meaning of engagement in the practitioner literature often overlaps with other constructs, in the academic literature it has been defined as a distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components that are associated with individual role performance. (Saks, 2006, p. 602)

For the purposes of this research, Saks's (2006) definition of employee engagement, as stated previously, was utilized: essentially employees providing work for not only their heads and hands at work, but also their hearts. When employees are connected at an emotional level—with their hearts—they come to work in a way that allows them to provide their discretionary performance to the tasks at hand. Meaning instead of only doing what is directly asked of them, they go above and beyond the minimum expectations as outlined in the job description because they believe in what the organization is doing, understand their role in the success of the larger organization, and are personally invested in doing their part to help the organization achieve its goals and aspirations.

Drivers of employee engagement. A great deal of research has been done on multitude of factors (or drivers) that may result in greater workforce engagement. Douglas McGregor (1960), through his well-known Theory X and Theory Y approach, drew a distinction between the assumptions about human motivation that underlie different approaches to leadership. Theory X assumes that people dislike work and must be coerced, controlled, and directed toward

organizational goals. Furthermore, most people prefer to be treated this way so they can avoid responsibility. Theory Y—the integration of goals—emphasizes the average person’s intrinsic interest in his/her work, his/her desire to be self-directing and to seek responsibility, and his/her capacity to be creative in solving business problems.

To further this Theory Y school of thought, Frederick Herzberg’s (2003) research indicated that “the factors involved in producing job satisfaction (and motivation) are separate and distinct from the factors that lead to dissatisfaction” (p. 9). What Herzberg called *hygiene factors* are minimum expectations that, when not present, lead to workforce dissatisfaction. Hygiene factors are basic needs extrinsic to the job and include: company policy and administration, supervision, interpersonal relationships, working conditions, salary, status, and security. However, when these hygiene factors are present, Herzberg found that they do not lead to satisfaction or motivation. Once hygiene factors are addressed in the workplace, the opportunity to motivate employees then exists within what he called *motivator factors*. These factors are intrinsic to the job and include: achievement, recognition for achievement, the work itself, responsibility, and growth or advancement. Ultimately, employee engagement goes beyond and must be preceded by hygiene factors. In other words, hygiene factors are the price of entry in terms of attracting and retaining talent, whereas motivator factors result in employees going above and beyond by providing their discretionary performance to the employer. To drive engagement, ultimately a balance must be sought among salary, advancement, and status, alongside being involved in work that feels good (Kahn, 2010).

Both McGregor’s and Herzberg’s theories are natural extensions of Abraham Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs theory, which states that people have a pyramid hierarchy of needs that they need to satisfy from bottom to top, starting from mere subsistence all the way through self-

actualization. Maslow felt that until one's foundational needs (bottom of the pyramid) were met, one could not advance up the pyramid to the higher level needs. In terms of how this theory manifests itself in the workplace, Maslow (1971) wrote that individuals who do not see the workplace as purposeful will not work up to their professional capacity, pointing to the potential of going beyond meeting employee's basic needs by connecting with their intrinsic values. The bottom line point is that work that has little personal meaning does not fulfill employees' psychological needs (Maslow, 1970).

The opportunity clearly exists for organizations to tap into these intrinsic motivators; the question then becomes how. Many diverse models exist that outline multiple possible drivers, including some derived from empirical research and others found in practitioner journals. Kahn (1990) identified three psychological conditions associated with engagement or disengagement at work; workers were more engaged at work in situations that offered them more psychological meaningfulness, when they felt a sense of psychological safety, and when they were more psychologically available (Saks, 2006). The other empirically based model of engagement comes from Maslach et al. (2001), which identifies six areas of work-life that lead to either burnout or engagement: workload, control, rewards and recognition, community and social support, perceived fairness, and values (Saks, 2006). Many practitioner models also exist. For example, practitioner engagement models range from Gallup's Q12 elements of worker engagement outlined in Table 1 (Harter, 2001) to Towers Watson's identified drivers for sustainable engagement: values and integrity, contribution, development opportunity, fairness and trust, feedback, talent retention, build capability, mastering change, and business knowledge (Prasad, 2012).

Table 1

Gallup's Elements of Worker Engagement

Number	Element
1.	I know what is expected of me at work.
2.	I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.
3.	At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
4.	In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.
5.	My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.
6.	There is someone at work who encourages my development.
7.	At work, my opinions seem to count.
8.	The mission/purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.
9.	My associates (fellow employees) are committed to doing quality work.
10.	I have a best friend at work.
11.	In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.
12.	This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.

Note. Adapted from *Employee Engagement: What's Your Engagement Ratio?* by Gallup, 2008. Copyright 2008 by the author.

Employers face challenge in identifying the engagement drivers within their particular workforce setting to make the work rewarding, make the work purposeful, and help the workforce derive meaning from the work. Saks (2006) conducted the first academic research to specifically conceptualize and test the drivers and consequences of employee engagement. He “provided an important bridge between previous theories of employee engagement, practitioner literature, and the academic community” (Schuck & Wollard, 2013, p. 136). Employee engagement drivers related to purpose can be found in any product, organization, or industry. One key to employee engagement for any employer then becomes to effectively identify the *why* of the work, articulate that *why* clearly and concisely, and help employees find alignment and motivation from the same. This concept will be explored further in the following section on purpose.

Power of employee engagement. “Research on engagement is in a stage of relative infancy and much more needs to be done in order to understand its antecedents, process

mechanisms, and outcomes” (Van Rooy, Whitman, Hart, & Caleo, 2011, p. 150). Despite the ambiguity in both clearly defining employee engagement and the best ways in which to influence employee engagement, the power of engagement is largely recognized as a key differentiator in business performance. From the beginning of engagement research, it was commonly agreed that “that engagement leads to both individual outcomes (i.e. quality of people’s work and their own experiences of doing that work), as well as organizational-level outcomes (i.e. the growth and productivity of organizations)” (Saks, 2006, p. 606). The research of Harter et al. (2002) has shown that engagement is directly related to meaningful business outcomes at a magnitude that has the potential to be critically important and highly valuable to all organizations. It is only by having a fully engaged workforce that employees are able to reach their fullest potential, resulting in the business also reaching its fullest potential. Although extensive research has validated the connection among employee engagement, customer satisfaction, and business results, for the purposes of this research the following paragraphs will attempt to highlight just a few of the significant studies that support these conclusions.

Right Management (2006) conducted an extensive study in 2005 in which their “sampling procedure was based on a statistical methodology that was representative of all employees in the United States by job level, industry sector and geographic location” (p. 9). The study featured 10,319 American respondents. The benefits that Right Management identified from having a highly engaged workforce included increased levels of customer focus, a better understanding by employees of how they contribute to the business, and an empowered feeling that each employee has the ability to deliver what the customers require. In addition, the results of the study also demonstrated a relationship between employee engagement levels and employee retention, the ability to retain customers, and improved financial performance. Right

Management's data allowed them to go farther in calculating the financial benefit of having an engaged workforce. They found that having an engaged workforce resulted in significantly higher revenue per employee when compared to a less engaged workforce.

A 2003 Gallup meta-analysis (Ott, 2007) suggested that investors should pay close attention to the engagement levels of the companies in which they are investing. Gallup's research into earnings per share (EPS) between high engagement workforces and low engagement workforces yielded "powerful proof that employee engagement correlates to crucial business outcomes" (p. 2). The research went on to conclude that companies with highly engaged workforces have "12% higher customer advocacy, 18% higher productivity, and 12% higher profitability" (p. 3) when compared to companies determined to have workforces that have low workforce engagement.

Fleming et al. (2005) also completed a meta-analysis that included the financial performance of 1,979 business units in 10 companies. Their findings showed that business units that scored above their database median on both employee and customer engagement metrics were, on average, 3.4 times more effective financially (in terms of total sales and revenue, performance to target, and year-over-year gain in sales and revenue) than units that ranked in the bottom half on both measures.

Although the upside of engaged employees is well documented, employers must also consider the downside of having disengaged employees. Gallup's (2001) research on disaffected workers estimated "that the lower productivity of actively disengaged workers penalizes U.S. economic performance by about \$300 billion, or a figure nearly equal to the defense budget" (p. 1). In addition, the meta-analysis concluded that companies with disengaged employees

experience “31% to 51% more employee turnover, 51% more inventory shrinkage, and 62% more accidents” than companies with highly engaged workforces (Ott, 2007, p. 2).

The potential of greater levels of employee engagement in most if not all businesses is clearly significant. For further exploration, the *Forbes* article titled “Why Employee Engagement?” (Kruse, 2012) identifies 28 unique research studies that expand upon the correlations between employee engagement and service, sales, quality, safety, retention, sales, profit, and total shareholder return.

It is interesting to note that most of the studies on employee engagement cited in this research were published before the economic crisis of 2008. As cited earlier in the chapter, Maslow (1943) and Herzberg (2003) spoke to the imperative of meeting employees’ basic needs before the potential exists to further engage them through intrinsic rewards. With increased economic uncertainty, higher unemployment rates, and lower wages, both employee and employers alike appear to have been more focused on survival than creating higher levels of employee engagement. One point of validation can be found in the research study titled “Measuring Employee Engagement During a Financial Downturn,” where Van Rooy et al. (2011) found that the proportion of organizations experiencing a decline in employee engagement during this same timeframe increased. These factors may provide some explanation as to the reduction of new scholarly research being published during the time period of this study regarding proactive methods of driving employee engagement.

Sense of Purpose

Very few people wake up every day with the objective of causing others harm. Conversely, research has consistently suggested that employees seek opportunities to make a contribution with their work (Fairlie, 2011). In fact, few get involved with anything believing

that their contributions will not matter (Shuck & Rose, 2013). A sense of belonging to something bigger than oneself is both a basic human need and an important element of employee engagement (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Further, a field study published in the *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* explored engagement at work and found that meaningfulness (or purpose) had “the strongest effect on employee engagement when compared to multiple factors” (May et al., 2004, p. 32). It is human nature to seek purpose and “that nature is now being revealed and expressed on a scale that is demographically unprecedented and, until recently, scarcely imaginable. The consequences could rejuvenate our businesses and remake our world” (Pink, 2009, p. 144).

The challenge is that most individuals do not know how to fulfill the desire to contribute to a greater good. Many feel stuck in their day-to-day lives without the perceived ability (whether due to cost of living, family obligations, fear, etc.) to follow a path that will allow them to live their purpose, make a difference, and leave a lasting legacy. It is not surprising, then, that the best-selling hardback book in publishing history is *The Purpose Driven Life*, authored by Rick Warren (Hamel & Breen, 2007), reinforcing the notion that many individuals desire to identify and live their purpose.

Within this gap lies a powerful opportunity for employers. A study published in the *Financial Times* found that “nearly 80 percent of students polled wanted to find socially responsible employment” (Knight, 2006, p. 1). When one then considers that Americans spend over 50% of their lives at work (The Inventure Group, 2003) and that 70% of working Americans are unfulfilled in their jobs (Gallup, 2013), suddenly it becomes very clear that a significant opportunity exists for employers to gain a competitive advantage by enabling employees to find at work what they are ultimately seeking: greater purpose in their lives.

History of purpose. Over time, many of the teachings derived from philosophy and the world's religions have focused upon the giving of oneself and the need to find purpose in one's life. "From the moment that human beings first stared into the sky, contemplated their place in the universe, and tried to create something that bettered the world and outlasted their lives, we have been purpose seekers" (Pink, 2009, p. 132). History supports this idea, and the first century Stoic philosopher Seneca (n.d.) expressed this sentiment when he wrote, "No one can live happily who has regard for himself alone and transforms everything into a question of his own utility" (Epistle 48, para. 1). Identifying purpose in one's life was less of a challenge in pre-industrial society, when "work was performed in the same community setting where people lived. Consequently, people knew one another closely and saw the connection between their work and how that work benefited the rest of the community" (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009, p. 191). Today, the same rallying cry for purpose and service is heard from authors, philosophers, entrepreneurs, and businessmen alike, and work has largely "lost its original sense of meaning as an integral part of human existence" (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009, p. 192).

In today's complex work environment, personal effort and how that effort impacts the whole is much less linear. Paul Hawken (1993) advocated for greater purpose in the workplace by proclaiming that the "ultimate purpose of business is not, or should not be, simply to make money. Nor is it merely a system of making and selling things. The promise of business is to increase the general well-being of humankind through service" (p. 1). This clarity of purpose is possible, and it is up to employers to help their employees translate individual roles into impact and outcome.

The modern day workforce appears to agree with Hawken's beliefs. According to Net Impact's *Talent Report: What Workers Want in 2012* (Zukin & Szeltner, 2012), 53% of workers

and 73% of students said that having a job where they can *make an impact* is very important or essential to their happiness. More than half of all workers and roughly two-thirds of students also said that making a contribution to society or making a better world is very important or essential to their ideal job. Increasingly more, employees must feel a greater sense of purpose if leaders want their organizations to reach the highest potential. Hence, supervisors have a powerful opportunity at their disposal to “help people see how their work connects to a broader purpose, reminding them about and helping them to see the larger context of their work” (Harter et al., 2002, p. 276).

Because more and more employees are seeking greater purpose in their work, employers are taking notice in an attempt to attract and retain the best talent, ultimately maximizing productivity and profitability. As a result, workplace purpose has taken on a much higher priority in the scheme of business, unleashing new potential in the modern economy. In his article, “Unlocking the Mysteries of Intrinsic Motivation,” Thomas (2000) supported this trend by identifying sense of meaning and purpose as one of the four most impactful intrinsic rewards when attempting to drive employee engagement. By pursuing a goal larger than profit, businesses have the potential to create even more success by tapping into intrinsic workforce motivations, producing higher levels of employee engagement and resulting in higher levels of profit. A sense of purpose has additional potential beyond increased profits; a study guided by self-determination theory concluded that “attainment of intrinsic aspirations related positively to psychological health” (Niemic, Ryan, & Deci, 2009, p. 291), possibly increasing overall wellbeing within a workforce and yielding other positive impacts including reduced healthcare expenditures. In today’s competitive business environment, it is clear that significant potential

exists in the pursuit of higher levels of workforce purpose at both the individual and organizational level.

Definition of purpose. Economist Milton Friedman (2008) argued that profit maximization should itself be the sole purpose of a company. Peter Senge (1990) disagreed and stated that while “profitability is a performance requirement for all businesses, it is not a purpose” (p. 263). Shareholder value or personal wealth maximization lacks the emotional connection and subsequent power to mobilize a workforce. Rewards tend to have an immediate but quickly diminishing effect upon performance and engagement. If these factors do not motivate individuals to do their best work, how then do leaders ensure that their businesses reach their fullest potential?

Businesses reach their potential by ensuring each and every employee reaches his/her highest individual potential. For individuals to reach their highest potential, they must understand how their efforts contribute to something greater than themselves. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1997) made this point by writing that “one cannot lead a life that is truly excellent without feeling that one belongs to something greater and more permanent than oneself” (p. 131). This can be accomplished by enlisting employees in the greater purpose of their work. Purpose or “meaning at work implies a relationship between the person and the organization or the workplace, in terms of commitment and engagement” (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009, p. 198).

Little agreement exists regarding the definition and theoretical frameworks of purpose in the workplace. The purpose-related literature that does exist often utilizes the word *meaningfulness* as opposed to purpose. With respect to this research, purpose and meaningfulness will be utilized interchangeably. Although one common definition does not

exist, many can be found in the literature. Baumeister and Vohs (2002) stated that the essence of meaningfulness is *connection* and is linked to positive outcomes for both the individual and the organization. Kahn (1990) defined meaningfulness as the positive “sense of return on investments of self in role performance” (p. 705). The Inventure Group (2003), a coaching and consulting group focused exclusively on purpose, defined workplace purpose as “the inward intent that drives outward action” (p. 9). They went on to say that when employees have a clear sense of purpose and are operating in alignment with it, they tap into a powerful source: their full potential. In their book *Conscious Capitalism*, John Mackey and Rajendra Sisodia (2013) defined purpose in the workplace as “the reason a company exists. A compelling sense of higher purpose creates an extraordinary degree of engagement among all stakeholders and catalyzes creativity, innovation, and organizational commitment” (p. 33). Mackey and Sisodia wrote that “a firm’s purpose is the glue that holds the organization together. You can also think of it as a magnet that attracts the right people – the right team members, customers, suppliers, and investors – to the business and aligns them” (p. 46). Douglas Ready and Emily Steckor Truelove (2011) have defined purpose as “the company’s reason for being; why it exists; its core mission as an enterprise” (p. 19). In their book *Built to Last*, Jim Collins and Jerry Porras (1994) defined purpose as “the organization’s fundamental reason for existence beyond just making money – a perpetual guiding star on the horizon; not to be confused with specific goals or business strategies” (p. 73). Likely the most useful definition of purpose comes from Damon, Menon, and Cotton Bronk (2003), who described purpose as “a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self” (p. 121). Finally, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (“Purpose,” n.d.) boils all of

this complexity down into something very basic and relevant, defining purpose as “the reason something is done or used: the aim or intention of something” (para. 1).

While no single agreed upon definition for purpose in the workplace exists, much commonality can be found within the literature, including that purpose: is a company’s reason for being, goes beyond solely making money, serves as a guiding star for decision making, engages and aligns stakeholders, and results in both the employees and the business reaching their fullest potential. In the context of this research, the *something* referred to in the Merriam-Webster definition is life itself (“Purpose”, n.d.). Said differently, for the use of this research, purpose can be defined as the intention of one’s life and how that life is used in the work environment.

Drivers of purpose. Historically, individuals have tolerated making a living at jobs that violated their basic values, even when their survival did not absolutely demand it (Palmer, 2004). In today’s competitive employment environment, this lack of values alignment is no longer sustainable. According to Havener (1999), organizations need to address and understand the deeper needs of employees in order to retain them and keep them motivated, as “talented people demand meaningful work...[;] deny it, they leave” (p. 1). Today, the citizens of the world have begun to identify themselves as part of a larger whole, recognizing that they have a greater purpose in life and can make a positive difference in the lives of others. This shift in ethical worldview will undoubtedly create behaviors that will influence companies to act in a socially responsible way (Hatcher, 2004).

In his book *Common Purpose*, Joel Kurtzman (2010) referred to this concept of employees going above and beyond in pursuit of a larger purpose as *scriptless service*. Kurtzman’s research found that “problem-solving scripts or manuals no longer work.

Individuals operating in organizations have to think for themselves based on an understanding of the company's vision, mission, and brand" (p. 34): all components of purpose when done correctly. Said differently, when employees understand and are aligned with the purpose of the organization (i.e., mission, vision, brand), only then will they be able to perform at their highest level in service of the larger organization and the greater whole. Without this alignment and clear understanding of what the organization is attempting to accomplish, the employee will not have the benefit of a north star providing direction in decision making and the confidence to be bold and take risks in the service of the organization.

All companies have a greater purpose to articulate. If nothing else, "by providing jobs, investing capital, purchasing goods, and doing business every day, corporations have a profound and positive influence on society" (Porter & Kramer, 2006, p. 14). By taking the time to develop and clearly articulate a workplace purpose, the employer makes it easier for employees to recognize that their efforts are contributing to a mission larger than themselves. Finding and heeding a work mission that goes beyond an individual has many naturally productive consequences; it provides employees with a source of deep energy and allows employees to become clear about how others may benefit from their efforts. Ultimately, a well-articulated workplace purpose provides guidance for employee conduct and a focus for spending precious time meaningfully (Leider, 2010).

