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Exploring Grit in the Experiences of Higher Education Development Officers: A Phenomenological Study

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EXPLORING GRIT IN THE EXPERIENCES OF HIGHER EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT OFFICERS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

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Dedication

This research project was inspired by and dedicated to the many people who spend their professional careers going out into the wild and doing the difficult work of raising private philanthropic support for higher education. The work calls for all of the mind, heart, spirit, tenacity, and hope that a person can muster, and the rewards are often celebrated behind the scenes and without fanfare. Development officers, your names may never appear engraved on the walls or known by the lives you have impacted, nonetheless, you are unsung heroes. Thank you for creating lasting opportunities for the future.

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To my partner James, you are the author of the white space between the words of this project. You created the space in our lives for me to work on and complete my dream. Thank you.

Lastly, thank you to the 18 development officers who shared of themselves here.

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Abstract

EXPLORING GRIT IN THE EXPERIENCES OF HIGHER EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT OFFICERS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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This qualitative phenomenological study was designed to gain insight into experiences of grit by development officers in higher education as they pursued their goals and processed their disappointments in the course of soliciting major gifts. Three main domains of literature underpinned the research: (a) motivation theory, (b) goal-setting theory, and (c) the grit model. An extensive literature review revealed little is known about how individuals make sense and assign meaning to their experiences of passion and perseverance, and less is known about how development officers in higher education foundations and institutionally-related nonprofit organizations decide how to set and pursue goals and overcome challenges.

Using a purposeful sampling approach with the intent of maximum variation, 18 development officers employed full-time in the United States at research-intensive universities or university-affiliated foundations were selected and interviewed virtually using a semi-structured interview protocol and an observational protocol. A process of thematic analysis followed the data collection and revealed 11 themes that were reported in relation to the research questions

and revealed themes related to passion, perseverance, and the role of self-talk in reflecting on overcoming challenges.

From the main themes, five meta-themes that responded to the essence of grit as experienced by development officers in higher education are discussed. This study enhanced what is known about how development officers assign meaning to their roles and navigate motivation and goal-setting activities. Further, it contributed to the theory and research of grit and how it manifests for people within a particular occupational context.

Specific implications are made for development officers as individuals, for HRD professionals in higher education foundations, HRD professionals in nonprofit organizations generally, and HRD professionals in for-profit enterprises. Recommendations are suggested for future research to test new constructs involved in the experience of grit and for understanding the function of grit within organizational contexts.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Despite extensive research seeking to illuminate the traits, beliefs, and motivations that drive individuals to pursue achievement and success (Ericson & Charness, 1994; Gottfredson, 1997; Hartigan & Wigdor, 1989; Paunonen & Jackson, 2000), it has remained unclear why, given similar levels of intelligence and training, some people outperform others and achieve more than their peers (Terman & Ogden, 1947). One contemporary approach that has provided initial promise for explaining this difference in success has been called grit: the passion and perseverance individuals apply toward their long-term goals, despite challenges, adversity, and failure along the way (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). In other words, Duckworth (2016) says that:

> To be gritty is to keep putting one foot in front of the other. To be gritty is to hold fast to an interesting and purposeful goal. To be gritty is to invest, day after week after year, in challenging practice. (p. 275)

In essence, to be gritty is to try, fall down, and get back up to try again. The extent to which an individual exhibits grit seems to serve as a powerful predictor of achievement in areas where commitment to goals requires consistency and resilience over time (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). Duckworth et al. (2007) examined the phenomenon of grit within the public and private sectors through a variety of educational and occupational contexts, from school classrooms to military training camps to competitive sales organizations. However, previous research has not explored the extent that grit operates within nonprofit organizations (NPOs). Despite their impact as significant employers and drivers of economic impact (Giving USA, 2016; McKeever, 2015), NPOs remain largely under-researched in the Human Resources Development (HRD) field (Kahnweiler, 2011).

The Uniqueness of the Nonprofit Organizational Context

The nonprofit sector is a significant economic engine and a driving force at local, national, and international levels (Anheier, 2005). Understanding the diversity, scale, and scope of this sector is a challenge due to the variety of affiliations and structures that are included (Salamon & Anheier, 1997). Nonprofit organizations (NPOs) are broadly defined as entities that are "organized and operated for purposes other than making and distributing profits" (Law Firm for Non-Profits, 2017, "What is a non-profit?," para. 1). This distinction, however, oversimplifies other important characteristics of NPOs; namely, that by their very existence, NPOs address societal or community needs, making them inherently mission-oriented (Bradley, Jansen, & Silverman, 2003).

Given this deeply-held mission orientation, employees of NPOs tend to work for rewards other than money, such as for stimulation, community, and increased flexibility (Rocco, 2001). Overall, the data shows that nonprofit employees embrace different work-related values and motives than employees in other sectors, for example, working for fewer financial rewards (Association of Fundraising Professionals, 2016).

Notwithstanding the mission orientation of these organizations and the motivations that employees have for working for them, the marketplace within which NPOs exist is progressively volatile. Because NPOs do not generate a profit or return financial value to stakeholders, there is a trend among these organizations to "do more with less" (Kahnweiler, 2011, p. 84). In fact, the environment that NPOs operate within is increasingly challenging, making "daily operations for nonprofit organization increasingly difficult" (Dobrai & Farkas, 2015, p. 26).

Organizationally speaking, NPOs are also designed and managed to achieve different outcomes than other types of organizations. Typically, NPOs aim at one two key results: they focus on maximizing the benefits they afford to their members and donors for giving, or they focus on expanding the services provided to their constituent beneficiaries (Weisbrod, 1998). They accomplish this work, often, through an unusual mix of labor resources that is comprised of both paid and unpaid work (Kahnweiler, 2011). The complexity of managing human resources in an environment of paid employees and unpaid volunteers accentuates the fact that motivations differ strongly in this sector than in for-profit or governmental entities (Anheier, Hollerweger, Badelt, & Kendall, 2003). Finally, as a sector, NPOs are facing a leadership crisis. Baby Boomer leaders are preparing to retire in the coming years, and there has been little to no talent development investments in the past (Kahnweiler, 2011).

Foundations as a Particular Type of NPO

Within the nonprofit sector, there are a variety of organizational types and purposes. One prevailing type of NPO is the foundation, defined as:

> A nongovernmental, nonprofit organization with its own funds and program managed by its own trustees and directors, established to maintain or aid educational, social, charitable, religious, or other activities serving the common

> welfare, primarily by making grants to other nonprofit organizations. (Renz, 1997, p. 111)

Foundations are 501(c)(3) organizations that are tax-exempt by the Internal Revenue Code, but that are not themselves public charities that serve a social need. Foundations accept gifts or assets from donors to create an endowment, which is a sizable financial investment that generates relatively independent funding for the sector in the form of grants (Anheier, 2005). In the U.S. alone, there are more than 80,000 private foundations (Foundation Center, 2014) that are self-supported by endowment income and that award grants to institutions according to their donors' intentions.

However, the innovation and long-term stability that foundations provide to NPOs are not without tribulation; foundations present their own problems. First, foundations that have an appropriate investment focus and expertise can be difficult to find (Anheier & Leat, 2002; Leat, 1999). Second, close ties between the foundation and the grantees and donors requires a "higher level of human resources and concomitant administrative expenses" (Anheier, 2005, p. 318). Third, foundations may be subject to public accountability for the use of funding and are thus scrutinized for hints of their using an unacceptable proportion of their resources on their own operations and administration rather than increasing their grant-making capabilities (Frumkin, 1997).

The trend in U.S. Foundations has shown not only a rise in the number of domestic foundations since the early 1980s, but also an upsurge in the size of the endowments under foundation management (Foundation Center, 2014). Of the fields that benefit from grants made by foundations, the education sector commands the largest share of philanthropic gifts, collecting more than 26 percent of the awarded funds

(Foundation Center, 2014). NPOs are able to do their work in part due to the grants made by philanthropic foundations, which also employee their own human resources to raise and manage investments for the social good. They are "strange creatures in the great jungle of American democracy" (Nielsen, 1972, p. 3) because they presuppose that individuals and corporations will give assets to NPOs to be managed and grown, and the proceeds then put to use serving the public.

Foundations in Higher Education

In general, higher education institutions are facing increased pressure to obtain necessary funding in order to deliver on their missions of teaching, research, and public service (McAlexander, Koenig, & DuFault, 2014). A significant source of this crucial revenue for American institutions is through private philanthropic support. In fact, "private support to higher education is stronger in the US than anywhere else in the world" (Proper, 2009, p. 153).

When John Harvard made an initial private gift through bequest in 1638 to the colonies' first college, thereby solidifying its position as an important learning institution (Drezner, 2011), the impact of philanthropy in higher education was established. It was not until later in the twentieth century, however, that more public universities began asking for gifts from individual donors as state-funding deteriorated (Drezner, 2011). Today, "education is the second most economically significant field of nonprofit activity in the United States, following only health care" (Anheier, 2005, p. 101). The transformation of funding models for higher education resulted in the enhancement of the quality of American education; in fact, "American higher education was elevate[d] to a position of excellence by philanthropy" (Council for Financial Aid to Education, 1973, p.

9). This point was more recently reinforced by Drezner (2011) when he drew the connection between an institution's ability to raise funds and their ability to produce results: "simply put, those universities that raise more funds have the ability to achieve more and surpass their competitors on many fronts, including rankings, student enrollment and retention, grants, and faculty recruitment" (p. 25).

While the evidence that support through private giving plays a central role to the potential of higher education to produce meaningful results, it is equally important to understand how these philanthropic gifts come to pass. It is, according to Drezner (2011), a result of the relationships that institutions build with their current and prospective donors that enables the "successful solicitation of the largest or leadership gifts" (p. 53). For many large Foundations, those relationships are cultivated through professional fundraisers, also known as development officers, advancement officers, or major gifts officers (Knowles & Gomes, 2009).

Development Officers in Higher Education

In order to address the resource needs of the organization, philanthropic fundraising and the requisite fundraising techniques have become increasingly sophisticated (McGee & Donoghue, 2009). For NPOs that operate by soliciting major gifts in order to support higher education, fundraising professionals are hired and developed to personally persuade donors to give (Panas, 2012). The professionals are development officers, and at a high level, development officers "identify values, wants, and needs of a potential major gift donor and develop a marketing mix that is specifically tailored to that individual" (Knowles & Gomes, 2009, p. 285). While the amount of a major gift varies depending on the NPO or foundation, it usually involves a gift that is significantly larger than one that would be given annually and can involve a multi-year pledge of funds. It will also often be 10 to 30 percent more than the project's budget (Knowles & Gomes, 2009) with permanent endowed funds typically created to sustain the project long-term or into perpetuity. The establishment of relationships between donors and institutions "illustrates how the internal environment of universities has been affected by the need for universities to meet challenges" (Daly, 2013, p. 21). In essence, "advancement professionals share a common goal, to develop support for the institution" (McAlexander et al., 2014, p. 244).

