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## EXPLORING GRIEF AND MOURNING IN WORK TEAMS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL MULTI-CASE STUDY

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EXPLORING GRIEF AND MOURNING IN WORK TEAMS: A  
PHENOMENOLOGICAL MULTI-CASE STUDY

by

ASHLEY KUTACH

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of Human Resource Development

Judy Sun, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Soules College of Business

The University of Texas at Tyler  
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The University of Texas at Tyler  
Tyler, Texas

This is to certify that the Doctoral Dissertation of

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has been approved for the dissertation requirement on  
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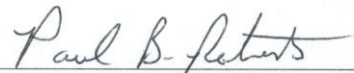
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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to those who have lost a loved one unexpectedly, especially a death due to violence, and those who stood beside them as they walked through the darkness of grief. Specifically, this dissertation was written in memory of Andrew “Drew” Edwin Carpenter who died by gun violence on November 5, 2017 at the age of 19 and in honor of his mother Julia Roberts. My dear friend Julia you have endured more than any mother can imagine and yet continue to trust in God, put one foot in front of the other, care for patients, love like only a mother and grandmother can, and be a friend to so many. Not surprisingly due to your kind and giving nature, you have endeavored to listen and provide support to others who are also grieving. Through your pain you have supported others in their pain. What a testament to who you are and what an inspiration you are to me and others. Your beloved Drew, our Sunshine, is not forgotten. My hope is that this dissertation honors him, honors you, and honors all those who are strong enough to care for those who are grieving.

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## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	iv
List of Figures .....	v
Abstract .....	vi
Chapter One: Introduction .....	1
A Contextual Story .....	1
Background to the Problem .....	2
Statement of the Problem.....	6
Research Purpose and Research Questions.....	9
Theoretical Underpinnings of the study.....	9
Grief Dual Process Model (DMP) .....	9
Social Support Theory .....	11
Team-Member Exchange Theory .....	12
Group Social Capital Theory and Social Networking Theory .....	13
Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory .....	15
Overview and Design of the Study .....	16
Research Context .....	17
Research Participants .....	17
Data Collection Procedures.....	18
Data Analysis Approaches .....	18
Significance of the Study .....	19
Assumptions.....	19
Definitions of Terms .....	20
Summary of Chapter One and Organization of the Dissertation Proposal .....	22
Chapter Two: Review of Literature .....	24
Introduction.....	24
Grief and Mourning .....	25
Impact of Grief on Individuals, Teams, and Organizations.....	34
Social Support.....	39
Teams and Team Social Interactions .....	42
Team-Member exchange (TMX) Theory .....	43
Group Social Capital Theory .....	44
Social Network Theory .....	45
Impacts of Social Support on Resources .....	48
Summary of the Chapter .....	50
Chapter Three: Research Design and Method .....	55
Introduction.....	55



Purpose of the Study .....	55
Research Questions .....	55
Design of the Study .....	56
Rationale for Conducting a Qualitative Study .....	56
Rationale for Conducting a Phenomenological Study .....	56
Rationale for Conducting a Case Study .....	56
Participants .....	57
Instrumentation .....	58
Data Collection Approaches .....	59
Data Analysis .....	60
Validity and Reliability .....	61
Researcher Reflexivity .....	62
Member Checking .....	62
Data Triangulation .....	63
Rich and Thick Verbatim Data Description .....	63
Role of the Researcher .....	64
Pilot Study Overview .....	64
Pilot Study Findings .....	67
Limitations .....	68
Summary of the Chapter .....	69
Chapter Four: Results .....	70
Purpose of the Study .....	70
Research Questions .....	70
Participants .....	71
Demographics .....	75
Research Findings .....	77
Research Question 1 .....	81
Research Question 2 .....	87
Research Question 3 .....	91
Team Dynamics .....	96
Summary of Findings .....	101
Chapter Summary .....	107
Chapter Five: Discussion, Conclusions, Implications, and Future Research .....	108
Summary of the Phenomenological Multi-Case Study .....	108
Discussion of Findings Relative to Literature and Theory .....	110
Grief and Mourning .....	110
Social Support .....	114
Teams and team Social Interactions .....	116
Impacts of Social Support on Resources .....	121

Implications to Theory, Research, and Practice.....	123
Research.....	123
Practice.....	124
Limitations .....	127
Recommendations for Future Research .....	128
Summary of the Chapter and Conclusion .....	130
References.....	131
Appendices.....	155

## List of Tables

Table 1	Brief Overview of Historical Views of Grief .....	25
Table 2	Literature Review Summary and Link to Proposed Study .....	51
Table 3	Participant and Team Details .....	74
Table 4	Participant Demographics.....	76
Table 5	Overview of Themes, Initial Codes, and Frequency of Coded Extracts.....	78
Table 6	Summary of the Research Findings .....	106
Table 7	DMP Related Study Findings .....	110
Table 8	Grief Study Situation Details .....	114

## List of Figures

Figure 1.	Dual Process Model (DPM) of Coping with Bereavement .....	32
Figure 2.	Dual Process Model Revised (DPM-R) of Coping with Bereavement ....	33
Figure 3.	Proposed DMP Revision based on Team Context Research Findings...	112

Abstract

EXPLORING GRIEF AND MOURNING IN WORK TEAMS: A  
PHENOMENOLOGICAL MULTI-CASE STUDY

Ashley L. Kutach

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The University of Texas at Tyler  
October 2019

The purpose of this research study was to explore the experiences of team members when a fellow team member returns to work after the unexpected death of a loved one. The participants in the study gave accounts of their personal experiences, and the overall team experiences, following a team member's return to work. The goal of the study was to investigate these experiences to provide insight that is not available in current literature.

This research was a phenomenological multi-case study based on six theoretical literature foundations: grief dual process model, social support model, team-member exchange theory, social network theory, group social capital theory, and conservation of resources (COR) theory. Research and interview questions were developed from these six theories and theoretical models to uncover how team members and teams experienced the impacts of grief within the context of a work team. The researcher conducted qualitative interviews with each participant, allowing participants to express their feelings, thoughts, and experiences. The interviews were transcribed, coded, and

analyzed to reveal themes in the data. A summary of the findings was included for the reader. Findings were discussed including implications for theory, research, and practice. In conclusion, limitations of the study were disclosed and future research opportunities were revealed.

*Keywords:* grief, mourning, bereavement, teams, unexpected death, social support, resources, work

## Chapter One

### Introduction

#### **A Contextual Story**

November 5, 2017 is a day I will never forget. As I rushed around the house packing to head to Georgia for a business trip, I missed a text from a dear friend of mine. When I noticed the text about 30 minutes later, I stood in disbelief at the message which read, “Please pray! Someone shot and killed my baby.” I walked outside to catch my breath in the chill of that early November morning as I dialed my friend, knowing a tragedy was unfolding on the other end of the phone. When my friend answered the phone, there was a deep wailing that is reserved for only the most painful, horrific moments. My friend’s 19-year-old son had been shot and killed in the early morning hours of November 5, 2017. A journey of grief and mourning began.

As a parent, my first thought was, “how will she survive this?” In the days that followed, as I had time to process the situation as a Human Resource Development (HRD) and Human Resource Management (HRM) professional, I thought often about how people in her situation would transition back to work and how her co-workers would help or hurt in the process, perhaps unknowingly. I also recalled other tragic situations in the past such as a co-worker whose adult son accidentally shot and killed her grandson while cleaning a gun after a hunting trip, my husband’s aunt whose teen daughter died by accidental drug overdose, and the owner of a local childcare facility whose daughter committed suicide. In all of these cases, the bereaved employee returned to work. I

wondered what they experienced upon their return and what their team experienced in the days, weeks, and months after their return. I longed to find information that would provide guidance to managers faced with helping an employee transition back to the workplace after a tragic event such as the one my friend experienced, and guidance to handle the possible impacts on the team as the grieving employee transitioned back.

### **Background to the Problem**

According to US Bureau of Labor Statistics data, approximately 60% of American adults work (United States Department of Labor, 2018). Considering that an estimated 70% of American adults have experienced or will experience a traumatic event at least once in their lives (“How to Manage Trauma”, 2019), workplaces are likely to encounter employees experiencing trauma. The term “trauma” is defined as a highly stressful event in someone’s life that causes intense stress, impacting the person’s capability to cope (“How to Manage Trauma”, 2019). Examples of traumatic events include, and are not limited to, events such as abuse, domestic violence, death of a loved one, a medical diagnosis, or assault (“Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder”, 2019).

One of the most common type of traumatic events considered in the literature is the death of a loved one, likely because of the number of people impacted by this type of event. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016), 2.7 million people in America die each year, and each death closely impacts an average of 5 people. It is estimated that at any given time, one in ten employees may be affected by bereavement (McGuiness, 2009). Bereavement is the experience following the death of a significant person in one’s life (Stroebe, Schut,& Stroebe, 2007). Chances are, many of those people have returned to work and are faced with handling their grief due to



bereavement in the workplace. Grief is an overarching term that includes all thoughts, emotions, and physical reactions to the traumatic event and can change from moment to moment (Wolfelt, 2016). While grief is what a person is feeling or experiencing internally, mourning is the expression of grief externally (Wolfelt, 2016). These external actions of mourning are the behavioral elements displayed by the grieving team member, which may be evident in the workplace.

Even more complicated than other experiences of the death of a loved one is the unexpected death of a loved one. Unexpected deaths caused by sudden illness, homicide, suicide, drug overdose, accident, or disaster are not uncommon in the United States. Every day in the United States approximately 160 people die due to homicide or suicide (Crosby, Mercy, & Houry, 2016). In 2010, according to an analysis of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data, the United States homicide rate was 7 times higher than other high-income countries. There were more than 16,000 deaths due to homicide in the United States in 2010. In addition, the suicide rate was twice as high as the homicide rate in that same year. When compared to women, men had more than twice the rate of unexpected death due to violence (Grinshteyn & Hemenway, 2016). When a death is sudden and unexpected grief can be even more difficult. Peritraumatic distress, which is a reaction of fear and horror to a traumatic event, is found to be key in the development of complicated grief outcomes (Hargrave, Leathem, & Long, 2012). Complicated grief is, “unusually severe and prolonged, and it impairs function in important domains” (Shear, 2015, p. 154). When experiencing complicated grief, the bereaved experiences intense emotional pain and may be consumed with memories of the deceased loved one. Approximately 2 to 3% of the world’s population is affected by

complicated grief, and that percentage increases when the deceased is a close loved one who was lost unexpectedly (Shear, 2015). When an employee returns to work while grieving, or even more challenging while experiencing complicated grief, from the organizational perspective there may be possible impacts including significant financial impacts.

Hazen (2009) indicated that in the United States alone, companies are losing as much as \$75.1 billion annually due to grief causing lack of focus, errors, and accidents. Grieving employees often have trouble remembering information and may not be able to concentrate on work tasks (Gibson, Gallagher, & Jenkins, 2010). And while some grieverers say that concentration and memory improved over time after their return to work, most report that their cognitive abilities never returned to pre-grief state (Gibson, Gallagher, & Jenkins, 2010). It is not difficult to understand how intense grief and mourning make working effectively difficult or impossible.

Yet, despite the potential financial impact of workplace grief, how grief is recognized and handled in the workplace is not often considered (Vickers, 2009). At this time, there are not specific legal requirements in the United States for employers to grant time off for grieving and mourning. The United States Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) of 1938 (FLSA 29, USC 201) regulates pay and other areas to ensure fair employment practices, but it does not regulate time off for illness or bereavement after the death of a loved one (United States Department of Labor, 2011). The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) will allow for time off in cases of a serious illness that makes the employee unable to work; however, the time off is limited and unpaid (United States Department of

Labor, 1993). Accordingly, it is at the discretion of employers to determine if and how much time off is provided.

A 2016 review of bereavement policies found that on average, organizations provide four days of bereavement leave to their employees after the death of a spouse or child, three days of leave for the death of other relatives such as grandchildren, siblings, parents, and grandparents, two days of leave for a miscarriage or the death of a spouse's relative, one day of leave for a death of extended family members, and zero days of leave for the death of a friend or colleague or other traumatic event (SHRM, 2016). Grieving though is a much longer process than just a few days (Lee, Read, & Markham, 2018).

Moreover, when an employee experiences the death of a loved one and then returns to the workplace, the employee, the team members, and managers are all faced with dealing with the impact of the employee's grief. The number of organizations utilizing work teams has increased rapidly over the past few decades and organizations have shifted from individual work to individuals working collectively toward common goals (Mathieu, Hollenbeck, van Knippenberg, & Ilgen, 2017). Since most team members and managers are likely not grief counselors, they will need guidance on what to say and not say and what to do and not do to provide support to the grieving employee and each other. It is likely that most human resource professionals, team members, and managers lack the understanding of the impact grief and mourning have on employees in the workplace, not to mention a lack of knowledge on how to provide support to those helping them handle the grief process (Tehan & Thompson, 2013).

## **Statement of the Problem**

Close to 2.5 million Americans die each year leaving behind family, friends, and colleagues to grieve their loss (Friedman, 2012). Cultural beliefs of the lay public and some medical experts view grief as a natural and normal response to loss (Friedman, 2012; Pomeroy, 2011). The death of a family member, friend, or colleague unexpectedly can cause escalated trauma and lead to grieving beyond what may be considered normal (Pomeroy, 2011). Grief is a personal experience that will vary from person to person, but often includes complex feelings of anger, distress and sorrow mixed with memories that prompt laughter and joy (Berzoff, 2011). According to Berzoff (2011), “grief, bereavement, and mourning are multidimensional, depending on the nature of the loss, the ways it was metabolized, the ways in which the loss shapes the self and the representation of the other” (p. 262).

While knowledge about death, dying and grief has advanced significantly in the past several decades, even social workers who often strive to assist those grieving due to their jobs have a need for continuing education to become better equipped to provide bereavement care (Pomeroy, 2011). More research is needed especially for grief due to traumatic losses which can lead to many difficult outcomes such as depression, complicated grief, anxiety, relationship troubles, and health problems (Pomeroy, 2011).

Not only does loss occur in various forms and manifest in different ways to different people, it occurs in every age group, population, and context (Pomeroy & Garcia, 2011). Workplaces are just one context in which bereavement and grief may be experienced (Tehan & Thompson, 2013). According to Hazen (2009), “No workplace can escape grief” (p. 290). Grieving though is usually viewed as a personal and private

endeavor (Worden, 2008). When people return to the workplace still grieving and mourning, they may not be able to compartmentalize their personal grief while at work. How they respond and react will likely permeate every aspect of their life, including their work life (O'Connor, Watts, Bloomer, & Larkins, 2010). When the person is employed, work is one of many aspects of life that is very likely to be impacted by grief. It is likely that the team member may not be able to leave their grief aside because grief cannot be turned on and off on-demand (Chichester & Janney, 2018).

Returning to work “is often a marker of trying to resume normal activity following a period of traumatic upheaval” (Gibson et al., 2010, p. 501). However, people may return to work while still in the early stages of grief and grieving individuals are often unable to function well in the workplace (Chichester & Janney, 2018; Little, 2010). It is socially expected that employees leave their personal issues at home to complete work related tasks (Lattannzi-Licht, 2002), but it is not reasonable that employees will be able to do so completely (Chichester & Janney, 2018). The work of grieving and the work of working will likely compete with each other (Little, 2010). Expected grieving behaviors, such as showing anger, crying, inability to focus, missing work, and withdrawing from others, are not aligned with behaviors accepted in the workplace (Hazen, 2009). Some people experiencing grief may not exhibit any of these behaviors, as if nothing happened. Whether displayed or hidden, grief may go unrecognized by managers or team members (Hazen, 2009; Thompson & Lund, 2017). Therefore, handling grief in the workplace is complex and it is important for managers and HRD and HRM professionals to understand, prepare for, and handle employee grief when faced with it in the workplace (Thompson & Bevan, 2015). Even beyond the potential financial

losses to the organization, these behaviors can cause dysfunctional relationships and even impact the overall morale within the workplace.

While grief as a personal experience has been extensively examined in the literature, less research has focused on grief in a work setting (Tehan & Thompson, 2013). In workplaces, team members and managers may be impacted directly by the grieving team member's behaviors, such as lack of efficiency, crying, and moodiness (Gibson et al., 2010). While team members may initially respond in supportive ways, they may grow weary of the demands of providing support and may not continue these behaviors throughout the grieving process (Manns, 2011). Not only may this be hurtful or challenging for the person experiencing grief, it is often troubling for the team member who may then be experiencing feelings of frustration, anger, or grief. While research provides information about the overall potential impacts to the organization when a grieving employee is in the workplace (Gibson et al., 2010), little insight is provided about how team members and/or managers are affected through the process of working with and perhaps providing support for a grieving team member.

Grief presents major challenges to organizations, forcing managers to deal with grief both at the individual level of the grieving employee and at the team level. Discussion about death is taboo in American society and often not discussed; therefore, there is much to be learned about this phenomenon (Chapple, Ziebland, & Hawton, 2015). To gain insight into this phenomenon, the experiences and thoughts of team members must be considered. A qualitative approach to gather these experiences and thoughts allowed the exploration of the complexity of experiences with grief that teams faced due to unexpected death.

## **Research Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of team members of grieving and mourning fellow team member and to investigate how the grief and mourning experience impacts individuals and the team.

Developing qualitative research questions is the beginning point of the inquiry process (Agee, 2009); therefore, research questions were developed to provide the plan and focus for the research (Richards, 2005). The following research questions guided the study:

- How are team members impacted by a fellow team member experiencing grief and mourning after the unexpected death of a loved one?
- How is a team impacted overall by a team member experiencing grief and mourning after the unexpected death of a loved one?
- What can be learned from the study of grief after unexpected death in the context of a team?

## **Theoretical Underpinnings of the Study**

Six theories and theoretical models underpinned this study: grief dual process model (Stroebe & Schut, 1999), social support model (Fenney & Collins, 2015), team-member exchange (TME) theory (Seers, 1989), social network theory (Scott, 2017), group social capital theory (Oh, Labianca, & Chung, 2006), and conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989).

**Grief dual process model (DPM).** Just over a hundred years ago, Sigmund Freud (1917) published an essay on mourning and melancholia that is considered to be the first major grief related theoretical contribution (Hall, 2014). Freud proposed the

concept of “grief work” that psychologists have continued to examine in contemporary research on grief (Archer, 2008; Hildreth, 2016). Since that time, many researchers have hailed Freud’s early work on grief as a good place to start in understanding the roots of grief related theory. The foundation of Freud’s theory was that grieving required the work of detaching from the deceased, readjusting to life without that loved one, and then moving on into new relationships. Many grief theories and models came after Freud’s early work that endeavored to provide order and structure to the process of grieving, but these theories have been frequently criticized as not addressing the complexity and uniqueness of grieving (Hall, 2014).

Recent models such as Worden’s Task Based Model (2008) aim to better capture the individual nature in which grieving occurs (Hildreth, 2016). McGuiness and Williams (2014) eloquently stated the complexity of handling workplace grief in saying, “Each of these people will experience grief in an intensely personal manner and need different things from their employer. Some bereaved employees may be unable to face work for some time, others may find coming back to work quickly dulls the pain; some employees may crumble at the mention of the dead person’s name, whereas others may draw strength from thinking about them” (p. 112). Even for employees experiencing grief for reasons other than a loved one’s death, behaviors, reactions, and needs will vary. The variation in the grieving process is important to understand in a work setting, as these variations must influence the response to and support of those grieving.

Worden’s (2008) Task Based Model built upon Freud’s early theory holding that grief is “work” and is better aligned with a modern understanding of the complexity of grieving. The model includes the tasks of accepting the reality of the loss, processing the



pain, adjusting to the new reality, and developing a continued bond with the deceased while moving on with a new life at the same time. Adding to the depth of his model, Worden (2008) included seven factors that are critical to consider as they will likely impact the grieving process. These factors are who the person was who had died, what their attachment level was to that person, how the person died, previous events, personality traits, social mediators, and other stressors that were present. These four tasks and seven factors are critical to understanding the complexity of grieving, how grief may manifest in the workplace, and the potential impacts to a team.

Stroebe and Schut's (1999) DPM, which advanced Worden's (2008) Task Base Model, provided the theoretical underpinning of this study with regard to grief and grieving. The DPM labels the four tasks in Worden's (2008) Task Base Model as loss-oriented behaviors. They added that bereaved individuals also perform restoration-oriented behaviors, which are behaviors aligned with accepting and adjusting to a new life without the deceased. Stroebe and Schut (1999) found that those grieving oscillate between loss-oriented and restoration-oriented behaviors. Understanding the complex behaviors associated with grieving is foundational to this study, as the focus of the study was the phenomenon of grief.

**Social support theory.** Another theoretical area playing an important role in grief in the workplace is social support. Outside of family, others in the workplace usually serve as the primary source of social support (Gibson et al., 2010). Allan Wolfelt (2016), an author, educator, and grief counselor, wrote directly to team members saying that, "Your support of a fellow employee can make a real difference in how he survives right now" (para. 2). Social support is a necessary component for healing (Little, 2010).

There are several theoretical perspectives on social support which should be considered including the stress and coping perspective, the social constructionist perspective, and the relationship perspective (Lakey & Cohen, 2000). Of particular importance to this research is the role of social support in stress and coping. A theoretical model presented by Fenney and Collins (2015) provided a theoretical connection between social support and an individual's ability to thrive, even when faced with adversity. Fenney and Collins (2015) stated, "One important function that relationships serve is to support thriving through adversity, not only by buffering individuals from the negative effects of stress, but also by helping them to emerge from the stressor in a way that enables them to flourish, either because of or despite their circumstances" (p. 116).

Providing social support may come at a cost to team members though. In the social support field, a phenomenon called Burnout Syndrome details how professions that require the daily work of providing support leads to burnout (Pines, Aronson, & Kafry, 1981). What if team members are providing support not because of their profession, but because of the circumstances of a particular team member? Individuals only have so much of themselves, their energy, and their support to give. To better understand how the "give and take" of social interactions occur on a team and the unique dynamics of teams, team-member exchange theory, group social capital theory, and Social network theory underpinned the study.

**Team-member exchange (TME) theory.** Team-member exchange (TME) theory was born out of social exchange theory. Though often referred to as a single theory, social exchange theory is more accurately described as various conceptual models related to a specific type of social interactions (Cropanzano, Anthony, Daniels, & Hall,

2017). Social exchange theory suggests that individuals have social interactions that involve nonmonetary resources such as good will, trust, and a sense of belonging through reciprocal exchanges (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960). A theory that is grounded in social exchange but specific to the interactions within a team, is team-member exchange (TME) theory (Seers, 1989). TME can be viewed at the individual or the whole team level (Farmer, Dyne, & Kamdar, 2015). As Seers (1989) stated, “Member roles become defined in relation to the group and its other members through the reinforcement of reciprocal actions” (p. 119). So, as team members interact with each other, roles are formed between individuals and within the group as a whole.

Team members feel part of a team identity when the exchange is reciprocal and team members are perceived to be equally pulling their weight on the team (Seers & Chopin, 2012). In the case of team members experiencing grief, they may not be able to pull their weight with the team workload and may not be able to contribute equally to meeting the team’s shared goals.

**Group social capital theory and social network theory.** In most organizations, employees are organized into work teams and teams have a social component (Mathieu et al., 2017). As such, two theories, group social capital theory and group social network theory, will provide insight into team social dynamics. Social capital theory describes social ties and interactions within groups and organizations (Bourdieu, 1986; Burt, 1992; Coleman, 1988; Coleman, 1990; Lin, 1982; Putnam, 1993). This evolution of theory is critical because it outlined that the flow of information between group members adds value and that social ties can be strategic drivers within businesses.

Group social capital theory has advanced in recent years, providing a deeper understanding of the value of participation in social networks. Within groups, there is a social structure which should be viewed in two ways, both as a whole, and as the individual parts of the social structure that make up the whole (Oh et al., 2006). Three main types of social capital are identified by contemporary scholars: bonding, bridging, and linking (Aldrich, 2012; Kawachi, Kim, Coutts, & Subramanian, 2004; Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). Bonding social capital is characterized by strong social relationships as would typically be found in a family or friend group (Aldrich & Meyer, 2014). Therefore, this type of social capital is usually associated with social support. Bridging social capital is characterized by social connections due to specific demographic or social connections such as race, class, location, or belonging to an organization (Aldrich & Meyer, 2014). The third type is linking social capital which is characterized by social ties between regular individuals and those with power (Aldrich & Meyer, 2014). Each of these types of social capital will be considered further, as each type may or may not be present in a work group and may impact the experiences of the work team.

Social network theory posits that social interactions and relationships occur within networks (Scott, 2017). These networks not only provide the social structure of a team, they often provide emotional support. Oh et al. (2006) stated that, “There are many times when setbacks might destroy morale, or when unexpected tragedies might cause a group to lose its focus, and social ties are called on to assist and support” (p. 571). Group social capital, especially the bonding type, is associated with higher levels of social support, especially during times of disaster or trauma (Hurlbert, Haines, & Beggs, 2000).

Given the growing dependence of organizations on teams, additional research is called for in understanding social interactions within teams, both at an individual level and a team level (Farmer et al., 2015). The focus of this case study provided not only further research in the theoretical areas of team-member exchange, group social capital theory, and Social network theory, it also provided an under-researched case in the study of team dynamics. Bordia, Restubog Bordia, and Tang (2014) stated that “Applications of social exchange theory in organizational research have tended to ignore the resource context and its impact on a focal dyadic social exchange” (p. 1). Resource availability will likely be affected by a grieving team member, which in turn will likely impact the social exchanges within the team. Therefore, the conservation of resources theory also underpinned the study.