As presented in his article "Good to Great," Jim Collins's (2001) research found that in order to create an organization that "produces sustained great results," the company must be able to articulate "a purpose beyond just making money" (p. 14). However there is no "one size fits all" in terms of purpose, and it is difficult "to intrinsically motivate work teams comprised of varying personalities and perceptions on an organizational level" (Wollard & Shuck, 2011,

p. 435). Once a clearly articulated purpose is established, the opportunity exists to help each individual in the organization understand how his/her role aligns with and contributes to this larger goal. More often than not employees go through the motions of their day-to-day tasks without a clear understanding of the importance of their specific role within the larger whole. The opportunity exists to help employees understand and embrace their particular roles, as well as recognize how they fit within this value chain. Therefore, organizations must look at purpose on both a micro and a macro level.

In his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, Victor Frankl (1984) recounted his experiences as a prisoner in the Auschwitz concentration camp during World War II. During his incarceration he observed inmates that were able to persevere even under the most difficult of circumstances simply because they had a stronger reason to live. They were able to identify meaning and purpose even in such a dire situation. He argued that individuals desire meaning in their lives and that a purpose greater than oneself differentiates those, in an extreme sense, that ultimately survive. Thankfully, modern employment can in no way be compared to the Holocaust; however, translating these concepts to the work environment has significant potential. Greater purpose can result in many positive outcomes for both the employee and employer alike, allowing each to not only survive but also thrive.

On a macro level, employers have the opportunity to help employees identify how they fit into the larger picture of the organization's success and how that success has the potential to make a positive difference not only for the individual but also in terms of the greater good. For example, employers can help an employee understand that by providing a better customer experience, he/she is ultimately helping the company grow revenue, and that some of that revenue will be reinvested in employee programs, community efforts, and environmental

conservation. Organizations have the opportunity to help each employee draw a correlation among individual purpose, effort, and creating a better environment for himself (employee), his/her family (community), and the world (environment). The more intrinsic motivators there are driving an individual to do what he does, the more engaged in the work he will ultimately be. As an example, in a study of call center representatives making fundraising calls, it was determined that “the people who read about what their work accomplished, raised more than twice as much money, through twice as many pledges. The purpose of their work doubled their performance” (Pink, 2009, p. 138). Helping employees to identify individual purpose and how that aligns with the workplace purpose has significant potential to increase engagement and subsequently workplace performance.

A company that fails to identify and articulate a purpose worthy of commitment misses a unique opportunity to foster greater commitment and productivity within a workforce. If employees do not find purpose within their work, they potentially end up leading a fragmented life and the employer misses the opportunity to tap into “the passion, imagination, willingness to take risks, patience, persistence, and desire for meaning that are the cornerstones of long-term financial success” (Senge, 1990, p. 263).

Power of purpose. As human beings, we yearn for meaning in our lives (Maslow, 1970); as employees, we yearn for meaning in our work (Fairlie, 2011). In pursuit of higher and higher levels of organizational performance, progressive employers are contemplating how to utilize purpose to motivate and align individuals so that they show up and provide their discretionary performance at work. Peters (1994) recognized that a huge potential reserve of energy and commitment in organizations could be released by making meaning for people

highlighting the fact that people desperately need meaning in their lives and will sacrifice a great deal to organizations that provide this meaning for them.

Chalofsky and Krishna (2009) concluded that before employees can find purpose in the workplace, they must first be aware of their own values, beliefs, and purpose in life. Once employees find this clarity, they can then seek “alignment between one’s purpose in life and the purpose for the work” (p. 196). The power of purpose comes alive when organizations can help individual employees identify their own purpose and articulate a clear organizational purpose that resonates with and inspires individuals within an organization (Ready & Truelove, 2011). When organizations get purpose right, as the individual is doing her work, she is constantly reminded (through the common purpose) of the big-picture impact of what the work relates to (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2003).

To accomplish this, many employers are now attempting to articulate how employees’ actions contribute to a greater good, attempting to connect employees to a purpose larger than the individual self and the task at hand. For example, Walt Disney attempts to further engage their employees not by saying that an employee’s job is to sell tickets at the entry gate but rather to make people happy. Undoubtedly, Disney’s goal is for each ticket agent to see his/her individual role in the larger whole and understand that he/she plays an important part in the overall customer experience. Many more examples exist, including Merck’s purpose, “To preserve and improve human life” (Collins & Porras, 1996, p. 69), Mary Kay Cosmetics’ “To give unlimited opportunity to women” (Collins & Porras, 1996, p. 69), the Grameen Bank’s desire to eliminate poverty, or Fannie Mae’s purpose of making housing affordable (Freeman, Velamuri, & Ramakrishna, 2006).

Each of these organizations is an example of companies that go well beyond the metrics of the business with the belief that by focusing on the *why* of the work, the desired outcomes (i.e., revenue) will follow.

These companies know why they exist, what they want to accomplish and how their values will serve as guideposts along the journey. Because they understand that humans seek meaning in their work, they have infused their workforces with a compelling and ambitious purpose that serves as a gravitational force – one that binds disparate people together, enabling them to achieve together what none could accomplish alone. (Ready & Truelove, 2011, p. 18)

Knowing *why* an organization exists is necessary to succeed and sustain over time. Companies that enjoy enduring success have core values and a core purpose (the *why*) that remain fixed while their business strategies and practices adapt endlessly to a changing world (Collins & Porras, 1996). Purpose helps to further define the *why* and includes defining an organization's "vision – where you would like to be; strategy – how you intend to get there; and ethics – the kind of behavior and standards along the way" (Crainer, 2011, p. 15). As Csikszentmihalyi (2003) proposed, this clarity of purpose results in meaningful work that allows employees to enter a *flow* state through which they are more engaged, creative, and productive, thus leading to superior results. Csikszentmihalyi (1975) defined flow as the "holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement" (p. 36). Another way to articulate total involvement is full engagement as a result of greater purpose discovered through meaningful work. The end result for both the individual and organizational level is that a compelling purpose has the potential to "get everybody pointed in the same direction and moving together in harmony" (Mackey & Sisodia, 2013, p. 46).

Utilizing purpose to drive employee engagement. For any employer, creating stronger employee engagement within their workforce is clearly a desirous outcome. However, with all of the possible motivators and demotivators, the biggest challenge for today's employers is

determining where to focus their engagement efforts. This is especially challenging for the human resources field, “A field that is often called on to develop interventions for the development of such a construct” (Schuck & Wollard, 2013, p. 137). Although little empirical research has been conducted on all of the factors that predict employee engagement, it is possible to identify a number of potential precursors from Kahn’s model (Saks, 2006). As stated previously, “Kahn (1990) found that there were three psychological conditions associated with engagement or disengagement at work: meaningfulness, safety, and availability” (Saks, 2006, p. 602). The present research study focused specifically on Kahn’s first identified factor, meaningfulness or purpose, by helping employees to identify how they are connected to the larger whole and understand how their roles contribute to the success of the larger organization.

Greater purpose has the potential to be a productive area for employers to focus their efforts and pay significant dividends, as it serves as “a potent source of employee engagement” (Ready & Truelove, 2011, p. 23). Although the empirical research is not currently as robust as one would desire, “There is empirical support for the association between meaningfulness and engagement” (Soane et al., 2013, p. 443). May et al.’s (2004) quantitative study showed that meaningfulness was a strong associate of engagement and, the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development’s (Truss et al., 2006) quantitative study found similar results. Primary drivers identified for this type of engagement are personal identification with the organizations values and the internalization of organizational values and mission (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009). Similarly, Fairlie’s (2011) study demonstrated that meaningful work was a strong correlate and a unique predictor of employee engagement. The Gallup organization, a leader in researching and measuring employee engagement, clearly acknowledged this simply by the fact that one of the only 12 questions included in their universally respected EES is “The mission/purpose of my

company makes me feel my job is important” (Gallup, 2008, p. 2). Further, a field study published in the *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* explored engagement at work and found that meaningfulness (or purpose) had “the strongest effect on employee engagement when compared to multiple factors” (May et al., 2004, p. 32), “yet, little research has explored an explicit connection between these two research variables” (Fairlie, 2011, p. 510). Hence, a unique opportunity for competitive differentiation exists for those businesses to able to articulate greater purpose with clarity and enlist others in their vision.

All employers have the opportunity to translate how individual roles and specific tasks add up to a much larger impact. When leaders connect teams and organizations to a sense of higher purpose, employees respond with their discretionary performance. Social identity theory suggests that an “individual defines him – or herself partly in terms of salient group memberships” (Ashforth & St. Mael, 1989, p. 34), such as the organization for which they work. When an employer can successfully help employees understand the value of the work they are doing and the difference that they are making, this effort is rewarded handsomely with higher levels of engagement, stronger performance, and the ability to more easily attract and retain outstanding talent.

A gap exists “in understanding how engagement emerges in practice and what strategies human resource development practitioners can utilize to cultivate positive conditions for employee engagement” (Shuck & Rose, 2013, p. 341). Although progressive employers innately seem to believe in the importance and power of creating greater purpose, “Meaningful work is underrepresented in current models” (Fairlie, 2011, p. 508), as little research has been conducted and published specifically identifying ways in which the practitioner can go about creating higher levels of purpose within a workforce. Given that “purpose is crucial for a firms success: it

is the primary source of achievement, and it reveals the underlying human dynamics of any human activity” (Mourkogiannis, 2006, p. 202) and given that purpose or meaningfulness has “the strongest relation to engagement, future research should continue to explore the determinants of psychological meaningfulness and its relation to different employee outcomes” (May et al., 2004, p. 32). This case study research was designed to do exactly that.

Chapter Three: Methods

This literature review demonstrates the impact that employee engagement can have on a business and the potential of enlisting a workforce in greater purpose. The topic of driving employee engagement through the establishment of greater purpose is worthy of greater examination. “Reframing engagement within the context of meaning and purpose provides a unique lens from which to view the conditions that cultivate the development of engagement” (Shuck & Rose, 2013, p. 341). Few studies have explicitly identified practical and specific ways by which to facilitate the establishment of greater purpose within a workforce. In this case study, the researcher studied specific actions taken in an attempt to establish greater purpose and the effect those actions had upon employee engagement. This chapter outlines the context of the study, the research design, and a description of the case itself. This chapter also addresses tools/instruments used, data collection strategies, and human subjects considerations. Finally, the chapter will include a proposed analysis and the plan for reporting findings.

Research Design

According to Creswell (2007), case study research is a qualitative approach in which the researcher explores a bounded system (a case) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case-based themes. Several authors concur with the following definition of qualitative research:

One undertakes qualitative research in a natural setting where the researcher is an instrument of data collection who gathers words or pictures, analyzes them inductively, focuses on the meaning of participants, and describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language. (Creswell, 1998, p. 14)

In this case, multiple sources of data were considered, including both quantitative and qualitative sources. Five years of employee survey data served as the primary quantitative source. In

addition, the researcher's personal log, field notes, and organizational artifacts offered valuable qualitative secondary information.

For the purposes of this descriptive, multiple-methods (qualitative and quantitative) research, the study design, focused on a single organization: Vail Resorts Management Company. In this descriptive case study, the researcher described the facts and characteristics of a given population or area of interest systematically, factually, and accurately (Isaac & Michael, 1997).

The Case

In February 2006, Vail Resorts named a new CEO (Vail Resorts, Inc., 2008). This new executive officer had a vision for how the diverse operations throughout the organization should maintain their local brand, entrepreneurial spirit, and unique guest experience while simultaneously capitalizing upon the synergies of working together as a larger company. Vail Resorts was starting from a place of decentralization, with little to no synergies being realized. In February 2008, the researcher was employed by Vail Resorts Management Company as the Chief Human Resources Officer and was subsequently tasked with creating this alignment.

In April 2009, the researcher began leading a series of actions designed to ultimately create greater alignment between the multiple disparate business units that made up the organization. This effort began with the establishment of the Culture Team, which was composed of 22 employees from different functions, roles, and levels across the organization (Table 2). This cross-functional, cross-divisional team was called together for the sole purpose of advancing the culture at Vail Resorts by creating alignment. The team worked to pursue alignment by attempting to create a greater purpose for all employees so each understood that he/she was part of something larger and that all roles were important in the organization's

success. In the language of the Culture Team participants, this was a calling bigger than oneself and beyond just receiving a paycheck and creating shareholder value.

Table 2

Vail Resorts Original Culture Team Participants (as of April 2009)

	Culture Team Member	Location and Department
1	Director	Heavenly Ski School
2	Director	Corporate Information Technology
3	Director	Corporate Marketing
4	Director	Corporate Safety
5	General Manager	Breckenridge Ski School
6	Executive Chef	Breckenridge Food and Beverage
7	Manager	Corporate Learning and Development
8	Vice President	Corporate Real Estate Development
9	General Manager	Breckenridge Management
10	Supervisor	Beaver Creek Safety
11	Manager	Lodging Environmental
12	Director	Keystone Marketing
13	Supervisor	Vail Ski Patrol
14	Manager	Corporate Recruiting
15	Director	Corporate Organizational Development
16	Director	Keystone Ski Patrol
17	General Manager	Keystone Hospitality
18	Supervisor	Breckenridge Ski Patrol
19	Director	Corporate Legal
20	Supervisor	Vail Ski School
21	Director	Corporate Real Estate Development
22	Manager	Breckenridge Ticket Office

The Culture Team believed that connecting employees to a greater purpose would lead to greater employee engagement and ultimately result in driving shareholder value. All team members took this work on as an additional duty in an attempt to make Vail Resorts all that they felt it could and should be. The Culture Team met monthly over the 5-year research period (2009-2013). During this period they pursued several abstract ideas and narrowed them down into clearly defined initiatives, including: creation of a new company mission statement, refining the company's values, attempting to communicate each of these efforts to the employee

population effectively, and introducing an EES to measure progress on each of the aforementioned goals. Each of these areas was chosen specifically to align employees across the enterprise with the organization's greater purpose in an attempt to drive employee engagement further and realize organizational synergies.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this case study was to determine if employers can drive higher levels of employee engagement by helping employees to identify a greater sense of individual purpose in the workplace. The study reviewed specific actions taken by the employer to help employees identify how their own individual sense of purpose was directly aligned with the organization's greater purpose and determine whether or not those actions resulted in higher levels of employee engagement. For the goals of this case study, creating greater individual purpose was pursued by focusing on organizational mission, values, community, and environment. The participants in the study were defined as Vail Resorts approximately 5000 full-time, year-round employees.

Research Questions

This research case study centered on examining the specific actions taken by Vail Resorts between 2009 and 2013 to drive greater purpose within the organization (as evidenced by review of the researcher's field log and associated artifacts) and the impacts of those actions on the corresponding 5 years of EES data. The study explored the following research questions:

1. How has the organization's creation of a renewed mission statement (Experience of a Lifetime) and the efforts to align the organization's culture around this statement further engaged the employee population?

2. How has the organization's creation of redefined values and the efforts to align the organization's culture around these redefined values further engaged the employee population?
3. How has the organization's focus and resulting actions in the area of community had an impact on employee engagement?
4. How has the organization's focus and resulting actions in the area of the natural environment had an impact on employee engagement?
5. How has the organization's focus and resulting actions in the area of employee communication, as it relates to aligning individual sense of purpose with organizational purpose, had an impact on employee engagement?

Sources of Data

Data came from one primary and two secondary sources. Primary data were derived from the EES, which spanned 5 consecutive years (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013) and the subsequent reports of those data. Ultimately all sources of information were reviewed in conjunction with the corresponding EES, resulting in an attempt to discern the impact of specific actions to the aligned survey questions. The researcher also drew on multiple secondary sources of information documented in his field log, including direct observations, artifacts, and documents. Table 3 shows the alignment of each question to the specific source of data. Each source of data will be explained in greater detail in subsequent sections.

Table 3

Research Questions and Corresponding Sources of Data

Research Question	Sources of Data
RQ1: How has the organization’s creation of a renewed mission statement (Experience of a Lifetime) and the efforts to align the organization’s culture around this statement further engaged the employee population?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EES Scores – I contribute to fulfilling the Vail Resorts mission of “Experience of a Lifetime” and I can identify with the Vail Resorts Mission of “Experience of a Lifetime” • Personal Field Log – Culture Vision, Experience of a Lifetime rationale, Experience of a Lifetime Guiding Principles, Employment Brand to Company Mission, Operationalizing Experience of a Lifetime • Artifacts – EC Presentation, Culture Video, Service Video, Story Telling Videos (2), CEO Experience of a Lifetime email
RQ2: How has the organization’s creation of redefined values and the efforts to align the organization’s culture around these redefined values further engaged the employee population?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EES Scores – I fully support the values for which Vail Resorts stands. • Personal Field Log – Values Integration into performance management, rewards and recognition, new hire orientation, and employee communications • Artifacts – Values Video, Values rollout presentation, Values bracelets, CEO Values communication
RQ3: How has the organization’s focus and resulting actions in the area of community had an impact on employee engagement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EES Scores – In my opinion this organization is socially responsible in the community and I understand my role in supporting our community involvement efforts. • Personal Field Log – Sustainability Vision, Employee Giving Counsels, Community Connection Events • Artifacts – Sustainability Vision Kickoff Presentation, ECHO brand launch, ECHO Video, Sustainability Vision Team Proposal Presentation, Sustainability Vision Team Project Plan, EPIC Volunteers rollout communication, EPIC Promise Video
RQ4: How has the organization’s focus and resulting actions in the area of the natural environment had an impact on employee engagement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EES Scores – I believe that this organization is an environmentally responsible company and I understand my role in supporting our environmental efforts. • Personal Field Log – ECHO Communications, ECHO Day, Guest Engagement • Artifacts – Hayman Fire Communication, Environmental Projects Presentation, Sustainable Operations Project Chart, ECHO Website, Energy Layoffs (Target 10%), The Next 10,
RQ5: How has the organization’s focus and resulting actions in the area of the employee communication as it relates to organizational purpose had an impact on employee engagement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EES Scores – This organization does an excellent job of keeping employees informed about matters affecting us. • Personal Field Log – Employee Communications Leadership, Leadership Summit(s), EPIC Awards • Artifacts – Inside EPIC Weekly, Inside Edge, EPIC Service Video

The Employee Engagement Survey

The primary source of data for this research was the annual Vail Resorts EES, which was envisioned and designed exclusively by the Culture Team. The team prioritized the development of an enterprise-wide EES to ensure that the company was listening to employees in order to know them, their concerns, and their desires more completely. They aspired to engage the employee population in taking personal ownership of the culture by involving them in the process. To accomplish this, the researcher enlisted a subset of the Culture Team to conduct a background analysis, define the scope of the survey, assess potential vendors, establish an appropriate budget, select a vendor with which to partner, design the survey, create a detailed timeline for implementation, and ultimately implement the survey. The team employed the following steps to take the idea of an EES from concept to reality: vendor selection, survey design, and survey administration.