Within their work of generating funds for the NPO, development officers hear "no" in response to their gift solicitations, sometimes more often than hearing "yes" (Panas, 2012). Furthermore, the demand for experienced development officers has increased to the point where the supply does not satisfy the demand; "there are simply not enough experienced major gift fundraisers to go around" (Pfeiffer, 2007). NPOs that leverage inexperienced development officers in raising funds from their donors also run the risk of "very real risk of damaged donor relations" (Knowles & Gomes, 2009, p. 391). In an environment where the national average retention rate for development officers is less than four years (Association of Fundraising Professionals, 2016) and has decreased since the 1990s (Mooney, 1993), it behooves higher education foundations to understand why development officers commit and persevere in their fundraising roles. In essence, the concept of grit warrants attention within this context.

Problem Statement

Within higher education-related foundations, professional development officers tend to relocate often and are considered "revolving door" jobs that are difficult to fill and retain, despite their criticality to generating revenue for the organization (Bell & Cornelius, 2013). This dynamic is problematic, not only because of the direct costs for NPOs to replace development officers, but also because turnover creates disruption to the relationship between the NPO and the donor (Iarrobino, 2006). While these issues certainly impact the NPOs that employ development officers, little is known about why development officers choose to leave or stay and how they experience the obstacles and challenges they face in their roles.

Further, in the contemporary grit scholarship, there is a lack of understanding about how passion and perseverance, or the grit concept, manifest for individuals. Much of the research grounded in the grit and goal motivation theory perspectives has been quantitative in nature (Alonso & Lewis, 2001; Duckworth & Gross, 2014; Naff & Crum, 1999; Vandenabeele, 2009), so insight into the processes by which individuals form and assign meaning to their goals and make decisions about persevering or changing them has been limited (Eskreis-Winkler, Shulman, Beal, & Duckworth, 2014). Similarly, there is an opportunity to illuminate more about how grit is expressed by individuals' lived realities of navigating between competing goals and self-regulating their pursuit of achievement through perseverance and passion (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014).

Within context-specific settings, like in the nonprofit sector generally and among development officers specifically, the current body of literature does not address an individual's tension between overcoming obstacles and their own beliefs about the importance and impact of their organizational mission (Wright, 2007). It is also unknown how grit impacts collective groups, like organizations. Since NPOs are organizations where the grit element of passion is likely to be pronounced due to their mission-focused nature, knowing more about how grit appears and influences groups like NPOs is necessary. Finally, there is a serious lack of academic HRD research that is oriented in the nonprofit sector, and this is a unique context for exploring social meaning-making in goal formation and overcoming challenges, both as an individual and as a collective (Wilensky & Hansen, 2001).

Purpose of the Study

The overall purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of grit by development officers in the higher education foundation context as these professionals developed and pursued their goals and processed their obstacles and disappointments in the course of soliciting major gifts.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework integrates and intertwines relevant bodies of literature to "frame the topic, goals, design, and findings" of research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this case, three related concepts guided the design and conduct of the study: social cognitive theory as it relates to motivation (Bandura, 2001); the contemporary grit concept (Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth, 2016); and goal-setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1990; Locke & Latham, 2002). See Figure 1 for a model of the theories applied in this research and how they informed the study's design to explore experiences of the phenomenon of grit.

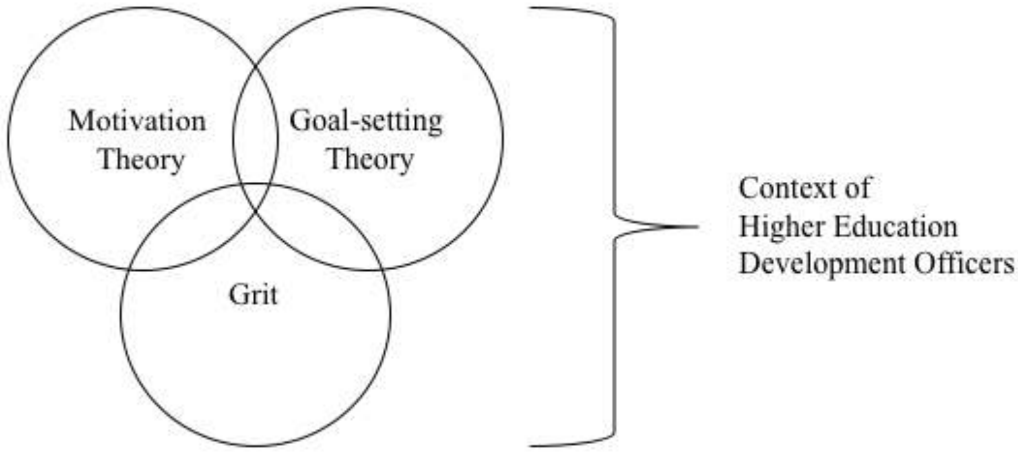

Figure 1. Theoretical framework.

Motivation Theory

Social Cognitive Theory. In terms of positively motivating people, particularly within work organizations, social cognitive theory and its main tenet self-efficacy operate as the driving psychological mechanisms for inspiring individuals' actions and behaviors to produce desired results (Stajkovic & Luthans, 2002). Essentially, self-efficacy is the lens through which people believe that they possess the knowledge and capabilities to affect their environment or perform a task. Self-efficacy leads to "cognitive motivational processes [that] operate to initiate, execute, and maintain work behavior" (Stajkovic & Luthans, 2002, p. 127). Another important feature of social cognitive theory is that people do not generate self-efficacy or behaviors in a vacuum; instead, the person, the behavior, and the environment interact and influence each other in reciprocal, bidirectional ways (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy and self-regulation lead to the concept of agency, or the ability to lead and direct their own behavior and create their own outcomes (Parajes, 2002). Bandura (1977) found the people with lower self-efficacy envisioned more unsuccessful outcomes or failures, while people with higher self-efficacy envisioned successful results. The mechanism by which people consider the possible consequences of their behavior and actions provides a cognitive source of motivation. Furthermore, self-efficacy helps individuals set goals, evaluate their performance, and choose whether or not to persevere in their efforts (Bandura, 1977).

Thus, social cognitive theory inhabits a shared conceptual space with the phenomenon of interest, grit, and provides a cognitive element for understanding motivation and goal-directed behavior that leads to achievement.

Grit

The principal concept that anchors this study is the contemporary construct of grit, which is comprised of two sub-parts: passion and perseverance (Duckworth et al., 2007).

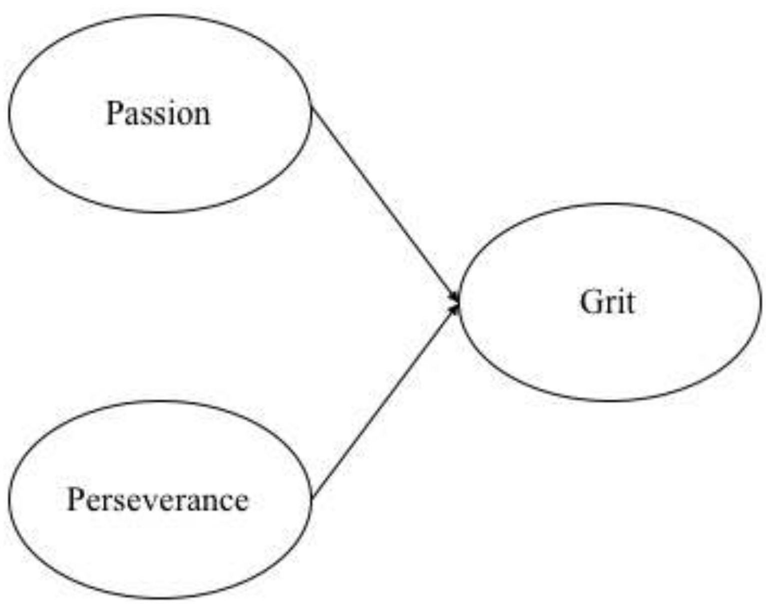

Figure 2. Grit model (Adapted from Duckworth & Quinn, 2009).

The roots of the grit concept date back more than 125 years, when Galton (1869/2006) observed that high-achievers drew upon more than just their cognitive ability; in fact, he posited that their ability was combined with zeal and hard work. Cox (1926) later corroborated this finding by building on estimated IQ rankings and character trait studies (Cattell, 1903; Webb, 1915) to conclude that the most prevalent personality traits that predicted achievement — when IQ was held constant — were persistence, confidence, and character.

In the contemporary literature and popular press, grit has been subject to a surge of interest due to its role in understanding exceptional performance and achievement. Within the concept of grit, passion is defined as consistency of interests over time, or the ability to invest effort in the same top-level goal over long periods of time (Eskreis-Winkler, Gross, & Duckworth, 2017, p. 3) without being derailed by competing goals or distractions. Perseverance is consistency of effort, or the tendency to sustain effort toward goals, even when setbacks or obstacles arise (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2017). Duckworth et al. (2007) developed a quantitative instrument to measure the presence of grit and to operationalize grit as a predictor variable rather than an outcome variable. Their results showed promise in predicting success and other desirable outcomes, like well-being or optimism, across several domains (Duckworth & Gross, 2014; Duckworth, Quinn, & Seligman, 2009; Duckworth et al., 2009; Eskreis-Winkler, Shulman, Beal, & Duckworth, 2014).

Further, Eskreis-Winkler et al. (2017) found that gritty individuals derive more motivation from meaning and engagement than from pleasure, they spend more time thinking about aspects of their lives that they can change rather than what they cannot affect, and they focus on their current goals as opposed to being distracted by alternatives.

Goal-setting Theory

The research related to goal-setting theory suggests that conscious goals affect action (Locke & Latham, 2002; Ryan, 1970), and this aspect of goal-setting theory overlaps with Duckworth's (2016) findings related to gritty individuals who select and maintain an ultimate goal. Locke & Latham (1990) found goals drive performance in four ways: by directing attention and action; by energizing individuals to produce more effort; by cultivating persistence; and by inspiring discovery and task-relevant learning and development. The presence of grit is only recognizable in its application to goal-directed thoughts and behavior (Duckworth, 2016), so these domains of literature involve overlap.