**Conservation of resources (COR) theory.** COR theory emerged out of stress research. A theoretical model called the conservation of resources (COR) model was introduced by Hobfoll in 1988 (Hobfoll, 1989). His model bridged the gap between the environmental and cognitive viewpoints of previous stress research. The basic tenet of the model was that people strive to retain, protect, and build up resources. Any potential loss of those resources is considered a threat. Resources include anything that is valued by an individual such as objects, personal characteristics, conditions, energies, skills, time, self-esteem, and a long list of other items (Hobfoll, 1989). COR suggests that although loss of resources is stressful, people employ other resources to offset the loss. Just the act of employing other resources may be an additional source of stress. For example, people placed in a role to provide support at a time when they needed support will experience increased psychological stress (Hobfoll, 2011). When few resources are

stored and the depletion of resources is high, there is a poor chance of success in handling the stress.

COR can provide several insights into the phenomenon of grief. First, from a grieving team member's perspective, someone grieving who returns to the workplace is likely burning resources to cope with the grief situation. What may not be clear is how deep and wide his or her resource pool was at the onset of the situation, or how appraisal of his or her resources is going. Second, from the team member perspective, how deep and how wide each team member's resource pool is may differ and how team members cope with the added stress of a grieving team member may vary, perhaps dependent on the level of social support provided. These perspectives tie closely to one of the seven factors introduced earlier in Worden's (2008) theoretical model of grief. How an individual handles grief will partly depend on other stressors in that person's life and environment. The more stressors present, the faster resources are consumed. In addition to the availability or lack of resources, the social relationship of team members may impact the team dynamic and performance. Therefore, many factors must be considered when examining the phenomenon of grief on the team environment including team dynamics and norms, the level of social support provided, the resources available to the bereaved, and the resources available to the team members.

### **Overview and Design of the Study**

The design of the study was a qualitative phenomenological multi-case study method aimed to accomplish the understanding of a phenomenon based on human perception and understanding (Stake, 2010; Yin, 2018). This method was appropriate based on the purpose of the study, as it provided the opportunity to gain insight into the

subjective perceptions of the personal experiences within a given context (van Manen, 1997). This phenomenological research was designed to uncover the lived experiences of people from their own perspective, thus interviews were utilized to collect data on the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014).

**Research context.** The research setting was within the dynamics of a work team environment in which one team member had experienced the unexpected death of a loved one causing grief and then returned to the workplace. Participants were selected using a purposeful approach to gain insight from those who had personally experienced this phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Individuals who were currently working or had previously worked on a team in which one of the team members experienced the unexpected death of a loved one were recruited to participate. Criteria for inclusion of the study were: (1) current or previous experience working on a team in which one of the team members experienced the unexpected death of a loved one during the time they were working on that team; and (2) the participant must have worked with the team member experiencing grief and mourning for at least six months following the team member's return to work. This timeframe was selected as it increased the likelihood that the team members experienced interaction during the time the team member was grieving and mourning. This time frame also allowed for experiences that extended over a period of time and participants were therefore likely able to provide rich details about their personal experiences.

**Research participants.** Participants were recruited to the study through social media requests and email for participants meeting the inclusion criteria. Potential

participants were screened using the stated criteria in the interview request, and those selected were asked to take part in the interview process.

**Data collection procedures.** Data was collected using semi-structured interview questions asked either face-to-face or via Zoom, an online video conferencing platform (Zoom Software, 2019). The interviews allowed the researcher to collect data about the feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviors of the participants and information about how the participants perceive their lived experiences (Merriam, 2009). The interviews featured semi-structured interview questions and flexibility was allowed within those questions to gain additional insight and explore thoughts and perspectives as they emerged in the interview (Merriam, 2009). All interviews were audio-recorded to allow for transcription and analysis of the data. Additionally, the researcher created detailed field notes during the interviews to record observations, personal thoughts, potential biases, and ideas aligned with interviewing best practices requiring the interviewer to be cognizant of her own views that may affect data subjectivity (Stake, 1995).

**Data analysis approaches.** Thematic analysis was utilized to analyze the data captured in the recorded semi-structured interview transcription (Braun & Clark, 2006). This process allowed the researcher to identify patterns and report themes in the data. The researcher followed the process for thematic analysis created by Braun and Clark, (2006) which contains six phases: (1) familiarization with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and, (6) producing the report.



## **Significance of the Study**

This study provided a unique contribution to grief and HRD/HRM literature by delivering empirical qualitative data related to this common but under-researched phenomenon. The study provided an opportunity to understand the experiences of team members working with a grieving team member after the unexpected death of a loved one and enhanced the understanding of behaviors and actions team members, managers, and HRD/HRM professionals should consider when handling this delicate situation. The qualitative approach provided the participants with an opportunity to describe their own experiences in their own words with their own meanings. These experiences have not previously been available in the grief literature.

## **Assumptions**

The following assumptions were made:

1. Participants will accurately and honestly recall their experiences.
2. The death of a loved one was a traumatic event causing the team member experiencing the unexpected death of a loved one significant stress, diminishing his or her ability to cope.
3. The inclusion criteria for participants is appropriate, therefore the life experiences of the participants are appropriate for the phenomenon being studied.
4. The minimum criteria of having continued work experiences with the grieving team member for at least 6 months following the team member's return to work is adequate.
5. Participants are sincerely interested in participating in the study and do not have other motives.

## **Definition of Terms**

To provide clarity and consistency in the terminology used in the study, key terms are defined in relation to their use in the study.

*Bereavement.* Bereavement is the experience following the death of a significant person in one's life (Stroebe et al., 2007).

*Grief.* Grief has been defined in many ways through decades of research. To provide a common understanding of the term grief, Parkes' (2009) definition was used. Parkes (2009) defined grief as the loss and yearning for something. While grief is often associated with the death of a loved one, grief can also be the result of the onset of a chronic illness, the breakup of a relationship, a lost opportunity or promotion, the death of a pet, or other difficult life event (Hazen, 2009). However, much of the research on grief is related to the death of a loved one.

*Group.* A group in a work context is a unit of an organizational structure formed to provide both focus and flexibility (Oh et al., 2006). While the terms "group" and "team" may be used synonymously in some research, in this study a team is a type of group that is working collaboratively toward a common goal(s).

*Group social capital.* Social capital is a collection of resources that are available within a group through the group member's social relationships (Coleman, 1988; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Oh et al., 2006).

*Human Resource Development (HRD).* According to Wang, Werner, Sun, Gilley, and Gilley (2017), HRD is "a mechanism in shaping individual and group values and beliefs and skilling through learning-related activities to support the desired performance

of the host system” (p. 1175). In other words, HRD includes any and all activities that make employees, individually and as a team, contribute more or less on the job.

*Human Resource Management (HRM).* A “soft” definition of HRM is used in this study (Collings & Wood, 2009, p. 3). HRM is the practice of aligning HR policies with the strategic direction of the organization and highlights the role of employees as a valuable resource needed to secure a competitive advantage.

*Manager.* A manager is an individual who is responsible for certain groups and types of tasks within an organization (Manager, n.d.). While the term manager does not always indicate that the individual has a staff of people who report to him or her, that is a requirement of the definition as it is used in this study.

*Mourning.* Mourning is the outward expression of grief, and may include behaviors such as, crying, showing anger or sadness, withdrawing physically, lack of focus, or other behaviors (Wolfelt, 2016).

*Social support.* Social support is the communication, both verbal and nonverbal, between people that reduces uncertainty about the relationship or a situation (Sias, 2009). Social support can be emotional support or tangible support.

*Team.* A team is two or more individuals working together to share accountability for specific work outcomes (Gardner & Quigley, 2014). The individuals included in a team work independently and/or collaboratively to meet shared goals and are part of a larger organization. While the terms “group” and “team” may be used synonymously in some research, in this study a team is a type of group that is working collaboratively toward a common goal(s) at work. The phrase “work team” is used to define the type of team studied.

*Trauma.* Trauma is a “deeply distressing or disturbing experience” (Joseph, 2012, para. 1). Trauma may be caused by the following experiences, but is not limited to these examples: divorce, illness, accident, death of a loved one, experiences of war, and abuse.

*Unexpected Death.* A sudden death that was not anticipated and one unprepared for (Goldstein et al., 2018).

### **Summary of the Chapter and Organization of the Dissertation**

The chapter began with the background to the problem which provided an orientation to the phenomenon of grief in the context of a workplace and work team. A statement of the problem followed, highlighting the lack of understanding in the literature of the impacts of grief on work teams and implications of these impacts to teams, managers, and HRM professionals. Next, the purpose of this qualitative study was stated, which was to examine the experiences of team members of a grieving team member and how the grief experience impacted the team at an individual level and a team level. The theoretical frameworks that anchored this study included theories and theoretical models of grief, social support, team-member exchange, social network, group social capital, and conservation of resources. The research questions that guided the study were established, and an overview of the research design was presented to address the research questions. A discussion of the significance of the study was then presented as evidence for the contribution the study will make. An overview of study assumptions and key definitions followed. Finally, the organization of the remaining chapters of the dissertation is provided next.

Chapter Two will review literature associated with the key concepts related to the study. Chapter Three will present an overview of the study design and method, including

a description of the participant selection process, data collection, analysis approaches, and study validity and reliability. It will also address limitations and conclude with a summary of the chapter. Chapter Four will discuss the research findings, and Chapter Five will share implications of the findings, limitations of the study, and proposed future research based on the study results.

## Chapter Two

### Review of Literature

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will review the domains of literature relative to the phenomenon of grief and mourning due to the unexpected death of a loved one within the context of work teams in the workplace. The chapter will be composed of five sections: Grief and Mourning; Impact of Grief on Individuals; Teams and Organizations; Social Support; Teams and Social Interactions; and conservation of resources (COR).

To locate scholarly literature, the researcher used the Google Scholar search engine and the university search engine through the University of Texas at Tyler's Robert R. Muntz Library. Searches included the following databases: Ebscohost, Emerald Full Text, Wiley Online, PsychINFO, Sage, and Business Search Complete. Initial searches were conducted limiting the search to the past 10 years of literature and using the following search terms: bereavement, grief, mourning, workplace, unexpected death, return to work after death, social support, team support, team-member exchange, and conservation of resources. These terms were searched in isolation and in combination to identify articles from which to begin understanding the literature. The reference sections of these articles were then utilized to identify additional articles to expand the breadth and depth of the literature reviewed.

As the focus of this study was re-entering the workforce after experiencing the unexpected death of a loved one, literature related to partially similar topics such as grief due to other types of death, organizations experiencing group grief due to loss of an employee, medical professionals handling ongoing loss and grief due to job role, grief due to loss of job that does not specifically study re-entry to the workplace, and others were excluded.

### **Grief and Mourning**

Grief has been defined in many ways through decades of research. Often times in the literature, the term grief is used synonymously with mourning or bereavement, though these words have unique meanings which can be found in Chapter One. While grief can be caused by any type of loss, much of the research on grief is related to loss of a loved one by death. This review of grief and mourning literature is not exhaustive, as grief has been studied for over 100 years by hundreds of scholars. A brief overview of the changing views of grief throughout the past 100+ years can be found in Table 1. This historical view of grief frameworks is provided to highlight the various views of grief over time and the complexity that still exists with understanding the grieving process.

Table 1

*Brief Overview of Historical Views of Grief*

Grief Framework	Research Summary
Early and Foundational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grief was viewed as potentially fatal, though not necessarily an illness, and suggested such remedies to grief as intense crying, opium, bloodletting, and purging (Rush, 1812)</li> <li>• Darwin (1872) identified two types of grief; an active form and a passive, more depressive form and observed facial expressions associated with grieving as seen in both humans and animals</li> </ul>

- Psychoanalytical

    - Freud (1917) published articles outlining ideas on mourning and melancholy, detailing that mourners perform “grief work” which includes detaching their emotional energy from the one they have lost, and integrating that energy into other parts of their lives
  - Psychiatric

    - Klein (1940) viewed grief as a temporary illness
    - Lindemann (1944) claimed grief is a psychiatric disease requiring intervention
  - Pathological

    - Deutsch (1937) argued that grief does not take a ‘normal’ course and that it can become chronic and pathological if not manifested
    - Klein (1940) viewed grief as a temporary illness
  - Psychological and Contrary Contemporary Views

    - Shand (1914) published the first thorough study of grief through the lens of psychology, outlining the “laws of sorrow” and four types of reactions to grief; aggressive, depressive, suppression through self-control, and frantic
    - The importance of social support while grieving was first introduced by Shand (1914)
    - Bowlby (1961, 1973, 1980) applied attachment theory to the separation reactions of grief
    - Parkes (1964a, 1964b) furthered Bowlby research and showed that psychiatric disorders can be triggered by bereavement including chronic grief and delayed grief
    - Kubler-Ross (1969) introduced the widely cited five stages of grief; denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance
    - Bowlby and Parkes (1970) added to earlier research a phase of numbness that occurs, particularly with the unexpected death of a loved one
    - Wortman and Silver (1989) advocated for empirical studies related to grief
    - Stroebe and Stroebe (1991) conducted the first empirical research on grief work
    - Archer (1999, 2001) disputed the concept of “grief work” and supported that grief is a natural reaction to loss of attachment
    - Strobe and Schut (1999) introduced a dual process model that includes loss-oriented stressors and restoration-oriented stressors
    - Klass, Silverman, and Nickman (1996) challenged conventional thinking that grieving requires severing attachment bonds
- 

Because of the vastness of over one hundred years of research, not all views will be covered in this literature review. The researcher will provide a more detailed review



of literature that is often used contemporarily to guide the handling of grief and grief literature that will help guide this study. The review will begin with an introduction to Sigmund Freud and his work. Although others such as Burton (1621), Rush (1812), and Darwin (1872) all wrote early discussions about grief, they are not as frequently referenced for their contributions in modern grief research.

Just over a hundred years ago, Sigmund Freud (1917) published an essay on mourning and melancholia proposing the concept of “grief work” that psychologists have continued to examine in contemporary research on grief (Archer, 2008; Hildreth, 2016). Freud’s early work on grief is foundational to much of grief theory. Freud stated that, “mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, and idea, and so on” (p. 243).

Freud’s research on mourning is the foundation for psychological research on grief, as it outlines that mourning is work in which the ego is completely absorbed, resulting in a loss of interest in all other efforts (Granek, 2010). The basis for Freud’s model of bereavement is attachment, the breaking of that attachment when a loved one dies, the process of readjusting to life without the deceased, and building new attachments and relationships (Hamilton, 2016).

Around the same time Freud was including grief in his writings, Shand (1914) wrote the first thorough study about the psychology of grief (Granek, 2010). Shand (1914) named four distinct types of grief including an aggressive type, a depressive type, a self-suppressed type, and a frantic type, which expanded upon Freud’s differentiation between mourning and melancholia. His writings also introduced an important

component to the process of grieving, the role of social support. Social support continues to be a studied factor in the grief process. Those with less perceived social support have been found to have higher rates of continued depression (Al-Gamal, Bin Saeed, Agnes, & Long, 2018). Social support's role in workplace grief and related literature will be discussed later in this chapter.

On the other hand, contemporary psychologists researching grief are mostly empirical in their research orientation (Granek, 2010). Their work has moved grief research much deeper, considering such topics as cognitive impairment and physiological changes during the grief process, mortality rate of those experiencing grief, aspects of trauma, personality and gender differences in grieving, and the impact of early development on the grieving process (Perrig-Chiello, Höpflinger, Spahni, & Carr, 2015; Stahl, Arnold, Chen, Anderson, & Schulz, 2016; Stroebe et al., 2007). Most frequently, the contemporary view is that grief is a psychological issue requiring assistance by psychologists and counselors. This view is a big shift from early research that viewed grief as a natural process that is worked through independently over time. In the contemporary view, those experiencing grief should get the professional help needed to move forward in life and return to work as quickly as possible (Granek, 2010; Green et al., 2001). These contemporary, psychological views are not going unchallenged though, as some researchers report that the impacts of psychology, historical events, and social norms have warped our natural views and abilities to grieve (Konigsberg, 2011).

Often, grief associated with an unexpected death is more complex and prolonged (Goldstein et al., 2018). An unexpected death is a death that was not anticipated in any way. Unexpected death, including homicide, suicide, and accidental deaths will likely

result in complicated grief (Nakajima, Masaya, Akemi, & Takako, 2012; Rozalski, Holland, & Neimeyer, 2016; Shear, 2015). Complicated grief lasts longer than acute grief, is more intense, and impairs daily function (Shear, 2015). When a person experiences complicated grief, they experience an extreme and prolonged longing for the deceased loved one, anger, declining physical health, and higher rates of suicidal thoughts (Zetumer et al., 2014). They may also experience disruption in their personal and work relationships and challenges with concentrating on work and other responsibilities (Currier, Irish, Neimeyer, & Foster, 2015). Although it is not likely that team members in the workplace will know if a team member is experiencing complicated grief, if the grief is caused by an unexpected death the prevalence of complicated grief is between 12.5% and 78.0% (Nakajima, Ito, Shirai, & Konishi, 2012).

While each person's grief is unique, patterns have been identified in the grieving process. Many grief theories have been formed to capture these patterns in models and provide helpful information about the process to those impacted by grief, which could provide guidance to work teams. One of the most widely cited models was published in Kubler-Ross' book titled *On Death and Dying* in 1969. This model is a stage approach to grieving, meaning people have to pass through various stages of the grieving cycle. Her research was centered on the grief associated when one is facing his or her own imminent death, such as cases with a terminal diagnosis, but the model has been studied in other contexts as well (Stroebe, Schut, & Boerner, 2017). The Kubler-Ross model includes the stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance and is frequently referenced in psychology, sociology, medicine, business, and other fields. The

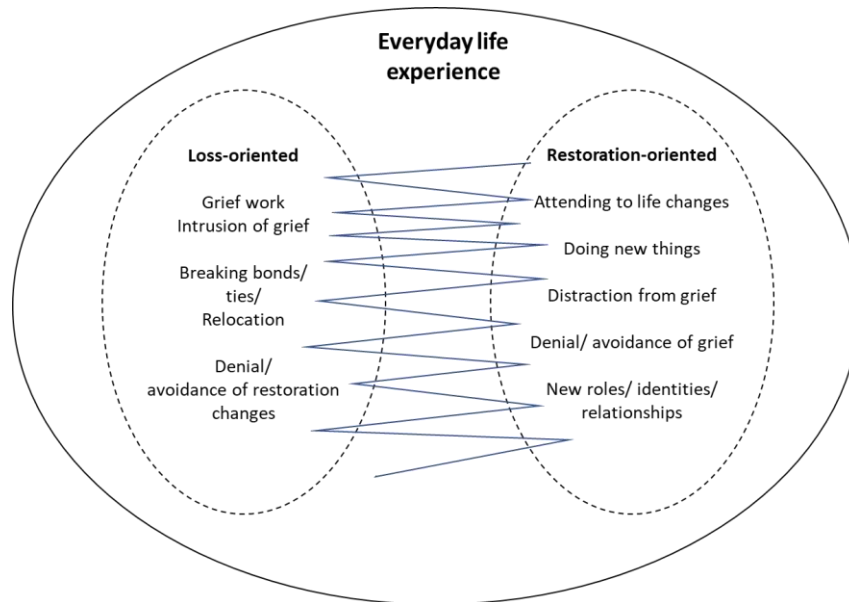
designation of this model as a stage approach is a critical one because it indicates that a grieving person passes through these stages in a specific order.

Grief models such as the Kubler-Ross model and many other stage models that followed her work (Bowlby, 1980; Horowitz, 1976; Sanders, 1989; Shuchter & Zisook, 1993) are widely utilized to provide guidance to managers and HRD professionals, yet they are criticized by some as being mostly untested (Doka, 2011) and possibly dangerous (Stroebe, Schut, & Boerner, 2017). While some experiencing grief may go through a “typical” process of grieving, others may not, especially if the grief is in response to the loss of a loved one due to unnatural causes (Hildreth, 2016) or if there is not much forewarning of the death (Archer, 2008). Some research supports that individuals bereaved by a natural death very often follow similar stages of grief established by Kubler-Ross (1969), and the grief lessens over time, usually within six months of the death (Maciejewski, Zhang, Block, & Prigerson, 2007). Natural death is not the only cause of grieving in the workplace though, and even employees grieving a natural death are all unique. So, these models do not necessarily provide the right tools for individuals, teams, managers, and HRD professionals to handle grief of any type, but certainly may not be useful when a team member is grieving due to the loss of a loved one by unexpected death.

Criticism of the stage of grief models have made way for more recent theories and theoretical models aimed to better capture the individual nature in which grieving occurs (Hildreth, 2016). McGuiness and Williams (2014) eloquently stated the complexity of handling workplace grief in saying, “Each of these people will experience grief in an intensely personal manner and need different things from their employer. Some bereaved

employees may be unable to face work for some time, others may find coming back to work quickly dulls the pain; some employees may crumble at the mention of the deceased person's name, whereas others may draw strength from thinking about them" (p. 112). Even Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005) agreed in a later publication that there is no such thing as a typical response to grief and that grief is just as individual as the individuals who experience it. Bowlby (1980) introduced a more flexible grief theory by identifying four overlapping phases a bereaved person goes through including shock, yearning for the one lost and protest of the loss, despair, and recovery. Worden (1982) developed another non-linear model that includes the four tasks of accepting the reality of the loss, processing the pain and grief, adjusting to the world without the deceased loved one, and finding an ongoing connection with the deceased while moving forward with life. Stroebe and Schut (1999) developed a non-linear approach to understanding grief that built upon Freud's (1917), Bowlby's (1980), and Worden's (1982) work and addressed some of the limitations in their models. The Stroebe and Schut (1999) model included two parts that happen simultaneously: handling loss-oriented and restoration-oriented stressors. Their new conception model, called the Dual Process Model (DPM), changed the direction of grief theory by focusing not only on the process of grieving, but also the daily life strains that must be considered during bereavement (Carr, 2010). See Figure 1. Stroebe and Schut's (1999) model recognized that grieving goes way beyond adjusting to life without a loved one, the entire world of the bereaved individual is distressing, stressful, and requires work to reorganize (Stroebe & Schut, 2005). A bereaved person may bounce back and forth between the loss-oriented tasks such as breaking attachment

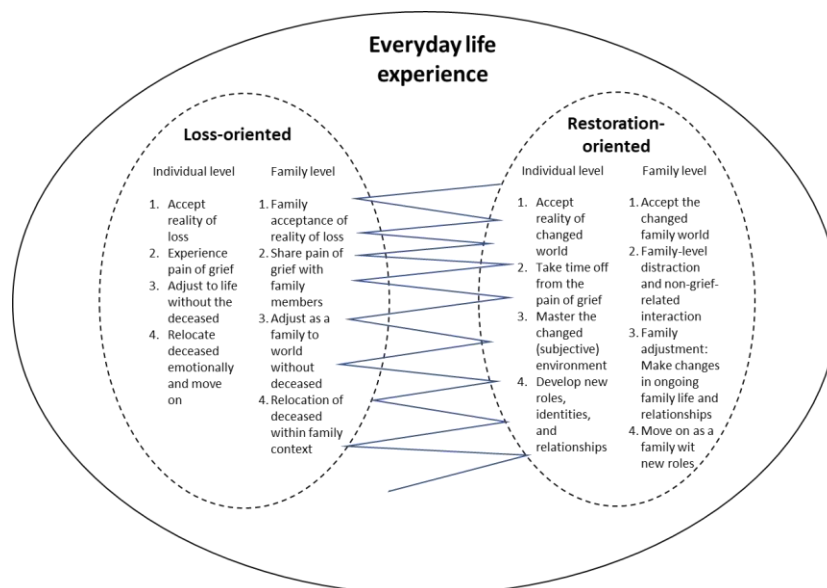
bonds with the deceased and restorative-oriented tasks such as going out to lunch with friends as a distraction from the grief (Carr, 2010).



*Figure 1.* A dual process model of coping with bereavement at the individual level. From Stroebe, M. S., & Schut, H. (1999). The Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement: Rationale and description. *Death Studies*, 23, 197-224.

Since the DPM model was published, empirical research of the model and components of the model have been conducted to examine and test it. The research studies have included both qualitative and quantitative studies in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, social work, and sociology (Carr, 2010). Carr (2010) published a review of these empirical studies through 2010 and made several suggestions for additional empirical research of the DPM model including the context of a death that was anticipated or unanticipated, how the loss-oriented and resource-oriented behaviors change over time, and how much a bereaved person focuses on each type of behavior. It was the creators of the DPM though that made the next big movement in the theoretical

understanding of grief. Stroebe and Schut (2015) recognized that even though contemporary non-linear models of grief such as the DPM provide a more realistic conceptualization of the grieving process than earlier stage models, they were missing an important element. They were missing the context that the loss and restoration-oriented behaviors are happening within. Stroebe and Shute (2015) reason that, “if such tasks are necessary for successful adaption at the individual level, a valid strategy would be to explore their viability at the family level” (p. 876). Their continued research led to the development of a revised DMP, called the DMP-R, that adds components of loss-oriented and restoration-oriented behaviors that are relative to the grief phenomenon within the family context. See Figure 2. The DPM-R model is pivotal because it recognized that grief does not impact only the individual level, it impacts others within a given context. Yet, it is not clear how the DPM-R model may be relevant in the context of work teams.