How the survey vendor was selected. The first step was to identify and select the best vendor to administer the survey. The following vendors were surveyed: Corporate Executive Board, Gallup, Hay Group, Hewitt, Market Metrics, Mercer, Questar, SuccessFactors, Towers Perrin, and Watson Wyatt. The Culture Team assessed each vendor based on previously-established criteria, namely: survey experience; size of database; reporting capability; industry experience; ability to customize; survey delivery mechanisms; and communication, education, and training offered. Although all of these criteria were determined to be important, the Culture Team further identified their highest priorities as: a vendor that could provide a large database to contrast with other companies and rate Vail Resorts compared to best-in-class (not just compare internal numbers year-over-year) and the ability to manipulate data and drill down beyond just general themes, identifying relationships between actions and results. The comparison to other

companies was important to the organization, as they aspired to create employee engagement levels that rivaled best-in-class organizations (based upon composite metrics, including financial performance and sophistication of human resources processes) and wanted the ability to measure their progress against these companies.

Ultimately Towers Perrin (now Towers Watson, following the merger of Towers Perrin and Watson Wyatt) was chosen to administer the EES for Vail Resorts. Their advanced analytics, leading-edge technology, and possession of the world's largest normative database of employee attitudes positioned them to provide the insights that lead to actions that could be implemented efficiently and sustained over time. Towers Watson surveys over 500 companies a year and their database is updated with data from over 4 million survey respondents annually (Towers Watson, n.d.).

How the survey was designed. The second step was to design the survey. Towers Watson has over 1,200 normative benchmarked questions across 400 norms (Towers Watson, n.d.). The Culture Team utilized culture, mission, values, business strategy, and senior leadership input as survey design inputs to identify key areas of importance to the company and assessed which of the normative benchmarked questions in the Towers Watson database most directly aligned with the needs of the organization.

The first survey administered in January 2010 included 30 questions grouped in 10 categories. Although no questions were removed, a few questions were added throughout the years in an attempt to hone in on a few specific emerging areas of opportunity (i.e., retention). The most recent survey included within the scope of this research was administered in January 2014 and included 33 questions categorized into 11 categories, which can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4

Vail Resorts Employee Engagement Survey Selected Questions (as of January 2014)

Category	Questions
Employee Engagement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I believe strongly in the goals and objectives of Vail Resorts. 2. I fully support the values for which Vail Resorts stands. 3. I understand how I can help Vail Resorts achieve its goals. 4. I would recommend Vail Resorts to a friend as a good place to work. 5. I am proud to tell others I work for Vail Resorts. 6. Vail Resorts inspires me to do my best work. 7. I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond what is normally expected to help Vail Resorts succeed.
Mission	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. I am personally motivated to help Vail Resorts be successful. 9. I can identify with the Vail Resorts Mission of “Experience of a Lifetime.” 10. I contribute to fulfilling the Vail Resorts Mission of “Experience of a Lifetime.”
Leadership	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. My organization’s management is interested in the well-being of employees. 12. Regarding the organization’s core values, I believe management decisions are consistent with the values.
Communication	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Management trusts the judgment of people at my level in the organization. 14. This organization operates with integrity in its internal dealings (i.e., with employees). 15. This organization does an excellent job of keeping employees informed about: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Matters affecting us b. Our products and services
Customer Focus	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 16. Sufficient effort is made to get the opinions and thinking of employees at this organization. 17. My department: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Constantly looks for better ways to serve its customers b. Actively seeks to understand customer requirements and expectations
Working Relationships	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 18. The people I work with are willing to help each other, even if it means doing something outside their usual activities. 19. There is good cooperation between: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Workgroups within my department. b. My department and other departments. c. Between my location/resort and other locations/resorts. (for full-time, year-round employees only)
Empowerment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 20. The information I need to do my job is readily available. 21. People in my department are encouraged to come up with innovative solutions to work-related problems.
Work Environment/ Safety	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 22. The organization provides adequate safety training. 23. My work area is a safe place to work. 24. I have the tools necessary to do my job effectively.
Employee Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 25. I receive feedback that is helpful in maintaining or improving my job performance. 26. I believe I have the opportunity for personal development and growth in Vail Resorts. 27. In my opinion, Vail Resorts does a good job of promoting the most competent people. 28. There are sufficient opportunities for me to receive training to improve my skills in my current job.
Sustainability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 29. In my opinion, this organization is socially responsible in the community. 30. I understand my role in supporting: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Our environmental efforts. b. Our community involvement efforts.
Retention (for full-time, year-round employees only)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 31. I believe this organization is an environmentally responsible company. 32. At the present time, are you seriously considering leaving Vail Resorts? 33. It would take a lot to make me look for another employer.

How the survey was administered. The EES was administered via a confidential online survey. Administering an online survey in an organization where the large majority of employees do not have access to a computer presents some unique challenges. In order to encourage participation from all employees in all work environments, HR team members spent time at their resorts in all major locations providing access to the survey via multiple iPads that they would carry with them and set up as temporary employee portals.

These efforts to encourage participation proved successful, as extensive EES data exist from the years 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013. The first survey was administered in January of 2010 to determine progress throughout 2009. This initial survey included 9,298 employee responses. This annual pattern continued and all subsequent surveys were administered in January immediately after the completion of each calendar year. Employee participation in subsequent years was 12,115 in 2010, 12,862 in 2011, 12,837 in 2012, and 14,699 in 2013, resulting in 61,811 total employee responses over the 5-year research period.

The EES was designed focusing on 10 categories to assess the areas of primary importance to the employee population. The 10 categories were working relationships, empowerment, sustainability, employee engagement, leadership, customer focus, work environment and safety, communication, employee development, and mission. Within these categories a total of 30 questions were asked, in addition to one open text comment area.

Each year after the survey closed, Towers Watson provided a detailed analysis summarizing the data. The resulting data from the surveys were compared annually to the Towers Watson Global High Performing Norm and the Towers Watson Leisure Norm. The data were also compared and contrasted among Vail Resorts' operational divisions/functional areas,

managerial levels, years of service, year-round and seasonal employees, and full and part-time employees.

Although the survey gathered data that relate to many categories as seen in Table 4, the questions isolated for use in this research were identified specifically to measure Vail Resorts' efforts in the areas of mission, values, community, environment, and employee communication. This study included five research questions with a total of eight sub-questions in an attempt to determine if specific enterprise-wide organizational initiatives increased employee engagement through the establishment of greater purpose. The specific EES questions utilized to address the research questions included:

- RQ1: I contribute to fulfilling the Vail Resorts mission of Experience of a Lifetime, and I can identify with the Vail Resorts Mission of Experience of a Lifetime;
- RQ2: I fully support the values for which Vail Resorts stands;
- RQ3: In my opinion this organization is socially responsible in the community and I understand my role in supporting our community involvement efforts;
- RQ4: I believe that this organization is an environmentally responsible company and I understand my role in supporting our environmental efforts; and
- RQ5: This organization does an excellent job of keeping employees informed about matters affecting us.

The remaining EES questions identified in Table 4 were not utilized for the purposes of this research.

Description of the instrument. There were five possible responses to each of the 33 EES questions: *Agree*, *Tend to Agree*, *?*, *Tend to Disagree*, and *Disagree*. Figure 2 visually depicts this rating scale.

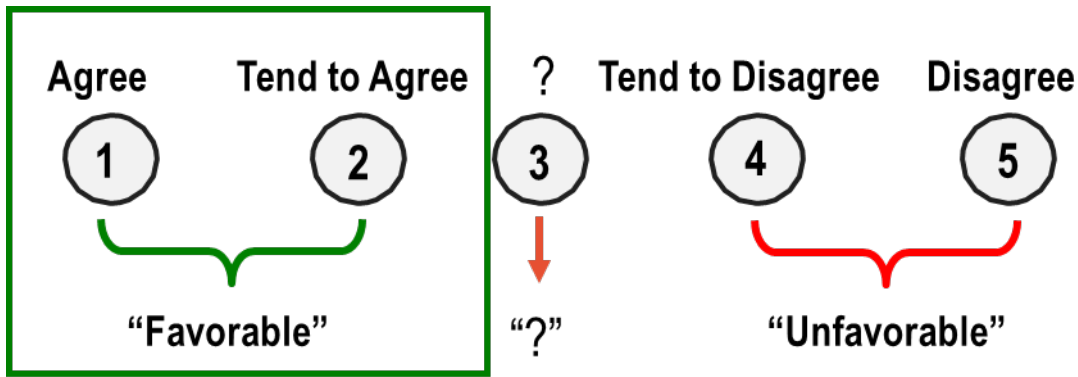


Figure 2. Vail Resorts employee engagement survey rating scale.

Favorable scores included the “Tend to Agree” and “Agree” percentage scores combined from the question rating scale, as illustrated in Figure 2. The responses were collapsed into these two categories and then a percentage of employee responses for the favorable category was compared year to year. Towers Watson considers a favorable response of 70% and greater as a positive score. Figure 3 offers an example of how the number listed for each EES question is the percent of favorable responses received.

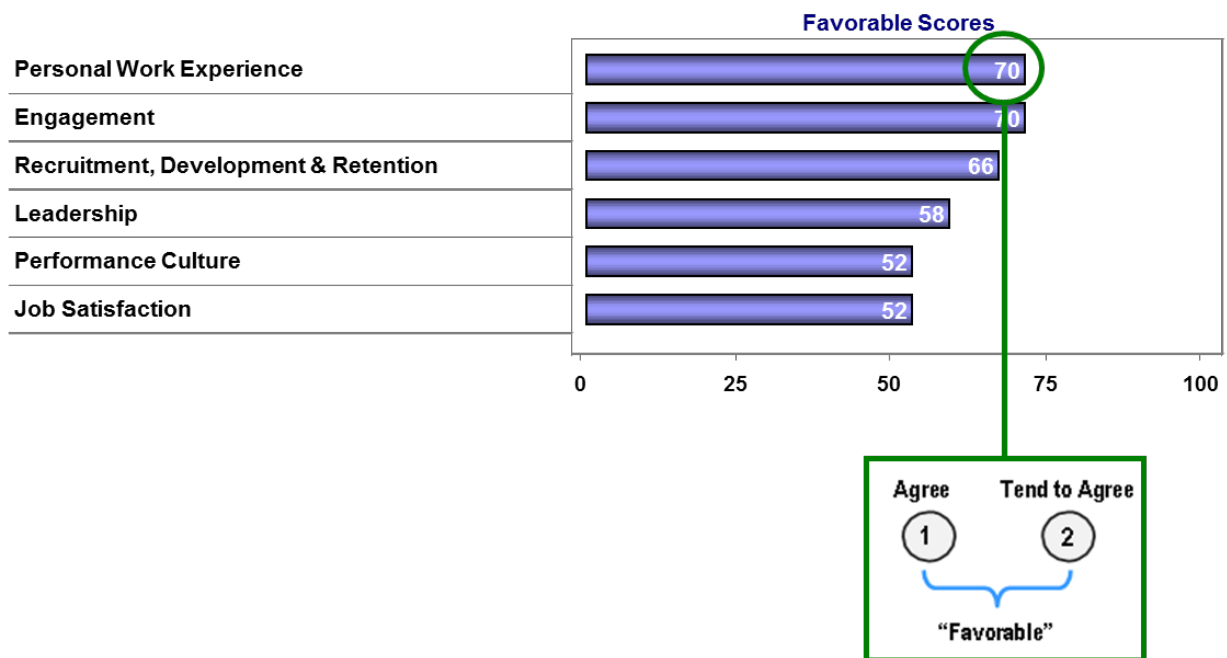


Figure 3. Example of how survey scores are displayed as a percentage of favorable responses.

Some areas within the data contain a dash (-) instead of a numerical score. A dash denotes that there is no score for that particular question in the designated year because the EES question was not yet asked of the employee population. The other possible employee responses included “?” and combined “Tend to Disagree” and “Disagree,” which translate into the Total Unfavorable percentage. The two main secondary sources of data include organizational artifacts and the researcher’s personal log/field notes.

Organizational artifacts. Many programs designed to drive and integrate each of these efforts were put into place and documented over the 5-year span of this study. Artifacts spanning from presentations, to videos, to interviews, to policies, to communication documents were used to demonstrate the actions that were taken to facilitate and perpetuate the desired outcomes of these purpose-driven initiatives. The target population for the development of the artifacts was the Vail Resorts full-time, year-round population of approximately 5,000 employees. The large extent of these artifacts can be found in Table 3.

Researcher’s personal log/field notes. The researcher began these efforts with a holistic view of what was possible. He believed that to take the cultural transformation from what was a mere vision to a detailed plan of action would require an integrated, systemic thought process: one that considered how to create positive change from the foundation up so as to establish the infrastructure to enable a sustainable transformation. The researcher’s field notes outline his vision, how he went about enlisting others in that vision, his multi-year roadmap towards the achievement of said vision, and detailed action planning. Field notes were captured throughout the 5-year period on a continuous basis, resulting in an extensive library of planning documents, brainstorming ideas, vision statements, etc. From the field notes, the researcher has

specifically included the information pertaining to driving employee engagement through greater purpose, as outlined in Table 3.

Human Subjects Considerations

This research qualified for an Exempt Review by Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) criteria, as outlined in 45 CFR 46.101 (b)(4), since the research's primary data source involved existing data that were recorded in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified (Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education and Psychology, 2009). As the survey administrator, Towers Watson served as a neutral third party and at no point in time did they or will they share any personal identifying information with Vail Resorts or the researcher. Towers Watson does not provide any identifying information, including but not limited to survey respondents' names, user names, or email addresses.

Secondary data source documents containing any personal identifying information were handled with strict confidentiality. Employee participation in all videos was completely voluntary, and these employees agreed to allow the use of the videos for both internal and external purposes. No graphics or pictures that include any personal identifying information were utilized within the dissertation manuscript, without the express written permission from the individuals involved. Other organizational artifacts that could contain identifying information were protected carefully to ensure minimal risk and no threat to employment. Finally, any identifying information within the researcher's field notes was managed with extreme confidentiality.

The researcher was granted full permission to research and document Vail Resorts' journey towards greater employee engagement. It was the desire of Vail Resorts to have the company's progress documented and shared in hopes of furthering their employment brand and

helping other organizations do the same. An application for exemption was submitted to the University's GPS-IRB based on the criteria for exemption; approval was approved in January, 2015 (See Appendix A).

Analysis

This research case study involved integrating quantitative and qualitative analysis methods (Villard, 2003). This method offered the researcher the ability to consider a variety of data sources including survey data, field notes, and organizational artifacts in the formation of study conclusions. The EES data item responses were tabulated by year and the amount of change from year to year was determined. The secondary qualitative sources were assessed following Richards and Morse's (2012) model to search for evidence that supports survey data findings.

The researcher utilized qualitative triangulation methods in an attempt to identify relationships between actions taken and resulting EES scores. After the researcher mind mapped what he believed to be the key drivers to the quantitative findings, he enlisted the five functional owners (mission, values, community, environmental, and communication) to articulate the steps in their processes and asked each to identify what they personally believed were the key aspects of their programs that resulted in driving greater organizational employee engagement. Strong alignment existed between what the functional leaders identified as the strongest employee engagement influencers and the researcher's original mind map. Once these relationships were documented, a Vail Resorts colleague who had experienced the entire 5-year journey was engaged to validate the identified association between organizational actions taken and the survey results. He was asked to review the identified relationships between qualitative actions and quantitative results and provide his agreement, his challenges, and additional insights. After

much discussion, the researcher and his colleague reached consensus and were able to finalize the findings outlined in the subsequent chapters achieving the ultimate goal of this analysis: to triangulate multiple data sources to arrive at study conclusions and recommendations for organizations that wish to drive employee engagement through the establishment of greater personal and organizational purpose.

Plan for Reporting Findings

The subsequent chapters include further explanation of the case, including the organization's mission and vision, a chronology of events, details and timing of the case data, and the researcher's interpretation of case results. The methods and detailed design of this study were carefully crafted to ensure the findings are valid and make a credible contribution to the understanding of driving employee engagement through greater purpose. The researcher understood that "without a deeper understanding of how the framework of meaning and purpose is operationalized within the engagement construct, its application and impact can seem adrift" (Shuck & Rose, 2013, p. 349). This study will be used to provide guidance to leaders on any relationships found to exist between the specific actions taken by the employer to help employees identify how their own individual sense of purpose is aligned directly with the organization's greater purpose and determine whether or not these actions resulted in higher levels of employee engagement. As it relates to this research, the specific actions taken by the employer are outlined in Table 5; each is explained in detail in Chapter 4.

Table 5

Timeline of Specific Actions Taken by Employer Relevant to Research

Year	Month	Event
2006	February	New Chief Executive Officer, Rob Katz hired
2008	February	New Chief Human Resources Officer, Mark Gasta (researcher), hired
	September	Launched “Target 10%” energy savings initiative
	November	“Vail Resorts Vision” innovation team launched
2009	April	“Culture Team” holds first meeting
	September	First Annual Vail Resorts Leadership Summit
	August	Public Affairs and Sustainability team is formed
	September	New mission statement, “Experience of a Lifetime” launched via Culture Video
	October	Launched “ECHO” program, focused on community and environment
2010	January	First annual Employee Engagement Survey
	March	First ever Employee Communications Manager hired
	September	First annual company volunteer day (ECHO Day) held
	November	First semi-annual all employee meeting (Inside Edge) held
2011	May	“Sustainability Vision Team” holds first meeting
	September	Revised company values launched
	September	Sustainability materiality matrix complete
	November	Inventory of community and environmental efforts complete
2012	January	Multi-year sustainability roadmap complete
	March	“The Next 10” energy savings initiative launched
	May	Community Volunteer Receptions
	August	“EPIC Volunteers” program launched
2013	October	Employee Giving Counsels
2014	January	Gathering of last annual Employee Engagement Survey data included in research

Chapter Four: Results

This chapter contains the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the employee engagement data. The researcher will draw on multiple secondary sources of information documented in his field log, including direct observations, artifacts, and documents in an attempt to make sense of the quantitative findings. Through this approach, the researcher hopes to provide some insights into what actions enabled (or not) the movement in employee engagement at the company. This chapter is organized to address each of the following research questions:

1. How has the organization's creation of a renewed mission statement (Experience of a Lifetime) and the efforts to align the organization's culture around this statement further engaged the employee population?
2. How has the organization's creation of redefined values and the efforts to align the organization's culture around these redefined values further engaged the employee population?
3. How has the organization's focus and resulting actions in the area of community had an impact on employee engagement?
4. How has the organization's focus and resulting actions in the area of the natural environment had an impact on employee engagement?
5. How has the organization's focus and resulting actions in the area of employee communication, as it relates to aligning individual sense of purpose with organizational purpose, had an impact on employee engagement?

Description of the Employee Sample

For the purposes of this research, the EES responses from Vail Resorts' full-time, year-round (FTYR) population were analyzed. The reason for investigating the FTYR population

exclusively is that this population is relatively consistent (has lower turnover) and benefited more directly from the efforts designed to drive greater purpose among the workforce throughout the research period. Conversely, the larger seasonal population is typically only employed for a few months out of each year and approximately 60% of this population is new every year.

The FTYR population includes a wide variety of employment types including exempt (salaried), non-exempt (hourly), corporate, field, long-tenured, and newly employed, among others. Types of positions responding to the survey include roles from the CEO to housekeepers and every role in between. As can be seen in Table 6, as of January 6, 2015 there were 4,546 employees in the FTYR category. The average length of service was 7.2 years, indicating that the majority were present consistently throughout the research period. Thirty-seven percent (1,667) of this population was female, and the remaining 63% (2,879) was male. Of the 4,546 within this category of FTYR employees, 2,462 or 54% were non-exempt, whereas 2,084 or 46% were exempt. The average age of this full-time population was 39.2 years of age.