Self-Talk. A particular technique for driving goal-directed behavior and enhancing performance, and a practice that Duckworth (2016) describes as integral to grit, is optimistic self-talk. Self-talk includes cognitive and self-regulatory functions (Puchalska-Wasyl, 2014) similar to self-efficacy elements described in social cognitive theory and includes three characteristics: the content of the self-talk, the selection of self-talk (whether assigned or self-selected), and the overtness (whether external/aloud or internal/silent) of self-talk (Hatzigeorgiadis, Zourbanos, Galanis, & Theodorakis, 2011). Self-talk is a technique that uses language to convey instructional or motivational content to oneself (Puchalska-Wasyl, 2014) and overlaps with techniques that Duckworth (2016) described in the experience of grit. Exploring more about this dialogism within individuals will provide a framework for understanding their action, cognition, communication, and language to reveal more about the reciprocal interactions between behaviors, the environment, and themselves (Hermans, 2003; Linell, 2007; Puchalska-Wasyl, 2014).

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

(1) What is the essence of grit as experienced by development officers in higher education?

  (a) How do development officers in higher education describe their experiences of passion?

  (b) How do development officers in higher education describe their experiences of perseverance?

(2) What role does self-talk play for development officers in higher education as they reflect on overcoming the challenges they face?

Overview of the Research Design

The methodological design of the main study was a qualitative phenomenological treatment, which was intended to accomplish the understanding of a phenomenon based upon human perception and understanding (Stake, 2010). Employing a qualitative methodology in this study proved most appropriate, given the opportunity to gain insight into the subjective meaning-making that occurs throughout human lived experiences (van Manen, 2016). Further, the result of phenomenological research was to "explore and search for the essential, invariant structure (essence) or the central underlining meaning of the experiences that contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on the memories, images, and meaning" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 52) of the study's participants. Additionally, this design portrayed the lived experiences of people from their own perspective and, thus, involved interviewing as a method of collecting data on the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014).

The research setting was found within the foundations and fundraising institutions affiliated with public, research-intensive, state universities in the United States. There were 81 possible foundations from which to recruit individuals (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2015) and all of these reflected a typical context for development officers in higher education. Within this setting, learning more about individuals' experiences of grit was important since "development officers have one of the most difficult jobs… their results are measurable and visible, but not fully within their control" (Worth & Asp, 1994, p. 79).

Participant Selection

This study involved a total of 18 participants, at which point data saturation was achieved. By its nature, a qualitative study is designed to utilize small samples of people, "nested in their context and studied in-depth" (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 31). Participants were selected using a purposeful approach, which is "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). Within each institution, individual development officers were recruited to participate in the main study. Criteria for inclusion in the study involved: (1) employment full-time as a major gift development officer by the institutionally-related higher education foundation; and (2) experience in face-to-face solicitation of major gifts from private donors.

Participants were recruited to the study by email initially and were screened using an online questionnaire, and those selected for involvement were invited to participate in an interview.

Data Collection and Analysis Approaches

Once participants were identified based on their ability to provide "information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 1990, p. 171), were recruited, and agreed to participate, data was primarily collected via semi-structured interviews that were conducted face-to-face over a video-conferencing platform. Interviews enabled the researcher to collect data on experiences, behaviors, thoughts, and feelings that cannot be directly observed and that provided information about how participants interpret their own lived experiences (Merriam, 2009). An interview protocol was utilized that featured both more and less structured interview questions and included flexibility to explore emerging thoughts and perspectives of the participants (Merriam, 2009). All interviews were audio-recorded to facilitate transcription and subsequent analysis, and the researcher maintained detailed field notes and a research journal throughout the interviews to capture observations and personal thoughts, biases, and ideas, which sustained "subjective judgement, analyzing and synthesizing, all the while realizing their own consciousness" (Stake, 1995, p. 41) during the research.

Along with collecting data through interviews, the researcher also obtained insight through direct observation of the participants' work place and from nonverbal behaviors. Observations "take place in the setting where the phenomenon of interest naturally occurs instead of a location designated for the purpose of interviewing" (Merriam, 2009, p. 117). By observing development officers in their native work settings, their offices and meeting spaces, the researcher developed a better understanding of how they experienced their work and interacted with donors and their organization. While grit cannot be observed, the inclusion of direct observation provided details that offered “a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon being investigated” (Merriam, 2009, p. 136).

As recorded semi-structured interviews were transcribed, thematic analysis was used to analyze the data (Boyatzis, 1998; Clarke & Braun, 2006). Thematic analysis is a process that “enables scholars, observers, or practitioners to use a wide variety of types of information in a systematic manner that increases their accuracy or sensitivity in understanding and interpreting observations about people, events, situations, and organizations” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 5). The researcher followed the process for thematic analysis presented by Clarke and Braun, (2006) which consisted of six phases: (1) familiarizing yourself with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report.

A feature of thematic analysis is that it is not integrated with a particular theoretical framework; instead, it is a specific method that gives it “unique flexibility, and the potential for researchers to use it in a range of different ways” (Clarke & Braun, 2014, p. 6628). This approach to data analysis permitted the researcher to explore both manifest and latent meanings expressed by the participants (Boyatzis, 1998). The themes were emphasized, not based solely on quantifiable measures like frequency, but on their ability to “capture something important in relation to the overall research question” (Clarke & Braun, 2006, p. 87).

Significance of the Study

This study provided an opportunity to understand the role that grit plays in the experiences of development officers working in the nonprofit context of higher education foundations. The study also enhanced the understanding of grit from at least three perspectives. First, the treatment of the qualitative approach afforded participants the opportunity to describe their experiences of grit in their own words and with their own meanings — a result not previously available in the grit literature. Second, the discovery of how individuals experience passion and perseverance within the specific context of higher education foundations and professional fundraising work advanced what the field knows about grit. Third, the study addressed shortcomings highlighted in prior grit scholarship in terms of the lack of consideration of how competing goals or collective environments impact an individual's experience of grit.

Further, this study resulted in a number of consequences that impact understanding more about the experiences of professional development officers. Academic research in the field of Human Resource Development (HRD) pertaining to the nonprofit sector is still in its infancy (Kahnweiler, 2011). Despite employing 10% of the American workforce (McKeever, 2015) and generating more than $370 billion last year in economic impact (Giving USA, 2016), the role of HRD and the professionalization of nonprofit organizations remains a maturing field of study (Bartram, Cavanagh, & Hoye, 2017). Understanding the dynamics of the nonprofit organizational environment, and within foundations that focus on serving higher education specifically, will create a positive development for the field and help NPOs understand how to support the individuals employed by them (Dobrai & Farkas, 2016).

In order to be successful soliciting gifts and raising charitable donations to advance higher education, professional development officers must continually develop relationships with donors and, at some point, ask them for a large gift. As a result, resilience and perseverance in the face of frequent rejection are important traits for a development officer to demonstrate. The strategies that development officers employ to bounce back and learn from past unsuccessful proposals may affect the ways they form and pursue professional goals. How an individual in the fundraising profession would reconcile the mission and goals of the organization with their own values and personal objectives in this competitive and persistent environment is an important opportunity to learn more about perseverance of effort, consistency of interests, and goal motivation in this particular context.

Definition of Terms

In the interest of clarity, consistency, and avoiding confusion throughout the study, it is imperative to define the key terms and articulate their relationships in relation to their use in the study.

Nonprofit Organization. Nonprofit organizations (NPOs) are broadly defined as entities that are "organized and operated for purposes other than making and distributing profits" (Law Firm for Non-Profits, 2017, "What is a non-profit?," para. 1).

Foundation. "A nongovernmental, nonprofit organization with its own funds and program managed by its own trustees and directors, established to maintain or aid educational, social, charitable, religious, or other activities serving the common welfare, primarily by making grants to other nonprofit organizations" (Renz, 1997, p. 111).

Institutionally-Related Foundation. Separate 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations dedicated to the support of a college, university, university system, school district, or teaching hospital. While most institutionally-related foundations are affiliated with public institutions, some private colleges and universities have also established such foundations (Bakerman, 2017).

Higher Education. Education beyond the secondary level; education provided by a college or university (Merriam-Webster.com, 2017).

Human Resource Development (HRD). "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" (Wang, Werner, Sun, Gilley, & Gilley, 2017, p. 1175).

Development. Used in this report interchangeably with "professional fundraising," or to include the sophisticated process of raising private support from individual donors for the benefit of a nonprofit organization (Worth & Asp, 1994).

Development Officer. An in-house employee of a foundation or institution who engages in the professional process of development for a nonprofit organization. In addition to their fundraising responsibilities, senior development officers' roles have expanded to involve managing large and complex development offices and managing large staffs of fundraisers (Worth & Asp, 1994).

Goal. The aim of an action focused on a level of proficiency or achievement, usually in a specified time period (Locke & Latham, 2002).

Grit. Passion and perseverance in working toward a long-term goal despite setbacks and failure (Duckworth et al., 2007).

Effort. Effort is the motivational state commonly understood to mean trying hard or being involved in a task (Humphreys & Revelle, 1984, p. 158).

Passion. Maintaining commitment of effort and interest toward a goal consistently over time (Duckworth et al., 2007).

Perseverance. Working strenuously toward a challenge despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress (Duckworth et al., 2007).

Self-talk. Defined as saying (aloud or silently in one's head) or writing motivational, instructional, or interrogative phrases or skill cues to oneself with the intention of positively affecting performance (Senay, Albarracín, & Noguchi, 2010; Todorovich, 2012).

Motivation. "Motivation is the hypothetical construct that has traditionally been used to describe and explain differences in intensity and direction of behavior" (Humphreys & Revelle, 1984, p. 157). "To be motivated means to be moved to do something. A person who feels no impetus or inspiration to act is thus characterized as unmotivated, whereas someone who is energized or activated toward an end is conserved motivated" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 54).

Personality traits. Personality traits are stable characteristics of individual differences that may be used to describe and to explain behavior (Humphreys & Revelle, 1984, p. 156).

Personality states. Personality states are the result of the combination of traits and situations (Humphreys & Revelle, 1984, p. 156).

Assumptions

1. Participants are able to honestly and accurately recall their experiences of grit after solicitations.
2. Participants are also expected to exhibit relatively high levels of grit behavior, given their ability to complete four-year degrees and be employed are research-intensive universities.
3. There are some nuanced differences within the NPO sector and higher education foundations which would bestow unique qualities from organization to organization.
4. Not all development officers consider a rejected solicitation a challenge, rejection, or obstacle.
5. The process of expressing lived experiences and the culture of the particular organization will have an impact on the perceptions of experiences by development officers as it relates to solicitations.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter One has described the background of the problem, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the theoretical framework, and the research questions that guide the study. Chapter One has also presented the significance of the study, assumptions, and definitions of key terms. Chapter Two will provide a review of the literature of key concepts that relate to and underpin the study. Chapter Three will present an overview of the design of the main study, including a description of the participant selection process, data collection, and analysis approaches. A discussion of the issues related to validity and reliability will also be addressed. Chapter Four provides an in-depth account of the process of thematic analysis used and the themes that were developed with accompanying support from the data to address the study's research questions. The final chapter, Chapter Five, presents a final summary of the results of the study and conclusions that can be drawn from the conduct of this study. Limitations and implications of the study are identified, and recommendations for future opportunities for further research and deeper exploration are proposed.