*Figure 2.* A dual process model of coping with bereavement at the individual and family level. From Stroebe, M. S., & Schut, H. (2015). Family matters in bereavement: Toward an integrative intra-interpersonal coping model. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 10, 873-879.

Advancements and new ideas about the relevance of DPM has continued in research. Stroebe and Schut (2015) introduced the link between the DPM and overload, referring to stressors that go beyond what the bereaved person feels he or she can handle. A bereaved person not only has the stressors of loss-oriented and restoration-related activity. Additional stressors such as the demands of the workplace, may cause stress related overload and burnout (Stroebe & Schut, 2015). Stroebe and Schut (2015) call for more research in several areas including how grief overload is associated with areas of life such as work.

### **Impact of Grief on Individuals, Teams, and Organizations**

When people experience the death of a loved one, how they respond and react will likely permeate every aspect of their life (O'Connor et al., 2010). When the person is employed, returning to work is one of the many aspects of life that may be impacted. "There is no part of human existence that loss and grief do not reach, and the workplace is no exception to this" (Tehan & Thompson, 2013, p. 265).

The literature provided details of the various impacts of the grief phenomenon to organizations, and those within organizations, when an employee is grieving. Moreover, the value of social support in the workplace context emerged in the literature as an important part of grieving. However, few guidelines and ideas for the role of the manager, team members, and /or HRD professionals in supporting a grieving employee could be found in the literature.

While grief is often associated with the death of a loved one, grief can also be the result of the onset of a chronic illness, the breakup of a relationship, a lost opportunity or promotion, the death of a pet, or other difficult life event (Hazen, 2009). This study was



limited to the phenomenon of unexpected deaths of loved ones; however, much of the literature reviewed provides a broader view of grief as it relates to any death or traumatic event.

Returning to work “is often a marker of trying to resume normal activity following a period of traumatic upheaval” (Gibson et al., 2010, p. 501). However, grieving individuals are often unable to function well in the workplace (Little, 2010). Grief may be hidden at work, but even if expressed, it may go unrecognized by managers or peers (Hazen, 2009). Recognized or not, grief may have serious financial and motivational impacts to organizations.

Hazen (2009) indicated that in the United States alone, companies are losing as much as \$75.1 billion annually due to lack of focus, errors, and accidents in response to grief. In 2014, suicide claimed more than 42,000 lives in the United States resulting in \$53.2 billion loss to the economy, mostly due to lost work productivity (Crosby et al., 2016). Homicide was estimated to have an additional economic cost of \$26.4 billion in that same year (Crosby et al., 2016).

Grieving employees often have trouble remembering information and may not be able to concentrate on work tasks (Gibson et al., 2010). A study of parents who had experienced the loss of a child by suicide revealed many individual experiences of grief. One parent said, “I have good days and bad days. It’s horrible, just horrible. There’s probably not a day goes by that I don’t have a cry... It just doesn’t get any easier” (Ross, Kólves, Kunde, & De Leo, 2018, p. 624). It is not difficult to understand how feelings such as these make working effectively difficult or impossible. Yet, there are not specific legal requirement in the United States for employers to grant time off for grieving. While

the United States Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) of 1938 (FLSA 29, USC 201) regulates pay and other areas to ensure fair employment practices, it does not regulate time off for illness or bereavement after the death of a loved one (United States Department of Labor, 2011). The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) will allow for time off in cases of a serious illness that makes the employee unable to work; however, the time off is limited and unpaid and does not apply to time off for grieving unless there is a medical requirement to do so (United States Department of Labor, 1993). Accordingly, it is the discretion of employers to determine if and how much time off is provided.

Even beyond the potential financial losses to the organization and legal considerations, these behaviors can cause troubled relationships within the workplace. Team members may be impacted directly by the grieving team member's behaviors, such as lack of efficiency, crying, and moodiness (Gibson et al., 2010). While those in the workplace may initially respond in supportive ways, they may grow weary of the demands of providing support and may not continue these behaviors throughout the grieving process (Manns, 2011). Team members may become resentful for needing to pick up extra work that is not able to be done by the grieving team member (Jackson, 2016). Not only may this be hurtful or challenging for the person grieving, it is often troubling for the other employee who may then be experiencing feelings of frustration, anger, or secondary grief.

In an American Hospice Foundation brochure on grief at work (Turner, 2012), employees are provided with ideas to provide support for their team members before and after their return to work. The brochure offers suggestions for what to say and what not

to say. One suggestion is to continue including the grieving person in social plans instead of assuming they will not be up for it. The bereaved team member may welcome some normalcy and may feel isolated if left out of social events. Continuing to socialize with a grieving team member may be uncomfortable, as people often find it challenging to know what to say or how to act. This is quite a social dilemma, as team members likely want to be inclusive, but feel uncomfortable doing so, and grieving employees feel isolated if left out.

The impacts of grief in the workplace are often left to the manager to handle. While most managers want to handle a grieving employee situation well, many are not sure what to do or how to respond (McGuinness & Williams, 2014). Much of the literature addressing the manager's role in supporting employees' grief referenced grief models that may help guide managers. Most frequently, the earlier discussed Kubler-Ross (1969) five stage model of grief, based on Freud's assumptions that grief is psychological work performed by the individual experiencing the grief, was often cited to help guide managers to know what to expect when an employee is experiencing grief. As discussed earlier in this chapter though, this model may not provide the appropriate tools needed when handling grief due to unexpected death in the workplace.

In a brochure published by the American Hospice Foundation (Turner, 2012), practical suggestions are given to managers. These suggestions include knowing the organization's policies and programs that offer support, staying in touch with the employee if they have not returned to work, creating an environment where work can continue, referring the employee to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) if available, setting an example of care professionalism, and asking questions before the employees

return to learn about their needs and preferences. Another important consideration for managers is respecting the privacy of the employee by not repeating privileged information.

Hazen (2009) provided steps that managers should follow that are more general, starting with recognizing the symptoms of grief. Then, managers must reflect on their observations and act to support the employees. The final step is educating others, including peers of the employee, on symptoms and support. Even the first step may be difficult for managers as not all employees will display symptoms, and some may not share that a situation has occurred that is causing grief. Symptoms of grief can be physical, emotional, cognitive, or a combination of these (Defraia, 2013). Physical symptoms may include tiredness, sleeplessness, nausea, loss of appetite, migraines, digestive issues, and heart problems. Emotional symptoms may include stress, detachment from others, feelings of guilt, and depression. Cognitive symptoms may include poor focus, wandering thoughts, and loss of memory. Outwardly, those grieving may cry, neglect personal needs, blame others, display anger, make poor decisions, or withdraw socially, but they may not display any outward behaviors consistent with grief, or they may display them well after the trauma or event occurred. This can make handling grief in the workplace complex for the manager and team members.

One of the challenges that managers may face when handling grief in the workplace is a lack of resources to guide their actions. Most managers are not trained to handle these situations in the workplace and may not act quickly enough to gather the resources needed. Often, managers seek help only after an employee's grieving is causing bigger problems or concerns with the individual employee or the team. In these

cases, not only are the manager and grieving team member impacted, but other team members may also be experiencing a team environment that is not ideal (Jackson, 2016).

### **Social Support**

Because team members work and communicate closely with one another, when one team member is experiencing grief it is likely that the team may be impacted in some way, especially if team members are providing social support for the grieving team member. Social support is the verbal or nonverbal communication that occurs between individuals that reduces uncertainty about the relationship or situation (Sias, 2009). Outside of family, others in the workplace usually serve as the primary source of social support (Gibson et al., 2010; Goldsmith, 2007), and social support is a necessary component for healing (Burke & Neimeyer, 2013; Little, 2010).

In a qualitative study of parents who returned to the workplace after the suicide death of a child, conducted by Gibson et al. (2010), coping emotionally and socially upon return to work was the highest concern related to transitioning back into the workplace. Participants were fearful of being the focus of attention or that co-workers would not know what to say, causing awkwardness in interactions. While some people who are grieving avoid conversations with others to prevent crying or other emotional outbursts, some appreciated being able to talk about their grief (Jackson, 2016). One participant in the Gibson et al. (2010) study said, “Certain of them used to sit and talk to me for a long time and would just let me talk and talk and talk, which is what I needed to do” (p. 509). Those who avoided conversations were not always doing so because they did not want to talk to someone. Sometimes they just did not have a trusted person in the workplace with whom they could talk. Some grieving participants claimed to struggle when a new

employee joined the team who did not know of their loss, while others found it refreshing to work with someone who did not know.

While those grieving often desire social support, not all grieving workers believe they were provided with the social support needed at work. A 2014 study by the National Council for Palliative Care found that 32% of employees bereaved within the past five years felt they were not treated compassionately by others in the workplace. In a 2011 study by Hopwood, 25 bereaved parents were interviewed about their experiences. Among them, 76% worked outside of the home. All working outside of the home reported “sustained, lower level of productivity” (p. 131). All but two of the working participants reported a need for better support from the organization and others within the organization. It was commonly felt that managers and peers often did not know what to say, so they said nothing at all. Most surprisingly, they felt as though some peers were resentful of perceived special treatment received by the grieving team member. A study of 21 adults following the death of a loved one by a car accident found that co-workers provided social support following the deaths, including attending the funeral, acknowledging their grief, and providing more tangible support such as food and drinks (Breen & O’Connor, 2011).

People cannot heal from grief alone; instead, there is a social component (Doka, 1989). Therefore, when people ignore the grief someone is feeling, or do not recognize the loss, the grieving person cannot resolve his or her feelings of grief completely. Those who are grieving require support through others’ willingness to talk about their grief and help them cope with his or her feelings (Toller, 2011). Team peers, even if not able to empathize with the grieving team member, can still support or hinder the grieving process

with their actions, such as providing or not providing extra help with work tasks. Some grieving team members find returning to work as a source of comfort due to the routine and “normal” functions performed there, especially if team members provide social support by offering encouragement and care (Lattanzi-Licht, 2002). Peers can respond in a caring way to a team member who is grieving by first recognizing what is going on with that person and what he or she may need while at work.

Strobe and Schut (1999) built upon Freud’s theory and altered it to indicate that those grieving can begin to connect and reinvest in relationships with others before completely withdrawing from the loved one who has died. These stages can happen simultaneously. It is important for the grieving individual to be able to look forward into the future and not only look back into the past. These findings provide interesting insights that may be used to better understand how peers at work can assist in the grieving process by becoming a trusted resource. Is there a time when providing social support is a burden to the team member?

Although there is not literature directly addressing the burden of team members providing social support at work after the unexpected death of a loved one, there is literature that provides insight to guide this study and perhaps future research. There are costs to providing social support (Taylor, 2011). While providing social support seems like a positive action, it may actually have negative consequences (Taylor, 2011). Taylor (2011) found that almost all cases of providing social support will result in the using of time, energy, and emotional resources. And, while some may find providing social support to be rewarding and beneficial long-term to a relationship, stress and feelings of burden have also been recognized. As the workplace has changed rapidly in the last few

decades and working on teams has become more prevalent, the social role of work has changed (Mathieu et al., 2017). Although it is obvious that grief and social support will influence team performance directly, teams providing such unique work dynamics have never been studied in the context of grief and social support. To understand how grief and social support may impact teams, it is important to understand team dynamics generally and how theories will inform understanding of grief and social support. Therefore, the researcher will briefly review the shift to work teams in the workplace and team-member exchange theory, group social capital theory, and social network theory.

### **Teams and Team Social Interactions**

In 2017 the *Journal of Applied Psychology* published a historical review of publications related to work teams over the past 100 years. The review detailed the historical context of work teams and found that work team research boomed in the 1990s (Mathieu et al., 2017). This shift to work team research in the past three decades reflected the shift from “that of individuals to that of collectives pursuing a common goal” (Mathieu et al., 2017, p. 460). Unlike groups of other types, work teams are working toward common goals and have shared accountability and values (Flood & Klausner, 2018). Work teams are different from groups or organizational departments because the members of a team have both individual accountability and team accountability (Katzenbach & Smith, 2015).

Today, many organizations organize employees into work teams to meet the demands of organizations within a competitive market (Henttonen, 2010; Mathieu et al., 2017). Three theories that provide awareness of the social aspect of teams are team-member exchange theory, group social capital theory and Social network theory. First,



team-member exchange theory will be explored to provide insight into the interaction dynamics within a team.

**Team-member exchange (TMX) theory.** TMX, introduced by Seers (1989), was developed as a complement to leader-member exchange (LMX) theory (Graen & Cashman, 1975; Graen, Cashman, Ginsburgh, & Schiemann, 1977) and drew upon social exchange theory (Homans, 1958) and organizational role theory (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Whereas LMX posits that leaders/managers develop relationships with subordinates based on social exchanges that occur, TMX argues that team members develop relationships with other team members based on social exchanges that occur (Banks et al., 2014). As working in teams becomes more prevalent in organizations, further understanding of the relationships within work teams is critical for both researchers and practitioners (Liao, Liu, & Loi, 2010). Understanding is critical because of the connection between TMX and work outcomes such as job performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions (Banks et al., 2014).

Seers (1989) introduced TMX based on his quantitative research showing that the quality of interactions between team members directly related to outcomes such as job satisfaction and rated job performance. This relationship is unique to team members and outside of the relationship between LMX and role-making and outcomes (Seers, 1989). Seers' research efforts went beyond previous research indicating the importance of the supervisor role in team dynamics and recognized the importance of peer relationships in teams. A key component of TMX is the perception of reciprocity (Banks et al., 2014). Team members' perceptions of how reciprocal interactions and actions are within the team define the team member's role and shape the team dynamic. Furthermore, how a

team member perceives the quality of interactions across the team, not just with individuals on the team, determines outcomes such as job performance, satisfaction and commitment (Banks et al., 2014).

While TMX provides a foundation for understanding the importance of intra-team dynamics, specific factors that impact the interactions can provide a deeper understanding of teams. For example, Seers (1989) provides research showing the importance in reciprocal interactions in teams but does not provide details about the actual interactions such as social components of teams. Group social capital theory and social network theory provide additional context for the social interactions that occur within teams.

**Group social capital theory.** In order to more deeply understand group social capital theory, the history that preceded the theory will be explored to provide foundational information. The theory of capital in general can be traced back to early works by Karl Marx (1849). His early conceptualization of capital was the surplus value taken by capitalists in the labor and wage exchange, in which case capital was considered both a value and an investment. Human capital theory, which was developed over 100 years later, also posited that capital is an investment that has expected returns (Becker, 1964; Johnson, 1960; Schultz, 1961), but focused on capital at the individual employee level. Employees invest in their knowledge and skills to make themselves more valuable, therefore expecting higher returns for the work performed. Building upon Hanifan's (1916) concept of social capital as fellowship and goodwill among a group of individuals who make up a social unit, Social Capital Theory emerged in research the 1980s and 1990s.

Group social capital theory, which emerged out of social capital theory research, conceives that within groups, organizations, and teams, social ties form through interactions (Bourdieu, 1986; Burt, 1992; Coleman, 1988; Coleman, 1990; Lin, 1982; Putnam, 1993). Bonding, bridging, and linking are the three types of group social capital identified by contemporary scholars (Aldrich, 2012; Kawachi et al., 2004; Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). Each of these three types of social capital may or may not be present individually or in combination in a work team. *Bonding* social capital are typically found in close family or friend groups and are characterized by strong social connections, which are the types of relationships usually associated with social support (Aldrich & Meyer, 2014). *Bridging* social capital forms through belonging to a specific demographic, group association, or proximity (Aldrich & Meyer, 2014). For example, people may feel socially connected to others on their work team just by virtue that they sense belonging to a team. The third type of social capital is *linking*, which is characterized by social ties between those without power and those with power (Aldrich & Meyer, 2014). The formation of each of these types of social capital on a work team, will depend upon on how the team is structured, the interaction that takes place and the relationships that are formed, which is often referred to as a network.

**Social network theory.** When employees work on a work team, they form a network based on the interactions and relationships within the team. The foundation of social network theory is based in three areas of research that contributed to the early ideas related to social networks; sociometric analysis grounded in mathematics, sociometric analysis grounded in interpersonal relationships, and anthropology analysis grounded community relations in less developed societies (Liu, Sidhu, Beacom, & Valente, 2017).

In the 1960s researchers began to bring these three areas of research together to develop the social network approach that considers both formal and informal relationships (Liu et al., 2017).

Social network theory is not a single theory. It is an assembly of theories and theoretical ideas that are all related to social networks (Kilduff & Tsai, 2007). These theories indicate that how a person behaves depends on his or her relationship(s) within a particular social network (Henttonen, 2010). A network can be formed in many contexts such as with friends, neighbors, volunteer groups, family members, and work teams (Borgatti & Ofem, 2010). Similar to how group social capital is formed through the interactions that occur within organizations, groups, and teams, social networks are most frequently relationships formed due to similarities such as membership on the same team, participation in the same events, and/or working in the same temporal space (Borgatti & Ofem, 2010). As we move through our lives, we relate to various social groups such as our family, friends, sports teams, community groups, and work teams (Haslam, Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009). On a work team, team members interact, share information, and work together in a way that social relationships may form (Borgatti & Ofem, 2010). The network and social environment that develops on a work team often goes well beyond just contextual membership in a group. Haslam et al. (2009) stated that, “Instead these groups shape our psychology through their capacity to be internalized and contribute to our sense of self” (p. 2). In summary, working on teams may actually form team members’ mindsets and define who they believe they are and what their role is on the team.

Not only does the social network of a work team provide instrumental work-related value and shape team members' view of themselves, it often times provides emotional and social support. Oh et al. (2006) stated that, "There are many times when setbacks might destroy morale, or when unexpected tragedies might cause a group to lose its focus, and social ties are called on to assist and support" (p. 571). Group social capital, especially the bonding type, is also associated with higher levels of social support, especially during times of disaster or trauma (Hurlbert et al., 2000).

As organizations increasingly organize employees into work teams to meet the demands of competitive markets (Mathieu et al., 2017), understanding the influences and impacts of teams will continue to be valuable. In situations that may alter team interaction and dynamics, such as a grieving team member returning to a work team, team-member exchange theory, group social capital theory, and social network theory provide insight that can guide further research on this phenomenon. All three theoretical views provide foundational evidence that the relationships within a work team are dynamic and greatly influence individual and team behaviors. They also provide evidence that in times of difficulty team members are likely to provide social support because of the relationships. TMX (Seers, 1989) ties how the quality of interactions between team members directly relates to outcomes such as job satisfaction and rated job performance. Group social capital theory (Oh et al., 2006) indicates that the interactions between team members form social ties and resources. Social network theory indicates these social relationships and ties will drive how that team member behaves within the team (Henttonen, 2010).

In a situation as tragic as an unexpected death though, especially if the grieving team member experiences complicated grief, the grieving team member will likely need high levels of social support (Bottomley, Burke, & Neimeyer, 2017). This support may take physical and emotional resources from those providing support and change the individual and team interactions. As discussed previously, TMX details the importance of the reciprocal nature of team relationships. When one team member experiences the unexpected death of a loved one, and is experiencing grief, the interactions may not be reciprocal and personal resources may be strained. While group social capital theory shows that interactions between team members increase personal and team resources (Oh et al., 2006), providing social support may reduce resources (Taylor, 2011). Resources within a team are typically reciprocal between team members, allowing team members to build a foundation of resources among the team members (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2015). When resources are depleted from that foundation due to helping behaviors such as social support, the team is at risk for a reduction in trust and performance (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2015). The conservation of resources (COR) model (Hobfoll, 1989) provides perspective on how un-reciprocal interactions and strained resources may impact teams.

### **Impacts of Social Support on Resources**

Pulling from and adding to earlier research on stress, Stevan Hobfoll presented a new stress model in 1988 called the conservation of resources (COR) model. This model bridged the gap between environmental and cognitive viewpoints of stress and the handling of stress (Hobfoll, 1989). The overarching message of the model is that people strive to retain, protect, and build resources, which can be anything that they value. Resources may include objects, personal characteristics, conditions, time, energy, or any

other aspect of a person's life. They can be physical, mental, or emotional. Any potential loss of these valued resources is seen as a threat. Hobfoll (1989) stated, "The view that individuals actively seek to create a world that will provide them pleasure and success is a long-standing one in psychology" (p. 516), so what about the circumstances that attempt to threaten pleasure and success? As already stated, providing social support pulls and depletes resources such as time and energy (Taylor, 2011).

Hobfoll (1989) did address COR and the relationship with social support through the discussion of three general types of resources: conditions, personal characteristics and energies. Conditions are titles or states of being such as marital status, position title, or tenure within a group. Personal characteristics are individual traits or skills that typically add in the protection and/or acquisition of resources. The final resource category is energies and includes resources such as time and money. There are a few tenets of COR that provide details to further understand the model. Hobfoll (1989) posits that social support does not fall in one of these types of resources. It likely takes resources from all three categories to provide support. Social support can both add to and take away from a person's resources. Halbesleben and Wheeler (2011) found that social support would diminish over time if the resources consumed through the support process were not replenished during that time. Even the title of Halbesleben and Wheeler's (2011) study, which begins with the words "I owe you one" (p. 608) points to the reciprocal nature of the COR model and ties to TMX theory's view that interactions must be reciprocal within teams. People store resources and must replenish them. When they are used up too quickly, or without replenishment, the result is stress and threat of the environment (Hobfoll, 1989).

Strong TMX relationships contain mutual exchange of resources in an equally reciprocal way, and the opposite is true for low TMX relationships (Farh, Lanaj, & Ilies, 2017). Just as high TMX relationships have been linked to positive outcomes such as job performance, positive work attitudes, and commitment, low TMX relationships have been linked to low job performance, negative work attitudes, and turnover intention (Farh et al., 2017).

Halbesleben (2006) specifically studied social support through the lens of the COR model and found that in a work setting, providing social support related to higher levels of burnout, likely because of the nature of work demands. This result was surprising since previous research indicated that social support increased resources. Halbesleben (2006) had a unique view from previous studies in that they included as the moderator the network in which the social support took place, either work or personal.

### **Summary of the Chapter**

The literature reviewed in Chapter Two explored grief and mourning, the impacts of grief and mourning on individuals, teams, and organizations, social support's role in grief, teams and team dynamics according to TMX theory, social network theory and group social capital theory, and COR theory.

Handling the unexpected death of a loved one is painful and difficult. Adding to that pain and difficulty, the challenge of returning to work while grieving will be overwhelming to most. The cost of this grief is quantifiable in some regards, costing organizations in the United States alone billions due to suicide and homicide related grief (Crosby et al., 2016). The cost may also have a non or less quantifiable component in the impacts to the other team members, especially those who may be providing social



support. Because of the unique nature of work teams, which have shared goals and accountability (Katzenbach & Smith, 2015), a team member who is struggling to contribute fully may impact individuals on the team and the team as a whole. Teams with high TMX are more likely to engage in Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCB) such as helping (Farmer et al., 2015), which could come in the form of helping with work tasks and providing social support. While OCB boosts social capital within teams, it may also cause citizenship fatigue by depleting team member resources (Bolino, Hsiung, Harvey, & LePine, 2015). When significant demands are made on team members to use resources to exhibit helping and support behaviors, fatigue is likely if resources are not being replenished (Bolino et al., 2015). Table 2 provides an illustration for the overall summary of the literature review including each of the theories guiding the research.

Table 2

*Literature Review Summary and Link to Study*

Theory	Researcher	Summary of Theoretical Information	Implications for this Study
Grief Dual Process Model (DPM)	Stroebe & Schut (1999)	The DPM recognizes that grieving goes far beyond adjusting to life without a loved one which was outlined in Worden's (1982) model. The entire world of the bereaved individual is under stress and the bereaved will oscillate between behaviors related to handling the loss and behaviors related to adjusting and reorganizing his or her life.	Understanding how people grieve and the behaviors associated with grieving is foundational to this study, as the focus of the phenomenon is grief.

Social Support Model	Fenney & Collins (2015)	Social support plays a key role in processing grief. Relationships not only assist the bereaved in handling the negative effects of grief-related stress, they help the bereaved once again thrive after the loss. In relation to the DPM model, which states that those grieving fluctuate between loss-oriented tasks and restoration-oriented tasks, Fenney and Collins (2015) state that others in the bereaved person's social circle play a vital role in supporting both types of tasks.	Outside of family relationships, work relationships serve as the primary source of social support (Gibson et al., 2010). When a bereaved person returns to work after the loss of a loved one, the social relationships formed at work will serve as support.
Team-member exchange (TMX) Theory	Seers (1989)	Relationships within teams form as the members of the team communicate and act in a reciprocal way. For example, if team member A helps team member B with a project then team member B will reciprocate and help team member A with a project. So, as team members interact with each other, roles are formed between individuals and within the team as a whole.	Team members feel part of a team identity when the exchange is reciprocal and team members are perceived to be equally pulling their weight on the team (Seers & Chopin, 2012). Based on understanding of how people grieve (Stroebe & Schut, 1999), it is likely that the bereaved team member will not be able to interact in a reciprocal way.
Social Network Theory	Scott (2017)	Social Network Theory posits that social interactions and relationships occur within networks. Networks can include family, friends, community, work teams, and others.	Organizations increasingly organize employees into work teams to meet the demands of organizations within a competitive market (Mathieu et al., 2017). Working together in a team

Group Social Capital Theory	Oh et al., (2006)	Within groups, there is a social structure, which should be viewed in two ways: both as a whole, and as the individual parts of the social structure that make up the whole.	forms a social network forming a unique social dynamic and culture.  Teams are more than individuals that happen to be in the same work group. The social structure of a team is comprised of both the individuals and then as the team overall.
Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory	Hobfoll (1989)	The basic tenant of the model is that people strive to retain, protect, and build up resources. Any potential loss of those resources is considered a threat. Resources include anything that is valued by an individual such as objects, personal characteristics, conditions, energies, skills, time, self-esteem, and a long list of other items. Although loss of resources is stressful, people employ other resources to offset the loss. One analogy often used is that of a bucket filled with resources. As the bucket is emptied, it has to be re-filled with other resources.	Not only is the bereaved team member drained of resources as part of the grief process (Stroebe & Schut, 1999), providing social support to the bereaved drains the resources of team members (Taylor, 2011). When resources are used up quickly or without being replenished, the result is stress (Hobfoll, 1989).