Table 6

Employee Demographic Data as of January 2015

Employee Type	# of Employees	Average Age	Average Years of Service	Female	Male	Hourly (non-exempt)	Salaried (exempt)
Full-Time	4,546	39.2	7.2	1,667	2,879	2,462	2,084

The FTYR population participating in the annual EES increased by almost 40% (2,826 to 4,479) throughout the research period as a result of multiple acquisitions. Despite the fact that many in this population are new to Vail Resorts and have not been a part of the year-over-year (YOY) purpose-driven efforts, their survey responses were included in the reported data.

Specifically, the number of FTYR employees that completed the annual survey in each year from

2010 to 2014 is reported in Table 7. The combined FTYR survey respondents for the 5 years of survey data was 18,347.

Table 7

Survey Responses by Year

Survey Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total
# of FTYR Survey Participants	2,826	3,395	3,789	3,858	4,479	18,347

Research Questions and Results

To address the five research questions, the results of the eight specifically identified EES questions measured during the 5-year research period are presented. In addition, other information gleaned from various organizational artifacts, including researcher field notes, is provided to aid in the interpretation of the EES results.

Both the company mission and the company values were identified as practical tools to help all employees understand what the organization stood for and what the company was attempting to accomplish. By better understanding the organization’s mission and values, employees could find personal alignment between themselves and the organization, resulting in greater levels of connection, and ultimately, engagement. The following is an outline of what actions the organization took in an attempt to facilitate greater alignment and the corresponding EES data related to each.

Research question 1. RQ1 asked, How has the organization’s creation of a renewed mission statement (Experience of a Lifetime) and the efforts to align the organization’s culture around this statement further engaged the employee population? As a first step to bring the organization together, the Culture Team identified the need for an employment brand that helped all of the diverse operations understand how they fit into the larger whole. They were looking

for the tie that would bind together all employees, regardless of location or role, by identifying the commonality among them. The ultimate hope was that through this process the team would help all employees understand the criticality of all roles and how the success of the organization depends upon each and every employee, not a single role or resort. As defined by the Culture Team, the goal of the employment brand was to: create unity among all employees, serve as a common point of pride, drive further employee engagement, help all employees recognize that they are empowered to do the right thing for the guest, and have it be simple and easily understood. Their objective was to develop a Vail Resorts culture brand identity that employees and shareholders could rally behind and believe in. They decided that the brand should ultimately make the employee experience more exceptional and resonate with all facets of the organization while supporting the mission. They believed that a successful culture brand would inspire pride in the company, guide decisions, influence public perception, and aid in employee recruitment.

Ultimately the team had a breakthrough with what seemed to be the simplest and most obvious concept of all: the development of the phrase, Experience of a Lifetime. While these seem like such simple words on the surface, the reality is that they had a lot of meaning to the team and ultimately to the organization. The idea is that if the company does its best to create the experience of a lifetime for every employee, every day, those same employees will do their best to create an experience of a lifetime for every guest at every interaction. Further, it does not matter if an employee is employed by the organization for a season or career; the presupposition is that most, if not all, will look back at their time at the company as an experience of a lifetime.

For example, for the children's ski instructor who spends only one season at Vail Resorts and then enrolls in law school, it is likely that she is now sitting in a law office high above

Manhattan looking back on her winter in the Rocky Mountains—skiing every day and enjoying every evening with friends who shared her passion—as an experience of a lifetime, a time she will never forget and would not change for the world. The term also applies to the employee who came out for a winter season in between his undergraduate degree and pursuing a career in his field of study but ultimately decided to remain in the mountain community to live his passion. As he looks back on his career in the ski industry and reflects on the fact that he was able to live his passion every single day, live in one of the most beautiful places on earth, and raise his family in a way that allowed him to share his passion with his children, he knows it was undoubtedly his experience of a lifetime. Despite the many sacrifices made to live this lifestyle, he too would likely not change his choices for any sum of money or a different experience.

Although the concept was initially intended to represent solely the company’s employment brand, the brand took on a life of its own when the employees of the organization began sharing their Experience of a Lifetime stories through videos, at the beginning of all meetings, and in the weekly employee newsletter, among many other places. Through these stories, connections began to happen across the organization. These connections could be felt from Jamaica, to the Grand Tetons, to Lake Tahoe. Connections included both personal experiences (“an epic powder day”) and service experiences (going to great lengths to fulfill a terminally ill guest’s bucket list experience). The intention was that all employees, regardless of location and role, could resonate with these stories because they captured why they do what they do. Employees of the company joined the organization because of their personal love of the outdoors and their desire to share that experience with others. The creation of Experience of a Lifetime and subsequent storytelling resulted in employees, both near and far, understanding that

they are part of something bigger, all passionate about the same things, and depend on one another, regardless of their role, to ultimately share the outdoor experience with their guests.

The “Culture Video” (Appendix B) was a non-scripted, employee-made video intended to capture the spirit and intent of the Experience of a Lifetime and was created to introduce the concept to the organization in 2009 at the first annual Leadership Summit. The Culture Team made the decision to create the video in an attempt to capture the essence of the employment brand versus attempting to solely enlist employees intellectually. The goal was to speak to employees’ hearts, their passion, versus just their heads. Most of the participants in the video were members of the Culture Team and a large majority of the video was filmed during a regularly scheduled Culture Team meeting. During this meeting each Culture Team member was called out of the meeting to be videoed one by one. No guidance or script was provided and each was just asked to speak to what working at the company meant to him/her and to share his/her Experiences of a Lifetime.

Ultimately the Experience of a Lifetime employment brand resonated so much with the employee population that it was adopted as the company’s mission statement and tagline (Appendix C). The new company mission, Experience of a Lifetime, was introduced to the organization in 2009. It is articulated on the company’s website in the following way:

At Vail Resorts, our mission is simple – to create the Experience of a Lifetime for our employees, so they can, in turn, provide exceptional experiences for our guests. We have the opportunity to make each guest interaction special and their time with us unforgettable, and that starts with our employees. Vail Resorts is dedicated to delivering seamless guest service by continuously investing in our team and the infrastructure, systems and training programs that support them. (Vail Resorts, 2014, p. 1)

To date, the ongoing storytelling across the company has galvanized the workforce beyond previous boundaries. Experience of a Lifetime stories are still being told in a wide variety of ways including at the start of all meetings, in the weekly employee newsletter, anytime there is a

need for an icebreaker activity, and in almost every other way imaginable. In hindsight, it can be seen that Experience of a Lifetime was successful because it: supports both the employee and guest experience, works for seasonal and FTYR career employees, is easy to remember and part of everyday lexicon, and is aspirational. In addition, the reason the organization was so successful at creating a mission statement that resonated with all employees was because it was designed by employees for employees. It was designed from the bottom up versus from the top down. The data in Table 8 demonstrate the resonance of the new mission statement based on the two mission-specific EES questions.

Table 8

Employee Engagement Survey Items Related to Organizational Mission #1

RQ1 Related EES Questions	Type of Response	2010 (N = 2,826)	2011 (N = 3,395)	2012 (N = 3,789)	2013 (N = 3,858)	2014 (N = 4,479)
EES Q1 – I contribute to fulfilling the Vail Resorts mission of “Experience of a Lifetime”	Favorable Responses	92%	96%	96%	97%	97%
	Change in Favorable Response	-	+4	0	+1	0
EES Q2 – I can identify with the Vail Resorts Mission of “Experience of a Lifetime”	Favorable Responses	84%	91%	92%	93%	92%
	Change in Favorable Response	-	+7	+1	+1	-1

The first question, “I contribute to fulfilling the Vail Resorts mission of Experience of a Lifetime,” received favorable responses throughout the research period. The favorable responses jumped significantly from 2010 to 2011 and remained unchanged in 2012. Another small improvement was seen in 2013, and the latest available data showed a continued positive movement, with 97% of the employees continuing to report a favorable response.

A similar trend was identified with the second mission related question: “I can identify with the Vail Resorts Mission of Experience of a Lifetime.” A significant jump in favorable

responses was recorded on the 2010 survey, moving the score from 84 to 91 in just one year. According to Towers Watson's analysts, an increase of 2% is considered significant progress YOY. This demonstrated increase of 7 percentage points in one year is therefore very unique. The upward trend continued in 2012 and 2013 with a slight decline of 1% in 2014.

Between 2013 and 2014 the *N* size did have the largest YOY increase during this research period as a result of a significant acquisition, increasing the population by 621 employees. One possible explanation is that these newly acquired employees did not benefit from the previous years of storytelling and communication. Despite the slight decline, in 2014 more than 4,000 employees responded 92% favorably to this question.

Research question 2. RQ2 asked, How has the organization's creation of redefined values and the efforts to align the organization's culture around these redefined values further engaged the employee population? The Culture Team identified the need to redefine the organization's values to make them resonate further with employees in an attempt to drive greater purpose. Together, the group discussed reasons for new values. It was not that the company's values statements were not right; at their core they did represent what the company believed. However, they needed to be refreshed to make them memorable, brought to life, and tied together so that they resonated with employees, as well as with the organization's other key stakeholders. Their vision was to take the organization's values from a paragraph on a page to a handful of guiding principles by which the company could navigate the world. When this was done properly, the team was hopeful that the values would: remain true forever, regardless of the happenings in the external environment; define what Vail Resorts stands for and how the organization would conduct itself; and answer the questions, "how do we want to treat others?" and "how do we want to be treated ourselves?"

Vail Resorts' organizational values were largely innate to all individuals working at the company. Before the Culture Team's work to redefine the company values, employees could generally articulate what the company stood for (service, community, environment, etc.). Unfortunately no one knew exactly what the organizational values were because they were buried deep in paragraphs of verbiage. As a result, they certainly were not achieving the goal of helping employees to further connect with the organization and consciously driving decision-making.

The group held multiple brainstorming sessions to come up with the primary topics describing what the organization valued. Building upon those insights, the group next developed a Values Blueprint (Appendix D) to outline the values and their corresponding descriptors, aspirations, and behaviors. When they had developed a roadmap outlining recommendations, they put together a presentation for the Vail Resorts EC to obtain feedback and buy-in on the new direction. Once approved, the redefined values were rolled out at the Third Annual Vail Resorts Leadership Summit (Appendix E), which included the company's top 500 leaders. Finally, the Culture Team was ready to cascade the organization's redefined values across the company via multiple communication channels (Appendix F).

Today, the values have been adopted across the company and influence many internal programs from employee relations to guest service to safety. Throughout Vail Resorts, it is common to see values posters hanging at employees' desks, in break rooms, and on bulletin boards. They are not there because employees were told to hang them up; rather, they are being displayed simply because employees are proud to display expressions of values that resonate with them. Once again this was an effort for employees by employees, resulting in the values being almost embraced immediately by most, if not all.

The key to success of the values redesign is that the values are now memorable; tied together; and brought to life through the use of icons, colors, and simple statements. Most importantly, the values were fully integrated into many core processes of the company, including hiring processes (i.e., standardized values based questions), performance management (i.e., performance is based 50% on values), developmental programs (i.e., New Hire Orientation), employee communication (i.e., Inside EPIC Weekly), and reward and recognition programs (i.e., Annual EPIC Awards). Table 9 outlines how employees responded to the annual question of “I fully support the values for which Vail Resorts stands” through 5 years of EES data.

Table 9

Employee Engagement Survey Item Related to Organizational Values #2

RQ2 Related EES Question	Type of Response	2010 (N = 2,826)	2011 (N = 3,395)	2012 (N = 3,789)	2013 (N = 3,858)	2014 (N = 4,479)
EES Q3 – I fully support the values for which Vail Resorts stands.	Favorable Responses	82%	88%	90%	91%	89%
	Change in Favorable Response	-	6	2	1	-2

Vail Resorts introduced revised company values in 2010 and saw a 6 percentage point jump in favorable responses on the 2011 EES. The years of 2012 and 2013 saw continued positive growth, with favorable responses of 90 and 91%, respectively, followed by a 2 percentage point decline on the 2014 survey. This was the only negative trend in the data. As previously stated, during 2013 the *N* size did have the largest YOY increase during the period studied, and one possible explanation for this decline is that the newly acquired employees did not benefit from the prior years of values communications, education, and process integration. Put simply, the new employees have not had sufficient time to gain deep familiarity with the company’s values. Despite the moderate decline in the final year of research, favorable responses increased by 7 percentage points during the 5-year research period, ending with 89%

of the Vail Resorts FTYR employee population indicating that they “fully support the values for which Vail Resorts stands.”

Community and environment. The company’s community and environmental (sustainability) efforts were the only purpose-driven efforts not envisioned and led by the Culture Team. As mentioned previously, the researcher believed that employees want to know the company is doing good, for the community and environment, and then learn how to personally engage in those same efforts. As validation of this concept, the organization began to gauge whether sustainability drove employee engagement through the annual EES. Through questions about community and environmental efforts, the survey validated that sustainability was a top driver of employee engagement for Vail Resorts. With that validation, the researcher first brought together a new functional team called the Public Affairs and Sustainability (PAS) department to better define the organization’s sustainability vision and efforts.

The company traditionally implemented a wide variety of sustainability programs across the organization that focused on environmental stewardship and strengthening the communities in which they operate. However, there was a missed opportunity. The company had not been managing the sustainability agenda in an aligned and integrated way that would not only ensure the greatest level of impact but also enable a holistic yet simple, clear, and compelling story about their efforts that would afford them the credit they truly deserved from all stakeholders.

Research question 3. RQ3 asked, How has the organization’s focus and resulting actions in the area of community had an impact on employee engagement? Because most of Vail Resorts’ operations are in small resort communities, more often than not, the employees *are* the community. Many times the company finds itself to be the largest employer in a community and its employees have purposefully elected to live in, work in, and raise their families as part of

those communities. Therefore, most have a vested interest in supporting the local community and want to know that their employer is investing in the same. The PAS Team's premise was that as a result of the organization focusing on greater community support, the employees would in turn become even more loyal to the company and hence more engaged.

The company would not only potentially benefit from a more engaged workforce, but also have a vested interest in creating vibrant communities from a consumer standpoint. The reality is that it does not matter how wonderful the mountain experience is if the community experience is poor. Guests will not return if both experiences do not meet and exceed their expectations. The organization chose to focus on the communities in which the company operates in an attempt to help employees understand that they work for an organization that is doing good work in the local community. Once employees better understood the company's efforts within the community, the subsequent goal was to help employees understand how they could engage individually with the organization in community support efforts.

For years, Vail Resorts made contributions in their resort communities without a thoughtful employee communications effort or involving employees in the philanthropic decision making process. The organization wanted to create an identity for the company's charitable efforts so that the employees and all those who live in their resort communities would have an understanding of their many comprehensive and generous efforts. In order to create this awareness, in 2009 the organization launched the Echo program (Appendix B). Echo, "a commitment that resonates," had an internal focus and was designed to create awareness and attract employees to the brand and the program. This umbrella brand was designed to encompass all of the organization's community and environmental efforts and gave the company a vehicle to speak directly to all of the efforts being undertaken by the organization in a comprehensive way.

Each year, Vail Resorts Echo donates more than \$6 million to nonprofits throughout the communities in which the company operates, as well as more than 8,500 hours of volunteer time, with a focus on supporting youths and the environment (Blankenbuehlersummit, 2012).

To contribute with more than just donations, the organization then created the idea to host *Echo Day*. *Echo Day* is a company-wide volunteer day that grew from 400 people to more than 1,600 during the research period. On the same day each year across the company's multiple locations, employees bring their family and friends to restore trails, help refurbish schools, clean up rivers, and perform other activities. *Echo Day* puts hundreds of volunteers en masse in the local communities on the same day at the same time, in an attempt to make an enormous positive difference almost immediately—a difference that in most cases would take these organizations years to accomplish. In addition to fostering real progress in areas where real needs exist, *Echo Day* brings employees, families, and friends together and creates a connection to both the company and one another in a way that is difficult to achieve solely in the work environment.

The researcher ultimately identified the need to bring together another diverse group of employees from across the company, similar to the Culture Team, to create and drive an integrated sustainability strategy. This team was chosen based upon their personal passion for, commitment to, and knowledge of the organization's community and environmental efforts. In addition, the team was a cross-functional, cross-divisional representation of most aspects of the organization, which the researcher believed to be necessary at this point in the journey to develop a holistic and integrated sustainability strategy. This team became known as the Sustainability Vision Team (SVT), and the composition of the group can be found in Table 10.

Table 10

Vail Resorts Original Sustainability Vision Team Participants (as of May 2011)

Sustainability Vision Team Member	Location and Department
1 Director	Breckenridge Marketing
2 Director	Heavenly Environmental
3 Director	Heavenly Mountain Operations
4 Manager	Retail Merchandising
5 Director	Retail Distribution Operations
6 Director	Community Affairs
7 Director	Public Affairs and Sustainability
8 Director	Public Relations
9 Manager	Employee Communications
10 Manager	Corporate Marketing
11 Manager	Vail Environmental
12 Manager	Hospitality Environmental
13 Vice President	Corporate Procurement
14 Manager	Breckenridge Lift Maintenance
15 Director	Northstar Food and Beverage
16 Director	Vail Ski School
17 Director	Corporate Compliance
18 Director	Hospitality Sales
19 Director	Corporate Legal
20 General Manager	Transportation
21 Director	Keystone Mountain Operations
22 Manager	Breckenridge Ticket Office
23 Manager	Charitable Giving
24 Manager	Beaver Creek Food and Beverage

Once the right people were in the room, the researcher enlisted them in the idea of sustainability by teaching the group about stakeholder theory (A. Friedman & Miles, 2002), essentially helping them understand that, in order for the organization to reach its fullest potential, it must simultaneously focus on, invest in, and ensure the alignment of all key stakeholders. The idea promoted was that only by simultaneously moving all key stakeholders forward can an organization reach its fullest potential and become truly sustainable. For Vail

Resorts, key stakeholders include employees, guests, shareholders, communities in which they operate, and the environment.

Once enlisted in the possibilities, the SVT went to work on the creation of an integrated, holistic, enterprise-wide sustainability strategy and associated roadmap. Some of the first products of their efforts included Community Volunteer Receptions, Employee Giving Councils, and the EPIC Volunteer Program, each of which will be reviewed in greater detail subsequently.

The EES validated that employees valued an employer that was committed to making a positive difference in the local community, and that they too want to get more involved. The SVT began holding focus groups at each resort to tease out what employees were looking for, and heard plainly that employees wanted to give back to their communities but did not know how to find nonprofits that needed help. In direct response, the PAS team began hosting volunteer receptions in each community and invited nonprofits to share information with employees about volunteer opportunities. The SVT believed that these community volunteer receptions would be a productive way to show the employee population all of the worthy community organizations that the company is supporting and, at the same time, help these employees identify ways in which they could personally engage in community philanthropic efforts. Each large community in which the company operates now hosts these events on an annual basis and hundreds of employees have ultimately volunteered; the participating nonprofits indicated that they had never previously seen such an influx of talent and help.

Next, the SVT envisioned and created what they called *Employee Giving Councils*. Before the implementation of these councils, the leaders in each resort community would make determinations based upon grant applications where the organization would spend their charitable dollars. The giving councils were designed to best determine what was of highest

importance to both the organization's workforce and each community in order to work with partner nonprofits to create needed new programs. The employees that made up these councils were representative of these communities, as they lived in them and were often raising their families there. Correspondingly, they cared deeply and had firsthand awareness of the greatest needs in the community and how they would like to see the organization's charitable giving prioritized.