Chapter Summary

The chapter began with an orientation to the phenomenon of grit and the context of the NPO sector, the impact of philanthropy on higher education, and the role of professional development officers as background to the problem that this study addressed. A statement of the problem followed, highlighting the lack of understanding in the literature that explained why development officers persevere in their roles or not, what passion and perseverance mean and how grit is manifested for individuals, and how grit operates within organizational or collective contexts. Further, a lack of academic HRD scholarship in the NPO context was presented. Next, the purpose of the study was to explore the lived experiences of professional development officers within their organizations. The theoretical framework that anchored the study included motivation theory, particularly self-efficacy; the contemporary concept of grit and its comprising elements passion and perseverance; and goal-setting theory and the role of self-talk in regulating goal-directed behavior. The research questions that guided the study were established, and an overview of the research design to respond to those questions was provided. A discussion of the significance of the study presented evidence for the expansion of knowledge and impact on practice as a result of the research. An overview of key definitions and assumptions embedded within the study followed to assist the reader with clarifying unfamiliar terms and understanding the beliefs inherent to the study. Finally, a roadmap for the remaining chapters of the dissertation was provided, as well as a summary of the first chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter presents the relevant domains of literature that pertain to studying grit and its underlying constructs, and how professional development officers in higher education experience this phenomenon. The chapter is organized into four sections. The first begins by providing an overview of motivation as informed by social cognitive theory, which underpins the formation and pursuit of goals. A section that covers the current grit literature, pertinent definitions, the passion and perseverance constructs that comprise grit, and the utility of grit in predicting success outcomes follows. The third section includes a discussion of goals, goal hierarchies, and goal-directed behavior that build from motivation and grit. Finally, the fourth section examines the nonprofit sector — and foundations that serve higher education specifically — and begins investigating the environment that calls for grit in development officers. Chapter Two concludes with a summary highlighting the review of the pertinent literature.

To conduct this review, The University of Texas at Tyler's Robert R. Muntz Library was utilized. The following databases were searched: Business Source Complete, Professional Development Collection, PsychINFO, PsycARTICLES, ScienceDirect, SAGE, Emerald Insight, Wiley Periodicals Inc., ProQuest, and EBSCO Publishing. In addition, GoogleScholar was used to supplement the search process. Keywords and phrases that yielded results used in this review included: grit, motivation, self-efficacy, self-talk, work, nonprofit, foundation, resilience, perseverance, fundraising, and development officers. No limitation on the date range was imposed, however, given the contemporary nature of the topic, most scholarship pertaining to the phenomenon of interest was published between 2007 and 2017. Other important seminal works were reviewed as well. Finally, peer reviewed articles, books, literature reviews, dissertation, and nonprofit trade publications were included in the review.

Motivation

In the literature, motivation has come to be known as the "differences in intensity and direction of behavior" (Humphreys & Revelle, 1984). Put another way, according to Ryan and Deci (2000) "to be motivated means to be moved to do something. A person who feels no impetus or inspiration to act is thus characterized as unmotivated, whereas someone who is energized or activated toward an end is considered motivated" (p. 54). More than 35 years of goal motivation research suggests that when individuals are committed to a goal, believe they possess the ability to achieve it, and do not adopt conflicting goals, their performance has a linear, positive relationship with task difficulty (Locke & Latham, 2006), meaning they take on increasingly challenging goals. The experience of being motivated to act, then, is initiated when a person engages in a cognitive process that establishes their belief that they can achieve a desired outcome (Bandura, 1977), otherwise known as self-efficacy, an element of social cognitive theory.

Social Cognitive Theory

In his social cognitive theory, Bandura (1999) built upon his earlier work in self-efficacy and laid the groundwork for understanding how motivation works within individuals. In this theory, personal agency, or the ability of people to "motivate, guide and regulate their activities" (Bandura, 1999, p. 27) is the result of two driving mechanisms: self-efficacy and self-regulation (Bandura, 1991).

Agency. A major paradigm shift in psychological theorizing occurred when social cognitive theory emerged as a model of interactive human agency (Bandura, 2001). Before then, human behavior was viewed as a linear process of environmental input stimuli from which a consequential output behavior was mechanically derived (Bandura, 2001). As greater understanding of the multilevel neural networks at play within human functioning surfaced, the complexity and dynamic nature of the human brain was reflected in the paradigm; however, the model assumed that the mental processes of constructing, planning, motivating, and regulating occurred non-consciously and without the whole personal parts of human cognition (Bandura, 2001). In this case, whole personal parts refer to wholly cognitive, psychological traits, while subpersonal parts are described as the level of brain activities that are functional parts of the nervous system (Drayson, 2014). In fact, Harré (1983) provided evidence to support a model whereby not people but their biological, subpersonal parts dictated their behavior, choices, and courses of action.

On the other hand, Bandura (2001) described a personal driver of behavior that included consciousness, the use of information for self-regulation, and the ability to make desired things happen. He offered the following definition of consciousness: "purposive accessing and deliberative processing of information for selecting, constructing, regulating, and evaluating courses of action" (Bandura, 2001, p. 3). In this way, Bandura (1997) provided a framework for understanding humans as agentic operators of their own lives, instead of just "onlooking hosts of brain mechanisms orchestrated by environmental events" (p. 22). Humans can analyze and interpret information and use that information to construct meaning, control their own impulses and responses, and decide upon the appropriate course of action as a result of that cognitive process.

Not only do people make agentic judgments about their own behaviors in response to external stimuli, but they also exist within social systems that impact that cognitive process. The social cognitive theoretical model suggests that human behavior is grounded in reciprocal causality, where internal personal factors like cognitive, affective, and biological aspects; behavioral patterns; and environmental events are all mingled determinants that influence each other bi-directionally (Bandura, 1997). In fact, the nature of the cognitive process of constructing symbolic, social, and psychomotor skills is heavily dependent upon the experience of doing so within a social and environmental context (Eisenberg, 1995). Of importance to Bandura (2001), human cognitive decision-making processes when managing tasks and behaviors must not be disembodied from humans' interpersonal lives and self-reflective experiences that enable them to select personally meaningful pursuits.

Thus, agency is the ability of humans to intentionally choose to behave or act in a particular manner. Bandura (2001) pointed out that intentions and actions are different; though they are related functionally, they are separated by time. To this point, he suggests considering intentions as self-motivators that are likely to affect the future actions of a person. This personal agency is the first mode of human agency whereby people can bring their influence to bear. A second mode of influence is that of proxy, where a person uses a mediated mode of agency to influence others who have access to resources or expertise to act on their behalf for the outcomes that they need.

The third mode of agency that Bandura (1997) described is that of collective agency. When people share beliefs about their collective power to influence their environment, they demonstrate collective efficacy and agency. This mode of group agency requires that people act in conjunction with one another based on their collective cognitive judgments about what behaviors and actions are most appropriate to achieve their desired outcomes. This collective "cognizing, aspiring, motivating, and regulating" (Bandura, 2001, p. 14) achieves the same functions as personal agency, only at the group level.

Self-efficacy. A critical component of agency, then, is the construct of self-efficacy. In order for an individual to engage in agentic behaviors, one must first believe that the desired effects from a proposed action are possible. Bandura (1977) presented a model of self-efficacy that is driven by two types of expectations: efficacy expectations and outcome expectations. Efficacy expectations refer to an individual's belief that they can successfully perform the behaviors required to produce a desired outcome. These expectations — or confidence — about one's ability to perform are balanced by outcome expectations, which are the person's belief that a given behavior will lead to certain outcomes. Bandura (1977) made this distinction between efficacy and outcome expectations because it is possible for an individual to believe that a behavior would lead to a desired outcome, but not believe that they could successfully perform that behavior. In this case, their outcome expectation would likely not influence their decision to act because of the lack of efficacy expectation.

Moreover, Bandura's (1977) model of self-efficacy described the sources of efficacy expectations that individuals develop. Through a process of social learning, personal efficacy is developed through four major methods: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. Performance accomplishments have been shown to be particularly influential in efficacy expectations because personal mastery experiences can raise or lower efficacy depending on when the exposure occurs. Early in the skill acquisition performance of a behavior, failure events could be more detrimental to efficacy expectations than later, after a comfortable level of personal mastery is developed for an individual. Vicarious experience refers to the expectations that people develop from seeing others perform activities or model particular behavior. They convince themselves that if other people can do it, they should be able to do it too (Bandura & Barab, 1973). Verbal persuasion is often used to influence behavior because people can be led to believe that they can perform a behavior successfully if they are told what to expect. Finally, emotional arousal is an important mode of gathering efficacy expectation information because it involves people's emotional arousal as it relates to threatening situations. Bandura (1977) found that people rely heavily on their physiological state of fear, anxiety, and stress when they are faced with vulnerable or unfamiliar situations. This emotional response can profoundly impact an individual's perceived self-efficacy as they decide whether to perform or avoid a behavior.

While these sources of efficacy information provide environmental input for humans to use when considering a course of action, this information is also processed and transformed by individuals who are affected by many other contextual factors, like their social, situational and temporal circumstances (Bandura, 1977). Thus, individuals undergo cognitive appraisals of this information to make judgments about their perceived efficacy and outcome expectations, and whether to enact specific behaviors or not. Self-efficacy, then, is a powerful player in the self-regulation of personal motivation toward goals.

Self-regulation. Along with self-efficacy, the other driving mechanism behind personal agency is self-regulation. The system that brings together the external, environmental influences on humans and their own ability to pursue purposeful action is self-regulation. As Bandura (1991) described, intentional and purposive action are symbolic activities; future events are conceived and cognitively represented in the present, and in anticipation of such future events, current motivators and regulators of behavior are enacted. Therefore, forethought and self-regulation are necessary components of causal agency, and through this mechanism, humans develop incentives and standards for behavior that guide their actions. In fact, Bandura and Simon (1977) found that motivation and behavior were little impacted by intention and desire; instead, psychological self-regulation must be developed and mobilized.