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The thorough search for literature related to grief due to unexpected death and the impacts to teams upon the grieving team member's return to work, revealed a substantial gap in current research. Though robust literature on grief is readily available, the phenomenon of grief has not been examined in a team context and it is not clear how it influences team dynamics. Additional research to explore the experiences of a team will

provide insight into this unfortunate phenomenon and help us better understand grief in this context. Not only does this research add to grief literature and the application of TMX theory, social network theory, group social capital theory, and COR theory to this specific phenomenon, it provides awareness and suggestions to team members, managers, and HRD professionals in addressing these situations in the workplace in order to improve team performance and work morale.

This study sought to address the articulated shortcomings in the existing literature by specifically examining the phenomenon of grief in a team workplace environment. The current literature fails to describe, from a peer team member's perspective, experiences with grief in the work team and therefore a phenomenological study was selected. Starks and Brown Trinidad (2007) stated, "Through close examination of individual experiences, phenomenological analysts seek to capture the meaning and common features, or essences, of an experience or event" (p. 1372). A phenomenological analysis was a logical choice for the study because the purpose of the study aligned with the aim of phenomenology, which is to understand the perceptions of individuals who have lived a specific event or experience.

## Chapter Three

### Research Design and Method

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will commence with a restatement of the purpose of the study and the research questions that guided its design. Since a pilot study was completed, the details of the pilot will also be presented. Details about the recruiting process for participants, data collection, and data analysis will be provided. Considerations of validity and reliability of the qualitative instrument will be addressed, and study limitations will be discussed.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of team members of grieving and mourning fellow team member and to investigate how the grief and mourning experience impacts individuals and the team.

#### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

- How are team members impacted by a fellow team member experiencing grief and mourning after the unexpected death of a loved one?
- How is a team impacted overall by a team member experiencing grief and mourning after the unexpected death of a loved one?

- What can be learned from the study of grief after unexpected death in the context of a team?

### **Design of the Study**

To reveal the lived experiences of team members who have worked on teams with a peer who experienced the unexpected death of a loved one and then returned to work, a qualitative phenomenological multi-case study was conducted (Yin, 2018).

**Rationale for conducting a qualitative study.** This study took a qualitative approach. Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated, “qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). In qualitative research, data that is text-based is gathered to answer questions such as “Who?”, “What?”, “Where?”, and “Why?” (Terrell, 2016). The results of qualitative research investigate, describe, and explain social life (Terrell, 2016).

**Rationale for conducting a phenomenological study.** A phenomenological study describes what an experience was and means to a person, or a group of people who lived the experience (Terrell, 2016). This type of study allows people or groups who have lived an experience to tell their story through their own lens (Moustakas, 1994).

**Rationale for conducting a case study.** Yin (2018) provided three clear conditions that must be met to determine if a research case study is an appropriate method. First, the research questions should ask “how”, “why”, and/or “what”, if the “what” question is exploratory in nature. Second, the researcher must not manipulate or have control over the behaviors observed in any way, as happens in experimental design. Third, the study focus must be contemporary, meaning it is not solely about a case

occurring in history, but in current times. The study conducted by the researcher met all three of these conditions, and therefore a case study was an appropriate research method. Yin (2018) provided a two-fold definition of a case study as a research method by saying, “A case study is an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 15).

### **Participants**

The participants of the study were those who met the study criteria including: (1) current or previous experience working on a team in which one of the team members experienced the unexpected death of a loved one during the time they were working on that team; and (2) the participant must have worked with the team member for at least six months following the team member’s return to work after the death. The timeframe of six months was selected to increase the likelihood that the team members experienced interaction over time and would be able to provide rich details about their personal experiences. Participants were selected using a purposeful approach to gain insight from those who have experienced the phenomenon of grief in a work team context that the study was designed to research (Merriam, 2009; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). When possible, participants were asked to recruit other team members to participate in the study. The snowball recruitment resulted in four cases in the case study representing the four different teams participating.

When conducting qualitative research, it is often debated how many interviews are adequate (Namey, 2017). There are not well-defined and accepted guidelines about how many interviews are enough (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A sample size is typically

between one and ten participants in a phenomenological study (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). Other suggested sample sizes often fall within that range, with Creswell (2014) suggesting a range of three to ten participants and Morse (1994) suggesting six or more participants.

Because there is not one solid answer to the debate of qualitative sample size, the notion of data saturation is considered. Just as there is no one-size-fits-all number of participants, there is also “no one-size-fits-all method to reach data saturation” (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1409). Some general guidelines of data saturation include continuing interviews until no new data or themes are identified and the researcher is confident that the study could be replicated (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Each study and research design is unique though, so determining how many interviews were required to reach data saturation was not about the actual number of interviews; instead, it was about the depth of the data that was collected (Burmeister & Aitken, 2012).

### **Instrumentation**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to provide rich and descriptive details about the phenomenon of grief at the work team level to discover the lived experiences of those in a particular context (Merriam, 2009). The study interview questions were designed to answer the research questions. See Appendix D for a matrix showing the alignment of the interview questions with the research questions guiding the study. Since the phenomenon of grief cannot be simply observed, semi-structured interviews were selected (Creswell, 2014). The semi-structured interview protocol provided consistency in the process of data collection, while allowing flexibility for the researcher to investigate further topics as they arose during the interview process (Castillo-Montoya,



2016). The same series of questions were asked to each participant to achieve the goal of data saturation (Guest et al., 2006), and the researcher asked additional questions, or asked for clarification as needed.

Since the goal of the study was to understand the participants' experiences and team experiences with working on a team with a grieving colleague, gathering their personal accounts was important. An interview protocol guided the semi-structured interviews and the researcher did not adjust after the pilot study (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The interview protocol consisted of pre-determined interview questions which were asked of each participant. See Appendix E for the interview protocol which includes information that was shared with each participant, the interview questions, and an outline of the conversation flow.

### **Data Collection Approaches**

The interviews were conducting face-to-face or via video-conferencing once the participants were selected. Face-to-face interviews took place in a private, quiet location. Interviews were scheduled for 60 minutes each and all participants provided written consent prior to beginning the interview. See Appendix C for the written consent that was provided. Participants were offered several time slots to select from, but each team's interviews were complete before the researcher moved on to interviews for the next team. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by Amazon Transcribe, a software designed to turn audio files into text, for later analysis. As the interviews took place, the researcher also created field notes that included observations.

Throughout the process, all data, both written and audio files, were secured on a computer that was password protected and an encrypted hard drive to protect the security

of participant information. Also, to further protect participant data, specific information provided by participants was not shared in any way that would connect them to the information. The dissertation and any future publication or setting in which this research is used will only utilize themes identified through the data analysis process and information will not be identifiable with names, details, or characteristics.

### **Data Analysis**

To analyze the data that was collected, the six phases of Thematic Analysis outlined by Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017) were used. Even though these phases are numbered, evoking a view that they are to be completed one at a time and only in a specific order, qualitative data analysis is much more fluid. One of the strengths of Thematic Analysis is the flexibility it offers (Nowell et al., 2017). The six phases include the researcher familiarizing herself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report of the results. MAXQDA, version 2018.2 (VERBI Software, 2018), a software developed to analyze qualitative and mixed-method data, was used to organize, categorize, analyze, and visualize all data that was gathered.

Since both interview data and field notes were collected, in Phase 1 the researcher studied the data to deeply understand all of the data that was gathered. This included reading the data many times and beginning to identify meaning in the data (Nowell et al., 2017). In Phase 2 the researcher reflected on the data and created initial codes that began to identify and organize the information. A consistent approach was used to code the data (Creswell, 2014), and in Phase 3 each data point was analyzed and categorized into themes (Nowell et al., 2017). The codes were sorted into themes to bring meaning to the

collected data. Thematic analysis allowed for flexibility as the researcher used judgement to determine the themes and adjust them throughout the process. In Phase 4 the researcher reviewed and refined the themes that were developed. For example, themes that were not robust enough on their own due to minimal codes relating to them were collapsed with other themes if appropriate (Nowell et al., 2017). The themes created provide deep insight into the phenomenon of grief in the work team context being studied and were specific enough to provide value to the field of HRD research. In Phase 5 of the thematic analysis the researcher made sense of the themes that emerged in Phases 3 and 4. A detailed description and analysis of each theme was developed to paint a picture of how the data answered the research questions (Braun & Clark, 2006). In the final phase the researcher completed a report of the final analyzation of the data and themes. The report includes rich details about the phenomenon of grief at the work team level and includes not only the codes and themes, but direct quotes from participants.

### **Reliability and Validity**

To be of value to practice or theory, a study design and the data analysis “must be rigorously conducted” (Merriam, 2009, p. 210). While reliability and validity in a quantitative study focus on the instruments themselves, qualitative case study research reliability focuses on the study design and the manner in which data is collected and analyzed. The researcher used techniques to ensure the validity and reliability of the research in an effort to build credibility of the research and make sure the study measured what it intended to measure. Creswell and Miller (2000) provided nine techniques to increase study reliability and validity, five of which were used in this study including

accounting for personal bias by researcher reflexivity, member checking, data triangulation, and the use of rich, thick description.

**Researcher reflexivity.** Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest the researcher reflect on and be transparent about any bias that may impact the research. Biases may include experiences, beliefs, or assumptions. Personal bias, as it relates to the researcher, are included in a section of Chapter Three titled *Role of the Researcher*. In qualitative research the researcher is immersed in the study as a tool through which data is gathered (Terrell, 2016), so personal bias must be considered. In phenomenological studies the researcher must go through a process of self-reflection of his or her own biases and assumptions to approach the research with an open mind (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007).

To reflect on potential researcher bias, the researcher engaged in bracketing techniques which captured and analyzed personal opinions, biases, and judgement during the data interpretation process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Given that the researcher has experienced providing social support for friends and colleagues after the unexpected death of a loved one, it was important to the integrity of the study that bracketing occur (Merriam, 2009). Bracketing is defined as the “act of suspending one’s various beliefs... in order to study the essential structures of the world” (van Manen, 1997, p. 185). While it may be impossible for the researcher to completely set aside her biases and assumptions, bracketing demands that the researcher temporarily set aside biases and assumptions as best as possible (Merriam, 2009).

**Member checking.** Once the interviews were conducted and transcribed, interviewees had an opportunity to read and validate the data (Creswell & Creswell,

2018). This technique, known as member checking, allowed participants to confirm that the transcriptions contained their thoughts and experiences accurately (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The researcher asked participants if the themes identified made sense and if the account of information was correct.

**Data triangulation.** Multiple sources of evidence were collected to increase research validity. First, interviews were conducted to provide the rich details of “hows” and “whys” that are key to case study research. Second, observation notes were collected. Since the interviews were conducted outside of the actual context, the researcher noted any nonverbal data, facial expressions, body language, and other data gathered through the interaction (Merriam, 2009). These details were captured in field notes both during the interviews and immediately following them (Merriam, 2009; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Once the interview transcriptions were complete, the additional observational data collected in the field notes were combined in the documentation of the data.

**Rich and thick verbatim data transcription.** Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest the use of verbatim data transcription to provide rich and thick details of the participant experiences. This technique enhances credibility by providing details that allow readers of the research to understand more fully the context, events, and experiences studied.

In addition to the four techniques to build credibility, the researcher is transparent about all aspects of the study and provides enough detail to allow the case study to be repeated (Yin, 2018), therefore enhancing study reliability. Yin (2018) suggests

conducting, “research as if someone were looking over your shoulder” (p. 44). Great care was taken to provide explicit and complete details in every chapter.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher was not only the lead for the study, she is a human resources leader, a manager, and a source of social support for a friend who recently experienced the unexpected death of her teenage son. Therefore, the researcher has her own lens through which she viewed the data, and that lens may have been influenced by her own biases and perspectives. These biases are acknowledged as they may have influenced how the collected data was viewed and interpreted. The role of the researcher was to be the instrument for the collection and analysis of the data (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). The researcher’s experiences, potential biases, and assumptions may have interrupted her ability to serve as an instrument in the study. There is a risk that the researcher may have misunderstood or misinterpreted participants’ lived experiences based on her own lived experiences. To minimize the negative risks of personal biases and assumptions, the researcher used a combination of participant member checks and bracketing to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study. These techniques aimed to minimize personal influence on shaping interpretations of and assigning meanings to the data (Creswell, 2013). The researcher’s intent is to uphold the standard expressed by Stake (1995) that “we have ethical obligations to minimize misrepresentation and misunderstanding” (p. 109).

### **Pilot Study Overview**

To test and refine the interview questions and method, a pilot study was conducted (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Creswell, 2013). The planned pilot was conducted

during the Summer of 2019. Prior to the pilot study, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained from The University of Texas at Tyler. See Appendix A for the IRB application. Three participants meeting the study selection criteria were interviewed to test the design of the study, the suitability of the research questions, the interview procedure, and data collection and analysis processes. The pilot study also allowed the researcher to test appropriate ways to recruit participants and fine-tune her interview skills.

Participants for the pilot study were recruited via LinkedIn and email due to convenience and access to members who may meet the study criteria. See Appendix B for the text of the LinkedIn and email request for participants. LinkedIn is a social networking site that launched in 2003 and is mostly used for professional networking (Brooks, 2012). In 2017 LinkedIn had 500 million users, with an estimated 260 million users who log in at least once a month (Darrow, 2017). The researcher “posted” a request for volunteers meeting the study criteria in June of 2019. When potential participants responded with interest, the researcher sent an email with a formal invitation to participate that included a consent document for their review.

With a goal of three interviews for the pilot, the researcher set a goal to have at least five participants with confirmed willingness to participate. This overage allowed for extra participants in the case that some were not able or willing to complete the interview process. Participants received a copy of the informed consent via email. Once the participants were selected, the researcher scheduled time to meet with participants in person or using a video and audio capable conferencing tool. All interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the participants. At the start of each interview the

researcher reviewed the details of the informed consent and asked participants to sign the form and provide verbal agreement.

Once recorded, the audio files were transcribed verbatim and the transcriptions were sent to the participants to review and confirm correctness. This participant check, known as member checking allowed participants to check the data for accuracy (Curtin & Fossey, 2007; Doyle, 2007), which aimed to ensure the trustworthiness of the research (Punch, 2005). The researcher also observed participant behavior during the interviews and kept detailed field notes to capture observations, thoughts, and potential biases during the data collection process. The transcripts and field notes were then evaluated using a thematic analysis process as a way to identify, analyze, categorize, and report themes found in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). The thematic analysis included six phases; the researcher familiarizing herself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report of the results (Nowell et al., 2017). MAXQDA, a software developed to analyze qualitative and mixed-method data, was used to organize, categorize, analyze, and visualize all data that was gathered (VERBI Software, 2018).

Once the pilot was complete, the researcher considered lessons learned, successes, and challenges to determine if adjustments were needed prior to deployment of the main study. Specifically, the researcher considered the appropriateness of participants, determined if the interview questions were sufficient to gather information needed to answer the research questions, evaluated the interview and data collection protocol, and tested the thematic analysis phases.



## **Pilot Study Findings**

The pilot study was conducted to review the interview protocol document, provide the researcher with practice in qualitative research procedures, and determine if any changes should be made to better address the research questions (Simon, 2011). Conducting the pilot study also allowed the researcher to gauge her ability to seek and identify interviewees meeting the study criteria. Conducting a pilot study, while not as frequently done in qualitative studies as it is in quantitative studies, is especially important for novice researchers because it allows the researcher time to practice interviewing, data collection, and data interpretation prior to completing a main study (Janghorban, Latifnejad, & Taghipour, 2014).

When the first respondent to the LinkedIn invitation for volunteer interviewees responded, he was asked to pass the researcher's contact information to anyone on the team who may be open to participating. Four out of five team members responded and were interested in participating in an interview. The first three of the four respondents were selected for the pilot and the fourth respondent was scheduled to interview at a later time as part of the main study. So, all participants in the pilot study were a part of the same work team within the same organization. All pilot participants were female, full-time employees. Ages and ethnicities varied among the participants.

Semi-structured, in-person interviews were conducted with each pilot participant. The interview recordings were transcribed using an online tool called Temi (Temi Software, 2019). The researcher reviewed each transcription to check for accuracy of the transcription tool output and the interviewees were provided the transcription for review.

The completed and reviewed transcriptions were then uploaded into MAXQDA, a software to assist in analyzing qualitative research data (VERBI Software, 2018).

Participant interviews revealed each team member's individual and perceived team perspectives related to the unexpected death of a team member's loved one and her subsequent return to work. Accordingly, valuable data was collected and contributed to the phenomenological exploration of each team member as they worked with the bereaved team member. The initial coding of the three pilot interview transcriptions revealed 51 codes. The researcher did an initial review of the codes and determined the codes fit into the main categories of grief mourning behaviors observed, impacts to individuals, impacts to teams, support provided, team dynamics in general, and suggestions for teams and managers faced with the study phenomenon. The pilot interviews revealed enough data about the participant's experience to continue with the study without changes to the interview protocol. Because the interview protocol did not require changes after the pilot study, the pilot interview data will be part of the main study data.

### **Limitations**

As with any research, there are limitations associated with this study. Four main limitations are the self-report nature of the data, the method of identifying participants, potential researcher bias, and limitations to the generalizability of the study results. First, because the purpose of the study was to gain insight on personal experiences of a phenomenon, it relied on self-reported data. The researcher assumed the participants were providing honest and accurate recollections of past experiences. A second limitation was the method of selecting participants. The researcher used a business

networking site to identify participants that met the study criteria. This method allowed participants to self-select into the study without verification of meeting study criteria. A third limitation is potential researcher bias. While the researcher has not personally experienced the unexpected death of a family member, the experience of a close friend losing a child to an unexpected death was the inspiration for conducting this research. The researcher has provided social support to her bereaved friend since her child's death in November of 2017, so she did bring her own personal experiences to the research process. Finally, the results of this case study are limited in their generalizability. However, the goal of a case study is to produce deep understanding of a specific case and phenomenon, not produce results that are generalizable to other cases.

### **Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter re-stated the purpose of the study and the research questions that guided the research study. Next, an overview of the pilot was detailed. Related to the main study design, the research study, role of the researcher, data collection, and data analysis were described and included a qualitative view of validity and reliability. Lastly, limitations of the study were discussed.

## Chapter Four

### Results

Chapter Four presents the results from the analysis of the data collected during the nine qualitative interviews. The purpose of the study is presented again for review. Next, an overview of the cases and participants and demographics are presented and described to provide background. Findings are presented for each of the research questions. These findings are supported by themes revealed during the coding process of the interview transcriptions, which are described in detail. Portions of the coded transcripts are included as examples.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of team members of grieving and mourning fellow team member and to investigate how the grief and mourning experience impacts individuals and the team.

#### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

- How are team members impacted by a fellow team member experiencing grief and mourning after the unexpected death of a loved one?
- How is a team impacted overall by a team member experiencing grief and mourning after the unexpected death of a loved one?
- What can be learned from the study of grief after unexpected death in the context of a team?

## **Participants**

Participants were selected purposefully, meeting the following study criteria: (1) current or previous experience working on a team in which one of the team members experienced the unexpected death of a loved one during the time they were working on that team; and (2) must have worked with the team member for at least six months following the team member's return to work after the death. There were six respondents to the study invitation shared on social media. Out of the six respondents, one met the study criteria fully, three responded to connect the researcher with others meeting the study criteria, and two did not meet the study criteria fully and did not have leads to possible participants. Those responding to connect the researcher with others were asked to pass along the researcher's email address and allow the individuals to connect if desired. Through those connections, eight additional participants were selected. In total, nine interviewees participated in the study, including the three pilot participants. Four work teams were represented by the participants; therefore, this multi-case study is comprised of four cases. From now on, for the convenience of discussion, the term "team" instead of "case", as each case is represented by a work team. Participant names included in this report are pseudonyms and not the actual names of participants.

The first team included four participants in a customer support team of a small media company based in Texas. The owner of the company responded to the social media post requesting participants and connected the participants with the researcher. The team, at the time of the death of the team member's loved one had a total of five team members, but only four participated in the interview. The fifth team member had not been a part of the team for long and did not believe she had enough experience with the

bereaved team member to participate. One of the team participants, Mary, was the manager of the team at the time of the death of the team member's loved one, and was still managing Jean and Amy at the time of the interviews. Sam had been promoted to manage another team at the time the interviews took place. At the time of the death of the team member's loved one, the team performed customer support work and were all sharing a large office space. They were able to see and hear each other at all times and engaged in open conversation about work and personal topics such as conversations about spouses and children. Only Amy described some potentially negative team dynamics by saying that the team had some social groups that had formed that excluded some on the team, but she did not share specifics. Amy attended church with and was personal friends with the bereaved team member before, during, and after the death of the loved one and had a very close personal relationship with her. At the time of the interview the bereaved employee was still working on the team.

Team 2 included a non-profit fundraiser and development team member of a not for profit organization. The organization has offices throughout the United States and the team participating in this study is based in Texas. While the team had four team members at the time of the bereaved employee returning to work, only one team member was available to interview. The participating team member responded to the social media post requesting interviewees. After the interview she shared with the researcher that she decided to reach out because the topic was of interest to her. Her stepson had passed away from a sudden illness many years before and therefore she was supportive of grief research that may benefit workplaces. At the time of the interview the bereaved team

member was no longer working on the team. She had resigned and took a position with another organization approximately one year after the unexpected death of her loved one.

Team 3 was represented by the leader of a small team in the leadership consulting industry. The organization has offices world-wide and the team that participated in this study is based in Texas. The full team consisted of the participant, a training leader, and contractors that provided training services. In this case the bereaved was one of the contractors who worked closely with the two full-time team members. Unique from Team 1 and Team 2, team members on Team 3 all work remotely from each other and only see each other in-person about once a month. At the time of the interview the bereaved team member was still working on the team.

Team 4 included three team members of a writing team in the publishing industry in Texas. At the time of the death of the team member's loved one there were five team members including the bereaved team member. One of the team members was not available to interview. Jerry was the manager at the time of the death of the team member's loved one and was still managing the team at the time of the interviews. Jerry had worked with the bereaved team member in a previous company and therefore had a long-standing relationship with her. Christine was working closely with the bereaved on a project at the time of the death of the team member's loved one, and was working from another state, only rarely having in-person contact with the bereaved. All of the others had daily in-person contact that also included social interaction such as eating meals together and celebrating life milestones together. At the time of the interviews the bereaved employee was no longer working on the team. She retired approximately one year after the unexpected death of her loved one. Although the retirement was planned in

advance of the death, she did accelerate the timing of her retirement. See Table 3 for a summary of details about the participating teams and the team members.

Table 3

*Participating Team Details*

Team	Type of work performed	Industry	Total # of Team Members	Participant Profiles
1	Customer Support	Media	5	<p>Sam- Female, age 20-29, married, high school graduate. Manager of a team that performs customer service type work (though not a manager at the time of death of the fellow team member's loved one).</p> <p>Mary- Female, age 40-49, married, college graduate. Manager of a team that performs customer service type work.</p> <p>Jean- Female, age 40-49, married, some college. Performs customer service and support work.</p> <p>Amy- Female, age 50-59, married, some college. Performs customer service and support work.</p>
2	Fundraising	Non-Profit	4	<p>Rebecca- Female, age 50-59, married, high school graduate. Performs fundraising work for a non-profit organization.</p>
3	Training	Leadership Consulting	2 plus contractors	<p>Rick- Male, age 40-49, divorced, master's degree graduate. Manages a team that provides leadership programs to other companies.</p>



4	Writing	Publishing	4	<p>Christine- Female, age 40-49, married, master’s degree graduate. Writes education materials.</p> <p>Brooke- Female, age 50-59, married, college graduate. Writes education materials.</p> <p>Jerry- Female, age 60-69, married, master’s degree graduate. Manages a team of writers.</p>
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The interviews were conducted individually over a period of three months. Each participant was provided the IRB-approved consent document (see Appendix D). Demographic information was collected at the beginning of each interview using a series of demographic questions (see Appendix F). All interviews were scheduled through email and executed in person or using the web conferencing tool Zoom (Zoom Software, 2019), which allowed video and audio conversation. Participants were asked permission for the interviews to be recorded. The IRB consent was reviewed, the purpose of the interview was shared, and the interview process was discussed prior to beginning the interview questions. The participants were asked to state understanding of the IRB, interview purpose, and process and to sign the IRB consent document.

**Demographics**

Participants were asked various questions at the start of each interview to gather demographic information including employment status, type of work performed, manager status, highest level of education, age, and marital status. Gender was also noted in the field notes based on observation. Of the nine participants, one (11%) was a man and eight (89%) were women. One (11%) participant was between the ages of 60 and 69.