The focus then shifted to how to provide employees with truly personal experiences through volunteer opportunities that directly align with their personal passions. In 2012 the company launched *Epic Volunteers*, a program that provides 40 hours paid time off per year to employees to volunteer at a charity of their choice, anywhere in the world. Rob Katz (as cited in Vail Resorts, Inc., 2012), Vail Resorts chairman and CEO, stated,

As a company, Vail Resorts wanted to expand the footprint of the Echo program by providing select employees the opportunity to participate in an Epic, life-changing experience through paid time off for longer volunteer projects... We were inspired by our employees' enthusiasm and passion for volunteerism. Epic Volunteers will provide employees the chance to have a more enriching, in-depth experience, and to continue their commitment to Do Good in our communities. (para. 2)

Did these community related actions result in increased employee engagement? The two related EES questions and the associated annual employee responses are outlined in Table 11. Strong positive momentum was experienced regarding both of these survey questions throughout the 5-year research period. Significant improvements were realized in both questions between the inaugural year of the survey and year 2. Throughout the research period, the positive responses to EES Q4 increased from 80 to 90 percentage points for a 5-year, 10-point improvement. EES Q5 experienced a very similar pattern increasing 11 percentage points during the same period. No YOY declines were experienced for either question.

Table 11

Employee Engagement Survey Items Related to Community #3

RQ3 Related EES Question	Type of Response	2010 (N = 2,826)	2011 (N = 3,395)	2012 (N = 3,789)	2013 (N = 3,858)	2014 (N = 4,479)
EES Q4 – In my opinion this organization is socially responsible in the community.	Favorable Responses	80%	86%	88%	90%	90%
	Change in Favorable Response	-	+6	+2	+2	0
EES Q5 – I understand my role in supporting our community involvement efforts.	Favorable Responses	80%	85%	87%	89%	91%
	Change in Favorable Response	-	+6	+1	+1	+3

Research question 4. RQ 4 asked, How has the organization’s focus and resulting actions in the area of the natural environment had an impact on employee engagement? Vail Resorts’ product is the outdoors, and in large part employees chose to be part of the organization to align who they are (outdoor enthusiasts) with what they do (their profession). Along with this love of the outdoors also comes a significant commitment to environmental protection and advocacy. The baseline EES data emphasized that Vail Resorts employees believed strongly that the organization has an obligation to protect and preserve the natural environment. As with Vail Resorts’ role in the community, the belief was that first employees want to know that they work for an organization that does good works as it relates to the natural environment. Once that task is achieved, employees then want to know how they can engage with the company to contribute personally to these efforts.

Taking this reasoning a step further, the SVT felt that if they could help employees understand that by doing their jobs as effectively as possible, they were helping the business be successful, and that success would translate into the company investing more time and resources into protecting the environment. Ultimately, this would result in the employees understanding

that their work directly influences protecting what they love and why many chose to join the organization in the first place: the environment.

Simultaneous with the community efforts previously reviewed, the SVT began to focus on improving efficiencies in the organization's operations through more sustainable practices. Similar to the company's community efforts, there were many existing environmental efforts, but the efforts were not integrated or aligned, and there was no comprehensive way to talk about it. Because of this, the company was not getting the credit it deserved internally or externally, nor was it maximizing impact. The group began by taking an inventory of all the environmental efforts currently going on within the organization. Next they asked stakeholders to complete a Materiality Test Questionnaire (Appendix G) that allowed internal subject matter experts to rate specific areas (i.e., procurement, waste, water) in terms of criteria such as levels of risk and alignment with values. After task completion, each of these areas was then plotted on a heat map with an *x*-axis of economic importance and a *y*-axis of importance to stakeholders, resulting in the prioritization and identification of the key areas of opportunity for the organization. From there, the team was able to create a multiyear roadmap guiding the organization's environmental efforts from current state to the desired future state in a thoughtful way. The guide clearly identified the interdependencies and ensured that the organization put first things first, ultimately resulting in an impactful, sustainable strategy. A few identified actions and initiatives on the roadmap are reviewed subsequently.

In 2012, the team launched *The Next 10*, an initiative designed to reduce energy use by 10%. This effort was based upon the 2008 *Target 10%* initiative, which was successful in both raising awareness and reducing expenses. This campaign resulted in significant savings for the organization, provided much-needed visibility to the organization's conservation efforts, and

enlisted the entire population in those efforts. The campaign provided a wonderful platform for ongoing communication related to both progress and ongoing employee engagement in the effort.

Another example of an environment-related initiative included on the roadmap was the SVT's efforts to create programs to better manage products and materials purchased by Vail Resorts. The team pursued this strategy to help the organization procure what was needed but to do so in a smarter, less environmentally impactful way. In pursuit of this goal, the SVT engaged the procurement team, which has subsequently woven sustainability into its projects whenever possible. The team includes sustainability questions in its request for proposal process and evaluates suppliers' sustainability efforts as part of the selection criteria. Team members evaluate the life cycle of company assets, focusing on total cost of ownership and value creation for the company. During the research period, they have reduced their supply base from 50,000 suppliers to fewer than 10,000, and as they continue to reduce the supply base, they are able to work more directly with suppliers on issues such as reduction of deliveries and packaging, evaluation of green products and recycle content, and product origin. The team members have also worked closely with operations and suppliers to evaluate the life cycle of the assets Vail Resorts purchases, with the goal of capturing total cost of ownership and working continually to improve asset performance. Through these efforts, they have already captured significant value in reduction of energy consumption and waste.

The SVT also came to the realization that—given the fact that the outdoors is their business—Vail Resorts attracted guests who wanted an experience of a lifetime in truly iconic locations and who most likely shared their love of the outdoors. They asked themselves, did this desire indicate an interest in sustainability by the guest? Did the guests, like the employees, also

want to connect with Vail Resorts on these issues? Did they have expectations that Vail Resorts be sustainable, and did they laud the organization for being so? Vail Resorts surveyed their guests and found that those who knew of the company's efforts were more likely to recommend the organization to a friend. Since its guests care about the environment and care about what kind of stewardship the company exhibits, the SVT saw an opportunity to play a valuable role in educating guests about and connecting them to Vail Resorts' sustainability efforts. From an employee perspective, this external effort likely would only further bolster employees' beliefs in and understanding of Vail Resorts' environmental commitment and impact as well.

In order to best to accomplish this task, the SVT identified the need to create a brand that meant something to guests, one that resonated beyond Vail Resorts' employees and communities while capturing their enthusiasm and commitment. Epic Promise, which replaced Echo, became that brand, a brand for all sustainability efforts at Vail Resorts (Appendix B). As an added benefit, Epic Promise aligned with all of Vail Resorts' major company initiatives, including Epic Pass, Epic Mix, Epic Academy, opening the door wider for meaningful communication with guests as well as employees.

The company quickly transitioned to Epic Promise, with successful community grant receptions, continuing strong employee programs, the creation of Epic Promise teams in each resort community to help with charitable-giving determinations (a continuation of Giving Councils but focused on both charitable and sustainable operations), and a continuing drive toward environmental programs and operational efficiency. In addition, Vail Resorts now gives out annual employee Epic Promise awards to those most committed to environmental stewardship and helping those in need. Finally, Vail Resorts is preparing for its first Epic Promise week, when it will engage employees and guests through Epic Promise initiatives in an

intensive, condensed time period. This week will allow the organization to test different ways to educate and engage both employees and guests. Table 12 details how employees responded to the two EES questions that asked employees if they believe the organization is environmentally responsible and if they understand their role in Vail Resorts’ environmental stewardship.

Table 12

Employee Engagement Survey Items Related to the Natural Environment #4

RQ4 Related EES Questions	Type of Response	2010 (N = 2,826)	2011 (N = 3,395)	2012 (N = 3,789)	2013 (N = 3,858)	2014 (N = 4,479)
EES Q6 – I believe that this organization is an environmentally responsible company.	Favorable Responses	-	-	91%	91%	91%
	Change in Favorable Response	-	-	-	0	0
EES Q7 – I understand my role in supporting our environmental efforts.	Favorable Responses	90%	90%	91%	91%	93%
	Change in Favorable Response	-	0	+1	0	+2

EES Q6 was not included on the annual Vail Resorts EES until the 2012 survey year and was added in order to include a normed environmental related question. Employee responses to this newly introduced survey question were immediately strong, with 91% of the FTYR population responding favorably and maintaining that strength throughout the 3 years of record. Despite the fact that this score did not increase YOY throughout the research period, a favorable response of 91% by the Vail Resorts FTYR employee population proved to be highly positive. EES Q7 experienced a similar but slightly stronger trend. In 2010 this question also received a very positive score of 90% favorable in the first year of the survey. During the research period the positive employee responses to this question increased from 90 to 93, resulting in steady improvement and an increase of 3 percentage points during the 5-year period.

Research question 5. RQ5 asked, How has the organization's focus and resulting actions in the area of employee communication, as it relates to aligning individual sense of purpose with organizational purpose, had an impact on employee engagement? The Culture Team was keenly aware that despite the company's best efforts in the areas of mission, values, community, and environment, the work would not have the desired effect of creating greater purpose in the workplace without strong communication efforts. Therefore, employee communication was also identified as a key priority on which to focus. The belief was that in order to maximize the investments made to drive purpose, employees must understand what efforts were occurring, why these efforts were being undertaken, the impact of the efforts, and the role they could play in the pursuit of these efforts. They believed that the value of sharing information and sharing it with context was critical to help all employees become more connected to the business and to better understand their role within the business.

Employee communication is no small task in an organization like Vail Resorts. With over 24,000 employees, many of whom are seasonal, most (~75%) who lack access to a company computer, and almost all of whom are scattered across mountains operating in remote locations, employee communication is challenging, to say the least. This unique situation makes employee communication all the more difficult and all the more important. The following discussion accounts for a few of the key steps taken by the organization to enhance employee communication efforts during the research period.

As a direct result of their emphasis and prioritization, the organization's first employee communication position was created. In March of 2010, the organization hired a manager to focus exclusively on employee communication. This new leader understood that the company's mission, values, and sustainability ethic would not have the desired impact if the employees were

unaware of these efforts or if the efforts did not resonate with the employees. Therefore, the employee communication manager partnered closely with the Culture Team in an attempt to enhance the culture and make the hallmarks of the culture stick. For example, rolling out the concepts of Experience of a Lifetime and the organizational values were a key priority for employee communication, and they constantly strived to tie all communications back to the organization's mission and values.

A fundamental priority for employee communication was to keep employees informed about company news. To accomplish this, they partnered with the public relations team and other internal teams across the company to align external communication plans with internal communication plans. Together, they proactively created holistic communication plans designed to keep employees at the forefront of the conversation and ensure they were the first to know and understand the why of decisions so they could conduct business accordingly and inform their guests and other stakeholders about important company developments.

However, because getting this news to the organization's employees was a significant challenge, the company required a unique mix of communication channels to meet the needs of corporate, operations, and front-line employees across several lines of business, not to mention a workforce that halves and doubles with the winter and summer seasons. One of the many communication strategies designed to communicate with this hard-to-reach employee population on a regular, reoccurring basis was the creation of *This Week at Vail Resorts* (TW@VR). TW@VR is a weekly, electronic, all employee newsletter that contains information relevant to employees across the company's locations, regardless of role, and reaches not only employees on the company's network, but also the more than 15,000 deskless employees through personal email addresses and a website that can be accessed outside of the network. TW@VR

incorporates employee spotlights, the latest business developments, and important new programs, all while constantly reinforcing the organization's mission, values, and sustainability efforts via stories, videos, and photos, and more.

Storytelling was a strategy heavily employed in all aspects of communication. The organization's communication efforts regularly shared stories of employees living the organization's values: stories of employees serving others, being safe, doing good works, doing right, having fun, and driving value. Stories also regularly highlighted employees who defined the organizational culture and the mission of delivering the Experience of a Lifetime. These stories were shared inside the organization via Employee Spotlights, Insider Profiles, and Epic Service stories, all of which could be found in TW@VR, regular EES updates, the newly created all employee meeting (Inside Edge) and Integration Spotlight newsletters. The communication team also began telling these stories more broadly to external audiences via Facebook, Instagram, jobs.vailresorts.com, and the company's other social channels.

As highlighted above, the organization also launched the first all employee meeting called "Inside Edge" in November of 2010. These live, semi-annual meetings were simulcast across the company, allowing the CEO and other key leaders provide insights into strategy and current priorities and provide direct, candid responses to employees' questions.

Finally, the Culture Team envisioned, designed, and led the Vail Resorts Leadership Summit. The Leadership Summit has become a signature leadership event, including the company's top 550 leaders. The summit serves to recognize, develop, facilitate deeper relationships among, and align leaders strategically and culturally. This annual event has proven to be the critical in the alignment of the organization's culture.

What impact did the communications efforts have over the 5-year research period?

Employee favorable responses to the EES question, “This organization does an excellent job of keeping employees informed about matters affecting us,” can be seen in Table 13.

Table 13

Employee Engagement Survey Item Related to Employee Communication #5

RQ5 Related EES Question	Type of Response	2010 (N = 2,826)	2011 (N = 3,395)	2012 (N = 3,789)	2013 (N = 3,858)	2014 (N = 4,479)
EES Q8 – This organization does an excellent job of keeping employees informed about matters affecting us.	Favorable Responses	71%	78%	81%	83%	84%
	Change in Favorable Response	-	+7	+3	+2	+1

With 71% of the FTYR employee population responding favorably to this question in 2010, this score was relatively low when compared to the EES questions reviewed previously. Similar to previous scenarios witnessed with several of the other questions reviewed, this question experienced its largest positive increase of 7 percentage points YOY between year 1 (2010) and year 2 (2011) of the survey. Despite being the lowest score at both the onset of the survey (71%) and the end of the research period (84%), this question did receive the largest total increase in positive responses (+13) over the 5-year research period.

Review of the Findings

Table 14 provides a high level overview of the research-related EES data in their entirety. When considering the baseline EES scores (year 1) versus the most recent 2014 scores, Vail Resorts achieved increases on all research-related EES questions with the exception of one, EES Question #6, which remained flat. EES score increases during the 5-year research period ranged from the highest increase of 13 percentage points for EES Question #8 to the one that remained flat, EES Question #6, which remained at 91% favorable throughout the entire period. Figure 4 graphically displays this consistent upward trend. At the end of the research period, EES

Question #1, “I contribute to fulfilling Vail Resorts mission of *Experience of a Lifetime*,” had the highest percentage of positive responses at 97% favorable. EES Questions #2 and #3 decreased YOY by 1 and 2 percentage points, respectively in 2014, the final year of the survey. The lowest EES score at the end of the research period was EES Question #8, “This organization does an excellent job of keeping employees informed about matters affecting us,” which finished at 84% favorable. Despite having the lowest scores of the research-related EES questions at the end of the research period, as stated previously, this question also earned the greatest increase, a 13 percentage point gain in favorable responses between 2010 and 2014.

Table 14

2010-2014 Employee Engagement Survey Items 1-5

RQ Related EES Questions	2010 (N = 2,826)	2011 (N = 3,395)	2012 (N = 3,789)	2013 (N = 3,858)	2014 (N = 4,479)	Total Increase/ Decrease Throughout Research Period
EES Q1 – I contribute to fulfilling the Vail Resorts mission of “Experience of a Lifetime”	92%	96%	96%	97%	97%	+5
EES Q2 – I can identify with the Vail Resorts Mission of “Experience of a Lifetime”	84%	91%	92%	93%	92%	+8
EES Q3 – I fully support the values for which Vail Resorts stands.	82%	88%	90%	91%	89%	+7
EES Q4 – In my opinion this organization is socially responsible in the community.	80%	86%	88%	90%	90%	+10
EES Q5 – I understand my role in supporting our community involvement efforts.	80%	85%	87%	89%	91%	+11
EES Q6 – I believe that this organization is an environmentally responsible company.	-	-	91%	91%	91%	0
EES Q7 – I understand my role in supporting our environmental efforts.	90%	90%	91%	91%	93%	+3
EES Q8 – This organization does an excellent job of keeping employees informed about matters affecting us.	71%	78%	81%	83%	84%	+13

In summary, the 5-year analysis highlights strong and relatively consistent positive movement with regard to driving employee engagement through creating greater purpose by all measures. At the completion of the research, the eight EES questions considered increased 7.1% during the 5-year period, on average. The researcher has provided some insight into what actions the employer undertook in an attempt to drive employee engagement. In Chapter Five he hopes to provide insight into *how* the company went about their work enabling this positive movement in employee engagement.

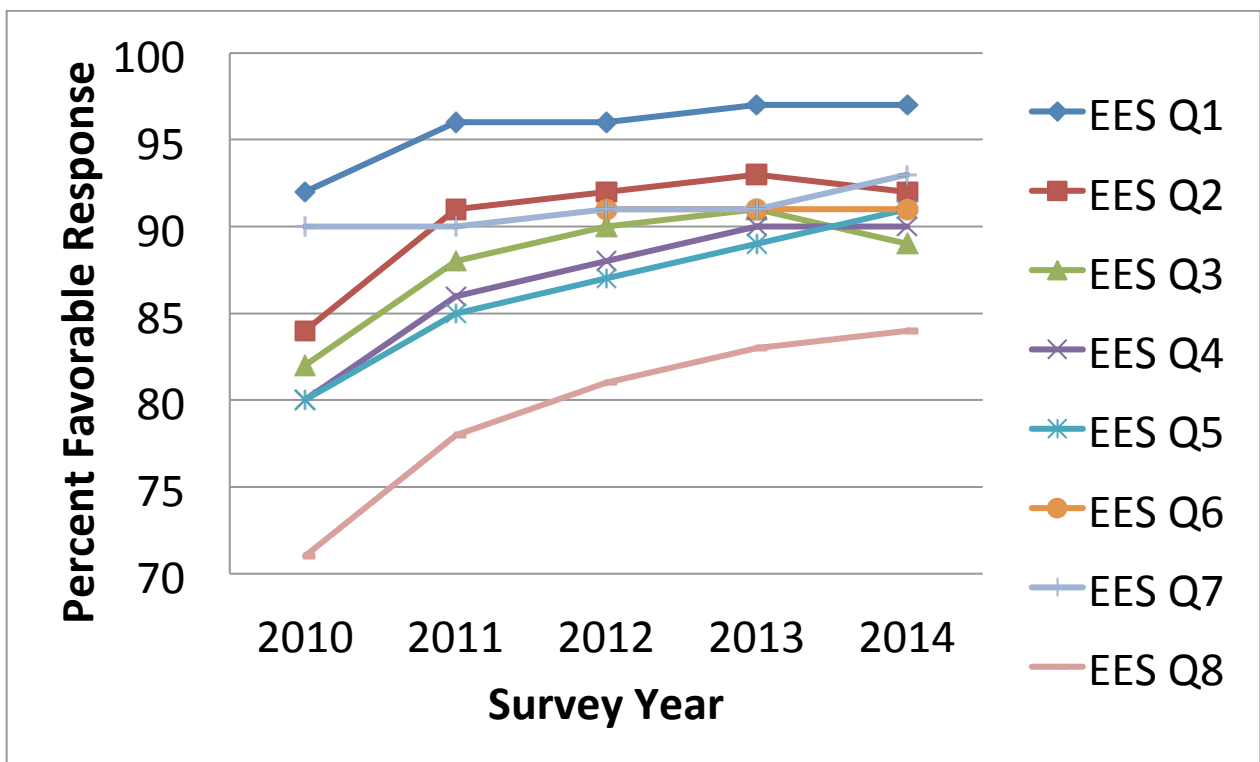


Figure 4. Research related EES questions YOY comparison.