Self-regulation occurs through a series of subfunctions: self-monitoring, judgment, and self-reaction (Bandura, 1991). Self-monitoring involves individuals assessing their own performances, the conditions under which those performances occur, and the subsequent effects, short-term and long-term, that result from their performance. This reflection is crucial to self-regulation since people must use this information to influence their own motivations and actions following this self-monitoring. The process, though, occurs within the lived and social experiences of people. For one, preexisting beliefs and values exhibit influence over how individuals feel about their performance and what parts of the performances are assessed. The mood or emotional state of an individual has also been shown to influence self-monitoring behavior (Kuiper, MacDonald, & Derry, 1983). By self-diagnosing and self-motivating, individuals can set goals and utilize performance feedback to direct their own behaviors.

Examining one's behavior is not enough, though. Judging that behavior provides more information for continued behavior. Performance can be judged on how well it measures up to an individual's personal standards, comparison to social references, conducting a valuation of the activity's significance, and evaluating the perceived performance determinants of behavior (Nielsen, 2017). Once performance is judged, it allows for self-reactive influences, which in turn provides the mechanism by which courses of action are regulated by an individual creating their own self-incentives (Bandura, 1991). Typically, this takes the form of self-satisfaction that is conditional on meeting a personal standard of performance in some arena. Ultimately, self-regulation is a series of cognitive processes that involve self-monitoring, judging, and taking self-reactive measures to motivate personal agency.

Overall, Bandura's findings that self-efficacy is a factor in performance and goal-directed behaviors has been supported (Moritz, Feltz, Fahrbach, & Mack, 2000; Schunk, 1990; Wright, O'Halloran, & Stukas, 2016), and motivation — as informed by Social Cognitive Theory — provides the basis upon which the grit concept was developed.

Grit

To date, grit has been explored as a non-conscious personality trait that is closely related to the Big Five trait of Conscientiousness, which characterizes people as "thorough, reliable, organized, industrious, and self-controlled" (Duckwork et al., 2007). This would suggest that the trait of grit is among the personality traits that are "relatively stable, highly consistent attributes that exert widely *generalized* causal effects on behavior" (Mischel, 1973, p. 253). However, grit has been found to produce explanatory power about the achievement of individuals beyond that of conscientiousness (Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014). The stability of personality traits and the divide between conscious and non-conscious mechanisms has not been clearly established in prior research of grit.

Explaining Achievement: Talent, Intelligence, Personality and Grit

The roots of the grit concept go back more than 125 years, when Galton (1869/2006) observed that high-achievers drew upon more than just their cognitive ability; in fact, he posited that their ability was combined with zeal and hard work. Cox (1926) later corroborated this finding by building on estimated IQ rankings and character trait studies (Cattell, 1903; Webb, 1915) to conclude that the most prevalent personality traits that predicted achievement — when IQ was held constant — were persistence, confidence, and character. These personality traits, however, did not disconfirm the predictive power of intelligence and talent in the phenomenon of achievement. To illustrate this point, IQ has been strongly correlated (up to r=.6) with a variety of success outcomes across a wide range of domains (Neisser, Boodoo, Bouchard, Boykin, Brody, & Ceci, 1996); however, Duckworth et al., (2007) explored alternative explanations of individual differences that account for achievement. Duckworth's background in teaching intermediate students aged 12 to 14 revealed a phenomenon of interest to her: some of her students with the most academic ability were performing poorly in her class while others who lacked what one might consider natural talent were doing quite well. That observation started her on a course toward understanding why, despite natural abilities like intelligence, some people succeed while others do not. Her answer has been to avoid mythologizing natural ability and focusing on the ways in which humans pursue goals over long periods of time.

In developing the grit concept, Duckworth et al., (2007) operationalized the concept as the higher-order construct of two factors: passion and perseverance. Passion, in this context, is not related to an intensity of feelings, but instead, consistency in interests over time. Perseverance is the sustained effort a person exerts toward a goal, despite setbacks, challenges, and obstacles. Together, passion and perseverance, when applied to a goal hierarchy, resulted in a sense of purpose and meaningfulness for individuals (Duckworth & Gross, 2014).

The role of intelligence in success and achievement outcomes has long been established in the literature, but Duckworth et al., (2007) questioned whether aptitude alone guaranteed achievement. Their model found, with strong reliability (Cronbach's alphas coefficients of .79, .85, .79, and .80), that individual differences in grit explained variance in desirable outcomes above what was explained by intelligence alone. The authors also demonstrated that grit was not correlated to intelligence, suggesting a distinct and separate construct in the equation altogether (Duckworth et al., 2007). In fact, in her book on the subject, Duckworth (2016) describes an equation in which when talent is combined with effort, skill is produced; likewise, when effort is applied to skill, achievement is the result. In her model, that gritty effort counts twice as much in the path toward building achievement and success outcomes (see Figure 3). According to Duckworth (2016), when effort is applied to talent, the result is an increase in skill.

Then, when continued effort and skill are combined, they yield achievement. Hence, effort counts twice in the equation of achievement.

Similar results that confirm the importance of grit in explaining achievement beyond what IQ explains were found in the literature. In another series of studies, Duckworth and Quinn (2009) validated a shortened Grit Scale (Grit-S) with reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .60 to .83. Other studies in the literature confirmed the significance of grit in explaining variance in achievement with similar correlation coefficients of .74 to .80 (Aparicio, Bacao, & Oliveria, 2017; Bayl-Smith & Griffin, 2015; Datu, Yuen, & Chen, 2017; Eskreis-Winkler, Shulman, Young, Tsukayama, Brunwasser, & Duckworth, 2016; Hart & Chabris, 2016; Mueller, Wolfe, & Syed, 2017). These studies confirmed seminal grit literature that positioned the construct as an individual trait that explains differences in achievement outcomes given similar levels of intelligence.

On the other hand, a number of other studies were not able to confirm the importance of grit in explaining achievement outcomes. One study found non-significant results (p=.1) for grit's role in explaining performance (Rego, Owens, Leal, Melo, Pina e Cunha, Gonçalves, & Ribeiro, 2015). Other studies were not able to replicate the correlations that have been typical in suggesting grit's role or found marginal difference between the grit construct and the Big Five personality trait of Conscientiousness (Briley, Domiteaux, & Tucker-Drob, 2014; Burks, Lewis, Kivi, Wiener, Anderson, Gotte, DeYoung, & Rustichini, 2015; Dumfart & Neubauer, 2016; Rimfeld, Kovas, Dale, & Plomin, 2016; Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, & Spaulding, 2016).

One of the limitations of the quantitative grit model and measurement instrument that Duckworth et al. (2007) proposed was the difficulty in assessing subjectively important goals and outcomes. Grit, as currently conceptualized in the literature, does not map success outcomes to individuals' personal objectives; in other words, the Grit Scale may ask questions about whether an individual stuck with a task to determine their perseverance, even though an alternative task might be a better avenue for achieving the individual's goal. This oversight in the concept may prove challenging for understanding complex goals or changes in both behaviors or goal-oriented activities.

Grit and Personality

One of the important theoretical hooks that Duckworth et al., (2007) use with grit was the operationalization of grit as two-part non-cognitive personality trait. Grit was proposed as distinct from other traditional facets of personality, like the Big Five, and encompassed the ability to sustain both effort and interest in long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007). Grit has also been positioned as a specific facet of the Big Five trait of Conscientiousness (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014), and more specifically, was defined in this context as working on difficult tasks at hand in addition to focusing effort toward hard-to-reach, higher-order goals over very long periods of time.

These findings were corroborated with other studies in the existing literature. Within the literature reviewed, some studies found that grit: was related to personal intrinsic motivation (Aparicio et al., 2017), related to endurance (Bayl-Smith & Griffin, 2015), served as a dispositional characteristic that moderated self-regulation (Converse, Steinhauser, & Pathak, 2010), presented as a stable pattern of behavior over time (Burks et al., 2015), held a positive relationship with motivation to participate in deliberate practice or effortful behavior (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2016), and bridges Conscientiousness and ambition (Roberts, Lejuez, Krueger, Richards, & Hill, 2014).

Further, Duckworth (2016) describes how life experience and age affects personality, and therefore, grit over time. Because circumstances change and create the need for humans to change, their grit and personalities develop along with the changing situation. This corresponsive principle (Roberts, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2003) leads to people changing how they think, feel, and then act in different situations over time. Baron, Mueller, and Wolfe (2016) also found the development of grit with maturity, suggesting the individuals become grittier as they get older or gain more life experiences.

Conversely, though, other studies in the review proposed that grit is actually cognitive in nature (Comer & Sekerka, 2017; Gledhill, Harwood, & Forsdyke, 2017; Grych, Hamby, & Banyard, 2015; Hallett & Hoffman, 2017; Jenkins, Wiklund, & Brundin, 2014; McMullen & Kier, 2016; Nielsen, 2017; Olszewski-Kubilius, Subotnik, & Worrell, 2015), is related to mental toughness (Fisher & Oyserman, 2017; Gucciardi, Peeling, Ducker, & Dawson, 2016), and is more similar to a state-like construct instead (Rego et al., 2015). In fact, in one instance, the differences in the treatment of grit, perseverance, and passion in the traditions of personality psychology (non-cognitive) and motivational psychology (cognitive) were particularly addressed with structural equation modeling (SEM). The results suggested that neither Conscientiousness and grit nor competency beliefs were effective in predicting achievement alone given their definitional overlap, mediated effects, uniqueness in predictive effects, and domain-specific attributes (Trautwein, Lüdtke, Roberts, Schnyder, & Niggli, 2009). To this point, Mischel (1973) demonstrated how individuals possess the ability to cognitively transform the meaning and impact of stimuli in any given situation, meaning that they could adjust their behavior depending on their assessment of that stimuli.

The debate in the literature about the nature of the grit construct is a complicated one since Duckworth (2016) herself discusses at length the importance of forming goal hierarchies and expressing motivation in the experience of the construct. Those goals are most certainly cognitive in nature, so the nuances of the relationship between grit and cognition remains inconsistent in the current literature.

Evidence for Revising the Grit Model

As originally conceptualized, grit was a second order factor composed of two facets: passion and perseverance (Duckworth, 2016). This model of perseverance constructed of effort and passion — or consistency of interests — was confirmed across several studies in the review (Aparicio et al., 2017; Burks et al., 2015; Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2016; Galla & Duckworth, 2015). Hart and Chabris (2016) attempted to include a complementary predictor, impulse control, into the grit model; however, the results indicated that the original two-factor structure was preferable.