Three (33%) participants were between the ages of 50 and 59. Four (44%) participants were between the ages of 40 and 49. One (11%) participant was between the ages of 20 and 29. Eight (89%) were married, and one (11%) was divorced. Three (33%) were managers at the time of the team member's loved one's death and six (67%) were non-managers. All participants (100%) were employed at the time of the interview. The highest education level of the participants varied. Three (33%) had higher than a 4-year college degree, two (22%) had a college degree, two (22%) had some college, and two (22%) only had a high school diploma. The participants performed various types of work including customer service, fundraising, leadership development, and writing. See Table 4 for a summary of participant demographics.

Table 4

*Participant Demographics*

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<i>N=9</i>	
<b>Gender</b>	
<i>Men</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Women</i>	<i>8</i>
<b>Age</b>	
<i>20-29</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>30-39</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>40-49</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>50-59</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>60-69</i>	<i>1</i>
<b>Highest Education Level</b>	
<i>High School</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Some College or Associate Degree</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>College</i>	<i>2</i>

<i>Higher than a 4-year Degree</i>	3
<b>Marital Status</b>	
<i>Single</i>	0
<i>Married</i>	8
<i>Widowed</i>	0
<i>Divorced</i>	1
<b>Employment Status</b>	
<i>Full-time</i>	9
<i>Part-time</i>	0
<i>Contractor</i>	0
<i>Not Employed</i>	0
<b>Manager Status</b>	
<i>Manager</i>	3
<i>Non-Manager</i>	6

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## **Research Findings**

The researcher used the data collected from the individual semi-structured interviews to determine the results for each of the research questions. Once the interviews were transcribed and loaded into MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2018), the interviewer read each line of each interview. When a participant made a statement that provided a deeper understanding of the phenomenon or provided potential answers to the research questions, the researcher assigned a code to the words or phrases identified. This process continued until the ninth interview, which was the fourth interview of Team 4, until no further codes were identified. The coding process identified 60 themes. The 60 themes were organized by the researcher into five thematic categories including Learnings about Grief and Mourning, Contextual Information about Team Dynamics,

Support Provided to the Bereaved, Impacts to Individual Team Members, and Impacts to the Team. These categories emerged from the pilot study categories as themes became clearer as more data was gathered.

The first two thematic categories, Learnings about Grief and Mourning and Contextual Information about Team Dynamics, provided background information and insight that helped the researcher understand the context of the particular team situation and experiences. The other three thematic categories directly related to the research questions. Nine of the themes address Research Question 1: How are work team members impacted by a fellow team member experiencing grief and mourning after the unexpected death of a loved one? Three of the themes address Research Question 2: How is a team impacted overall by a team member experiencing grief and mourning after the unexpected death of a loved one? Eighteen of the themes address Research Question 3: What can be learned from the study of grief after unexpected death in the context of a team? An overview of the thematic categories, initial codes, and frequency of coded extracts included in each theme are reported in Table 5.

Table 5

*Thematic Categories, Coded Themes, and Frequency of Coded Extracts*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Coded Themes</b>	<b>Frequency of Coded Extracts</b>
Learnings about Grief and Mourning	Strength of the bereaved	20
	Getting back to normal	11
	Faith	8
	Openness/transparency	7

	Other relatives/family	7
	Return to work	6
	Emotions/feelings	6
	Need for a normal routine	5
	Each situation is unique	5
	Missing work	4
	Mourning behaviors	4
	Showing appreciation/thanks	2
	Telling the story	2
	Continued mourning	2
	Skills to mourn/grieve well	1
	Desire for bereaved to help others	1
	<i>Subtotal</i>	91
Contextual Information about Team Dynamics	Manager relationships	17
	Level of interaction	14
	Friendliness of the work environment	13
	Work/job stressors	13
	Family feel of the work environment	12
	General work environment	10
	Communication on the team	10
	Team relationships	9
	Level of collaboration	8
	Helping others	8
	Level of fun in the work environment	4
	Negative experiences	2
	Exciting times	1
	Age differences on team	1
	<i>Subtotal</i>	112
Impacts to Individuals	New perspective	12

	Uncertainty on how to behave	10
	Helping with work	10
	Opportunity to show you care	8
	Uncertainty on what to expect	6
	Curiosity about the death/situation	5
	Feeling helpless	3
	Admiration for the bereaved	1
	Closer relationship to the bereaved	1
	<i>Subtotal</i>	56
Impacts to Teams	Team relationships	3
	Interruption to work	1
	Consideration of other team members	1
	<i>Subtotal</i>	5
Support Provided to the Bereaved	Read the needs of the bereaved	22
	Offer general support/help	17
	Manager support	15
	Give space	13
	Provide food	10
	Be normal	9
	Reassure job stability	8
	Listen	8
	Communicate and stay in touch	7
	Financial support	4
	Don't ask if okay	4
	Be careful with words/comments	4
	Provide personal help	3
	Put work aside	2
	Be encouraging	2
	Organizational level support	2

Give hugs	1
Be mindful of capacity	1
	<i>Subtotal</i> 132
<hr/>	
	Total 396
<hr/>	

To analyze the thematic categories, themes, and coded segments the researcher considered both the frequency of coded segments and the similarities and differences of the themes between the cases. Therefore, meaning of the data is formed not only based on how often a particular theme or code appeared in the data, but also in comparing the data across cases. The findings are organized by research question.

**Research question 1.** The first research question asked how team members are impacted by a fellow team member experiencing grief and mourning after the unexpected death of a loved one. Gibson et al. (2010) claimed that team members may be impacted by mourning behaviors such as crying, moodiness and lack of efficiency in handling work. While they may respond in supportive ways initially, team members may grow weary of the demands of providing support (Manns, 2011). Team members may even become resentful for needing to take on additional work load (Jackson, 2016). All participants in the study continued to work with the bereaved team member for at least six months post their return to work. The researcher included this criterion to make sure the teams had time to have lived experiences beyond the initial experiences upon the bereaved team member's return. The data gathered in this study both confirmed and contradicted literature, depending on the team.

Based on literature, the researcher assumed as the interviews began that she would hear about negative impacts the situation had on individuals, but the results from Team 1 contradicted the literature. On the day that the team members were informed of the death of their team member's husband, they did admit to feeling anxious about the situation overall, overwhelmed with sadness for their team member, and worried about how they would manage at work. Adding to the anxiety was the timing of the death. The team was in the busiest season of the year. Sam stated, "But that was hard on us knowing that she was hurting on that day and there was nothing that we could do about it because we're not him and he wasn't here to be with her." They picked up extra work during the first week, which was difficult considering the workload during that time period. Also, because of the close relationships that had formed on the team, each of the team members felt a sense of loss and recognized that others on the team may be grieving as well, especially since they all knew the bereaved team member's children and other family members.

A week later, when the bereaved team member returned to work, team members were worried about her return. Mary said, "You know, because you, you know I didn't know what was going to come, how it was going to be, how are we going to handle it? I had no idea." However, the team members' fears and uncertainty were quickly dismissed. The bereaved team member came back and while the team shared there were moments when she would need to step away to cry or re-focus, they were surprised at how well she was able to function at work. Jean recalled, "So, you know, I was kind of amazed at how well she was when she came back. It was very inspiring to me, like



really.” And the manager Mary stated that when the bereaved came back to work it was very seamless in her transition. She said:

It’s pretty much, you know, the same as it was. It’s, it’s, I’m kind of baffled at it honestly. I mean, you know, it’s just not something that you would expect at all or I wouldn’t, I wouldn’t, I would not have expected that with the nature of what happened. So...yeah, it’s, it’s, it’s, it’s kind of mind blowing I think.

It is interesting that Mary repeated and stuttered words in these statements because she did not repeat and stutter words in previous statements. The researcher noted in the field notes that she seemed very genuinely shocked at the situation. So, beyond the initial uncertainty, the team members reported no negative impacts.

The Team 2 participant shared quite different experiences about the individual impacts once her bereaved team member returned to work. The death occurred during a holiday, when team members were on holiday leave. The bereaved team member took approximately an additional five work days off after the holiday. Rebecca recounted spending time after her return to work listening to the bereaved team member, allowing her to remember her lost loved one and work through her feelings. She also remembered asking to take on work in order to help. She recalled the bereaved team member sitting at her desk crying for long periods of time at first and the situation, “pretty much consumed us for the first few days” she said. Rebecca also reported that her relationship became more strained over time as the bereaved team member continued to struggle with crying, lack of focus, and the need to discuss her feelings. After a month or so Rebecca believed the team member should be making progress in her grieving. Instead, she felt that the bereaved team member continued needing an amount of support that took too much time

away from work and was burdensome for her. Rebecca sheepishly shared, “My relationship with her because...I found that she didn’t...I’m trying to say this in as nice as possible, she, the best way to say it is she dwelled on it.” She described that asking the bereaved how she was doing would likely lead into a 30-minute dialogue, going over and over the details of death and the struggles she was having. Rebecca’s uncomfortable words and body language while sharing these feelings indicated that she likely wanted to be supportive, she just felt that the bereaved individual was unreasonable in her need for support over time. The results from Team 2 supported the literature in finding that over time team members may grow weary of providing support and the resources required to do so will be depleted.

At this point in the data gathering and analyzing process the researcher noticed that Team 1 and Team 2 had very different experiences in how individuals on the team were impacted. Based on literature, the researcher wondered if Team 1 was an anomaly, so she continued interviews to gather more data that may provide insight into the contradiction. The Team 3 participant, Rick, illustrated a different experience than Team 1 or Team 2, but one that more closely matched the positive experiences of Team 1 participants. Only one participant, the manager of the team, took part in the study. It is a very small team consisting of the manager, a training manager, and a group of consultants that work on special projects as needed. When one of the consultant’s wife died unexpectedly due to a weather-related injury, Rick provided support such as food for the family and offered general support and help. The work that was scheduled for the bereaved team member at that time had to be cancelled, so no additional workload was taken on by Rick. Several other contractors did offer to cover work as needed. After

weeks went by after the death, Rick scheduled lunch with the bereaved team member to check in with him and let him know to take his time. Rick was surprised to learn during that initial meeting that the bereaved was ready to begin working again, and they began a new project together. Rick was positively impacted through the experience by having a new perspective on tragic situations. He shared, “And we don’t have, and it’s unfortunate that those sad events create that opportunity for us, but if we let that slip away, we’re really missing an opportunity to, to really demonstrate how much we care about people.” Rick even took these feelings further by saying that there is actually a business benefit that came out of the tragedy because his ability to show how much he cared for the team members built “engagement and loyalty” within the team.

After the death of her grandson after an accidental shooting, the bereaved team member on Team 4 experienced a health concern that kept her out of work for a few weeks. Upon her return, Team 4 participant team members did mention the bereaved demonstrating mourning behaviors such as crying and needing time away, and did report having to pick up extra work, but they did not indicate negative impacts to them individually in doing so. Echoing Rick’s experience, Brooke and Jerry both shared more than once during their interviews how the experience allowed them to show how much they cared for the bereaved team member. Jerry said regarding her part in supporting the bereaved team member, “We need to know that we’re cared for and...yeah, and that we have the freedom to be who we are.” Brooke, who all team member participants agreed was instrumental in coordinating help for the bereaved team member, said, “But the bottom line is take care of their needs, physical, emotional, spiritual, you know, lots of prayer, and, uh, support in that regard and, yeah.” Team members did not discuss any

negative feelings associated with needing to help or growing weary of providing help over time.

On Team 4, only Christine reported feeling uncertain about what to expect when the team member returned to work and uncertain about how to behave. Her feelings of uncertainty were similar to those expressed by team members of Team 1. For example, she stated:

I don't know if this is within the first few days or whatever, but just...when she did return, just always feeling like, I'm wondering like how to support her...and I think this probably goes for when anyone that you care about loses a loved one. You were always wondering like, do I say something? Do I just not bring it up? 'Cause I don't want to remind them even though, you know, they're probably always thinking about it and, and that kind of thing.

Christine was also the only remote team member, working in another state, and contributed some of her uncertainty on the fact that she was not in the office with the rest of the team, so she was not always knowledgeable about what was going on, what support was being provided, and how others were communicating with the bereaved team member. Christine stated, "And then I also remember feeling like I wanted updates and I wanted to know what was going on, but I knew that my manager and other team members were like in the moment trying to deal with it." Other than feelings of uncertainty and helplessness in the early days after the death of the team member's loved one, she did not claim any negative outcomes suggested by research such as growing weary of providing support or resentment. Even though the team, including Christine,

did pick up extra work during that time, they did not report any negative feelings about having to do so.

Other than Christine's initial uncertainty about the situation, Team 4 team members mostly reported positive experiences that included a deeper appreciation for their team relationships and new perspectives about life, work, and relationships. Brooke shared about her relationship with the bereaved over time saying:

Not that, I feel like we were pretty close anyway, but maybe closer because that was, it was very traumatic and to hear the details and try to sort through those, and so it is like a more intimate like, I knew a little more details about her family I guess, so, so maybe closer in that sense.

In summary, no negative ongoing outcomes were reported from Team 4 team members. In fact, positive outcomes were reported by all team members.

Surprising to the researcher, only one out of four teams of participants reported negative individual impacts. Though some reported initial uncertainty and worry about handling the situation, individuals on three of the teams ultimately believed they were positively impacted by their experiences. These findings are contrary to researcher expectations based on relevant literature about grief and the impacts of grief.

**Research question 2.** The second research question asked how a team is impacted overall by a team member experiencing grief and mourning after the unexpected death of a loved one. Literature does not exist specifically stating possible impacts to teams when a team member unexpectedly loses a loved one and then returns to work, which is a reason this study was selected. The impacts to individuals though can provide ideas on how teams may be impacted overall. Some participants even struggled

to separate the two. For example, when participants were asked about the support provided and/or impacts to them personally, participants often responded using the word “we” instead of “I”, referring to not only their experiences but their perception of other team members’ experiences. Accordingly, it was sometimes difficult for the researcher to separate if the experiences described by participants were the individual’s experiences or if the individual was speaking from a team perspective. This challenge is not surprising though based on group social capital theory which supports that individuals in a team interact and form relationships that then combine together to form an overall network (Aldrich & Meyer, 2014).

Team 1 team members shared only positive experiences about how the team was impacted. These findings are consistent with group social capital theory in that the individuals were positively impacted by the experience and therefore the overall team impact was also positive. Jean shared:

And I feel like if anything it just made everybody...even a bit closer because when you see somebody walk through something like this that is so incredibly shocking, unlike nothing you would ever see coming...everyone kind of has to let down their guard, I guess a little bit.

Jean also said, “It made everyone want to be friendlier, warmer, more understanding of each other.” Mary shared that at first the team was worried about how it would work when the bereaved team member returned to work. She said people were concerned about how much work they would need to pick up and how they would handle working with a team member they cared for who would be hurting. Their concerns did not become a reality though. Mary found that the team had a good attitude and stepped in to

help as needed. She attributed the lack of impact to the team to the attitude and demeanor of the bereaved team member. She believed the bereaved team member “set the tone for everybody else’s behavior”.

Team members of Team 1 said Mary, their manager, played a critical role in their experiences as a team. Team members had many stories of the manager’s actions immediately after the death and along the way that were helpful to them. First, Mary called a meeting directly upon learning of the death. The details surrounding the death were not clear at that time, but Mary wanted to make sure the team knew what was happening and why the bereaved would not be at work. Mary also provided details about her expectations for the team, how the week would go, and what the plan was to cover the work. Because there were some difficult details about the death which would possibly be reported on the local news, she let the team know that it would not be acceptable to discuss hearsay with each other. Mary also met individually with team members to check in on them. Sam recalled, “She was in there every day checking on us, making sure we didn’t need anything or if we did that she would jump in and help us as soon as possible” and said that Mary took on the most extra work to help the team.

Aligned with the individual impacts reported, Team 2 did not have such a positive team experience. Just as the team member reported her own relationship with the bereaved declining upon her return to work, she reported overall team relationships deteriorated. Rebecca recalled:

I think for the relationships that were already strained, it just intensified it. And so there was, on the bereaved team member’s side, she was I guess irritated and

upset that she felt like this team member and that team wasn't understanding enough.

Other team members were also frustrated with the bereaved team member as well.

Rebecca said the situation "put a strain on everybody because you know, you can't help but be a little irritated." When Rebecca was asked if there was anything different she would do if she was put in a similar situation again she responded that she would have engaged in more conversation with her team members. She believed that many on the team may have been uneducated about grief and how people grieve, so providing some education, even if in an informal way, may have helped the team cope during this difficult time.

Ultimately the bereaved team member in Team 3 left the company approximately a year after the death of her adopted father. Rebecca believes that the team relationships led to her resignation even though Rebecca also believes that the team did everything they knew to do to support her. Because of the continued time off work and impactful mourning behaviors exhibited at work, the team experienced stress and burden which caused a divide in the team network.

The Team 3 participant did not provide much detail about the impacts to the team experiences as a whole, perhaps because the team is small and many team members are contractors which limits their exposure to other team members. Rick did recall that when the death occurred the team had to cancel the projects that were scheduled immediately for the bereaved team member and the other trainers were "super cool about it." They all wanted to help with work that needed to be covered and offered to do so. Rick believes that when the team was faced with an opportunity to help they wanted to do so not only



because it would help a fellow team member during a very difficult time, but also because it provided intrinsic positive value as well. He stated, “And you know, number one that makes us feel good about ourselves because we’re doing the right thing.” Rick did not recall any negative team outcomes or experiences.

Similar to Team 1 and Team 3, Team 4 did not experience negative team impacts. Their experiences as a team were mostly neutral though. When asked how the team dynamics changed over time, Christine stated, “I don’t think they did. I mean, because we are all already and always were so collaborative and like supportive of each other that I don’t, I can’t really say that they did” and Brooke responded similarly saying, “I don’t know that it necessarily changed.” Brooke did recall that perhaps the team was more compassionate with each other as a result of the experience, but there was very little discussion about specifically positive experiences and outcomes.

**Research question 3.** The third research question asked what can be learned from the study of grief after an unexpected death in the context of a team. Grieving goes beyond adjusting to life without a loved one. The bereaved person faces distress and stress that will permeate into all aspects of his or her life (Stroebe & Schut, 2005). While grieving, a person will pivot between behaviors associated with handling the death and behaviors associated with moving past the death and moving on in life (Stroebe & Schut, 2005). Participants learned much about grief and also about ways to handle grief in the team context through their experiences.

A theme that dominated in Team 1 related to what they learned was how surprised they were at the strength of the bereaved and how quickly she returned to “normal” at work. Sam said:

She was quiet, but still her bubbly, loud self when she came back to work, she really kept her personal life out of her work because she knew she had a job to do, which I applaud her because I would not have been able to do that and I probably would have been gone a lot longer.

The manager of the team also was surprised and said:

I was, I think my first experience personally was I was shocked at the demeanor...if you had not known this had happened, and I will say that to this day, if you did not know that this had happened to her, you would not know...I don't how...she is the same. She is the exact same as she was before, which is very strange to me.

Since the bereaved team member came back to work able to continue with work as normal, the team said they also just went along with work as normal. There were, and still are, times when some additional support was/is needed, but these times seem to be infrequent.

Team 1 also revealed that an important part of knowing how to support the bereaved team member upon her return to work was to read the needs of the bereaved and act accordingly. Mary, who stated that she had never been in a situation like this before, decided she would just observe and see how things went. She said:

And so, you know, I kind of made up my mind that I was going to see how they were to see how I needed to react instead of me just coming in all, you know, amped up one way and, and bringing that in when I didn't need to.

As Mary observed prior to reacting, she found that it was best to be supportive in the ways that the bereaved person needed and not let her own emotions or feelings get in the

way. Other team members also expressed the importance of being observant to determine if the bereaved team member needed quiet, space, a listener, or help with work.

One of the most frequent needs that Team 1 discussed was having to “read” if the bereaved needed space and time away or needed normalcy. The team assumed that the bereaved team member would be out of work for a while due to the unexpected and tragic nature of the death, but the team member returned the next day to take care of a few things and then returned back to work full-time the following week. Team members voiced they wanted her to know that it was okay if she needed more time away and the manager, Mary, assured the bereaved her job was safe no matter what. They also articulated they wanted her to know it was okay if she needed the normalcy of returning to work. Mary said, “So we wanted to make sure she knew that she was taken care of number one. Number two we wanted to let her know that there’s no pressure here. If you want to come back so that you can keep some semblance of a normal routine, that’s fine, but at any point if it becomes too much, we’re going to step in and handle it.” Mary sensed the bereaved team member was worried about her job and Mary wanted it to be clear that her job would not be an issue.

Rebecca on Team 2 learned that giving the bereaved team member space was often needed, but that boundaries needed to be put in place about the amount of time. This learning contradicted what Team 1, Team 3, and Team 4 discussed in giving an open-ended offer for space and time. Rebecca stated she should have said, “We’re going to give you a few days to just kind of do what you need to do” instead of leaving the option open for ongoing time away because the team struggled with the bereaved team member’s physical, mental, and emotional absence. Rebecca reminisced about her

frustration with giving the bereaved space by saying, “But I think that, I think she felt it was open ended, that she could just be this way forever, you know?” Generally though, they all expected that the bereaved team member would return to “normal” at some point and became frustrated when the mourning expanded beyond those expectations. This finding is interesting because it is so contradictory to what the other three teams learned about grief and allowing space for the bereaved.

Team 3, like Team 1, learned that grief may not always manifest as expected. Rick assumed based on his understanding of grief that the bereaved team member would be unable to continue with the team as he had before the death. He was surprised to learn though that grief does not always result in a person becoming incapacitated in every area of his or her life. He reflected:

There's, there's grief and there's mourning and, and people associate...grief with a lot of sadness, low energy, and just kind of retracting from the world. And I think what he has taught me and everyone else is that...grief doesn't have to look like that. Or mourning doesn't have to look like that. Mourning can be like taking action and mourning, we can, we can mourn, we can grieve, but not let our lives fall apart.

Also, similarly to Team 1, Rick discussed his amazement with the bereaved team member's ability to handle work and home responsibilities at the same time. This was especially surprising since the deaths in both of these cases left the bereaved team members to be single parents, raising kids without their deceased spouses. Rick shared that the bereaved team member admitted that parenting alone was not easy and there were

both logistical and emotional challenges to doing so but said, “He talks about it, but he also gets work done. So, it's really just super cool to, to see how his mind works.”

Team 4 participant Brooke believes her team learned that everybody handles grief differently, not only from the bereaved perspective but also from the perspective of the other team members. She had personally experienced grief after losing close loved ones and so she had a certain perspective on how the grieving may play out. Others on the team had not yet experienced losing a loved one and did not have expectations how it would go. They also learned that team members each handled the situation uniquely. Some wanted to help with work or other physical tasks, some wanted to provide emotional support through listening and talking, and some wanted to ignore the situation altogether. This finding is thought-provoking because it enhances the complexity of grief in a work team context. Not only may a bereaved team member grieve uniquely, which is consistent with literature (Worden, 2008), the other team members may handle the situation uniquely.

The complexity of grief in the work team context makes the role of the manager very important. Jerry recalled that one team member had not experienced grief due to unexpected loss previously and how she had to learn strategies along the way. As the manager, Jerry had to not only read the needs of the bereaved team member, but also the needs of the other team members. She stated, “And so I had to make sure that everyone was...being able to respond to that in a way that was, not productive, that sounds so cold, but important for them personally or what they could manage.” One detail that Jerry attributed to the team’s success in handling the grief was the relationships they had formed prior to the death which contributed to the team dynamic.

**Team dynamics.** Though not specifically asked as a research question, much data emerged during the study about team dynamics and the potential impacts on grief. Because the results from the study varied greatly between Teams 1, 3, and 4 and Team 2, the researcher explored what data the teams provided about the teams prior to the unexpected death of the team member's loved one to determine if there were differences that may have impacted the team's experiences and outcomes contrarily. First, the researcher considered if there were other contextual details or circumstances which may have been different between the teams. The researcher recalled that Rebecca on Team 2 shared details about the death of the mother of the bereaved in the years prior and the subsequent death of her biological father in the months following her adopted father's unexpected death. Perhaps the multitude of traumatic events compounded the grieving outcomes. Upon reviewing the data though the researcher discovered that Team 4 also shared that the bereaved team member on that team had multiple traumatic events occurring around the time of the death of her grandson, including divorce and health concerns. While the bereaved team member did leave the organization about a year after the death, similar in timing to the resignation of the bereaved team member on Team 2, the exit was a retirement that was already in discussion prior to the death. Therefore, the researcher explored and considered other contributing factors.

Upon further review of the data, what was evident was that the reported team dynamics prior to the death were quite different between Team 2 and the other teams. Team 1, Team 3, and Team 4 all described their team dynamic positively before the death of the team member's loved one. Only Team 2 reported that team relationships were negative and strained before the death of the team member's loved one. Interestingly,

Team 2 is the team that also reported relationships declined further upon the bereaved team member's return to work. As discussed in Chapter Two, team-member exchange theory, group social capital theory, and Social network theory provide foundational evidence that the relationships within a work team are dynamic and greatly influence individual and team behaviors.