Chapter Five will provide an in-depth review of the specific approaches taken in an attempt to drive greater purpose. Chapter Five’s presentation of findings and recommendations offers a detailed review of what the researcher classifies as the *how* of the work. The *how* is not about the specific action but rather the way in which the organization went about doing the work at hand (i.e., principles employed, approaches taken, beliefs held, etc.).

Chapter Five: Findings and Recommendations

This chapter will explain the practical significance of the previously reviewed results and interpret how the both the specific actions taken by the organization and the way in which the organization went about the work as it relates to those results. The chapter ends with limitations and suggestions for further research.

Review of the Study

As per the EES results reviewed in Chapter Four, greater purpose in the workplace has the potential to pay significant dividends to employers because it serves as “a potent source of employee engagement” (Ready & Truelove, 2011, p. 23). Hence, a unique opportunity exists for businesses to gain competitive differentiation if they are able to articulate greater purpose with clarity and enlist others in that vision.

In Chapter Four the specific actions taken by the organization and the corresponding EES results were reviewed in detail. However, every organization is different and has different needs. The question then becomes not what specific actions to take but rather how to go about identifying the right actions for a particular organization and then how to best execute those actions. Chapter Five will focus on what the researcher concluded about *how* to build a purpose-driven organization.

Methodology

This study involved integrating quantitative and qualitative analysis methods. This method gave the researcher the opportunity to consider a variety of data sources, including survey results, field notes, and organizational artifacts in the formation of study conclusions. The ultimate goal of this analysis was, through the triangulation of data sources, to identify

conclusions and recommend actions that can be taken by organizations desirous of driving employee engagement through the establishment of greater purpose.

Key Findings

Chapter Four demonstrated the potential of driving employee engagement through the creation of greater purpose. Table 14 provides a high-level overview of the research-related EES data in its entirety. When considering the baseline EES scores (year 1) versus the most recent 2014 scores, Vail Resorts achieved increases on all research-related EES questions with the exception of one, which remained flat. EES score increases during the 5-year research period ranged from the highest increase of 13 percentage points to the one that remained flat. At the end of the research period, the highest percentage of positive responses was 97% favorable. Only two EES questions decreased YOY, by 1 and 2 percentage points in the final year of the survey. The lowest EES score at the end of the research period finished at 84% favorable. This same question achieved the largest score increase, a 13 percentage point gain in favorable responses.

Conclusions

In this chapter the researcher hopes to provide insights into not *what* specifically was done but rather *how* the organizational change effort was facilitated, enabling the actions taken by the organization to be effective. Hence, the conclusions will focus on how the researcher went about the work and achieving the results reviewed in Chapter 4. The true conclusion is that the success of the initiatives was much less about what was accomplished, as purpose will look different in different organizations, and much more about how the researcher went about the work. The researcher has reached the following three conclusions: (a) the answers are within the system; (b) an integrated, holistic, systemic approach is needed; and (c) ultimately, employees

must take ownership of organizational change initiatives for success. Figure 5 serves as a visual aid depicting the sequencing of how the conclusions fit together. Each of these conclusions will be reviewed in detail with a discussion of the implications and recommendations for practitioners hoping to replicate similar results.

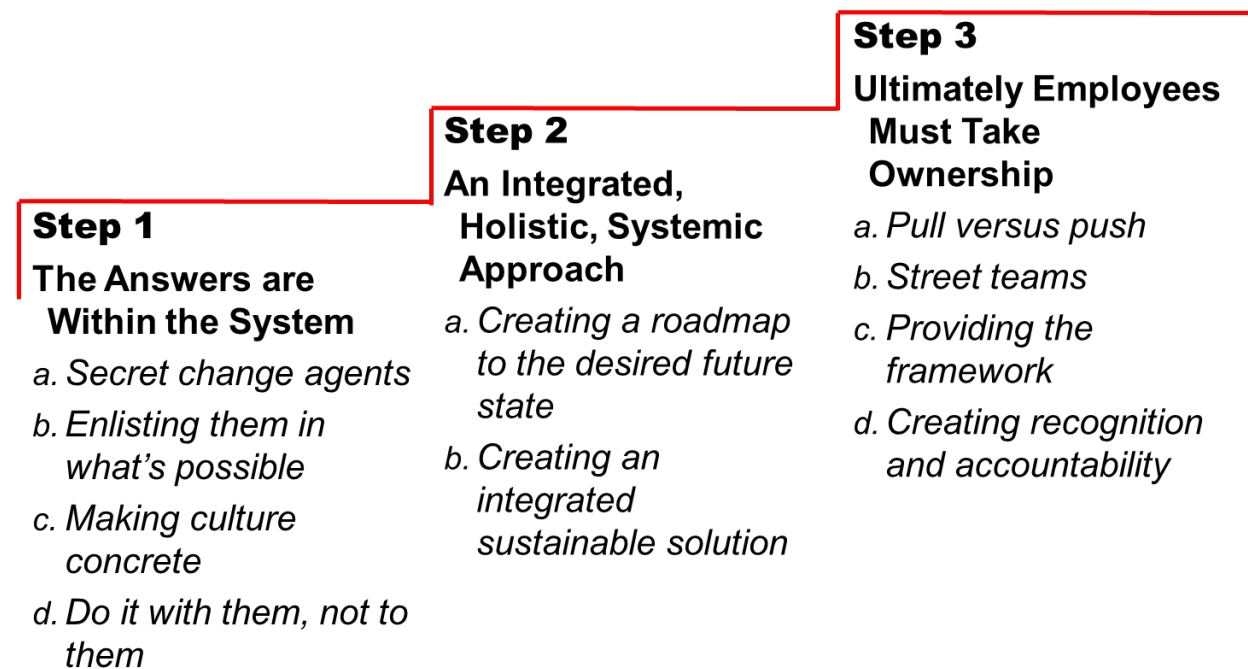


Figure 5. Integrated change process.

The qualitative and quantitative results reviewed in Chapter Four demonstrate strong and relatively consistent positive movement with respect to driving employee engagement through the creation of greater purpose by all measures. At the completion of the research, the eight EES questions considered in the research increased, on average, 7.1% during the 5-year period. These demonstrated results are consistent with the literature findings stating that employees want to believe in something bigger than themselves and that increased employee engagement will occur if organizations can provide this sense of greater purpose in the workplace.

Conclusion one: The answers are within the system. Aligning culture to create greater purpose is not about creating something new but rather about working with the organization to

identify the commonalities that exist throughout, creating ways to speak to those commonalities and holding them up as the organization's own. From the beginning, the Culture Team's work was not intended to be about creating new content. Rather, it was about understanding, collaborating, clarifying, aligning, and co-creating enterprise-wide solutions. It also was about giving the organization a way to talk about ideas like culture, values, and service. This can be accomplished by identifying the organization's secret change agents, engaging them in the possibility of making the organization all that it could and should be, educating them on how to take the abstract idea of culture and make it concrete, and doing the work *with* them versus *to* them. This process provides the best opportunity for the organization to get it right, resulting in products that resonate with the employee population and have the desired impacts.

Secret change agents. In 2008, the researcher worked with operational leaders to identify employees from different functions, roles, and levels across the company to come together and talk about advancing the culture at Vail Resorts. These employees had no familiarity or expertise with culture or other organizational development-related topics. Instead they were representative of the organization: ski patrollers, ski instructors, executive chefs, technology professionals, and more. This group became the Culture Team and also the model for the organization by becoming aligned with the higher purpose of the organization, serving as a living symbol of that standard, and attracting others toward the same.

Using the ideas cited in Pascale and Sternin's (2005) article titled "Your Company's Secret Change Agents," those invited to serve on the Culture Team were already identified by the organization's leadership as walking, talking, living examples of Vail Resorts' culture. They did not necessarily have a title or a position of significant power; instead they had influence with and respect of their coworkers, and others already looked to them for information and direction,

as they were respected and trusted members of the team. They were cultural icons, whether they knew it or not. These influencers exist in every organization, and one need not look far to find them. Ask anyone within an organization, and they will immediately be able to identify employees who fit this bill. By nature they are also ready, willing, and able to do everything within their power to help to make the organization all that it can and should be. Once the organization's secret change agents were in the room, it was up to the researcher to enlist the team in what was possible.

Enlisting them in what is possible. The researcher believed that if he gathered the organization's secret change agents, enlisted them in what he believed was possible for the organization, and facilitated this cross-functional, cross-divisional group, ultimately this purpose-based work would flourish. Cross-functional refers to working in concert with all of the different operations and traditional functional areas (ski operations, hospitality, retail, marketing, human resources, finance, etc.), as well as working across geography and operating entities in order to involve all systems that are connected to the proposed work being conducted.

This belief in possibility was rooted in the researcher's personal values and numerous experiences, validating this meaning-based approach on a smaller scale. The goal was to support the achievement of significant tactical and organizational deliverables by enlisting the Culture Team with a deeper sense of purpose. This purpose-based approach had a significant impact on the entire process. In retrospect, two levels of transformational impact can be discerned. First, many Culture Team members experienced transformation at a personal level. Second, the nature of the projects themselves were imbued with a transformational message and had significant purpose-based implications for the entire organization.

The researcher chose to first help others to see possibilities and then inspire them to strive to accomplish what they never before thought possible. An inspirational vision helps team members to dream and believe that the impossible is possible. Zander and Zander (2002) asserted that “a vision releases us from the weight and confusion of local problems and concerns, and allows us to see the long clear line. A vision becomes a framework for possibility” (p. 169). Without a sensible vision, a transformation effort can easily dissolve into a list of confusing and incompatible projects that can take the organization in the wrong direction or nowhere at all (Kotter, 2007).

The approach followed Quinn’s (2000) suggestion that if a leader is clear on purpose and in design, then preparation is not about information; it is about approaching the project in the right state of being. The researcher was committed to embodying that and to creating an environment for participants to discover and achieve the right state of being as well. The researcher expressly chose methods of communication, engagement, decision-making, and dialogue that facilitated this goal. The environment created was tactical enough to be credible, but transformational enough to be a clear departure from business as usual at the company.

The Culture Team was inspired by the idea that work could be achieved in a different way. In order to not just complete the projects but rather be transformational leaders for the organization, the team focused on both the process and the people. The evidence of the success of this approach was found most directly in the continued, extemporaneous growth of the Culture Team. The group continued to grow and grow, with volunteers from throughout the organization wanting to do their part in creating a better future. Even now, the researcher continues to receive regular communication from participants sharing about the personal impact that the Culture Team had on their lives.

The greater purpose evolved from helping team members understand that they were not just creating new tools and processes for the organization that would have only a direct and positive impact on the business. The Culture Team was doing that and the work also had the potential to change the lives of thousands of employees by helping each find greater purpose in his/her work. They were explicitly committed to changing the company, one employee at a time, by providing a better understanding of what the organization was attempting to achieve and helping them understand how their role fit into the success of the larger organization. The researcher believed and enlisted the Culture Team in the vision that all of this and more would lead to greater employee engagement at work, which has significant potential to not only drive shareholder value but also result in greater satisfaction in employees' personal lives with their family members, potentially making both the employees and their families stronger participants and contributors to their communities as a whole. The Culture Team was not tasked to improve a few company processes; the team was motivated by the fact that they were attempting to change lives and in turn change the world. They found this vision to be worth getting up for in the morning and worth investing in with their discretionary performance.

Making culture concrete. Culture is an abstract concept and inaccessible to most. The abstract concepts of culture and enterprise-wide change were new territory for most in the room, and it was challenging for them to make sense of such an abstract assignment. The thought of not only moving the culture but also moving it across an enterprise of hundreds of disparate locations and thousands of employees was incredibly daunting and seemingly impossible. The team intuitively agreed that aligning the workforce through the creation of shared purpose was the right thing to do. Nonetheless, the team was unclear on where to even begin. Therefore, the researcher had to not only enlist the team in what is possible, but also make the abstract concrete.

He had to educate the team on what culture is and how to move it. The presentation used to begin this dialogue, about what culture is and how to take it from concept to action, can be found in Appendix E. The goal was to take the concept of culture and begin to paint a picture of how these concepts manifest themselves in specific actions.

For example, if organizations want to help employees understand how they fit into the larger equation and success of the company, one approach is to begin by telling the story of the organization. Talk about the vision that the founders had for the organization. Share the values upon which the company was founded. Share how those values come to life today in terms of action and how those actions add up to the manifestation of the founder's vision and the company's success. Explain how all roles within the organization are critical to the manifestation of the founder's vision. When the vision and values align personally with an employee, they he/she begins to see how he/she are connected to something larger and how his/her individual role is integral to the success of the whole. He/she begins to appreciate the importance of all employees and how everything fits together. In an attempt to accomplish exactly this goal, the Culture Team put together what they entitled "The Founders Video" (Appendix B) for the organization.

There is a risk that when an organization becomes clear on who it is and what is important, that some employees may realize that they are not aligned with the organization. Based upon their own personal values, they do not find greater purpose in helping to achieve the organization's work. While losing these employees is a real risk, in the end, it is a risk worth taking, and one that will ultimately be better for both the employee and the employer. The employee in this example will only be fully engaged if he/she is able to identify with the organization and the organization's purpose. If this is not the case, both the organization and the

individual are better off with the employee departing and finding that alignment somewhere else. This also enables the organization, with this newfound clarity of purpose, to attract and retain those who share similar values.

Although this is only one example of how organizations can begin to make concrete the abstract concept of culture, the exact concept can be applied to many initiatives utilizing means such as rewards systems, values, rituals, symbols, stories, and celebrations (Schein, 1990). The overarching idea being that it is not enough to simply express the desire and intention to create a purpose-driven organization. Leaders must articulate that vision and then identify specific, concrete actions that begin moving the organization toward that vision. Often, the daunting task of trying to create transformational, enterprise-wide change freezes leaders into inaction because it simply feels too big. A key point to remember is that leaders do not need to understand completely how to get from their current state to the ultimate vision. All they really need to identify is the first few steps to move closer to that vision. Once they accomplish those first few steps, they will have a newly formed, clearer picture of the next few steps. Ultimately, they must trust the process.

Do it with them, not to them. Once the team had a better understanding of what culture was and how to potentially move it, they began to define all that they thought Vail Resorts' culture could and should be. This visioning exercise was utilized to ultimately provide direction to all initiatives, both near- and long-term, which the Culture Team selected for action. Without a clear definition of where the team was attempting to take the organization, each initiative might or might not have moved the needle in the right direction. Once this vision was defined, the team then considered the organization's current status in order to craft a roadmap forward. Based on the desire to move from the current state to the envisioned future state, the team's first

step was to define the most foundational, fundamental actions to ensure that they were building from the ground up and putting a solid foundation into place. Over time, having a strong foundation in place addressing the key interdependencies was critical for the success of future initiatives. This necessity of ensuring an integrated, holistic, systemic approach will be discussed in much greater detail in conclusion two. After a full review of all of the possible initiatives to drive employee engagement through purpose and create greater organizational alignment, the team prioritized the opportunities, selected three for immediate action (employment brand, organizational values, and EES), and developed what were called *passion groups* to align with and support each opportunity.

The passion groups were small teams specifically focused on one of the three initiatives. Team members voluntarily signed up for the group of their choice based upon their personal passions. The fact that members were allowed to self-select their passion group was a key component of the success of these groups. More often than not, organizations require employees to be part of certain teams or initiatives that are selected based upon their specific subject matter expertise or role within the organization. This approach does not always lead to the development of that individual or align with his/her evolving interests and passions. By allowing individuals to self-select the passion group, team members were immediately fully engaged, committed, and excited to be a part of their project of choice.

Most all of the success of the initiatives taken on by the Culture Team can be attributed to the way in which the team was structured. The cross-divisional, cross-functional nature of the team resulted in having team members who took on the work as an additional duty because they believed in the company and were committed to making it all that it could and should be. Having their insights and advocacy was the primary reason for the success of all initiatives. This

level of engagement by employees who were representative of the larger whole is why the work has been largely embraced by the entire organization: it was because this work was seen as for the people, by the people.

Summation for conclusion one. By engaging operational representatives of the organization, they become the empowered representatives of their business unit. These operators were both engaged in the direction and process and tasked with communicating progress and key decision points back to the business. The Culture Team's approach was to use their personal experiences and beliefs to define what the organization was all about in order to accentuate all that they believed in for the benefit of fellow employees. This reflective model of servant leadership allowed the team members to be driven by inner purpose while focused on others.

Although this approach seems grounded in common sense, in the researcher's opinion, it is an uncommon practice in most organizations, as this level of collaboration takes time. However, it was the collaborative design process (Quinn, 2004) that was a key to success. The researcher chose to incorporate an emergent process design and allow the work of discovery, learning, and clarity happen in the moment, wherever possible. These discoveries would then guide the needed actions, which would then be followed by evaluation and ongoing planning. This collaborative project, then, was about a small handful of simple imperatives. First, it was about getting the right people at the table. Then, it was about surfacing the right questions. Finally, it was about engaging in a collaborative, iterative, meaning-making process, the end result of which is a unified approach to aligning the culture and further engaging the workforce through greater purpose.

Because of the researcher's commitment to emergent process design (Quinn, 2004), he chose to allow the work of discovery, learning, and clarity to happen in the room in concert with

the group. The Culture Team began each session with a summary of findings and recommendations from the previous event but allowed group members to question and clarify things of which they were unsure or with which they were uncomfortable. Each meeting was organized according to an agenda but was infused with opportunities for large-group dialogue, questions, and disagreements. In situations where members of the group found this frustrating or counterproductive, the researcher took the time to pause and examine the dynamics with the group.

Participants spoke in superlative terms about the nature of the design process. This enthusiasm can be contrasted with the historical relationship between corporate functions and their counterparts in the field. These collaborative efforts engaged the field in unprecedented ways. Communication was regular and specific; the Culture Team served as a steering committee for the passion groups, which were well-used; and team members ultimately reached consensus on most issues. The organizational perception of the Culture Team was that it was a process for and by the field, facilitated by corporate partners. The researcher was the facilitator of the process, and while the corporate HR department helped with the development and the execution of specific initiatives, in reality, all of the ideas and a significant amount of the work came from the within the organization. The fingerprints, so to speak, of the organization were all over the work, so at the end of the day, when the programs were rolled out, they were embraced by the organization as their own.

Conclusion two: An integrated, holistic, systemic approach. Well-meaning programs, processes, and tools, regardless of how good they may be, will not add up to something more in isolation. Organizations must first begin with the end in mind by envisioning the future and enlisting others in the same. Once a team is clear on where they want to go, they can then build

a roadmap from their current state to the desired future state, beginning with the most foundational items, to ensure interdependencies are seen to and that what is built is aligned, is sustainable, and results in the desired outcomes.

Creating a roadmap to the desired future state. According to Kotter (2007),

Real transformation takes time, and a renewal effort risks losing momentum if there are no short-term goals to meet and celebrate. Most people will not go on the long march unless they see compelling evidence that the journey is producing expected results.
(p. 65)

Therefore, process facilitators must lead a process in which a clearly articulated roadmap is developed so that all key stakeholders understand fully what is required in order for the system to move from its current state to the desired state.