In some cases, though, an alternative model of grit was successfully tested. Datu et al., (2017) provided evidence that a third factor of grit, adaptability to situations, was statistically significant and highly reliable (Cronbach's alpha=.88). In their model, adaptability was defined as the ability to expect challenges, accept changes, be flexible, and display a drive to overcome any new difficulties as they arise (Datu et al., 2017). Of interest, these behaviors seem cognitive in nature, bringing into question again the nature of grit in the consciousness. Another important aspect of the study was its orientation in a collectivist context. Previously, grit has been explored in terms of individual differences and individualistic achievement outcomes; this expansion of grit into more collective contexts is important as it relates to the nature of nonprofit organizations. Another study, set in a military setting, found that adaptability, or flexibility, was an important third factor in grit's ability to predict group-level achievement outcomes (Gilson, Dix, & Lochbaum, 2017). The studies that called for the inclusion of a third factor, adaptability, are a counterbalance to the ordered structure that is typically assumed in Conscientious personality types.

Goal-Setting and Goal-Directed Behavior

One of the key differentiating features of grit from other concepts like self-efficacy or Conscientiousness is that grit emphasized long-term perseverance, or stamina, over short-term intensity (Duckworth et al., 2007). Further, people with pronounced grit set long-term goals for themselves and maintain focus over time, whether or not they receive positive feedback or extrinsic reward (Duckworth et al., 2007). Therefore, the role of goal-setting and goal-directed behavior is integral to understanding the experience of grit.

Goal-Setting Theory

Goal-setting theory emerged more than 50 years ago in psychology literature and was rooted in the premise that when individuals form conscious goals, those goals affect their actions (Ryan, 1970). Locke and Latham (2002) examined the relationship between goals and organizational task performance, highlighting the connection between goals and actual action. In the course of their studies, they found: a positive, linear relationship between goal difficulty and task performance (Locke & Latham, 1990); the utility of specific, difficult goals in improving performance rather than the vaguer 'do your best' goals (Locke & Latham, 1990); and that goal specificity reduced the ambiguity around acceptable performance, resulting in higher performance (Locke, Chah, Harrison, & Lustgarten, 1989).

Further, goal-setting theory was harmonious with Bandura's social cognitive theory in that self-efficacy played an important role in both. Locke and Latham (2002) posited that individuals with high self-efficacy not only set goals for themselves, but also set more difficult goals, were more committed to their goals, and responded better to feedback, especially negative feedback (Locke & Latham, 1990; Locke & Latham, 2002; Seijts & B. W. Latham, 2001).

Another meaningful contribution of Locke and Latham (2002) to the goal-setting literature was greater knowledge of mechanisms through which goals drive behavior and performance. The first is that goals "direct attention and effort toward goal-relevant activities and away from goal-irrelevant activities" (Locke & Latham, 2002, p. 706) both in terms of thought and behavior. When it comes to passion and perseverance, Duckworth (2016) stresses the purpose of goals in developing grit; she says that "grit is about holding the same top-level goal for a very long time" (p. 64). This guiding top-level goal is the pinnacle of a goal hierarchy that guides the thoughts and actions of gritty people.

Hierarchical Goal Framework

In the tradition of motivational psychology, Duckworth and Gross (2014) suggest that goals are typically organized hierarchically, containing numerous lower-order goals that are domain and context specific (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Kruglanski, Shah, Fishbach, Friedman, Chun, & Sleeth-Keppler, 2002). These goals are usually tied to higher-level, more abstract, longer-term goals that are less action-oriented. In this hierarchical framework, grit involves subscribing to a dominant superordinate goal structure and putting forth consistent effort and perseverance toward achieving that goal, even in the face of failure or rejection, and often for long periods of time (Duckworth & Gross, 2014). As Duckworth (2016) described, some psychologists call this superordinate goal at the pinnacle of the hierarchy the “ultimate concern” (p. 63). Grit involves holding onto the same superordinate goal — or the same ultimate concern – for a very long time and expending effortful practice or work towards achieving its realization.

Ultimately, the focus of grit toward goals has grounding in human nature. In fact, Ford (1992) described human beings as inherently goal-driven organisms. Put another way, much of human behavior is goal-directed (Locke & Latham, 2013); so, understanding why some people adhere to their goals and others do not is also of worthwhile HRD focus.

Self-Talk as a Technique for Enhancing Goal-Directed Behavior

One of the ways that self-efficacy can facilitate goal attainment is through developing strategies that expresses confidence in the accomplishment of the goal (Locke & Latham, 2002). To this point, Duckworth (2016) described the role of hope in the experience of grit: “It rests on the expectation that our own efforts can improve our future” (p. 169). The belief that personal effort can create agency in an individual’s circumstances bridges self-efficacy, grit, and optimism. Learned optimism was born out of positive psychology and the work of Duckworth’s mentor Martin Seligman (Duckworth, 2016; Seligman, 1990), and the concept of optimism has been linked to a growth mindset, meaning an individual believes it is possible to learn and increase their capacity to learn (Dweck, 2012; Dweck, 2015).

In cultivating a growth mindset — and hence, a gritty attitude — language plays an important role (Duckworth, 2016). In fact, one technique that Duckworth (2016) suggests for cultivating grit is to practice "optimistic self-talk" (p. 193). Self-talk was defined as saying (aloud or silently in one's head) or writing motivational, instructional, or interrogative phrases or skill cues to oneself with the intention of positively affecting performance (Senay et al., 2010; Todorovich, 2012). In terms of understanding more about motivating goal-directed behavior and the experience of grit, this introspection in the form of self-talk contains "linguistic categories and structures shaping the way people construct mental representations of events" (Senay et al., 2010; Zwaan & Radvansky, 1998). The literature is lacking exploration into what gritty self-talk might look like in people's own words.

The Nonprofit Sector

Essentially, nonprofit organizations are significant in two ways: first, they achieve meaningful good in society; and second, the people who work in nonprofit organizations tend to hold values and motivational ideas that are different than typical employment (like money and power).

As presented previously in Chapter One, the nonprofit sector has become a significant economic engine and a driving force at local, national, and international levels (Anheier, 2005). Since a variety of names, structures, and affiliations are used interchangeably to describe nonprofit organizations, assessing the diversity, scale, and scope of the sector is a challenge (Salamon & Anheier, 1997). Nonprofit organizations

(NPOs) are broadly defined as entities that are “organized and operated for purposes other than making and distributing profits” (Law Firm for Non-Profits, 2017, “What is a non-profit?,” para. 1). This distinction, however, oversimplifies other important characteristics of NPOs; namely, that by their very existence, NPOs address societal or community needs, making them inherently mission-oriented (Bradley, Jansen, & Silverman, 2003).

Because of the centrality of the organizational mission for many NPOs, employees tend to work for rewards other than money, such as for stimulation, community, and increased flexibility (Rocco, 2001). This finding echoes the earlier work of Clark and Wilson (1961), who found that there were three types of incentives: material, solidary, and purposive. Material incentives, like financial rewards are common in for-profit organizations (Weisbrod, 1998), Solidary incentives, which arise from the benefit of association with the organization, and purposive incentives, which are goal-related intangible rewards, are of critical importance for employees of NPOs (Clark & Wilson, 1961). Other aspects of public service motivation that are rooted in compassion and self-sacrifice, like altruism and prosocial behavior, also factor into the reasons why members of NPOs join and stay with these types of organizations (Perry, Hondeghem, & Wise, 2010). Overall, the data show that nonprofit employees embrace different work-related values and motives than employees in other sectors, for example, working for fewer financial rewards (Association of Fundraising Professionals, 2016).

Furthermore, the marketplace within which NPOs exist is progressively volatile. Because NPOs do not generate a profit or return financial value to stakeholders, there is a trend among these organizations to “do more with less” (Kahnweiler, 2011, p. 84). In fact, the environment that NPOs operate within is increasingly challenging, making "daily operations for nonprofit organization increasingly difficult" (Dobrai & Farkas, 2015, p. 26).

NPOs are also designed and managed to achieve different outcomes than other types of organizations. Typically, NPOs either aim at one of two key outcomes: maximizing the benefits they afford to their members and donors or expanding the services provided to their constituent beneficiaries (Weisbrod, 1998). To accomplish this work, NPOs often employ a unique mix of labor resources comprised of both paid and unpaid work (Kahnweiler, 2011). NPOs grapple with the dynamic of managing human resources in the form of paid employees and unpaid volunteers, and this environment accentuates the fact that motivations differ strongly in this sector than in for-profit or governmental entities (Anheier, Hollerweger, Badelt, & Kendall, 2003). Finally, as a sector, NPOs are facing a leadership crisis as the Baby Boomers prepare to retire in the coming years. For their part, NPOs have made little to no talent development investments in the recent past (Kahnweiler, 2011).

Foundations as a Particular Type of NPO

Within the nonprofit sector, there are a variety of organizational types and purposes. One prevailing type of NPO is the foundation, defined as:

> A nongovernmental, nonprofit organization with its own funds and program managed by its own trustees and directors, established to maintain or aid educational, social, charitable, religious, or other activities serving the common welfare, primarily by making grants to other nonprofit organizations. (Renz, 1997, p. 111)

Foundations are 501(c)(3) organizations that are tax-exempt by the Internal Revenue Code, but that are not themselves public charities that serve a social need. Foundations accept gifts or assets from donors to create an endowment, which is a sizable financial investment that generates relatively independent funding for the sector in the form of grants (Anheier, 2005). In the U.S. alone, there are more than 80,000 private foundations (Foundation Center, 2014) that are self-supported by endowment income and that make grants to institutions according to their donors' intentions.

However, the innovation and long-term stability that foundations provide to NPOs are not without tribulation; foundations have their own problems. First, it can be difficult to find the investment focus and expertise that foundations require to manage their assets responsibly (Anheier & Leat, 2002; Leat, 1999). Second, foundations must work closely with the grantees and donors, and this requires a "higher level of human resources and concomitant administrative expenses" (Anheier, 2005, p. 318). Third, foundations may be subject to public scrutiny as they are held accountable for their use of funding. If foundations are suspected of misusing funds or spending a disproportionate amount of funding on their own operations and administration, the perception of self-interest and impropriety can be damaging (Frumkin, 1997).

In the U.S., the trends since the 1980s indicate that foundations grown in both number and in size of the endowment assets under management (Foundation Center, 2014). Of the fields that benefit from grants made by foundations, education draws the largest share of philanthropy, collecting more than 26 percent of the awarded funds (Foundation Center, 2014). NPOs are able to do their work in part due to the grants made by philanthropic foundations, which also employee their own human resources to raise and manage investments for the social good. They are “strange creatures in the great jungle of American democracy” (Nielsen, 1972, p. 3) because they presuppose that individuals and corporations will give assets to NPOs to be managed and grown, and the proceeds then put to use serving the public.