Prior to the death of the team member's loved one, Team 1 described their team as friendly and positive with a family feel. Sam portrayed the team saying, "They were a big family, like we all talked about our husbands and our kids and everything." Jean shared that everyone on the team is very friendly, warm and always had a lot of fun together. The team all shared one large office, where it was easy for them to collaborate, so there was a high level of interaction between all team members. Mary said that from the time they got there in the morning to the time they left for home, the interaction was constant. Sam said, "Oh, every day. Every hour. Every minute. We were, we all sat in the same room at our own little desk and we could talk back and forth to each desk, no cubicles or anything." Because of this environment, team members claimed to have strong relationships with each other and some discussed how they would pray for each other and got to know each other's families.

One team member, Amy, while still maintaining that the team environment was positive, did allude to some possible concerns with the team related to team members not being transparent or sincere in their relationships, but no specifics were provided and no other team members reported these concerns. The manager, Mary, clarified that the team members all got along well and that if there were minor issues between team members, they were not chronic or ongoing. Amy is also the team member that had the closest

personal relationship with the bereaved. They were long-time personal friends and attended the same church, so Amy was involved outside of work with the family. Sam also had personal relationships with the bereaved and her family, including a relationship with the bereaved team member's adult daughter. Though not a personal relationship, Mary, the manager, had worked with the bereaved team member at a previous company, so they had a long-standing relationship. The nature of the relationships is shared here because it provides a picture of the unique team dynamics of Team 1.

Team 2 had a very different team dynamic. While Rebecca initially reported that the team worked well together, she then admitted there were personality challenges that were ongoing between some of the team members. She specifically shared that, "the bereaved team member struggled with a couple of other team members, just mostly personality differences." The work the team did required daily interaction, so team members did communicate. The conflict the bereaved team member had with the others had not reached the point that they would not speak to each other. When asked about the reason for the conflict, Rebecca stated it was due to personality conflicts and a lack of having things in common. Rebecca recalled:

And they didn't, were not always willing to step outside of their own feelings to say 'she just sees things differently than I do'. You know. There was this 'this is how I am and you should be that way too' attitude.

She recalled that one team member was very straightforward in her style of communication. She would get straight to the point when she needed something or had a question and the other team member desired some softness to the approach, so there was a bit of a disconnect in their communication styles.



Rebecca described the managers relationship with the team as very good overall. The manager did have to deal with the conflicts between the team members. They were often going to her and complaining about each other. This was frustrating to Rebecca and she recalled thinking to herself, “You’re grown people. Y’all need to work this out. This is not kindergarten.” She said she believes the manager did try to coach the team members individually and had likely also had some joint conversations to try to resolve the issues. Although Rebecca was not part of the conversations or issues, she said that it caused a lot of stress for her and the team.

Team 3 described the least interaction among the team members, due to the nature of contract work. Team members would only collaborate when working on a project together, usually in contractor pairs, or at quarterly scheduled events. The team manager scheduled quarterly events such as “happy hours” but said that outside of those projects and events he did not believe any of the team members had personal relationships. Most of the communication and collaboration took place between the manager, the training manager, and the individual contractors. They would meet up about once a month in person for coffee as a team and then the contractors would meet frequently with the training manager to discuss various projects. Though relationships were not deep or long-standing, they were positive in nature. Rick shared that, “Outside of that, the collaboration really comes in with idea sharing and experience sharing with other trainings at these meetings. We have to make sure that we’re all learning from each other consistently.”

Team 4 also described a very collaborative work environment. Like Team 3, Team 4 often worked in pairs. Christine described:

And...so I mean, there were months where we were on for hours a day together, you know...you know, frequently, like we would break off and each separately write something or work on something and then get together and review it together and give feedback and that sort of thing.

Team 4 described their manager Jerry as an important component of the team dynamic. Team members described her as personable, approachable, trustworthy and forthcoming about expectations. Not only did the team portray a personal connection with each other, they portrayed the manager as caring about their personal situations. The team members who worked in the same location would have lunch together, bring breakfast foods to share, and talk about children, grandchildren, and life experiences. Even though Christine was a remote employee, working in another state, she felt like the team members knew what was going on in her life and she knew what was going on in theirs. Unlike in Team 1 though, team members did not claim to have personal relationships with other team members outside of work.

Jerry made an interesting connection between the team dynamic and the relationships among team members. She said:

I think we learned how important it was to have had the relationship we did before the loss because a lot of the way we were able to respond to the loss was because we knew so well about that person. We already knew what makes her tick, what makes her happy, what brings her joy, what brings her peace. And, so knowing that so well about her gave us the opportunity to kind of know how to step in.

This connection is interesting because it sparks an idea that perhaps the differences in team dynamics played a role in the differences in experiences between teams.

### **Summary of Findings**

This study was guided by three main research questions:

- How are team members impacted by a fellow team member experiencing grief and mourning after the unexpected death of a loved one?
- How is a team impacted overall by a team member experiencing grief and mourning after the unexpected death of a loved one?
- What can be learned from the study of unexpected death grief in the context of a team?

The focus of this case study's first research question was to determine how individual team members were impacted when a team member experiences the unexpected death of a loved one and then returns to work. To address Research Question (1) and determine the core of how individual team members are impacted by a grieving team member who returns to work after the unexpected death of a loved one seven interview questions were asked to draw out participant experiences. After conducting the data collection until the point of data saturation, which was comprised of nine interviews, thematic analysis revealed nine themes, including 56 coded segments, which described the individual experiences of team members. Each theme was given a rank within the research results based on coded segment frequency. The following nine themes were identified in order of frequency:

- New perspective
- Uncertainty on how to behave

- Helping with work
- Opportunity to show you care
- Uncertainty on what to expect
- Curiosity about the death/situation
- Feeling helpless
- Admiration for the bereaved
- Relationship to the bereaved

The researcher considered both the frequency of coded segments and the similarities and differences of the themes among the cases to analyze how the data answers the research question. Though the researcher anticipated participants detailing negative individual impacts based on grief research, only Team 2 reported negative impacts. Teams 1, 3, and 4 described positive individual impacts such as closer relationships with others on the team and a new, positive perspective of grief. Conversely, Team 2 identified feelings of frustration, stress and burden related to ongoing support of the bereaved beyond what was anticipated.

The second research question focused on the impacts to teams overall when a team member experiences the unexpected death of a loved one and then returns to work. To address Research Question (2) and determine the core of how teams are impacted by a grieving team member who returns to work after the unexpected death of a loved one four interview questions were asked to draw out participant experiences. After conducting the data collection until the point of data saturation, which was comprised of nine interviews, thematic analysis revealed three themes, with five individually coded

segments, which described the overall experiences of teams. The following three themes were identified in order of frequency:

- Team relationships
- Interruption to work
- Consideration of other team members

The researcher considered both the frequency of coded segments and the similarities and differences of the themes among the cases to analyze how the data answers the research question. In line with the results for Research Question (1), results for Research Question (2) varied by team. Teams 1, 3, and 4 experienced increased bonding with the team including enhanced relationships with both the bereaved and other team members. Even though work was disrupted due to the situation, and these teams had to provide support, the outcomes were generally very positive. Team 2 on the other hand experienced deteriorating relationships due to the burden of support and frustration associated with the mourning behaviors of the bereaved.

The third research question focused on what can be learned from the study of unexpected death grief in the context of a team. To address Research Question (3) and identify what can be learned through the experience of working on a team with a grieving team member who returns to work after the unexpected death of a loved one and suggestions for managers and teams who experience this situation, nine interview questions were asked to draw out participant experiences. After conducting the data collection until the point of data saturation, which was comprised of nine interviews, thematic analysis revealed 18 themes, with 132 coded segments, which can help guide

managers and teams when faced with this circumstance. The following 18 themes were identified in order of frequency:

- Read the needs of the bereaved
- Offer general support/help
- Manager support
- Giving space/time
- Provide food
- Be normal
- Reassure job stability
- Listen
- Communicate and stay in touch
- Financial support
- Don't ask if okay
- Be careful with words/comments
- Provide personal help
- Put work aside
- Be encouraging
- Organizational level support
- Give hugs
- Be mindful of capacity

The researcher considered both the frequency of coded segments and the similarities and differences of the themes among the cases to analyze how the data answers the research question. The most frequent themes overall were identified across the four teams. These

included identifying the needs of the bereaved and behaving accordingly, giving the bereaved team member space and time to grieve, the importance of manager support, and offering general support and help to the bereaved. Different teams shared slight differences in these learnings though. Team 1 was surprised by the strength of the bereaved team member when she returned to work, which was also dominant within Team 3. Team 1 found that it was critical to read the needs of the team member and then respond and behave according to those needs and all three of the other teams supported this finding. Team 1 also identified the importance of giving the team member space and time to grieve, though Team 2 added that boundaries should be set on the space and time given. Finally, Team 1 found that bereaved team members sometimes need the normalcy of returning to work and Teams 3 and 4 supported these findings and encouraged others faced with a similar situation to make the team environment as normal as possible.

Because of the contradictions in the findings, the researcher looked to uncover factors that may have contributed to the differences in experiences among the teams. The researcher identified that team dynamics prior to the death of the team member's loved one were very different and therefore may have been a contributing factor. Though levels of closeness varied among Teams 1, 3, and 4, all of these teams reported high levels of interaction and strong relationships among team members, and these teams also had positive experiences and outcomes. Team 2 conveyed team relationships that were strained and full of conflict and the team had negative experiences and outcomes.

For a summary of the study findings see Table 6. All results of these findings will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

Table 6

*Summary of the Research Findings*

	<b>Team 1</b>	<b>Team 2</b>	<b>Team 3</b>	<b>Team 4</b>
Research Question 1	Individuals reported positive impacts such as closer relationships and new perspectives	The individual reported negative experiences such as frustration and burden	The individual reported positive impacts such as closer relationships and new perspectives	Individuals reported positive impacts such as closer relationships and new perspectives
Research Question 2	The team experienced increased bonding and enhanced relationships with the bereaved and each other	The team relationships with the bereaved deteriorated due to the ongoing need to provide support beyond the level they anticipated	The team experienced increased bonding and enhanced relationships with the bereaved and each other	The team experience was mostly neutral with some positive impact on compassion for others
Research Question 3	Surprise by the strength of the bereaved  Read the needs of the bereaved and respond accordingly  Give the bereaved space and time to grieve  Sometimes a grieving person needs a sense of normalcy	Give the bereaved space and time to grieve, but put some boundaries around the space and time provided	Grief and mourning may not appear as anticipated, and may provide an inspired new perception of how grief and mourning may appear	Not only do people grieve uniquely, team members will handle the grief and mourning of a bereaved team member uniquely  The manager has a critical role in handling the situation



Team Dynamics Prior to the Unexpected Death	3 out of 4 team members indicated relationships were very strong with some team members also having personal relationships with each other outside of work	The team member indicated that relationships were strained and some team members did not get along well due to personality conflicts	The team member indicated that relationships were strong, though not on the personal level as Teams 1 and 4	All 4 team members indicated relationships were very strong with high levels of interaction
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### Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings that resulted from data collection and analysis from nine interviews with team members who had experienced working with a bereaved team member after the unexpected death of a loved one. An overview of the research purpose and research questions were provided first. Next, details about the participants and cases were provided along with demographic information. The results of the study as they related to the research questions were discussed and included coded segments for support. In Chapter Five a discussion of the meaning of the themes within the thematic categories will be provided along with a discussion on how the data relates to the literature, implications for practice and research, as well as limitations of the study.

## Chapter Five

### Discussion, Conclusions, Implications for Practice, and Future Research

This chapter includes discussion related to the findings from the phenomenological multi-case study research. A summary of the research will be provided including the data collection, analysis, and results. Conclusions, implications of the research, and future research possibilities will be addressed.

#### **Summary of the Phenomenological Multi-Case Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological multi-case study was to examine the experiences of team members and teams of grieving and mourning fellow team members and how the grief and mourning experience impacts individuals and the team. Those who had experienced this situation were interviewed to discover their personal and team experiences. Interviews were facilitated over a three-month period, June 2019 through August 2019, and the collected data was analyzed. Many themes emerged during the data analysis endeavor. Saturation of thematic instances was achieved after nine interviews.

After a recursive process of manual open coding using MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2018) and further analysis to identify patterns in the initial codes, 60 themes emerged that revealed details about grief experienced in the context of work teams. These themes were divided into five categories of themes related to the same topic area. When compared to the initial 51 codes identified in the pilot study, themes remained consistent. Therefore, the data gathered during the pilot study was also included in the

data for the full study. The 60 themes that emerged were organized into five thematic categories including Learnings about Grief and Mourning, Contextual Information about Team Dynamics, Support Provided to the Bereaved, Impacts to Individual Team Members, and Impacts to the Team. The thematic categories, themes, and coded segments were then analyzed as they related to the research questions and across the four cases included in the study. The following discussion, implications, limitations, and future research possibilities are based on the data that was analyzed and the research findings of relevant literature and to the research questions.

### **Discussion of Findings Relative to Literature and Theory**

**Grief and mourning.** Stroebe and Schut's (1999) Dual Processing Model (DPM) provided the theoretical underpinning of this study with regard to grief. The DPM describes two types of grieving behaviors: behaviors related to mourning which are loss-oriented and behaviors related to adjusting to life without the deceased loved one which are restoration-oriented. Stroebe and Schut (1999) found that individuals grieving oscillate between loss-oriented and restoration-oriented behaviors. Understanding the complex behaviors associated with grieving was the foundation to this study, as the focus of the study was the phenomenon of grief. A later version of the DPM, called the DPM-R (Stroebe & Schut, 2015), revised the model to include the impacts of grief not only at the individual level, but also the family level. While the work team level is not the focus of the original or revised model, it calls for consideration as work team members may interact closely with the bereaved upon the return to work. Also, the research findings related to Research Question (3) provide rich insight into how teams experience grief and what can be learned from those experiences.

The loss-oriented and restoration-oriented behaviors included in the DMP were confirmed through the research findings. Participants shared mourning behaviors exhibited by the bereaved such as crying, missing work, lack of focus, and needing to talk about the lost loved one. These findings align with grief literature showing that symptoms of grief can be physical, emotional, cognitive, or a combination of these (Defraia, 2013). They also shared instances of the bereaved wanting time away from grief through the normal routine provided by work. This echoes findings by Lattanzi-Licht (2002) that showed grieving team members find returning to work as a source of comfort due to the routine and “normal” functions performed there. See Table 11 for coded segments aligned with the DMP components.

Table 7

*DMP Related Study Findings*

Examples of coded segments related to loss-oriented behaviors	Examples of coded segments related to restoration-oriented behaviors
<i>If she was having a rough time, they could let her, give her time to cry or just talk or whatever. (Brooke, Team 4)</i>	<i>He talks about it, but he also gets work done. (Rick, Team 3)</i>
<i>It was a 30-minute conversation with lots and lots of details and lots and lots of rehashing. (Rebecca, Team 2)</i>	<i>She was quiet, but still her bubbly, loud self when she came back to work. She really kept her personal life out of her work because she had a job to do. (Sam, Team 1)</i>
<i>I think we all expected one day just to go back to complete normal, but there’s some days where it might be his birthday or their anniversary that came up and that was hard. (Sam, Team 1)</i>	<i>And other than that, it’s business as normal because, you know, eventually a couple of days down the road, she did say she needed some normalcy because there was so much change so quickly. (Mary, Team 1)</i>

*He, he doesn't bottle up his, I mean he talks very openly about what his challenges are right now, which is really cool because there's no elephant in the room. (Rick, Team 3)*

*Like there was multiple times when it would just be random Tuesday or Wednesday and she would have to leave. (Sam, Team 1)*

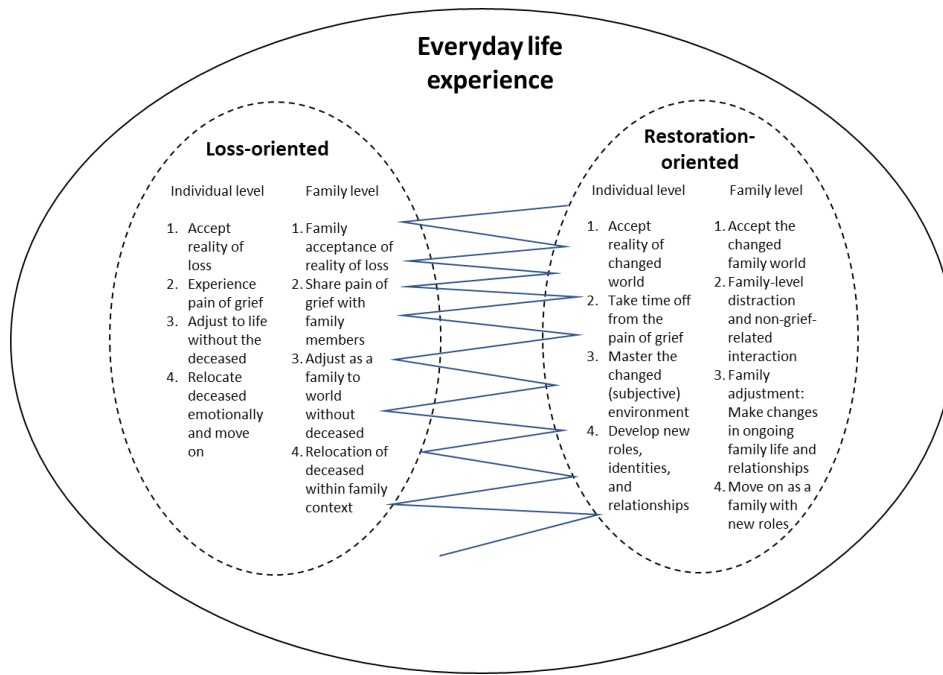
*You know, just probably, you know, several meltdowns...just not being able to concentrate, not being able to focus...a zombie likeness. (Mary, Team 1)*

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*She felt kind of like she needed some, uh, just normal routine. (Jean, Team 1)*

*She needed to just kind of feel like she was doing the usual stuff and it was good for her kids too, I think she said at the time. (Jean, Team 1)*

As discussed previously in Chapter Two, the DPM-R model was pivotal in grief theory and research because it recognized that grief does not impact only the individual level. It also impacts others within a given context. The DPM-R added the family context, showing the loss-oriented and restoration-oriented behaviors experienced at the family level. DMP in the context of work teams is yet another lens to consider. Based on the information gathered about impacts to individual team members which answered Research Question (1), and teams overall, which answered Research Question (2), the researcher proposes additional DMP relevance in the context of work teams. See



*Figure 3.* A dual process model of coping with bereavement at the team level as proposed by the researcher based on research findings.

Another important element of the DMP and DMP-R that is thought-provoking based on this study’s findings is how the bereaved oscillates between loss-oriented and restoration-oriented behaviors. The most frequent responses that were coded for the theme titled “Read the needs of the bereaved” addressed the need for team members to adjust based on the bereaved person’s personality and situation, but also based on the oscillation between the two types of grieving behavior. Christine on Team 4 clearly demonstrated this by saying:

I think I just really tried to like, be aware of signals from her and if I got the impression that she seemed to want to talk about him, like we would, you know...and that sort of thing. And just making it very apparent that if she wanted to like stop talking about work for a minute and I’ll talk about that. We could do that at any time.

One of the managers, Jerry on Team 4, stressed the importance of reading the bereaved team member's ability to complete certain tasks day to day, moment to moment by saying:

And then points where it was just to say, you know what, let's just do something different today. Maybe instead of this work task where we have to be really focused, why don't you do this research or, so maybe finding an alternate...activity that would not be so difficult with the emotionality, mainly for the subject.

These findings show that while the bereaved person is oscillating between loss-oriented and restoration-oriented behaviors, team members must constantly adjust to the pivots.

Carr's (2010) review of empirical studies through 2010 supported that additional research should be conducted to include the context and situation of a death, specifically if the death was anticipated or unanticipated, how the loss-oriented and resource-oriented behaviors change over time, and how much a bereaved person focuses on each type of behavior. This study added to grief theory by working to discover data related to Carr's recommendations for more research on grief in a specific situation. Therefore, information was gathered about the deceased and the bereaved team member to "paint a picture" of the circumstances that led to the grief. See Table 8 for situation details. It was expected, based on early research (Keesee, Currier, & Neimeyer, 2008), that experiences with grief would vary depending on the circumstances of the death, the age of the deceased, and the relationship between the deceased and the bereaved. Because the study did not include interviews with the bereaved, the study did not gather differences in grief based on bereaved team members' experiences, and results did not support that the team members' experiences with grief were impacted by these factors. Rebecca on Team 2 in

the study described how the bereaved team member struggled greatly upon returning to work regarding her ability to focus and get work done. The death in Rebecca's experience was one that the researcher, based on previous research, expected to result in the least complex grieving process compared to the other situations. The deceased was in his 70s, much older than some of the other deceased loved ones, and the death, though unexpected, was due to natural causes. As a comparison, the death of the team member's loved one on Team 1 was not only unexpected, it was a stabbing and the victim was only in his 40s or 50s. However, the bereaved team member in Team 1 was reported by team members to transition remarkably well back to work showing very few mourning behaviors at work.

Table 8

*Grief Study Situation Details*

Team	How long ago was the death (at the time of the interview)?	How old was the bereaved team member?	How old was the loved one at the time of death?	What was the cause of death?	What was the relationship between the deceased loved one and the team member?
1	9 months	40s	40s or 50s	Stabbing	Spouse
2	2-3 years	Mid 50s	70s	Heart attack	Parent
3	7 months	Early 40s	Late 30s	Severe weather related	Spouse
4	4years	60s	Teens	Accidental shooting	Grandchild

*Note: Some details are approximations based on the team members' memory or perceptions and may not be exact.*



**Social support.** Doka (1989) discussed the importance of a social component as people heal from grief. Bereaved individuals require support through others' willingness to talk and listen about the grief they are experiencing (Toller, 2011). Participants reported providing many types of support including but not limited to: listening, providing food to the family, providing financial support, communicating by staying in touch, taking on additional work tasks, and giving the bereaved team member space to grieve.

As team members adjusted to the bereaved team member's needs in an effort to provide support, there was a potential burden on team members providing social support. Taylor (2011) found there can be costs associated with providing support and while providing support is a positive action, it may result in negative consequences. Providing support uses time, energy, and emotional resources which Taylor (2011) states may be a rewarding experience that benefits the relationship long-term or may lead to feelings of stress and burden.

Participant responses supported both of Taylor's (2011) statements of possible outcomes of social support with mostly positive outcomes, but also some negative. Some participants expressed very positive feelings about their role in providing support for the bereaved team member. Brooke on Team 4 even specifically stated her relationship with the bereaved team member improved through the experience by saying:

Not that, I feel like we were pretty close anyway, but maybe closer because that was, it was very traumatic and to hear the details and try to sort through those.

And so, it was more intimate, like I knew a little more details about her family I guess, so.

Another participant believed the experience drew the entire team closer. She said, “but it did a lot to bind us together and kind of develop, uh, a bond that we would not have had.”

Oppositely, Rebecca on Team 2 shared that providing support such as listening and helping with job tasks became a burden. She recalled:

It was a 30-minute conversation with lots and lots of details and lots and lots of rehashing, going back over. You know, we were, I think she still expected us to continue to help her, but we felt like, you know, it’s been long enough that it’s time to kind of...you know, not that you get over it, but it’s time to kind of get back to your, your job, and it, it, it, was very debilitating for her.

These different outcomes are aligned with Taylor’s (2011) findings and the researcher was intrigued that eight of nine participants described mostly positive outcomes to providing social support. One factor that was discovered in the study findings that may play a part in the outcomes discovered is the team and social interactions that took place before and after the death of the team member’s loved one.

**Teams and team social interactions.** Three theories that provided awareness of the social aspect of teams are team-member exchange theory, group social capital theory and Social network theory. Each of these theories guided the research and led to the second research question which focused on the impacts to teams overall when a team member experiences the unexpected death of a loved one and then returns to work.

Group social capital theory asserts that within groups, organizations, and teams, social ties form through interactions (Bourdieu, 1986; Burt, 1992; Coleman, 1988; Coleman, 1990; Lin, 1982; Putnam, 1993). Additionally, social network theory indicates that how a person behaves depends on his or her relationship(s) within a particular social network (Henttonen, 2010). The researcher asked questions to gather details about the

team dynamics, interactions, and relationships both before and after the death of the team member's loved one to uncover details about the participant experiences working in a team context. Fourteen themes emerged that described the team dynamics in general, prior to the death of the team member's love one. In order of frequency, the themes included:

- Level of interaction
- Work and job stressors
- Manager relationships with the team
- Friendliness of the working environment
- Family feel of the working environment
- Overall team environment
- Communication on the team
- Team relationships
- Helping with others' work
- Level of fun of the working environment
- Specific team experiences
- Age differences
- Exciting times experienced as a team

Even though several of the themes described the work environment and relationships, these themes are listed separately to give a clearer picture of the team dynamics of the participating teams. All but two of the themes that emerged painted a positive picture of the team dynamics. Of the two negative themes, the unhappy times reported were general such as Jean on Team 1 saying, "There'd be days where someone was cranky"

and Sam on Team 1 stating, “So at that point, like if somebody asks us to do something and we’re in the middle of it, we would probably snap back at them and stuff.” Mostly, participants shared positive information about their teams, the relationships within the teams, the relationship with managers, and the way the team worked together.

The researcher also asked four interview questions to draw out specific participant experiences related to the second research question about the impacts on the team after the bereaved team member’s return to work. Three themes identified provided insight about the research question. First, some participants stated that the experience actually made their relationships within the team stronger. Jean on Team 1 stated:

So, you know, there's just the stuff that makes you like thankful and you look at everyone a little bit more like, you know, life's tough but we have to spend these hours of our lives together, so let's make it as good and real as we can kind of thing.