Instead of building the roadmap from scratch, it is important first to understand and capitalize upon the good work that the organization has already done. All too often a new leader comes into an organization, bringing all his/her previous experiences, wanting to have quick answers to the organization's needs. In this scenario, a leader may insist on implementing his/her ideas as he/she has done in previous organizations, without regard to where the new organization is and what is currently in place. To avoid this situation, much listening and research must occur in order to build an integrated system, because in most cases this new leader is entering into the organization somewhere mid-stream in its evolution.

The roadmap must also capture the priorities of all key stakeholders. In order to obtain support and resources to embark on transformational work, the key stakeholders must fully understand how the work meets their desired needs. It is likely that while the stakeholders may know what they want, they do not necessarily know how to get from here to there without the human resources practitioner helping them understand the roadmap and the complexities of what it will take to achieve their ultimate goal. For illustration, oftentimes stakeholders will be

looking for sophisticated tools like 360-degree evaluations without fully understanding the complexity involved in designing and administering this type of tool effectively. When the practitioner has fully built out a multiyear road map, it then can clearly show the stakeholder where 360-degree evaluations fit into the overall strategy. The roadmap can also show how interdependencies such as leadership competencies, learning and development programs, and effective coaches, to name a few, are being put into place first in order to position the organization to successfully implement the 360-degree review process to the leaders of the organization.

In order to build a system that produces the desired results, organizations must take into consideration a broad range of short- and long-term issues. Unless an organization is crystal clear on its priorities, it can become distracted easily. When this level of clarity is found and clear project plans and expectations are developed, those established deadlines serve to keep team members focused. When the team has developed a holistic roadmap and the supporting strategy to execute on the roadmap, then they also have the visibility to ensure proper resource allocation. The inherent danger in not doing this, or in straying from the roadmap by reacting to all calls to action, is that the work can potentially become interventions versus integrated, systemic change.

Starting from the foundation is critical when trying to create greater purpose within a workforce, as leaders must build on the foundational elements in order to develop the subsequent strategies appropriately. Figure 6 presents a helpful roadmap articulated by Collis and Rukstad (2008) to utilize when organizations are interested in the order in which to engage their employee population in the development of certain aspects of greater organizational purpose. When organizations start first with the organizational mission, that then informs all others

aspects of the purpose of the journey, including values, vision, and ultimately the organizational strategy.

MISSION

Why we exist

VALUES

What we believe in
and how we will behave

VISION

What we want to be

STRATEGY-----

What our competitive
game plan will be

The BASIC
ELEMENTS
of a Strategy
Statement

BALANCED SCORECARD

How we will monitor
and implement that plan

OBJECTIVE = Ends
SCOPE = Domain
ADVANTAGE = Means

Figure 6. Hierarchy of company statements. *Note.* Adapted from “Can You Say What Your Strategy Is?” by D. J. Collis & M. G. Rukstad, 2008, *Harvard Business Review*, 86(4), 82-90. Copyright 2008 by the authors.

By creating an effective roadmap, the organization can put first things first, ensuring that they are creating an integrated system and that all of the interdependencies are in place and designed in such a way to support future initiatives. This thoughtful integration of all efforts creates alignment and reinforces the original intent. For example and as previously mentioned, the Culture Team created and rolled out the redefined company values to the organization. Had the team stopped there, regardless of how good the values work may have been, the efforts would have likely died on the vine or at least not reached their fullest potential. Because the

Culture Team recognized that the values must be created prior to designing dependent systems, they were able to later integrate the redefined values into many other processes, including performance reviews, employee communications, reward systems, and more. The bottom line is that they took care of first things first as a result of having developed a thoughtful roadmap, which ensured that the system they created was integrated and sustainable.

Creating an integrated, sustainable system. In order to create successful and sustainable change, leaders must ensure they factor in all that must be considered in such change.

Traditionally at Vail Resorts, people processes were designed without a systemic roadmap in mind, resulting in multiple initiatives that in no way built upon each other or aligned with an identified future state. As the team embarked upon designing systems to align the workforce through purpose, it was imperative to ensure that all programs drove toward the desired behaviors and outcomes. Team members recognized that none of the programs or initiatives were independent of the other and that each had to be put into play at the appropriate time and place for success and sustainability.

In order to build an integrated and sustainable system, detailed project planning is imperative to ensure full coordination of all aspects of the moving parts. A variety of support systems were used to keep the projects on track and to ensure full visibility and efficient communication. A project manager maintained a detailed project plan that accounted for and coordinated all deliverables and milestones. Project documents and resources were stored and updated on a SharePoint site to minimize problems due to version control. Weekly communication updates to team members were coordinated and disseminated via email. Passion groups created wiki-pages or SharePoint sites for collaborative work.

To ensure effective communication and coordination was occurring, many forms of large-group dialogue were used frequently throughout the process. The design of this dialogue included some aspects of Open Space Technology (Bunker & Alban, 1997). For many participants, this was initially uncomfortable. However, it was the belief of the researcher that important issues of difference could not be resolved, or even understood, without giving the entire group an opportunity to impact the agenda and weigh in. The room was organized in a large circle for the ease of making statements and asking questions. After several hours of working in this format, the team became quite comfortable with the dialogue, and even the more reserved members were able to engage.

These tools and approaches enabled the passion groups to stay connected and aligned to all of the projects that were moving forward simultaneously. They afforded team members the opportunity to weigh in on all aspects of each project and created a deeper level of ownership for each versus only the project with which they were directly involved. This approach ensured both the full integration and the personal ownership of all aspects of the Culture Team's work.

Summation for conclusion two. At the outset, this project felt immense, larger than anything the researcher had ever attempted in the past. This challenge engaged and activated creative energy in the team. In hindsight, the researcher recognized that he has come to hold several core beliefs about change initiatives of this nature. First, it can be done. While ambitious projects of this scope are intimidating and require an enormous amount of hard work, they are not relegated to the realm of fantasy or textbook case studies. Seeing this project through to completion has reminded the researcher of the value and possibility of purposeful, thoughtful, and well-planned, large-scale systemic change.

Second, it is not as complicated as it seems at first. In retrospect, many of the ingredients that made this project successful were simple values and common-sense beliefs about what people need in order to feel secure during times of transition and change. Most HR professionals have successfully used similar approaches to change on a smaller scale with similar results. Underlying all of this is the firm belief that *how* the work is achieved is at least as important to a successful outcome as *what* the work is.

Finally, the researcher firmly believes that although it may require a more difficult and longer journey, good change takes time, and he recommends a systemic approach, rather than one-off initiatives, as the only way to promote real and lasting positive change. The good news is that momentum builds momentum, and even small steps seem to have bigger-than-expected impacts, resulting in even more support for the change agenda and more engagement by the employee population.

Conclusion three: Ultimately, employees must take ownership. In the researcher's opinion and experience, the only way engagement efforts will fully take root is if they are ultimately owned by the employees of the organization. Initiatives pushed from above and not owned by the local teams are not sustainable. Employees must ultimately take ownership based upon their belief in the desired goal and their own personal desire to create their own reality. The Culture Team strongly believed in this concept and initiated several approaches to facilitate this type of employee behavior.

Pull versus push. All too often, functional groups such as human resources, sales and marketing, and finance believe that they know what is best for the operational groups they support. The corporate office stereotypically attempts to impose its ideas and programs upon the business without sufficient input from the operation. Regardless of whether corporate's direction

is correct, the operational departments often resist this type of top-down change. The researcher believed that this “eat your vegetables because they are good for you” approach would fail. Therefore, he employed a pull versus push model; instead of pushing ideas out to the operation, the Culture Team pulled guidance from the operation on how to design the programs in a way that would meet the operation’s needs. It was critical to first clearly understand the needs of the customers (the business leaders and their employees), so the team accomplished this through in-depth, organizational gap analysis, interviews with key leaders, and employee focus groups.

The researcher articulated the notion to the team that if the corporate office were to fall off of the face of the earth tomorrow, the company operators would continue to serve both the employee and the customer. Therefore, if the corporate office is to exist, its sole job is to provide tools and resources that allow the operators to do their jobs even more effectively. Essentially, its role is to make their jobs easier. Anything short of that, and the corporate office might as well disappear. All too often, positional power goes to leaders’ heads, resulting in their forgetting who requires whom to succeed. Ultimately, the corporation cannot serve the customer without the organization’s employees.

Street teams. The Culture Team wanted to re-create what its members had experienced and the way in which they had gone about their work by creating local versions of the Culture Team. By definition, a street team is a group of people who precede a band, arriving in town before the band and building excitement about the band by putting up posters, drawing announcements in chalk on sidewalks, etc. This was the spirit and intent of what the Vail Resorts Street Teams hoped to accomplish. Their objective was to represent the larger organization (Culture Team) and build excitement around what is possible and what is to come. The Street Teams were composed of members of the employee community who represented the

truest sense of what it meant to be a Vail Resorts employee. They brought forward all aspects of the culture and looked to share the company culture with their co-workers, new employees, prospective employees, shareholders, the community, and guests. The goals of the Street Teams included tactically extending out beyond the Culture Team, building a grassroots feel to the overall efforts of the Culture Team, earning additional credibility in operations, communicating efforts throughout the workforce, adding a personal touch to all Culture Team initiatives, establishing local employee ownership of all initiatives, and opening up feedback channels throughout the organization. The specific tasks of each member of the Street Team were defined as follows:

- Advocate and drive initiatives that build a stronger, better company culture; participate in company activities and events;
- Act as a point of contact for employees with questions, comments, ideas, or concerns related to our company culture and related initiatives;
- Be the voice of the Culture Team in the field—speak on their behalf, gather input, present ideas, and take responsibility for solutions;
- Be prepared to act on requests from the Culture Team to advance the mission and values; positively represent the efforts of the Culture Team and the company at organized events (internally and in the community);
- Provide and gather ideas and suggestions that aim to improve and advance the company culture;
- Commit to designated checkpoints with the Culture Team to share feedback, make recommendations, and take action.

These teams were just one more way in which the organization attempted to create local ownership for the employee experience and employee engagement. They were viewed as a key to taking any initiative from concept to action and giving it a fighting chance of being embraced by the local employee population.

Providing the framework. Detailed processes or convoluted guidelines are difficult for employees to fully understand and even more difficult for them to execute. The idea the Culture Team employed was to capture the spirit and intent of each initiative and then, instead of providing a great deal of detail for the employees to follow step by step, find the simplicity on the far side of complexity. The intent was to identify ways in which the Team could provide guardrails within which employees could work, so to speak, but not be so overly prescriptive that employees would not be able to work autonomously or make each program their own in a way that was sincere and authentic to them personally. To do this, each initiative became more of a simple framework that captured the spirit and intent of the concept versus detailed scripts or processes.

One example of this approach can be seen in the way Experience of a Lifetime was launched. Instead of providing employee guidelines and expectations at the launch, the Street Team introduced the concept and simply began encouraging employees to share stories. The idea is that when initiatives like this are done well, they will resonate with the population and take on a life of their own without the company pushing or scripting the efforts. When an organization gets it right, momentum builds momentum, and each initiative will take root without having to be pushed. Experience of a Lifetime quickly came to life for the entire organization and immediately became part of the employee vernacular.

EES action planning is another example of providing a framework and allowing local teams to run with the opportunity. All leaders with a team of five or more receive a full EES report specific to their team's results. In addition, they receive action-planning tools including an action-planning template, a manager's guide to action planning (Appendix H), access to a best-practice library, and action-planning reports.

The action-planning template is an online platform that enables team leaders to collaborate on an action plan for their survey group(s). The online action-planning template allows users to record and track multiple high-level goals (objectives) linked to survey categories/items; record and track specific actions taken to complete plan objectives, including resources needed, start and end dates, the action owner, priority, and completion status; and provide viewing rights to allow leaders to see the action plans of the groups below their group in the survey hierarchy.

The best-practice library is a database of best practices provided by Towers Watson that offers managers suggested best practices for their action plans. In addition, it also serves as an internal library of actions from Vail Resorts' ongoing action plans, providing a dynamic internal resource of suggested actions. This library serves as a resource to help managers develop their action steps and increase sharing of best practices across the organization. Action-planning reports are printable reports of group action-plan details and completion status, which gives organizational leaders the ability to run reports focused on a survey category or a completion status and share plans and progress with employees.

These tools are designed to serve as a framework to help local teams take ownership for their own employment experience. When organizations are able to enlist their workforce in designing interventions to make the most of their own employment experience, amazing things

can happen. Oftentimes employees end up identifying low-cost initiatives that result in significant positive impacts. Even more compelling, the leadership team would have never thought of providing many of the initiatives that were ultimately put in place.

One example of this occurred when a local Street Team was working to identify activities that would further engage Vail Resorts' workforce. Vail Resorts offers a high-end guest experience called First Tracks to select guests. First Tracks provides guests special access to the ski mountain well before it opens in the morning, offering a semi-private experience in nature. While most anyone would acknowledge that this program is a compelling offering, few would consider offering this experience to employees because most of them are already getting up early to go to work and spend all day, every day, on the mountain. The Street Team recommended that the organization offer First Tracks to select employees as a form of recognition. Much to the leadership team's surprise, employees absolutely loved this special recognition that had been traditionally reserved for high-end guests, and the organization was able to provide the experience to select employees at little cost. Employee First Tracks is now provided as a reward for outstanding performance at all Vail Resorts mountains and is one of the most sought-after and valued employee experiences the organization has to offer. This serves as one small example and a true testament to the potential of empowering a workforce to take responsibility for its own experience.

Creating recognition and accountability. Finally, while it is critically important that organizations enlist employees in what is possible and provide them with the tools and resources to take personal ownership in the culture of the organization, it is just as important to set clear expectations, recognize the employees who embrace those expectations, and hold all employees accountable for noncompliance.

Culture and the employee experience are everyone's responsibility. Gone are the days when organizations could focus solely on revenue or customer satisfaction. In today's competitive environment, organizations that are going to succeed and sustain need to focus simultaneously upon all key stakeholders. Culture, employee engagement, employee development, and all other aspects of the employee experience must become part of the leadership agenda, and all employees must be held accountable for not only revenues and service levels, but also employee engagement. The use of the words *all employees* instead of just *leadership* is intentional because creating the proper culture is not just a leadership responsibility; it is the responsibility of all employees to be part of the employee experience solution. This does not mean that there will be no ongoing challenges or that employees should be hesitant to raise these issues. Organizations cannot fix what they are unaware of; so all employees within an organization have the responsibility and obligation to bring those challenges to the attention of leadership. Challenges will continue to exist in any work environment; therefore, the key to dealing with them is to encourage and expect all employees to raise issues in a respectful and constructive way, offer possible solutions, and express a willingness to be part of the solution. The idea that employees can simply raise problems without solutions or ownership should not be acceptable. The idea that leaders can deliver financial results while leaving havoc in their wake is likewise unacceptable. Employees and leaders alike must clearly understand the behavioral expectations of the organization and be held accountable to high levels of performance.

Those who are unable or do not desire to get on board with the direction of the organization cannot just be left to create unrest. They must be encouraged to either get aligned with and support the direction of the organization or find another organization with which they

are more personally aligned. These situations should not be treated in a way where either side seems to believe there is a clear right or wrong answer. All organizations and individuals value different things, and when alignment does not occur it does not mean the individual or the organization is bad. Instead it just means there is a poor fit between the two. Bottom line, it is not the organization against the individual, but rather, it is the individual against the expectation; the organization is there to provide support and encouragement. However, when the individual is unwilling to step up to those expectations, he/she is likely not aligned with the larger purpose of the organization and unlikely to ever be fully engaged.

Where there is accountability, there must also be recognition when individuals, teams, or business units demonstrate high levels of alignment and ownership. Vail Resorts does this in a multitude of ways—all derived from the clarity that the Culture Team created around the organization's values. Monthly celebrations occur at all locations based upon peer and leadership nominations of those who demonstrate that they are living the organization's values. In addition, at the end of every year, the best of the best of those nominated are hosted at an annual event where awardees are treated the way in which the organization expects each of them to treat their guests. They are all flown to one of company's iconic locations and provided with their own Experience of a Lifetime, with the opportunity to partake in fine dining, a high-end hospitality experience, and all kinds of resort activities ranging from guided fly fishing to river rafting: experiences typically afforded to only the wealthiest in the population.

A simpler but highly impactful effort can be found in the Values Pins. Each of these pins reflects one of the Vail Resorts values, and leaders carry a few with them as they go about their day-to-day business. When the leader hears about or witnesses employees demonstrating one of these values, he/she provides immediate acknowledgement by handing them the appropriate pin

to wear on their uniform. Employees take great pride in displaying the pins they have earned and attempt to collect them all. The Values Pin provides an example of an effort that is simple but extremely powerful.

Summation for conclusion three. The best employee engagement ideas for a specific organization are not necessarily found in research papers or identified as best practices. Organizations can and should learn from these external resources, but ultimately, it is the researcher's conclusion that the best ideas are identified and designed by the organization for the organization. When employers spend the time to better understand their workforce, their unique needs, and their specific motivators, they can then design solutions that are uniquely theirs and deliver on their organization's unique value proposition. When organizations take this approach, they are not only aspiring to align with best practice; they are creating best practices. They are designing solutions that are uniquely their own and can deliver on that organization's unique and special employee value proposition. The results allow them to deliver value based on the very reasons employees chose to join the organization in the first place and differentiate their employment experience in a completely unique way.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Study

Each organization is unique, and it is a mistake to try to draw conclusions from one and assume that the same conclusions will translate directly over to another. In order to further solidify the conclusions made from this research, replicating both the actions taken and the way in which the work was done with more companies would add additional credibility and reliability to the conclusions.

Determining conclusive, direct relationships between driving purpose and employee engagement is likely impossible whenever researchers are involved with complex systems. In

order to better understand these relationships, further research that isolates parts of the whole may provide additional insight into the exact relationships between actions and engagement. With that said, this isolated approach would cause further questioning around the cumulative, simultaneous effect of working on the whole system versus small incremental actions. Despite how well those small actions may be implemented, the possibility exists that in isolation they do not equate to greater employee engagement. The opposite limitation then may become true. The question then becomes, is the whole greater than the sum of its parts?

Likely the largest limitation to this study is the fact that the researcher was an integral part of the system based upon his leadership role within the organization and his facilitation role in all of the initiatives reviewed in this research. This level of involvement by the researcher clearly does not allow him to be completely unbiased or totally objective. Another opportunity for further study would be for an unaffiliated researcher to conduct similar research at additional organizations.

A final recommendation for organizations is that they should take the time to compile, review, and reflect upon all of the data available to them in order to make more informed decisions. Organizations have a surfeit of data but often make decisions without fully leveraging all that is available to them. Further analysis would undoubtedly allow most organizations to conduct a more rigorous review and make a more informed decision, translating to a higher likelihood that the initiatives selected for action will produce the desired outcomes.