Foundations in Higher Education

As state and federal funding for higher education decrease, institutions are facing increased pressure to obtain necessary funding in order to deliver on their missions of teaching, research, and public service (McAlexander, Koenig, & DuFault, 2014). A significant source of this crucial revenue for American institutions is through private philanthropic support. In fact, “private support to higher education is stronger in the US than anywhere else in the world” (Proper, 2009, p. 153).

In 1638, John Harvard made an initial private gift through bequest to the colonies’ first college, to establish Harvard University. This act solidified Harvard’s position as an important learning institution (Drezner, 2011), and the impact of philanthropy in higher education was established. It was not until later the twentieth century, however, that more public universities began asking for gifts from individual donors as state-funding deteriorated (Drezner, 2011). Today, “education is the second most economically significant field of nonprofit activity in the United States, following only health care” (Anheier, 2005, p. 101). This transformation in funding models for higher education resulted in the enhancement of the quality of American education; in fact, “American higher education was elevate[d] to a position of excellence by philanthropy” (Council for Financial Aid to Education, 1973, p. 9). This point was more recently reinforced by Drezner (2011) when he drew the connection between an institution's ability to raise funds and their ability to produce results: "simply put, those universities that raise more funds have the ability to achieve more and surpass their competitors on many fronts, including rankings, student enrollment and retention, grants, and faculty recruitment" (p. 25).

While the evidence that support through private giving plays a central role to the potential of higher education to produce meaningful results, it is equally important to understand how these philanthropic gifts come to pass. It is, according to Drezner (2011), a result of the relationships that institutions build with their current and prospective donors that enables the "successful solicitation of the largest or leadership gifts" (p. 53). For many large Foundations, those relationships are cultivated through professional fundraisers, also known as development officers, advancement officers, or major gifts officers (Knowles & Gomes, 2009).

Development Officers in Higher Education

To emphasize an earlier point: nonprofit organizations depend upon raising critical resources (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), and in order to address the resource needs of the organization, philanthropic fundraising and the requisite fundraising techniques have become increasingly sophisticated (McGee & Donoghue, 2009). For NPOs that operate by soliciting major gifts in order to support higher education, fundraising professionals are hired and developed to personally persuade donors to give (Panas, 2012). The professionals are development officers, and at a high level, development officers "identify values, wants, and needs of a potential major gift donor and develop a marketing mix that is specifically tailored to that individual" (Knowles & Gomes, 2009, p. 285).

While the amount of a major gift varies depending on the NPO or foundation, a major gift typically involves a gift that is significantly more than a typical gift. It can often be 10 to 30 percent more than the project's budget (Knowles & Gomes, 2009). The creation of these relationships with foundations and related roles within higher education institutions themselves "illustrates how the internal environment of universities has been affected by the need for universities to meet challenges" (Daly, 2013, p. 21). At the essence, "advancement professionals share a common goal, to develop support for the institution" (McAlexander, Koenig, & DuFault, 2014, p. 244).

Within their work of generating funds for the NPO, development officers hear "no" in response to their gift solicitations, sometimes more often than hearing "yes" (Panas, 2012). Furthermore, the demand for experienced development officers has increased to the point where the supply does not satisfy the demand; "there are simply not enough experienced major gift fundraisers to go around" (Pfeiffer, 2007). NPOs that leverage inexperienced development officers in raising funds from their donors also run the risk of "very real risk of damaged donor relations" (Knowles & Gomes, 2009). In an environment where the national average retention rate for development officers is less than four years (Association of Fundraising Professionals, 2016) and has decreased since the 1990s (Mooney, 1993), it behooves higher education foundations to understand why development officers commit and persevere in their fundraising roles.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a review of the relevant literature on motivation as informed by social cognitive theory, the concept of grit and its constituents passion and perseverance, goal-setting theory and the role of optimistic self-talk. The chapter also provided an orientation to the nonprofit sector in general, and the context of higher education foundations and development officers in higher education specifically. An overview of the relevant literature is included in Figure 3.

This study was designed to address some of the key gaps and contradictions found in the grit scholarship. Primarily, there is lack of understanding of how individuals engaged in work fraught with rejection and obstacles, like higher education development, experience grit and its related concepts of passion, perseverance, self-efficacy, goal-setting, and optimistic self-talk. The current literature also fails to describe, from individuals' perspectives, whether they recognize grit consciously or whether it manifests non-consciously, and how they think, feel, and construct meanings about their experiences of grit. Further, while Duckworth (2016) expressed optimistic self-talk as a strategy for enhancing grit, there has not been any empirical study of the content and meanings created by people in their experiences of grit. Finally, additional factors comprising grit have been proposed in the literature through quantitative research, and yet, the qualitative exploration of the experience of grit has not yet occurred in the published research body of knowledge. The concept of grit has become a popular and promising idea for explaining why talent alone does not guarantee achievement and success. The role of effort and consistency in the face of obstacles and challenges warrants study because of its ability to inform the HRD field. In the case of nonprofit development officers who are engaged in the work of soliciting private support for higher education, the competition for donors and dollars is high and the consequences of success are vital to the institutions they work for. The chapter concluded with a summarization.

Motivation Theory	• Social Cognitive Theory
	  o Bandura (1977) develops self-efficacy from his Social Learning Theory that was popular at the time (1960s). This begins Bandura's (and others') interest in the role of cognition in the self-regulation of behavior.
	  o Bandura (1997) emphasizes the reciprocal influences that a person, their behavior, and the environment have on each other.
	  o Bandura (2001) synthesizes his body of research on Social Cognitive Theory and emphasizes the agentic nature of human behavior.
	  o Moritz, Feltz, Fahrbach, & Mack (2000) and (Wright, O'Halloran, & Stukas (2016) find contemporary support for the importance of self-efficacy in predicting performance and goal-directed behaviors.

Grit	• Grit
	  o Grit develops out of seminal literature that questions the nature of talent and intelligence (Cox, 1926; Galton, 1869/2006).
	  o Duckworth et al., (2007) find support across a variety of domains that grit explains achievement above and beyond personality, talent, or intelligence alone.
	  o Duckworth & Quinn (2009) validate a shorter instrument to measure grit and confirm the two-factor structure (grit comprised of passion and perseverance). They also discover that grit is enhanced with age and experience, suggesting that grit may be an individual difference that is malleable beyond maturation.
	  o Eskreis-Winkler, Gross, & Duckworth (2017) demonstrate the usefulness of grit in a variety of contexts and continue to refine the construct.
	  o A number of emergent studies test the usefulness of grit in a variety of contexts and test alternate models of grit (Aparicio et al., 2017; Gilson et al., 2017; Ion, Mindu, & Gorbanescu, 2017; Rimfeld, et al., 2016).

Goal-Setting Theory	• Goal-setting
	  o Goal-setting theory derives from Ryan's (1970) finding that conscious goals affect action.
	  o Locke & Latham (1989) discover that goal specificity increases the level of performance and later (2002) synthesize their work related to how higher level and more difficult goals produces higher levels of effort and achievement in individuals.

	- Duckworth (2016) includes hierarchical goal frameworks in her conceptualization of how grit is experienced. She finds that having a central, ultimate goal produces more grit. - Seligman (1990) pioneers knowledge around learned optimism. Dweck (2012, 2015) builds on this concept with growth mindset and how the belief that one can improve and learn affects optimism. - Senay et al. (2010) publish findings that motivational or instructional self-talk improves task performance. - Duckworth (2016) highlights the value of growth mindset, optimism, and self-talk to enhancing grit and its effects.

Figure 3. Summary of the relevant literature and key contributions to the study

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

Introduction

This chapter begins with an articulation of the purpose of the study and the research questions that guide its design. It then presents a detailed account of the pilot study and its impact on the main research design, followed by a presentation of the design of the main study. The participant recruiting process, data collection techniques, data analysis procedures are provided. Next comes an explanation of how issues associated with reliability and validity from a qualitative paradigm are presented, and finally, a discussion of the limitations associated with the study follows.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of grit by development officers in the higher education foundation context as these professionals develop and pursue their goals and process their obstacles and disappointments in the course of soliciting major gifts.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

(1) What is the essence of grit as experienced by development officers in higher education?

- (a) How do development officers in higher education describe their experiences of passion?

(b) How do development officers in higher education describe their experiences of perseverance?

(2) What role does self-talk play for development officers in higher education as they reflect on overcoming the challenges they face?

Summary of the Pilot Study and Influence on the Main Study Design

To test, refine, and validate the design of the main study (Creswell, 2013; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; van Teijlingen & Hundey, 2001), a pilot study was conducted during the Spring 2017 semester and was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of Texas at Tyler. The pilot study consisted of an embedded phenomenological single-case study consisting of interviews of five professional development officers who were employed at a foundation dedicated to an institution of higher education and were engaged in the work of soliciting major gifts from donors. The purpose of the pilot study was to determine the feasibility of the design, to determine the ability to recruit participants for the study, to assess the appropriateness of the research questions, interview protocols, and data collection and analysis procedures, and to fine-tune the skills and capabilities of the researcher as instrument in the study (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2014).

The pilot case setting was purposefully selected based on its ability to provide "information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest" (Patton, 1990, p. 171) and due to the convenience and access granted to the researcher during this stage of the study. The pilot research setting was a public Tier 1 research state university in the Southeastern United States. The foundation was institutionally-affiliated but operated privately and independently of the University. It also employed full-time major gift development officers who solicited donors for philanthropic donations to support the university.

Participants were individually recruited by email to produce maximum variation in terms of tenure, background, demographic characteristics, and job tenure so that a range of experiences could be collected within the case (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). A total of 10 individuals were invited to participate; five respondents agreed to participate while the other five did not respond to the invitation.

After confirming their willingness to participate, the researcher scheduled time to meet with each participant, in person, away from their office. Prior to the interview, the participants received a copy of the informed consent form via email. All interviews were conducted face-to-face and were voice recorded with the permission of the participants. Before commencing each interview, the researcher reviewed the details of the informed consent, received the participants' signatures on the form, and elicited a verbal agreement at the start of the interview. All audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and then returned to the participant to confirm their accuracy as a form of member-checking (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995). The transcripts were then evaluated using a thematic analysis process, which Boyatzis (1998) suggested may be the "of the most use in the early stages of the research inquiry process, such as the pilot stage" (p. 5). In addition to audio recording the interviews, the researcher also kept detailed field notes throughout the interviews to capture observations and personal thoughts, biases, and ideas during the data collection.