Participants reporting improved team relationships also confirmed that their experience as a team remained positive and productive despite the difficulty of the situation.

Conversely, the one participant that reported negative team impacts upon the bereaved team member’s return to work also shared that relationships were not positive even before the unexpected death. Rebecca on Team 2 stated, “There were some personality challenges as there always are between some team members. The bereaved team member struggled with a couple of other team members, just mostly personality differences.”

Aligned with social network theory, which indicates that how a person behaves depends on his or her relationship(s) within a particular social network (Henttonen, 2010), eight participants described positive work relationships before the death of the team member’s loved one and continued positive relationships post the bereaved team member’s return to

work. The one team member who reported negative team relationships prior to the death of the team member's loved one also reported continued and escalated negative relationships upon her return to work. These findings support Seers' (1989) TMX theory which showed that the quality of interactions between team members directly relates to other positive outcomes such as job satisfaction. In the case Team 2, the outcome resulted in the bereaved team member leaving the organization after about a year of continued relationship troubles.

One of the key components of TMX is the perception of reciprocity (Banks et al., 2014). Even though mourning behaviors and team member's needs were discussed by participants, only one participant expressed concerns over the reciprocity of relationships and work once the team member returned to work. Rebecca on Team 2 stated:

And so there was on the bereaved team member's side, she was I guess irritated and upset that she felt like this team member and that team member wasn't

understanding enough... but it's like enough already you still have to do your job.

Rebecca attributed the frustration around the lack of reciprocity to two factors. First was her perception that the team relationships were already negative prior to the death of the team member's loved one. Second, Rebecca described the bereaved team member as not being able to return to work tasks as quickly as the team needed her to. She said, "And that caused a great deal of stress and conflict because not only was she not there and we were taking some of her work, but she wasn't there at all."

Next, one participant did note that the situation caused an interruption to work performed by the team. Rick on Team 3 stated, "So first time that we were able, so after it happened...it was like, you know, he had to basically cancel everything", and in that team, when a team member cancelled his or her assignment, it interrupted the team's

ability to complete work. Later in the interview Rick reported that once the bereaved team member was able to return to working though, the team was excited to have him back and impressed with his ability to continue working considering the situation.

A third impact to teams discovered during the interviews was the need for team members to not only be concerned and provide support for the bereaved team member, but also for the other members of the team. Christine on Team 4 said:

So...I mean maybe one thing I perhaps would...see, you know, try to check in with my other team members to see how they are kind of coping with it. Cause we didn't really talk about it as a team that much, I don't think.

While other participants did not specifically state the need to check in with other team members, they did reveal individual impacts that could impact overall team experience such as feeling helpless, uncertainty of how to behave or what to expect, and the need to pick up extra work to help. One participant specifically mentioned that the situation provided an opportunity to not only show care for the bereaved team member, but to show care for the team in general. Rick on Team 3 said,

"I'd say, you know, uh, it's an opportunity to show that team member, but also all the other team members that we have that we care about them as individuals."

Overall, the team dynamics discovered during the study supported that the relationships and networks formed on work teams, when positive, are conducive to providing social support and help during times of need. As previously mentioned, Oh et al., (2006) stated, "There are many times when setbacks might destroy morale, or when unexpected tragedies might cause a group to lose its focus, and social ties are called on to assist and support" (p. 571). The teams interviewed certainly demonstrated this to be the case.

**Impacts of social support on resources.** The COR model developed by Hobfoll (1989) postulated that people strive to retain, protect, and build resources, which can be anything that they place value on. The resources referred to in the model may be physical, mental or emotional. When these resources are threatened with a potential loss, people seek to protect their resources and even gather additional resources as a safety. Providing social support, such as in the case of team members supporting a bereaved team member, pulls and depletes resources such as time and energy (Taylor, 2011).

Hobfoll (1989) maintained that providing social support can both add to and take away from a person's resources and Halbesleben and Wheeler (2011) found that social support would diminish over time if the resources consumed through the support process were not replenished during that time. Halbesleben's (2006) study of social support through the lens of the COR model found that in a work setting, providing social support results in higher levels of burnout, likely because of the nature of work demands. This result contradicted previous research which indicated that social support increased resources.

Teams in the study identified eighteen ways they supported the bereaved on their teams. In order of the frequency mentioned during the interviews, they supported the bereaved by performing the following:

- Reading the needs of the bereaved
- Offering general support and help
- Giving the bereaved team member space
- Managers giving specific support
- Providing food
- Being/acting normal

- Reassuring the bereaved of job security
- Offering to listen
- Communicating often and staying in touch
- Providing financial support
- Being careful of the words and comments said/done around the bereaved
- Providing personal help
- Providing organizational level support
- Putting aside work when needed
- Giving hugs
- Encouraging the bereaved
- Being mindful of the work capacity of the bereaved

Each of these support-providing behaviors pulled resources from the team members and teams providing the support. Only one of the nine research participants provided an indication that the support provided was to the point of causing burnout or stress.

Rebecca on Team 2 stated, “I think the team was expecting things to start getting better and they were not improving at the rate that we really would have liked to. Still, trying to be very sympathetic and understanding. But there’s still, you do have a job that you have, you have to do.” All other teams expressed continued desire to support their bereaved team member, without mention of feeling burdened. Comments such as the following by Brooke on Team 4 were common among Teams 1, 3 and 4. “I think just make sure that person knows that we’re there to like, that I’m there to help in any way that I could to take care of them personally. And that that is more important than the workload.” Relating these findings back to the team dynamics uncovered during the



study, the one team that noted feeling burdened by providing support as time went on is the same team that noted negative team relationships prior to the death of the team member's loved one, especially the relationship between the bereaved and some of the other team members.

### **Implications for Research and Practice**

**Research.** This study focused on the phenomenon of grief in the context of work teams. Using the DMP (Stroebe & Schut, 1999) as a theoretic foundation to guide the study (see Chapter Two) provided an understanding of the complexity of grief generally. The revised DMP (Stroebe & Schut, 2015), which added the context of a family to the grief process, sparked new ideas about grief in the context of work teams. This study viewed the phenomenon through the context of a work team, therefore adding to the literature from a different perspective. The themes that emerged and the answers to the research questions provided understanding of grief within work teams, therefore contributing a deeper understanding of grief theory and providing the groundwork for additional studies on grief in the context of work teams.

Because the context of the study was work teams, several theories guided the study and provided a foundational understanding of how people work within teams. Team-member exchange theory, group social capital theory and Social network theory all contributed to the researcher's understanding of teams and informed considerations that should be made when the team is faced with a difficult situation such as a team member unexpectedly losing a loved one and then returning to work. The research findings supported past research indicating the importance of relationships within a team therefore contributing a deeper understanding of team-member exchange theory, group social

capital theory and Social network theory and how they interact with the phenomenon of grief within the team context.

Finally, the COR model guided the research in understanding how resources may be used or depleted through providing social support to a bereaved team member. The research findings revealed that only teams without strong relationships prior to the death experienced stress or burnout as a result of the social support provided. One possibility that lends to further research is that it may be the strong social connections within the teams that provided enough resources to offset the resources used through providing support to the bereaved team member. The study contributed to a deeper understanding of the COR model and how various resources impact team dynamics during times of difficulty.

Since this study was a phenomenological, qualitative multi-case study, the researcher gathered data to provide a richer, deeper understanding of the phenomenon of grief within the context of four work teams. Research on this phenomenon in this context was not previously available, so the study provides a first-view perspective that can help guide future research. Additional qualitative research on grief in work teams would further validate the research findings and future quantitative studies would provide quantifiable data to guide those experiencing this phenomenon.

**Practice.** The third research question in this study asked what can be learned through the experience of a team member losing a loved one unexpectedly and then returning to work. Participants shared an abundance of detail in the support they provided that they believed had positive implications. While all of the themes identified may provide valuable insight for team members, managers, and HRD professionals, the most dominant themes that can inform practice will be discussed.

First, participants often repeated the need to read the needs of the bereaved. Just as each person handles grief in his or her own way, on his or her own time, others must also react in ways that best meet the needs of the bereaved team member. Sometimes the team member may not even know what he or she needs. Rick on Team 3 stated:

Like, he's like, everyone says, let me know what you need. And he's like, I don't know what I need, like everything. And so it's just the open ended question isn't helpful. It's really helpful when people just do things.

This may sound confusing though because if the bereaved team member does not know what he or she needs, then how will team members know what is needed? Participants were able to provide specific ideas on how to determine what is needed. Christine on Team 4 said, "I think I'd say use what you know about the person's personality to help guide you" and also "I think I just really tried to be aware of signals from her and if I got the impression that she seemed to want to talk about him, like we would, you know." Of course, following the advice of these participants can likely only be achieved if team members have a relationship and know enough about each other to read team member needs in such situations. Jerry, the manager of Team 4, recalled others in the organization asking her how they knew what to do and how to meet the needs of the bereaved and she responded, "Well, because of the experiences we had had." These findings support earlier reported findings that group social capital is associated with higher levels of social support, especially during times of disaster or trauma (Hurlbert et al., 2000). Team members who have invested in each other are more likely to know each other and be able to read the needs of a team member during difficult times.

A second recommendation for practice based on findings in the data is to offer ongoing general support and help. This support can be offered at the individual, team,

and/or organizational level. In this study, examples of all three levels of support were provided. General support is defined by the research results as any type of support that may be helpful to the bereaved. The support could be work related or personal. Mary on Team 1 said, “I think the most important things that I’ve learned out of that, this is just to number one be honest with them and let them know, you know, that you’re here. Do, you know, in whatever it is that you can do to support them that you’re available.” It is important to note that participants mentioned this general offering of support and help on many occasions during the interview indicating that they did not just mention it once to the bereaved. They offered support and help often and over time.

A third recommendation for practice is to ensure the manager is providing adequate support to both the bereaved team member and the other team members as needed. The manager’s support must start as soon as he or she is notified of the death. Even if notified by another team member, participants were thankful for managers who met with them immediately and shared an appropriate level of details and discussed what they can do and what may happen next. Mary on Team 1 shared, “I wouldn’t change any of that meeting with the team to let them know, you know, this is what has happened, this is what we’re going to do, these are the expectations.” Then, ongoing, daily support of the entire team will be important. Sam reported that her manager checked on the team members to see if they needed any help with work or other support and would “jump in and help” if she sensed it was needed.

These three implications for practice provide implementable ideas for team members, managers, and HRD and HRM professionals to consider should they be in a similar situation in the future. While the results of this study are not intended to be generalizable to all work teams, they do provide a deeper understanding of the

phenomenon of grief in work teams and therefore can provide general guidance at a minimum.

### **Limitations**

As with most research, this study did have a number of limitations. First, the study relied on self-reported data which is therefore based on individual perceptions. While this limitation is intentional in order to gather individual experiences, the absence of observation or third-party confirmation of the findings is a limitation. The focus on phenomenology is to uncover the essence of participants' experiences. The meaning of those experiences, this study does provide a comprehensive articulation of these experiences through self-reporting. While the study involved participants from multiple work teams, and the interviews took place over a time period of three months, it was not a longitudinal study and therefore did not explore how the participants' experiences might change over time.

A second limitation is the sample size and demographics of participants. Although data saturation was achieved, and there is no agreed upon sample size required for a study with the specified design, nine participants is a modest sample size for a phenomenon so prevalent in the workforces. Two of the cases analyzed only had one participating team member. Additionally, eight out of nine participants were women, though it is not certain if this prevalence of women was due to the source used to recruit participants or a higher likelihood in women volunteering to be interviewed about their experiences with the phenomenon. The small sample size and unequal participation by women, along with other factors, preclude generalizability to all work teams. The goal of qualitative research is not to achieve generalizability, but rather to discover in-depth

understanding. Therefore, despite this limitation, the rich, thick description of experiences may be useful for other individuals and managers in a work team context.

A third limitation is the role of the researcher and the personal experiences that may bias the research. The researcher was the facilitator of the interviews and the designer of the study, so her interpretation of experiences may have been impacted by her desired outcome. The researcher had also within the past few years provided social support for a friend who experienced an unexpected loss of a loved one. Her experiences in providing support and experiencing the phenomenon of grief were still vivid in the researcher's mind and may have impacted her perceptions of the interviewee responses. However, member checking was used to ensure authenticity of the findings.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The study findings and limitations reveal several recommendations for future research. A qualitative, phenomenological treatment was employed to explore the experiences of grief broadly within the context of a work team. Future research into the topic could consider other contexts or other case types. Even the researchers who developed the DMP used as the theoretical underpinning for the study indicated that most grief models and theories are missing the component of context in which the loss-oriented and restoration-oriented related behaviors are happening (Stroebe & Schut, 2015). For example, specific case types could include only work teams within a specific industry or type of work team. Also, the study included both team members and team managers. Future studies could include only one or the other team member types to further understand specific experiences related to role type. Future studies could also use the DMP-R (Stroebe & Schut, 2015) and study contexts outside of the work team

altogether, such as friend groups, hobby groups, and so forth. All of these would provide a deeper understanding of grief in various contexts.

Of concern in this research, very few men were recruited to participate. A deeper investigation into gender differences would yield additional insights into the experiences of grief within work teams. Also related to gender differences, only one of the bereaved team members discussed during the interviews was a man. Again, a deeper investigation into possible gender differences in team experiences depending on the gender of the bereaved would yield additional insights into the experience of grief within work teams.

During the interview with Christine on Team 4, she mentioned that she worked in a different state than the rest of the team members. Near the end of her interview she suggested that future research may include studies specific to teams with team members working remotely from one another. Considering the popularity of remote workforces in today's business world this is a specific context in which the study could be repeated. The headline of a 2013 Forbes article read, "One in five Americans work from home, numbers seen rising over 60%" (Rapooza, 2012). Chandra, Srivastava, and Theng (2012) concur that work has significantly spread across the globe in the past two decades causing organizations to find new ways to effectively work outside of face-to-face settings. While some organizations continue to follow the trend of increasing virtual work opportunities, some are pulling back. In 2013 Yahoo! CEO Marissa Mayer announced, "speed and quality are often sacrificed when we work from home" (Smith, 2013, para. 4). The controversy around remote work is ongoing and the phenomenon of grief, which this study found is sensitive to relationships within the work team, provides an exciting backdrop for future research.

## **Summary of the Chapter and Conclusion**

Chapter Five began with a brief overview of the study. Following a discussion of the findings of the study relevant to existing literature, the chapter presented implications of the findings related to research, theory, and practice. Limitations and recommendations for future research complete the chapter. The findings of this study demonstrate that the phenomenon of grief within a work team context is as diverse as the experiences of those grieving. There are common themes though that can guide work teams, including both individuals and managers, when faced with a team member who experiences the unexpected death of a loved one.



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## Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Review Application

### THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT TYLER INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

#### FULL BOARD REVIEW APPLICATION

IRB: *Sum2019-116*

Approved by: *G Duke as Expedited, Category 6, 7*

Date: *June 10, 2019*

The University of Texas at Tyler faculty, staff, students, or employees who propose to engage in any research, demonstration, development, or other activity involving the use of human subjects must have review and approval of that activity by the IRB, prior to initiation of the project. The Committee is responsible for safeguarding the rights and welfare of subjects who participate in the proposed research activity.

The purpose of this form is to review proposals which may not be eligible for exempt or expedited review.

#### **Attach (electronically) with this application:**

- Written consent form unless a waiver of written informed consent is requested
- Signature page of Thesis or Dissertation Committee members showing proposal approval
- Brief research proposal that outlines background and significance, research design, research questions/hypotheses, data collection instruments and related information, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures.  
**Most of this can be copied and pasted to relevant parts of the application but please keep B & S brief for the application.**
- Human Subject Education Certification for PI, co-investigators, and research assistants participating in recruitment, data collection, data analysis, or, if they have any exposure to identifiable data (if training has not been completed at UT Tyler within a 3 year period of time)
- Tool/instrument/survey; if copyright or other issues prohibit electronic form, submit one hard copy

**PLEASE ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS IN ORDER TO DELAY IRB APPROVAL.  
IF A QUESTION DOES NOT APPLY, ANSWER "N/A."  
(For This And All Other Boxes, Type "X" or Content)**

**COMPLETE ALL ITEMS TO AVOID DELAY IN IRB APPROVAL**

DATE:  
*TBD*

Principal Investigator	<i>Kutach</i> (Last) <i>Ashley</i> (First) <i>L.</i> (MI)
PI Title and Credentials	<input type="checkbox"/> Assistant Professor <input type="checkbox"/> Associate Professor <input type="checkbox"/> Professor <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Student <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Faculty Sponsor Name and Email if PI is Student	<i>Judy Sun, jsun@uttyler.edu</i>
PI Phone PI Email	<i>(512)484-3003</i> <i>akutach@uttyler.edu</i>
Co-Investigator(s)	<i>NA</i>
Co-Investigator(s) Email and Telephone	<i>NA</i> <i>NA</i>
Secondary Contact Person in Absence of PI	<i>Judy Sun</i>
Secondary Contact Person's Telephone and Email	Phone: <i>(903)565-5912</i> Email: <i>jsun@uttyler.edu</i>
Title of Proposed Research	<i>Exploring the impact of grief and mourning due to unexpected death on working teams of the bereaved: A Phenomenological multi-case study PILOT STUDY</i>
Source of Funding	<input type="checkbox"/> NIH <input type="checkbox"/> Local <input type="checkbox"/> Industry <input type="checkbox"/> Other Federal (Specify) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) <i>Self-funded</i>

**1. For proposals involving Personal Health Information (PHI) data:** If this is a retrospective chart review (Category 5) (health records research), or, data involves review of PHI, refer to the IRB's HIPAA policies and procedures in the IRB Handbook and complete any appropriate forms. All can be located on the UT Tyler IRB site: <http://www.uttyler.edu/research/compliance/irb/>

**1a. Does this protocol include the use of PHI?**  Yes     No

**NOTE:** *If the protocol includes the use of PHI, refer to the IRB Handbook on HIPAA policies and relevant forms that must be completed before IRB approval can be obtained.*

**2. Purpose Of Study:** *The purpose of this pilot study is to examine the experiences of team members, individually and as a team unit, working in a work team alongside a grieving and mourning team member who has experienced the unexpected death of a loved one, and how the grief and mourning experience impacts individuals and the team at the team level. Once the pilot study is complete, revisions may be made and an IRB application will be submitted for the full study if needed.*

**3. Research Questions:** *The following research questions will guide the study:*

- *How are work team members impacted by a fellow team member experiencing grief and mourning after the unexpected death of a loved one?*
- *How is a team impacted overall by a team member experiencing grief and mourning after the unexpected death of a loved one?*
- *What are suggestions we can provide to managers in order to improve the team experience when a team member experiences grief and mourning after the unexpected death of a loved one?*

**4. Brief Background and Significance of Study:** *Team members and teams may be impacted directly by the grieving team member's behaviors, such as lack of efficiency, crying, and moodiness (Gibson, Gallagher, & Jenkins, 2010). While team members may initially respond in supportive ways, they may grow weary of the demands of providing support and may not continue these behaviors throughout the grieving process (Manns, 2011). Not only may this be hurtful or challenging for the grieving person, it is often troubling for the team member who may then be experiencing feelings of frustration, anger, or grief. While research provides information about the overall potential impacts to the organization when a grieving employee is in the workplace (Gibson, Gallagher, & Jenkins, 2010), little insight is provided about how team members and/or teams are affected through the process of working with and perhaps providing support for a grieving peer. This study will provide an opportunity to understand the experiences of a team working with a grieving team member after the unexpected death of a loved one. The study will also enhance the understanding of behaviors and actions team members, managers and HRM professionals should consider when handling this delicate*

situation. *The qualitative approach will provide the participants with an opportunity to describe their own experiences in their own words, with their own meanings. These experiences have not previously been available in grief literature. This study will provide a unique contribution to grief and HRM literature by delivering empirical qualitative data related to this common but under researched phenomenon.*

**5. Population To Be Studied:**

a. **Ages:** 18+ years of age

b. **Gender:** *All*

**Explain below if either gender is to be excluded:**

*NA*

c. **Are all racial and ethnic groups included?**  Yes  No

**Explain below if a racial or ethnic group is to be excluded.**

*NA*

d. **Number of Anticipated Subjects:** *3 (pilot study only) and then as needed to reach data saturation.*

e. **Inclusion Criteria for Sample Eligibility:** *The research participants of the study will be those that meet the study criteria including: (1) current or previous experience working on a team in which one of the team members experienced the unexpected death of a loved one during the time they were working on that team; (2) the participant must have worked with the team member for at least six months following the team member's return to work after the death. The timeframe of six months was selected to increase the likelihood that the team members experienced interaction over time and will be able to provide rich details about their personal experiences; and (3) the experience of the participant must not have been more than five years ago to increase the chances of accurate recall.*

**Note:** *Any study involving prisoners requires a full board review, and may not be approved under expedited review.*

**6. Explain the locations or settings for sample recruitment and data collection:**

*Participants will be recruited to the study through social media requests for participants meeting the inclusion criteria. The interviews used to collect the data will be conducted in quiet, neutral, public locations convenient for the participants. Location examples include meeting rooms in a library or business. If a participant is not available to interview in person, the interview will be conducted online using Zoom.*

**7. Explain from whom permission has or will be obtained from the settings in which sample recruitment and/or data collection will take place:**

*No permissions are needed for the sample recruitment. Permission will be requested if rooms are reserved for the interview setting locations.*

**8. Explain in detail who will be recruiting participants and the sample will be recruited:**

*The principal researcher will recruit the human participants via social media. Snowball recruiting may be used, where others identify and refer other team members that meet study criteria.*

**9. Copy and paste text below from any flyers, ads, letters etc. that are used for recruitment of participants. In addition, attach any recruitment materials if there are graphics or other figures used other than text.**

*I'm looking for interviewees! I'm conducting a study of impacts of grief on work teams and looking for participants that meet the following criteria: (1) current or previous experience working on a work team in which one of the team members (not you personally) experienced the unexpected death of a loved one during the time they were working on that team; (2) must have worked with the team member for at least six months following the team member's return to work after the death; and (3) the experience of the participant must not have been more than five years ago. If you meet these criteria and are willing to learn more about participating, please private message (PM) me or email me at [akutach@patriots.uttyler.edu](mailto:akutach@patriots.uttyler.edu). Or, if you know someone else who meets these criteria please share my contact information. Note: This study is being conducted as requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Human Resource Development at The University of Texas at Tyler.*

**Informed Consent**

**. Prospective research ordinarily requires written informed consent. If any special classes are eligible to participate, discuss how the consent process will differ. Inclusion of children (under 18 years) requires permission of at least one parent AND the assent of the child (refer to UT Tyler's Policy on Informed Consent of Children).**

If written consent is to be used, terminology must be about the 8<sup>th</sup> grade level, or as appropriate for the accurate understanding of the participant or guardian.

If there are questions about the literacy or cognitive level of potential participants, there must be evidence that the participant is able to verbalize basic information about the research, their role, time commitment, risks, and the voluntary nature of participating and/or ceasing participation with no adverse consequences.

**Please use the template posted under the IRB forms as a guide, and attach as a separate document with the application submission.**

**10. This section only for those requesting a waiver or alteration of written informed consent:**

Justify the waiver or alteration in accordance with the following four criteria established under 45CFR46.116(d)(1-4).

All four criteria must be met in order to have signed written informed consents. In other words, you must answer “yes” to all four of the criteria below in order to NOT have written and signed informed consents.

**If you are requesting a waiver of written and signed informed consent, Indicate “yes” if the statement is true about your proposed research:**

1. The research involves no more than minimal risk to the subjects   
Yes  No

2. The waiver or alteration will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the subjects  
 Yes  No

3. The research could not practicably be carried out without the waiver or alteration,  
 Yes  No **AND**

4. Whenever appropriate, the subjects will be provided with additional pertinent information after participation  Yes  No.

**11. When prospective informed consent is waived, explain how you will obtain permission to use participant’s data. If no permission is planned, please explain your rationale.**

NA

12. **Will blood samples be required?** (If so, answer a through f)  Yes

No

a. Venipuncture  Venous catheter

Arterial puncture  Arterial catheter

Cutaneous (e.g., finger, heel)

b. Will the collection procedure consist only of drawing an extra volume of blood at the time blood is drawn for clinical purposes?

Yes  No

c. Specify the important features of the blood collection, including the volume of research blood obtained in each collection, along with the frequency and duration of the collection (e.g., 10 ml at noon and 8 p.m., one day every two weeks for a six-month period).

NA

d. Will >50 ml of blood be drawn from the same subject more than once?

Yes  No

e. If "Yes," what procedures will be in place to assure that the frequency and amounts will not exceed the specifications?

NA

f. Is it known or anticipated that any subjects will also be having blood drawn for other purposes during the study period?

Yes  No

13. **Will the study involve the use of drugs?**

Yes  No

a. A placebo Yes  No  Name: NA

- b. A standard FDA-approved agent  Name: *NA*
- c. A non-therapeutic approved agent (e.g., to modify a physiologic response)  Name: *NA*
- d. A new investigational therapeutic agent  Name: *NA*
- e. A new use for an agent approved for another purpose  Name: *NA*

For (d) or (e) give IND # [Click here to enter text.](#)

**14. Will the study involve the use of a new device?**

Yes  No

If so,

- a. The device has an IDE number  Yes  No   
Number: *NA*
- b. It is for therapeutic use
- c. It is for diagnostic use

**15. Describe in detail any proposed intervention(s) for this study (write this section as if you were providing instructions to a layperson who is not familiar with the study):**

*NA*

**16. Detailed Data Collection Procedures **ATTENTION:** Be very specific for this item (write this section as if you were providing instructions to someone who is not familiar with the study):**

Specify ***in detail*** **who, what, when, where, how,** duration type of information for your procedures.