Closing Comments

Every organization has the opportunity to help its employees find greater purpose in their work. The answers are often different, but purpose exists for all. The potential of focusing on purpose involves more than compelling business motives. There exists a benefit for both the

organization's stakeholders and the world at large. "Stewardship is what parents do for their kids: think about the long term, so they can have a better future" (T. Friedman, 2007, p. 15). The opportunity in front of business leaders today is to lead their organizations with the same long-term perspective that they apply to their children. In fact, both are inexplicitly interlinked. Significant opportunity exists in helping modern society better see the world through the frames of both short-term and long-term perspectives. Too often individuals are only concerned with making a living at jobs that violate their basic values, even when their survival does not absolutely demand it (Palmer, 2004). By promoting an ethical framework that helps expand modern society's worldview, the citizens of the world will begin to identify themselves as part of a larger whole and recognize that they have a greater purpose in life and can make a positive difference in the lives of all.

The most widely utilized definition of sustainability is drawn from the Brundtland Commission: "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Wirtenberg, William, & Lipskey, 2009, p. 2). By definition, that which is not sustainable cannot last. "A sustainable corporation is one that creates profit for its shareholders while protecting the environment and improving the lives of those with whom it interacts" (Savitz & Weber, 2006, p. x).

A new, socially responsible approach to business is needed for companies to both survive and prosper. The time has come for business leaders around the world to recognize that whatever they do to the planet, they do to everyone, and that no one community or country should disproportionately bear the brunt of the burden. The time has come for businesses to lead across traditional borders in order to develop win-win solutions. Business leaders have the opportunity to build upon their strengths to lead, create strategy, align resources, and

systemically execute to do both well and good. In the long run, thinking that one can exist without the other is short-sighted. This approach provides no margin, no mission, and “companies that are carrying out sustainability strategies are often the best financial performers, as the 2007 *AMA Sustainability Survey* in *Creating a Sustainable Future* clearly reveals” (Wirtenberg et al., 2009, p. 26).

If business leaders are still not convinced and are looking for a financial argument demonstrating a relationship between the organization’s employee engagement improvements and the success of the business, look no further. While clearly beyond the scope of this research and with many other factors beyond employee engagement influencing, during this research period Vail Resorts stock price went from a low of \$14.80/share during March of 2009 to an all-time high of \$101.53/share in March of 2015. This performance obviously results in significant shareholder value and performance like this does not happen by mistake. Performance like this can only happen with a strong commitment and constant focus on driving employee engagement, among other things.

In conclusion, purpose drives employee engagement. Employees want to believe in their organization and the idea that they are part of something bigger. They want to work for more than a paycheck. Employers have a unique and powerful opportunity to capitalize upon this potential. However, employers should not necessarily pursue greater purpose in the workplace solely because they have been told it is their obligation or “the right thing to do.” Rather, employers should engage in these efforts simply because it is a good business decision: one that will ultimately provide the organization with the opportunity to further engage employees, gain customer loyalty, reduce expenses, deepen partnerships within the communities in which they operate, and reduce their environmental impact. Ultimately, an amazing opportunity exists for

employers to drive employee engagement through the creation of greater purpose, resulting in a significant win-win by doing both well and good.

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APPENDIX A

Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board Approval

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board

January 16, 2015

Mark Gasta


Protocol #: E1214D06

Project Title: Driving Employee Engagement through Greater Purpose

Dear Mr. Gasta:

Thank you for submitting your application, *Driving Employee Engagement through Greater Purpose*, for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Graduate and Professional Schools Institutional Review Board (GPS IRB). The IRB appreciates the work you and your faculty advisor, Dr. Davis, have done on the proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations (45 CFR 46 - <http://www.nihtraining.com/ohsrsite/guidelines/45cfr46.html>) that govern the protections of human subjects. Specifically, section 45 CFR 46.101(b) (2) states:

(b) Unless otherwise required by Department or Agency heads, research activities in which the only involvement of human subjects will be in one or more of the following categories are exempt from this policy:

Category (2) of 45 CFR 46.101, research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: a) Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and b) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

In addition, your application to waive documentation of informed consent has been **approved**.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit a **Request for Modification Form** to the GPS IRB. Because your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the GPS IRB.

6100 Center Drive, Los Angeles, California 90045 ■ 310-568-5600

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite our best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the GPS IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete explanation of the event and your response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the GPS IRB and the appropriate form to be used to report this information can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* (see link to “policy material” at <http://www.pepperdine.edu/irb/graduate/>).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all further communication or correspondence related to this approval. Should you have additional questions, please contact Kevin Collins, Manager of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at gpsirb@pepperdine.edu. On behalf of the GPS IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Thema Bryant-Davis".


Thema Bryant-Davis, Ph.D.
Chair, Graduate and Professional Schools IRB

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives
Mr. Brett Leach, Compliance Attorney
Dr. Kay Davis, Faculty Advisor

APPENDIX B

Video Artifacts

1. Vail Resorts Culture Video
2. Vail Resorts ECHO Video
3. Vail Resorts EPIC Promise Video
4. Vail Resorts Founders Video

Note. All videos will be made available by contacting the researcher at 

APPENDIX C

October 21, 2009 CEO Email Reference Experience of a Lifetime

To Everyone:

We recently completed our first ever Leadership Summit in Keystone. There were folks from across our company, including all five of our mountain resorts, our hospitality division, and our real estate division, including folks from Colorado Mountain Express and our retail operations, Specialty Sports Venture. It was almost 200 people, all grade 28 and above.

In many ways, just bringing everyone together in one place for a couple of days was reason enough for the retreat. No matter how much you talk about it, actually seeing us all together really brings home how we are all part of one company. However, we did get a chance to discuss, share, learn and teach each other what our Company is all about. We held open houses on each of our divisions and corporate efforts and breakout sessions on topics like social media, Vail Resorts Vision, Epic Summer, Risk, and Master Planning. We talked about how we will be marketing our experiences in a very challenging economy and with the media industry going through significant change. We also heard a terrific presentation from our CFO on how everything we do “on the ground” is connected with how we drive shareholder value. We also celebrated, with an upbeat awards dinner recognizing so many of the great accomplishments we had this past year, even in a tough environment.

Maybe most importantly, we codified a new way to describe what makes our Company so special- Experience of a Lifetime. How we need to aspire to create an Experience of a Lifetime for our employees so they, in turn, can create an Experience of a Lifetime for our guests. Many folks got a chance to describe their Experience of a Lifetime since being a part of Vail Resorts. By the end of the Summit, the emotional connection people had to Experience of a Lifetime was striking. So much so, that after some additional thought, we have decided to change our Mission from “Extraordinary Resorts, Exceptional Experiences” to simply “Experience of a Lifetime”- something that describes both why we work here and what we should be doing. It’s important to note, that we are not really changing our Mission- just what words we use to describe it. More to come on this change and where it will show up.

The Leadership Summit was a definite high point for me in my 18 years of association with this Company. In fact, I closed out the sessions, by sharing that the Summit was, in fact, my Experience of a Lifetime with Vail Resorts. My only disappointment was that we could not have every one of our 15,000 employees participate in the event. However, I would like to share a link to a video that was played at the event. The video, which was created by our own employees, is truly a work of art- both in terms of what it says, but also how it says it. Luckily, we also videotaped much of the conference and will be looking for ways to share that with a much larger group. But, it is my hope that this video shares a little piece of we all saw that which makes Vail Resorts so special. BTW- my favorite line in the video is “The one thing I love about being at Vail Resorts is that it allows you to align who you are with what you do”. Hard to think of a better goal.

All the best,
Rob

APPENDIX D

Vail Resorts Values Blueprint

Vail Resorts Foundational Values Blueprint Exercise

Prepared by the VRV Culture Group

Updated August 30, 2011

Our Group’s Vision: “To recognize and *celebrate unique cultures* within Vail Resorts, while identifying and sharing *the values that make Vail Resorts who we are together*, and tie employees more closely to those values.”

VR Mission: To create the experience of a lifetime for each other, in turn creating the experience of a lifetime for our guests.

VR Values: At Vail Resorts, our values contribute to fulfilling our mission and align the needs of our five stakeholders: our guests, our employees, our communities, our shareholders, and the natural environment. We are held accountable for living these foundational values in everything we do. By remaining true to these foundational values over the years, today we are much more than a ski company; we are a family of vertically integrated, destination-based resorts and companies who depend on one another to create the *Experience of a Lifetime*. The purpose of this Values Blueprint is to create a model to emotionally connect all employees to Vail Resorts.

Table D1

Vail Resorts Values Blueprint

OUR VALUES	COMMUNICATION DESCRIPTOR	ASPIRATIONS	BEHAVIORS
SERVE OTHERS	Own it, personalize it and elevate it.	We are fostering a culture of service to become the undisputed service leader in the travel and leisure sector.	Own it. Personalize it. Elevate it.
DO RIGHT	Act with integrity – always do the right thing, knowing it leads to the right outcome.	We are dedicated to and accountable for exemplifying our moral principles and ethical standards in everything we do. In essence, we strive to always do the right thing.	Always do the right thing. Have purpose, pride and principles. Demonstrate character and honesty. Be transparent. Be personally committed. Lead by example. Don't be afraid to make the unpopular decision if it is best for the Company. Exemplify Vail Resorts values.
DRIVE VALUE	Grow profit through smart and innovative business practices.	The first rule of business is to stay in business. Do that and we can reinvest in our guests, our	Drive business growth. Own it.

OUR VALUES	COMMUNICATION DESCRIPTOR	ASPIRATIONS	BEHAVIORS
		employees, our communities and the environment.	Invest yourself in the organization's success.
DO GOOD	Preserve our natural environments and contribute to the success of our local communities.	As a Company we are committed to the sustainability of, and individually we are dedicated to caring for, the natural environment and the communities in which we live, work and play.	Protect and restore our natural environment. Dig in and get your hands dirty. Don't accept mediocre. Go the extra mile. Each and every action matters Partner with our communities. Move forward, give back. Contribute to the quality of life for others and our business. Embrace Echo.
BE SAFE	Be committed to the safety and wellness of our employees and guests.	Safety of our employees and guests is foundational to everything we do. When employees make safety a focus, everyone benefits.	Play it safe on the job. Ensure the safety of our guests. Never compromise safety. Protect your passion; save your season. Be well.
HAVE FUN	Fun is our product – create fun, enjoy your work and share the contagious spirit.	Fun is our product. As employees and ambassadors of Vail Resorts, we strike the perfect balance between work and play.	Take fun seriously. Work hard, play hard. Exhibit personality. Experience our product.

How can each of us help these foundational values live on at Vail Resorts?

- Exemplify these values.
- Hire people that exemplify these values.
- Mentor employees to exemplify these values.
- Empower employees to exemplify these values.
- Praise and reward employees for exemplifying these values.

APPENDIX E

Presentation Artifacts

1. Vail Resorts Values Presentation
2. Culture Team Kickoff Presentation

Note. All presentations will be made available by contacting the researcher at



APPENDIX F

CEO Email Reference Redefined Company Values

Hello Everyone,

I have some exciting news to share with you – news that I hope will strike a chord. I'm talking about our values. Our shared Vail Resorts Values.

This past year, the Vail Resorts Culture Team, consisting of individuals from departments across the Company, focused on reviewing, redefining and animating our Company values. Our goal was to take the Values Statement listed on our Company website and bring the words to life in an actionable and meaningful way. The good news is that our values are right on target – they reflect who we are and what we believe. The opportunity that presented itself was to translate them into a more impactful, more visual way for all of our employees to easily understand and embrace them. We realized that our values need to be memorable, relevant and clearly and concisely represent who we are and what we stand for.

Results from our employee engagement survey support this as well. Based on the results of the question, "I fully support the values for which Vail Resorts stands", we realized that many of our employees remained unclear as to what our Company values are. While we have made significant improvement year over year on this question; it is still our biggest opportunity compared to the Global High Performance Norm, an external benchmark against which we compare our results to other companies that demonstrate superior financial and employee engagement results.

Our values are core to who we are at Vail Resorts. They're based on our Company mission to provide the Experience of a Lifetime to our guests and employees. They drive our actions each and every day. It is vitally important, therefore, that we all know and understand each value to better apply them and lead with our values in mind.

I am excited to share with you our newly redefined values:

Serve Others. *Own it, personalize it and elevate it.*

Do Right. *Act with integrity—always do the right thing, knowing it leads to the right outcome.*

Drive Value. *Grow profit through smart and innovative business practices.*

Do Good. *Preserve our natural environment and contribute to the success of our local communities.*

Be Safe. *Be committed to the safety and wellness of our employees and guests.*

Have Fun. *Fun is our product —create fun, enjoy your work and share the contagious spirit.*

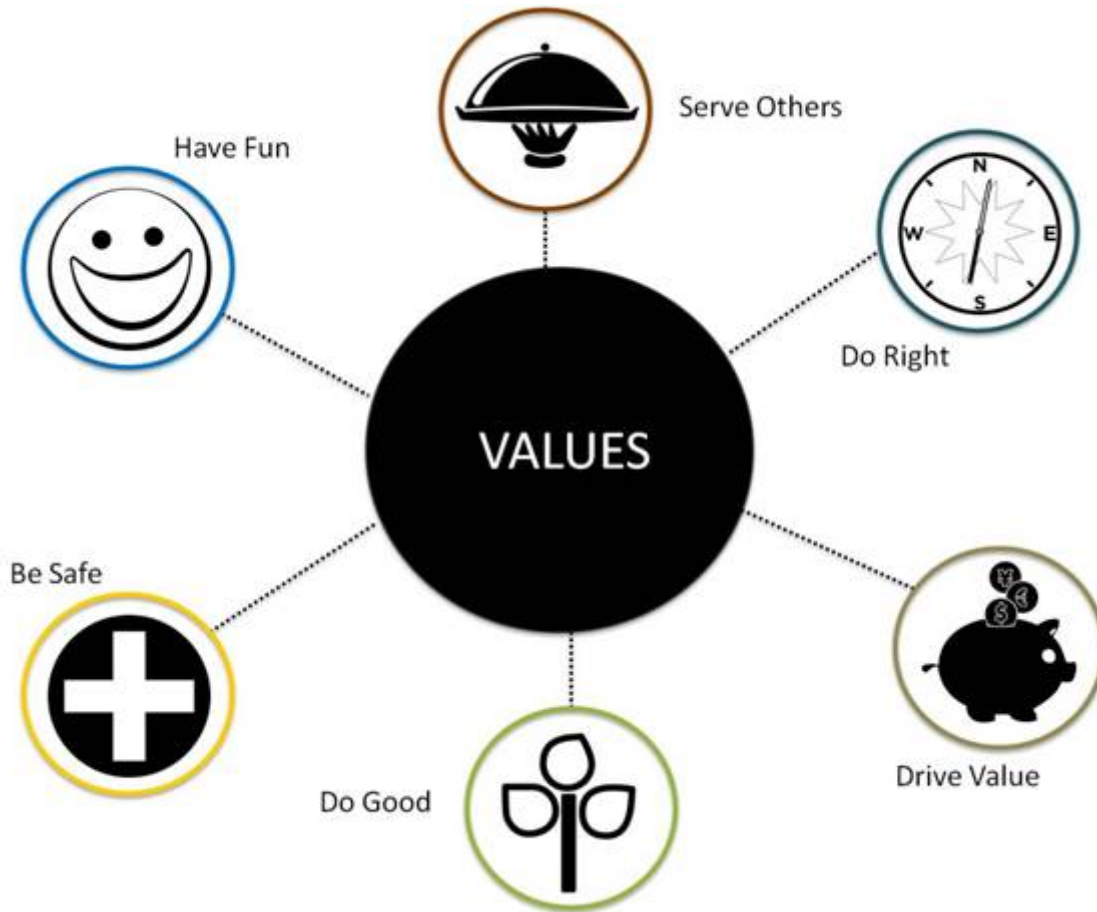


Figure F1. Vail Resorts values.

I hope these resonate with you and I encourage you to not only share them with your team but to also truly embrace them and live them every day. I'm proud of the fact that our Company has made a strong and unyielding commitment to nurturing our culture and defining – and redefining – our values. I hope you are too.

For a more in-depth look at our values, review our [Values Presentation](#). Stay tuned for communications to further bring our redefined values to life.

All the best,

Rob

APPENDIX G

Materiality Test Questionnaire

Table G1

Materiality Test Questionnaire

Group	Is this already mentioned as important by stakeholders?	Does this constitute a future challenge for your sector? Is it already discussed by peers?	Is this connected to relevant laws, regulations, international agreements with strategic significance to your organization/stakeholders?	Does this constitute an opportunity for your organization?	Does this contribute to the likelihood that a significant risk to your organization occurs?	Is this recognized by scientists/experts as risk to sustainability?	Does your organization have specialized knowledge or competencies to contribute to sustainability in this area?	Does this contribute to successful implementation of your strategy or does this reinforce the "values" of your organization?	TOTAL
Climate Change									
Transportation									
Waste									
Water									
Forest Health/ Biodiversity									
Compliance									
Community Vitality									
Employee Engagement									
Economic Performance									
Indirect Economic Impact									
Procurement									
Infrastructure									

APPENDIX H

Vail Resorts Manager's Guide to Action Planning

MANAGER GUIDE TO ACTION PLANNING

The overwhelming reason employees choose not to participate in surveys is because no action is taken or employees are unaware of action being taken. In order to ensure that you take action and your employees stay connected to the process, follow these three steps:

1. **Understand** your results
2. **Create** an action plan *with your team*
3. **Track & Communicate** progress on actions

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1. Understand your results

To receive your results, you must attend a *Results to Action Overview* offered at your resort/location or through a webinar. Please check with HR for a schedule. Then, review your results prior to facilitating a meeting with your employees. For more information on understanding results, view the *EES Results Interpretation Quick Guide*.

2. Create an action plan with your team

Each manager who receives a report is responsible to create an action plan with their teams. Follow these four steps during the meeting with your employees:

- a. **Share the results with your team** – Review the results and ask your team to make overall observations regarding: the **strengths** to build on, **opportunities** to focus on, areas that have **improved**, and areas that have **declined**. When sharing improvements since last year, highlight the actions that have occurred.
- b. **Prioritize**– Ask your team what top 2-3 areas should be the priorities (one strength and one opportunity) for action planning. Review your **top 5** and **bottom 5** questions and your top and bottom categories as possible areas to focus on.
- c. **Seek Clarification** – Before creating your action plan, it's important to understand what your team meant by their collective responses for the top priorities. Consider asking the following questions:
 - i. Who experiences this as a strength/opportunity?
 - ii. What factors contribute to this strength/opportunity?
 - iii. Why is this a strength/opportunity for this group?
 - iv. When is this a strength/opportunity?
 - v. Where have you noticed this strength/opportunity?
 - vi. How can this strength/opportunity be leveraged/improved in the next year?
- d. **Brainstorm actions & create your action plan** – Provide your team the opportunity to brainstorm ideas within the top priority areas in order to determine **2-3 actions**. Consider the following when creating your action plan:
 - i. Focus on creating actions for one strength and one opportunity
 - ii. Review the examples on the *Action Planning Worksheet* and review your action plan from last year
 - iii. Create actions that are simple to implement and within your control
 - iv. Determine an end date; each action should have a deadline by spring '12 and should not be ongoing
 - v. Assign an owner from your team to each action (you should not own each action)

Once you and your team identify your actions, complete the excel *Action Planning Worksheet* and submit to your local HR office by **May 16**.

3. Track & Communicate Progress on actions

It is essential to keep your team informed of progress that is being made as a result of the survey. Quarterly updates on progress and follow-up to action planning will occur locally and organization-wide by: **June 28**, **September 28**, and **January 4**. Ask your team how they would like to be kept informed on the local and organization-wide updates on progress.

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Figure H1. Manager's guide to action planning.