*Once a participant responds affirmatively to the email social media request to participate in the study, the researcher will confirm the criteria, including definitions of any terms that may be needed to ensure criteria are met. The researcher will offer available time slots and work to find a mutually beneficial time and location (if conducted in person). The interviews will take place in the Summer semester of 2019. They will be conducting face-to-face or via video-conferencing*



once the participants have been selected. Face-to-face interviews will take place in a private, quiet location. Interviews will be scheduled for 60 minutes each and all participants must provide written consent prior to beginning the interview and the researcher will explain all details of the consent, including the facts that the participant may stop the interview at any time without negative consequence and that the participant should use a pseudonym of their choice to protect confidentiality of data. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed by Amazon Transcribe, a software designed to turn audio files into text, for later analysis. Three groups of interview questions will be asked:

### **Personal Demographic Questions**

1. What is your current employment status (working full time, working part time, not working)?
2. What type of work do you do (if employed)?
3. Are you currently managing a team?
4. What is your highest level of education achieved?
5. What is your age?
6. What is your marital status?

### **Questions Related to the Study Context**

When you were working with the colleague who experienced the unexpected death of a loved one:

1. When was the death of your team member's loved one?
2. How long following the death did you continue to work on the same team as the bereaved team member?
3. What was your role/job at the time?
4. What was the bereaved team members role/job at the time?
5. What was the work team dynamic and how did the team members work together?
6. If known, what was the cause of death of the bereaved team member's loved one?
7. What was the relationship between the bereaved team member and the deceased?
8. If known, how old was the bereaved team member at the time of the loved one's death?
9. If known, how old was the team member's loved one at the time of death?
10. What circumstances led to you no longer working on the same work team with the bereaved team member (if applicable)?

### **Questions Related to Case Experiences**

1. Please tell about the team dynamics prior to the death of the team member's loved one. Second level questions depending on the level of detail provided/not provided:

- a. *How did the team work together to meet team goals and deadlines?*
- b. *How did team members get along socially?*
- c. *What level of daily interaction took place between team members?*
- d. *What sources of stress did the team face?*
- e. *What was the relationship like between the manager and the team members?*
2. *What was your experience working with the bereaved team member in the first few days following their return to work?*
3. *How did your experience working with the grieving team member change over time?*
4. *How did you help the grieving team member upon his/her return to work?*
5. *What did other team members do to help the grieving team member upon his/her return to work?*
6. *How did the team dynamics change following the bereaved team member's return to work?*
7. *NON MANAGERS ONLY How did the team manager help the grieving team member upon his/her return to work?*
8. *What have you learned about grief after an unexpected death after working directly with the grieving team member upon his/her return to work?*
9. *What has your team learned about grief after an unexpected death while working directly with the grieving team member upon his/her return to work?*
10. *If you were put in a similar situation again, what would you do the same?*
11. *If you were put in a similar situation again, what would you do differently?*
12. *What advice would you give others dealing with a team member returning to work after the unexpected death of a loved one?*
13. *Is there anything about your or your team's experience with a grieving team member after an unexpected death that you believe impacted you or your team that you have not yet had a chance to discuss?*

**17. Data Analysis Procedures:** *To analyze the data that is collected, the six phases of Thematic Analysis outlined by Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017) will be used. Even though these phases are numbered, evoking a view that they are to be completed one at a time and only in a specific order, qualitative data analysis is much more fluid. One of the strengths of Thematic Analysis is the flexibility it offers (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). The six phases include the researcher familiarizing herself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming*

themes, and producing the report of the results. MAXQDA 2018.2, a software developed to analyze qualitative and mixed-method data, will be used to organize, categorize, analyze, and visualize all data that is gathered. Since both interview data and field note data will be collected, in Phase 1 the researcher will need to deeply understand all of the data that is gathered. This will include reading the data many times and beginning to identify meaning in the data (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). In Phase 2 the researcher will reflect on the data and create initial codes that begin to identify and organize the information. A consistent approach will be used to code the data (Creswell, 2014), and in Phase 3 each data point will be analyzed and categorized into themes (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). The codes will be sorted into themes that will bring meaning to the data that has been collected. Thematic analysis allows for flexibility as the researcher uses judgement to determine the themes and adjust them throughout the process. In Phase 4 the researcher will review and refine the themes that have been developed. For example, themes that are not robust enough on their own due to minimal codes relating to them may be collapsed with other themes if appropriate (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Ideally, the themes created will provide deep insight into the phenomenon being studied, and specific enough to provide value to the field of HRD research. In Phase 5 of the thematic analysis the researcher will make sense of the themes that emerged in Phases 3 and 4. A detailed description and analysis of each theme will be developed to paint a picture of how the data answers the research questions (Braun & Clark, 2006). In the final phase the researcher will complete a report of the final analyzation of the data and themes. The report will include rich details about the phenomenon studies and include not only the codes and themes, but direct quotes from participants.

## **18. Risks and benefits to the subjects and/or society**

**Risks:** Participation in this study should pose minimal or no side effect or risks as all information shared during the interview(s) will be kept confidential. The topic area is a sensitive one though (unexpected death and grief), and even though the participants are not the team member directly experiencing the grief, the discussion of their team members' grief could bring up memories or feelings of secondary grief.

**a. Describe actions to minimize risks to subjects and actions to minimize possible effects of the risks to subjects:**

*If the participant appears to be struggling with secondary grief as details of team member's grief is remembered and discussed, the researcher will allow time for the participant to gather his/her thoughts and if needed ask if the participant would like to move on to another question. The participant will also be provided with an online counseling website [www.betterhelp.com](http://www.betterhelp.com) to access as needed. No participant names, organization names, or other identifiable characteristics will be used in future publications/conference papers. Additionally, pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of participants and any people mentioned by the participants during the interview(s). Lastly, the data will be thematically aggregated and only relevant quotes will be used as examples in support of themes.*

**Benefits:** *As a result of the study society as a whole, organizations, and those working in teams may gain greater insight into the impacts of grief on work teams.*

**19. Confidentiality of Data:** Specify how confidentiality will be secured and maintained for research data and/or specimens.

*Throughout the process, all data, both written and audio files, will be secured on a computer that is password protected and an encrypted hard drive to protect the security of participant information. Also, to further protect participant data, specific information provided by a participant will not be shared in any way that would connect them to the information. Only themes identified through the data analysis process and information not identifiable by with names, details, or characteristics will be included in in the dissertation, publication, or any other setting.*

**20. Identifiability of data or specimens:** Will the specimens or data be identifiable?

**(NOTE:** Anytime code numbers are used, or signed consent forms are used, there is ALWAYS potential identifiability of data).

Yes  No If yes, complete item **20a**.

**20a.** State the type of identification, direct or indirect, on any specimens or data when they are made available to your study team (see definitions below):

*No direct identifiers such as participant names and contact information will be accessible to the study team if/when they listen to*

*audio recordings of the interviews because participants will be asked to use pseudonyms and asked to not reference organization names. Indirect identifiers (pseudonyms) will be used to track participant data will be available to the study team through the data analysis process. No personal identifying information will be on any transcript.*

**Direct Identifiers** include subject name, address, social security, etc.

**Indirect Identifiers** include any number that could be used by the investigator or the source providing the data/specimens to identify a subject, e.g., pathology tracking number, medical record number, sequential or random code number)

*See above*

**21. Access to Data:** Specify faculty and staff (members of the study team) permitted to have access to the study data. *Judy Sun, Rochell McWhorter, Paul Roberts*

**22. Have all individuals who have access to data been educated about human subject ethics and confidentiality measures?** (**NOTE:** This is responsibility of PI)

Yes  No

**23. Protection of Data:** State how data and participant identities will be protected, e.g., located filing cabinet in investigator's office, on password protected computer, location(s) of computer, etc. No personal

**24. If data is on a laptop,** acknowledge that the laptop will never be in an insecure location where theft is possible (e.g., in a locked car)

I acknowledge the security of the laptop at all times

**25. Could any part of this activity result in the potential identification of child or adult abuse, communicable diseases, or criminal activities?**

Yes  No

25a. If “Yes,” estimate the likelihood of disclosure: *NA*

26.

Does any part of this activity have the potential for coercion of the subject?

Yes  No

26a. If “Yes,” explain and describe proposed safeguards: *NA*

27. **Is there a potential Conflict of Interest pertaining to this protocol as defined in the UT Tyler *Conflict of Interest* policy on the part of any individual at UT Tyler who is associated with this protocol?**

Yes  No

27a. If “Yes,” please explain. *NA*

**27b. If you answered “yes” to the above question, or, if this research is either federally funded, or federal funding has been applied for, a UT Tyler Conflict of Interest form must be completed by accessing the Office of Sponsored Research (OSR) *website before final approval.***

27c. Has a COI form been completed and submitted to the OSR?

Yes  No  N/A

28. **Could the desired information be obtained from animals or other laboratory models?** Explain: *NA*

Yes

No

**29. Will the subjects incur any expenses for experimental (or otherwise unnecessary diagnostic) tests or procedures?**

Yes  No

**If “Yes,” explain how funds will be supplied if the subject is not able to begin or continue to provide funds: NA**

**Is there ANY chance that participant data could be used for future research with researchers or persons not included on this application?**

Yes  No

a. If “yes”, will identifiers be stripped prior to sharing participant data?

Yes  No NA

b. If “no”, please indicate what identifiers are on the data and how participant confidentiality will be maintained:

Start here: NA

c. If “yes is marked for either “a” or “b”, has this been entered per federal requirements on the informed consent form?

Yes  No NA

**Cooperative Agreements with Other Institutions**

**30. If any part of this study will be conducted in an institution or location administratively separate from UT Tyler, please indicate at which institution (attach IRB approval letter from the other institution).**

N/A

NA

**31. Does this activity utilize recorded data to be sent to cooperating institutions not under your control?**

Yes  No

**31a..**

If so, could the data contain personal or sensitive information

Yes  No

**31b.** If "Yes," how do you propose to maintain confidentiality of the data? NA

**Consultation and Collaboration**

**32. Subject Recruitment and Management:** If approval is required from other professionals for the recruitment or management of the subjects, please identify and provide contact information from the individual(s) responsible for the subjects. Electronic letter of approval must be submitted by the PI.

**Name of Professional:** NA

**Institution/Agency:** [Click here to enter text.](#)

**Contact Information:** [Click here to enter text.](#)

**Name of Professional:** NA

**Institution/Agency:** [Click here to enter text.](#)

**Contact Information:** [Click here to enter text.](#)

**Name of Professional:** NA

**Institution/Agency:** [Click here to enter text.](#)

**Contact Information:** [Click here to enter text.](#)

**33. Research Collaboration:**



Research collaborators are other non-UT Tyler-affiliated researchers whose participation enhances the scientific merit of a research project. List collaborators below and have each verify that they have read the research protocol and agree to participate by emailing the PI, and PI is to forward these emails of agreement to IRB Chair with this application.

NA

**Institution:** [Click here to enter text.](#)

**Information:** [Click here to enter text.](#)

**Collaborator Name:**

**Collaborator**

**Collaborator Contact**

Please be aware that IRB is responsible for ensuring compliance to protocols and to federal regulations. All full board reviews are automatically reviewed annually by an IRB member. Consents and data may be requested for review.

**SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Signature indicates agreement by the PI to abide by UT Tyler IRB policies and procedures and the Federal Wide Assurance, and to the obligations as stated in the “Responsibilities of the Principal Investigator” and any other related policies and procedures described in the UT Tyler IRB Handbook (listed on the OSR website), and to use universal precautions with potential exposure to specimens.

*Ashley Kutach*

*TBD*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name or affix electronic signature  
(Electronic submission of this  
form by PI indicates signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix B: Institutional Review Board Approval Letter



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

uttyler.edu/research ■ Fax: 903-565-5858

June 10, 2019

Dear Dr. Kutach,

Your request to conduct the study *Exploring the Impact of Grief and Mourning Due to Unexpected Death on Working Teams of the Bereaved: A Phenomenological Multi-Case Study*, IRB #SUM2019-116 has been approved by The University of Texas at Tyler Institutional Review Board under expedited review. This approval includes the written informed consents that are attached to this letter, and your assurance of participant knowledge of the following prior to study participation: this is a research study; participation is completely voluntary with no obligations to continue participating, and with no adverse consequences for non-participation; and assurance of confidentiality of their data.

In addition, please ensure that any research assistants are knowledgeable about research ethics and confidentiality, and any co-investigators have completed human protection training within the past three years, and have forwarded their certificates to the IRB office (G. Duke).

**Please review the UT Tyler IRB Principal Investigator Responsibilities, and acknowledge your understanding of these responsibilities and the following through return of this email to the IRB Chair within one week after receipt of this approval letter:**

- This approval is for one year, as of the date of the approval letter
- **The Progress Report form must be completed for projects extending past one year.** Your protocol will automatically expire on the one year anniversary of this letter if a Progress Report is not submitted, per HHS Regulations **prior** to that date (45 CFR 46.108(b) and 109(e): <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/policy/contrev0107.html>)
- Prompt reporting to the UT Tyler IRB of any proposed changes to this research activity
- **Prompt reporting to the UT Tyler IRB and academic department administration will be done of any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others**
- Suspension or termination of approval may be done if there is evidence of any serious or continuing noncompliance with Federal Regulations or any aberrations in original proposal.
- Any change in proposal procedures must be promptly reported to the IRB prior to implementing any changes except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject.
- If you are using student emails to distribute surveys, always BCC them to facilitate confidentiality.
- Ensure that any online consent form, whether anonymous or not, always has the IRB# and approval date.
- Approval with signed written consent

Best of luck in your research, and do not hesitate to contact me if you need any further assistance.

Sincerely,

Gloria Duke, PhD, RN  
Chair, UT Tyler IRB

## **Appendix C: Recruitment of Participants Social Media and Email Text**

I'm looking for interviewees!

I'm conducting a study on impacts of grief in work teams and looking for participants that meet the following criteria:

- (1) current or previous experience working on a work team in which one of the team members experienced the violent death (suicide, homicide, or accident) of a loved one during the time they were working on that team; and
- (2) must have worked with the team member for at least six months following the team member's return to work after the death.

*If you meet these criteria and are willing to learn more about participating, please private message (PM) me or email me at [akutach@patriots.uttyler.edu](mailto:akutach@patriots.uttyler.edu). Or, if you know someone else who meets these criteria please share my contact information.*

**Note:** This study is being conducted as requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Human Resource Development at the University of Texas at Tyler.

## **Appendix D: Informed Consent to Participate in Research**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT TYLER**  
**Informed Consent to Participate in Research**  
**Institutional Review Board #Sum2019-116**  
**Approval Date: June 10, 2019**

**Project title:** “Exploring the impact of grief and mourning due to unexpected death on working teams of the bereaved: A Phenomenological multi-case study”

**Principal Investigator:** Ashley Kutach

**Participant Name:**

**Simple Description of Project Purpose:** The purpose of this pilot study is to examine the experiences of team members, individually and as a team unit, working in a work team alongside a grieving and mourning team member who has experienced the unexpected death of a loved one, and how the grief and mourning experience impacts individuals and the team at the team level.

**Research Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to do the following things:

- You will be asked to participate in a personal interview with the primary researcher. The interview duration is expected to be one hour in length and an additional interview or email exchange may be needed for clarification purposes.
- The interview(s) will be audio recorded with your permission and the conversation will be transcribed verbatim.
- You will be asked to choose a pseudonym for the interview to protect your identity.
- You will be asked to not name anyone or any business organization by name during the interview.
- You will be asked to examine the transcription of your interview(s) for accuracy and will be asked to respond to insights gleaned by the researcher about your experiences to ensure accurate interpretation.

**Potential Risks:** Participation in this study should not pose any side effect or risks to you as all information shared during the interview(s) will be kept confidential. No participant names, organization names, or other identifiable characteristics will be used in future publications/conference papers. Lastly, the results of the study will be summarized with relevant quotes but with no identifying information with those quotes.

**Potential Benefits:** A summary of the findings will be shared with participants at the conclusion of the study. As a result of the study, participants may gain greater insight into the impacts of grief on work teams.

**Understanding of Participants:**

I have been given a chance to ask questions about this research study. The researcher has answered my questions. I understand all possible risks.

If I sign this consent document, I agree that:

- I am taking part in this study because I want to. I chose to take part after having been told about the study and any possible risks to me.
- I know that I am free to not be in this study. If I choose to not take part in this study, there will be no negative result of my choice.
- I have been informed that if I choose to be in this study, then I can change my mind and stop at any time. If I do stop being part of this study there will be no negative result of my choice.
- My name and other identifying information will not be in any reports, presentations, or publications unless I give my permission. The UT Tyler Institutional Review Board (the group that ensures research is done correctly and that procedures are in place to protect research participants) may look at the research documents as part of their monitoring procedures, and it will be kept confidential.
- If I have questions concerning my participation in this study, I will contact he principal researcher: Ashley Kutach at (512)484-3003, akutach@patriots.uttyler.edu.
- If I have questions concerning my rights as a study participant, I will contact Dr. Gloria Duke, Chair of the Institutional Review Board, at (903)566-7023, gduke@uttyler.edu.

**CONSENT/PERMISSION FOR PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY**

I have read and understand what has been explained to me. I give my permission to take part in this study as it has been explained to me. I give the primary researcher permission to register me in this study. I will receive a signed copy of this consent form.

---

Signature of Participant Date

---

Witness to Signature Date

I have discussed this study with the participant, using language that is understandable and appropriate. I believe that I have fully informed this participant of the nature of this study and its possible benefits and risks. I believe the participant understood these explanations.

---

Signature of Principal Researcher Date

**Appendix E: Research Question and Interview Question Alignment Matrix**

<b>Interview Questions</b>	<b>Background Information</b>	<b>Research Question 1- How are team members impacted by a fellow team member experiencing grief and mourning after the unexpected death of a loved one?</b>	<b>Research Question 2- How is a team impacted overall by a team member experiencing grief and mourning after the unexpected death of a loved one?</b>	<b>Research Question 3- What can be learned from the study of grief after unexpected death in the context of a team?</b>
<b>Personal Demographic Questions</b>				
1. What is your current employment status (working full-time, part-time, contract, or not employed)?	<b>X</b>			
2. What type of work do you do (if employed only)?	<b>X</b>			
3. Are you currently managing a team?	<b>X</b>			
4. What is your highest level of education achieved?	<b>X</b>			
5. What is your age?	<b>X</b>			
6. What is your marital status?	<b>X</b>			
<b>Questions Related to the Study Context</b>				
<b>When you were working with the colleague who experienced an unexpected death of a loved one:</b>				

7. When was the death of your team member's loved one?	<b>X</b>			
8. How long following the death did you continue to work on the same team as the bereaved team member?	<b>X</b>			
9. What was your role/job at the time?	<b>X</b>			
10. What was the bereaved team members role/job at the time?	<b>X</b>			
11. If known, what was the cause of death of the bereaved team members' loved one?	<b>X</b>			
12. What was the relationship between the bereaved team member and the deceased?	<b>X</b>			
13. If known, how old was the bereaved team member at the time of the loved one's death?	<b>X</b>			
14. If known, how old was the team member's loved one at the time of the death?	<b>X</b>			
15. What circumstances led to you no longer working on the same work team	<b>X</b>			

with the bereaved team member (if applicable)?				
<b>Questions Related to Case Experiences</b>				
<p>16. Tell me about the team dynamics prior to the death of the team member's loved one.</p> <p>a. How did the team work together to meet team goals and deadlines?</p> <p>b. How did the team members get along socially?</p> <p>c. What level of daily interaction took place between team members?</p> <p>d. What sources of stress did the team face?</p> <p>e. What was the relationship like between the manager and the team members?</p>	<b>X</b>			
17. What was your experience working with the grieving team member in the first few days following their return to work?		<b>X</b>		



18. How did your experience working with the grieving team member change or not change over time?		<b>X</b>		
19. How did you help the grieving team member upon his/her return to work?		<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>
20. What did the other team members do to help the grieving team member upon his/her return to work?			<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
21. How did the team dynamics change following the bereaved team member's return to work?			<b>X</b>	
22. NON MANAGERS ONLY How did the team manager help the grieving team member upon his/her return to work?				<b>X</b>
23. What have you learned about grief after the unexpected death after working directly with the grieving team member upon his/her return to work?		<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>
24. What has your team learn about grief after			<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>

unexpected death while working directly with the grieving team member upon his/her return to work?				
25. If you were put in a similar situation again, what would you do the same?		<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>
26. If you were put in a similar situation again, what would you do differently?		<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>
27. What advice would you give others dealing with a team member returning to work after the unexpected death of a loved one?				<b>X</b>
28. Is there anything about your or your team's experience with a grieving team member after a unexpected death that you believe impacted you or your team that you have not yet had a chance to discuss?		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>

## Appendix F: Interview Protocol

Hello! My name is Ashley Kutach. I'm a Human Resource Development student from the University of Texas at Tyler. I'm here to learn about the experiences that team members have had when a member of his/her team experiences an unexpected death and then returns to work in the work team. Thank you for taking time to talk with me today and share your experiences.

There are no right or wrong answers, or desirable or undesirable answers. I want you to feel comfortable sharing what you really think and how you really feel. I will be audio recording our conversation since it will be impossible to write down everything and carry on an attentive conversation with you at the same time. I will also be taking notes as we talk, just to organize my general thoughts throughout.

Everything you say will remain confidential, meaning that only I will be aware of who provided what information. You will be using a pseudonym (alias) during the interview, so that you cannot be identified. Additionally, I will take all measures necessary to keep your information secure and confidential including safe storage of the data documented during and after your interview and masking any company names, team member names, and any identifying information that you may accidentally share.

First, let's review the consent agreement that was sent to you via email in advance of this interview. (review the details in the consent document and have them sign it)

Are you okay with the consent agreement and with me recording our conversation today?

If yes: Thank you! If at any time you change your mind, just let me know. Or, if you want to say something 'off the record', again, just let me know.

If no to the recording: Thank you for letting me know. I will only take notes of our conversation.

Next, let's make sure the terms that I will be using are defined, so that we are 'on the same page' and have the same understanding about some of the words that you will hear throughout our time together.

*Work Team*- A work team is a team of people in a work environment that are working to meet the same objectives. The team members have both individual accountability and team accountability.

*Unexpected Death*- an unexpected death is one that is sudden and not anticipated in any way

*Grief*- the feelings of loss and pain after the death of a loved one

*Mourning*- the behaviors associated with grieving, which may vary widely

Any other terms that have already come up that you want further defined? If one does come up along the way don't hesitate to ask.

Before we begin the interview, do you have any questions? (discussion if needed)

If any questions arise during the interview feel free to ask them at any time.

To get started, I would like to learn more about you and the situation that you experienced.

### **Personal Demographic Questions**

1. What is your current employment status (working full time, working part time, not working)?
2. What type of work do you do (if employed)?
3. Are you currently managing a team?
4. What is your highest level of education achieved?
5. What is your age?
6. What is your marital status?

### **Questions Related to the Study Context**

When you were working with the colleague who experienced an unexpected death of a loved one:

7. When was the death of your team member's loved one?
8. How long following the death did you continue to work on the same team as the bereaved team member?
9. What was your role/job at the time?
10. What was the bereaved team members role/job at the time?
11. If known, what was the cause of death of the bereaved team member's loved one?
12. What was the relationship between the bereaved team member and the deceased?
13. If known, how old was the bereaved team member at the time of the loved one's death?
14. If known, how old was the team member's loved one at the time of death?

15. What circumstances led to you no longer working on the same work team with the bereaved team member (if applicable)?

**Questions Related to Case Experiences**

16. Tell about the team dynamics prior to the death of the team member's loved one.

Second level questions depending on the level of detail provided/not provided:

- a. How did the team work together to meet team goals and deadlines?
  - b. How did team members get along socially?
  - c. What level of daily interaction took place between team members?
  - d. What sources of stress did the team face?
  - e. What was the relationship like between the manager and the team members?
17. What was your experience working with the bereaved team member in the first few days following their return to work?
18. How did/has your experience working with the grieving team member change over time?
19. How did you help the grieving team member upon his/her return to work?
20. What did other team members do to help the grieving team member upon his/her return to work?
21. How did the team dynamics change following the bereaved team member's return to work?
22. NON MANAGERS ONLY How did the team manager help the grieving team member upon his/her return to work?

23. What have you learned about grief after an unexpected death after working directly with the grieving team member upon his/her return to work?
24. What has your team learned about grief after an unexpected death while working directly with the grieving team member upon his/her return to work?
25. If you were put in a similar situation again, what would you do the same?
26. If you were put in a similar situation again, what would you do differently?
27. What advice would you give others dealing with a team member returning to work after the unexpected death of a loved one?
28. Is there anything about your or your team's experience with a grieving team member after an unexpected death that you believe impacted you or your team that you have not yet had a chance to discuss?

Thank you so much for your time today. As I mentioned before, this interview will be transcribed, and I will send the transcription to you for review to make sure everything was accurately captured. If you think of anything else after the interview that may be helpful for me to know, don't hesitate to reach out to me by email or phone.