The data coding, interpretation, and analysis phase began after the first interview was complete by way of thematic analysis involving a line-by-line coding technique whereby the codes were organized into themes, and finally, categories for thematic comparison and analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Merriam, 2009; Van Maanen, 2011). Using this technique, the data inductively drove the development of the themes and thereby reduced the raw information (Boyatzis, 1998). During this stage of the analysis, Tesch's (1990) eight steps in the coding process (see Table 1) were used the develop *in vivo* codes (Creswell, 2014). *In vivo* codes utilize the actual words and language used by the participants to label the text (Creswell, 2014).

Table 1

Tesch's Eight Steps in the Coding Process

1. Get a sense of the whole. Read all the transcriptions carefully. Perhaps jot down some ideas as they come to mind as you read.
2. Pick one document (i.e., one interview) – the most interesting one, the shortest, the one of the top of the pile. Go through it, asking yourself, "What is this about?" Do not think about the substance of the information but its underlying meaning. Write thoughts in the margin.
3. When you have completed this task for several participants, make a list of all topics. Cluster together similar topics. Form these topics into columns, perhaps arrayed as major, unique, and leftover topics.
4. Now take this list and go back to your data. Abbreviate the topics as codes and write the codes next to the appropriate segments of the text. Try this preliminary organizing scheme to see if new categories or codes emerge.
5. Find the most descriptive wording for your topics and turn them into categories. Look for ways of reducing your total list of categories by grouping topics that relate to each other. Perhaps draw lines between your categories to show interrelationships.
6. Make a final decision on the abbreviation for each category and alphabetize these codes.
7. Assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis.
8. If necessary, recode your existing data.

Note. From Creswell, 2014, Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches (4th Ed.), p. 198. Copyright 2014 John W. Creswell. Reprinted with permission.

Simultaneously, the researcher engaged in techniques of bracketing, which attempted to capture and separate the personal opinions, biases, and judgements during the interpretation process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Given that the researcher was familiar with the organization and knew the participants, it was important to the integrity of the pilot study that bracketing occurred (Merriam, 2009), if only to make the influence of the researcher's experience more obvious. Bracketing is the "act of suspending one's various beliefs… in order to study the essential structures of the world" (Van Manen, 1994, p. 185). Merriam (2009) adds that, while it may be impossible to do completely, bracketing demands that the researcher, once aware of their biases and assumptions, "temporarily set [them] aside" (p. 25).

Further, the data analysis in the pilot study was also enhanced by an evaluation of the coding structure using QSR International's NVivo 12 Suite for Mac. This software was used to organize data into themes which kept the material organized and retrievable (Klopper, 2008). By conducting several coding and validation exercises, including receiving feedback and guidance from a research advisor, the accuracy of the information was protected and new themes that added meaning to the research questions were included.

The results of the study revealed that higher education DOs, in general, are goal-oriented and perseverant; in other words, they appear to be "gritty." They did, however, hold different perceptions of passion and perseverance; for example, some expressed being driven by role expectations and used data and metrics for goal-setting, while other perceptions revolved around participants' passion for the mission of the organization or for helping others. When it came to motivation, all development officers in the pilot study expressed a belief that their self-motivation was a natural, innate trait that had been instilled in them from their upbringing. Other motivational factors included the responsibility of the job of development officers — or the responsibility of representing the institution, personal career achievement goals, and visual cues like inspirational postings that helped them stay motivated. When describing their experiences of overcoming rejection, the denial was not perceived as personal; it was separate from the "self" and the mission. Finally, in terms of how the development officers described overcoming challenges, the most prevalent theme was that they viewed the act of soliciting major gifts as separate from "self," meaning that they did not internalize the rejection. While many development officers expressed feelings of disappointment, they also talked about maintaining an optimistic mindset and talking through discouraging occurrences with their supervisors and peers. Another common result was that all participants articulated gaining a sense of purpose from their work.

The activities and behaviors that participants described aligned with at least one of their explicit goals, whether it was performance-related or passion-driven. Despite this result, it was unclear whether the participants were cognitive and intentional about pursuit of a superordinate goal — or "ultimate concern" (Duckworth, 2016, p. 64). Two participants mentioned having an ultimate concern, though not job-related, while others did not express such. One possible explanation may be that grit is a general personality trait and not domain-specific to work.

The *a priori* codes developed through the pilot study served as a tool for analyzing open codes that emerged from the main study coding process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). While these *a priori* codes have been shown to be relevant and descriptive in the pilot study, the researcher must also take care not to force the data into predetermined categories based on what is expected (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Other influences of the pilot study included: revisions to the research questions and the interview protocol to enhance the focus of the study and subsequent data collection; confirmation of the ideal interview arrangements to include face-to-face meetings that last at least an hour; and greater emphasis placed on the analytical process and interpretative approach to the data analysis process of the main study.

These findings and the process of conducting the pilot study influenced the design of the main study in the following ways:

1. The research questions were revised to remove a question that sought to compare personal and professional goal-setting and goal-motivation experiences. The main study focused only on the professional goals of development officers and their experience of grit within the context of their work.
2. The interview protocol was revised to remove any mention of “grit” or asking about times when the participants experienced “resilience” since this line of questioning primed the participants to only share experiences where they overcame challenges. Instead, the main study asked for the personal stories of development officers soliciting major gifts, both when they were successful and when they were unsuccessful.
3. The codes and themes that emerged from the pilot study were retained as possible *a priori* codes (Appendix B). While new codes were generated by the main study, the strategic combination of the deductive codes from the pilot study findings and the inductive results of the main study enhanced the analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

4. The preference for interviews remained face-to-face, either in person or virtually and were scheduled for 60 to 90 minutes each.
5. Greater attention was spent on the interpretive capabilities of researcher and revealing the latent meaning of the codes and themes that the main study generates.

Design of the Main Study

To explore the unique context, the richness of the experiences, and the lived realities of development officers in higher education foundations, a qualitative phenomenological study was used (Stake, 1995; Van Manen, 1997). The main study drew upon the qualitative tradition of research, which "seeks to discover and to describe in narrative reporting what particular people do in their everyday lives and what their actions mean to them" (Erickson, 2011, p. 43). Not only did a qualitative approach uncover the experiential meaning of people's thoughts and behaviors, but it also treated the phenomena of interest with a holistic orientation that reveals the complexity and richness of life (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Within the qualitative methodology, the main study took on a phenomenological perspective, which is the study of lived experience (Husserl, 1970). When approaching a research question from a phenomenological orientation, "to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings" (Van Manen, 1997, p. 5). The main purpose of phenomenological research is to learn about a phenomenon through the lived experiences and the subjective meaning that people who have lived the phenomenon attribute to that experience (Lester, 1999).

For the main study, the primary research objective was to know more about the essence of grit. Data was collected from multiple development officers to learn more about the essence of grit and the type of self-talk that is used to motivate goal-directed behavior, within the context of higher education-related foundations and institutions. The end result of the collection, analysis, and synthesis of data in the course of this study resulted in "a rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study" (Merriam, 2009, p. 43) within a natural, typical environmental context.

Research Population

Despite the fact that the first charitable gift to higher education occurred during the colonial days, more than 90 percent of the nonprofit organizations in the U.S. have been established since the 1950s (Hall, 2010). In 2017, GuideStar, an organization that collects information about U.S. charities and nonprofit organizations, hosted a database of more than 5,000 college- and university-related NPOs (https://www.guidestar.org/nonprofit-directory/education-research/college-university/10.aspx) with detailed descriptions and profiles on each organization. Of those organizations, there were 81 public research-intensive state universities (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2015), all of which retain their own affiliated foundation or fundraising institution (Appendix D). Each public research university, on average, employed 49 development officers (CASE, 2017), meaning that thousands of development officers are working to supplement public education by raising private support for state universities.

The research population for the main study was development officers within foundations or institutions that were affiliated with a public, research-intensive, state university in the United States. Within this context, the phenomenon of interest was explored in a natural situation that is reasonably common among foundations and fundraising institutions.

Participant Selection Strategy and Criteria

By nature, a qualitative study is designed to utilize small samples of people, “nested in their context and studied in-depth” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 31). Sampling, in general, is the process of selecting sources of data from which information pertinent to the research objectives can be extracted (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015). Participants were selected using a purposeful approach, which was “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). Purposeful selection ensured the presence of information-rich cases by intentionally recruiting participants who could yield insight about the phenomenon (Patton, 1990). Within the research population, individual development officers were recruited to participate in the main study via email and a screening questionnaire validated that participants met the study criteria for inclusion. Criteria for inclusion in the study involved: (1) employment full-time as a major gift development officer by an institutionally-related higher education foundation or similar institution; and (2) experience in face-to-face solicitation of major gifts from private donors.

Since phenomenologists seek to understand the “common features of the lived experience” (Starks & Trinidad, 2007), the design of the study aimed to reveal the essence of grit from a broad range of data sources. From those whom were eligible to participate, a purposeful maximum variation selection strategy was used, so that essential characteristics and patterns of grit could be explored across dissimilar people's experiences (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Participants in this study were selected with an intention of maximum variation in terms of the characteristics and demographic qualities that informed the description of development officers' experiences of grit.

In qualitative research "there are no set rules" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 138) for determining the appropriate sample size. That being said, in order to demonstrate rigor in the study, data sets must support a complex conceptualization that "accurately account[s] for the phenomenon under investigation" (Anderson, 2017). For phenomenological studies, the typical size of sample ranged from one to 10 participants (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Likewise, Creswell (2014) suggested three to 10 participants for phenomenology. Morse (1994) recommended at least six participants.

More important than the number of participants, though, is an ability to justify that the sample size was sufficient (Anderson, 2017). That justification should show that participants were recruited until the point of data saturation or "completeness" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2014) was achieved in the data. While data saturation is a term fraught with loose usage and inconsistencies (Nelson, 2016), saturation is "taken to have occurred when further data gathering and analysis will add very little to the conceptualization" (Anderson, 2017, p. 128) or similar observations reoccur (Strauss & Corbin, 2015). Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) found that, when using interviews to collect data, data saturation occurred at approximately 12 interviews. Given these guidelines established in prior research and the purpose of the study, a minimum of 10 participants were targeted for recruitment from different foundations or institutions who provided "reasonable coverage of the phenomenon" (Patton, 2002, p. 246).

Before any data was collected or contact with potential participants was established, approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Texas at Tyler was obtained to ensure the safe, ethical, and secure conduct of the study. IRB approval was granted (see Appendix C) and the recruitment of participants began.

To begin recruiting participants, the researcher compiled a list of email addresses of major gift development officers from foundations' and fundraising institutions' websites for 81 public, research-intensive state institutions in the United States. An email that invited development officers to answer a short screening questionnaire (see Appendix F) was sent to the list of email addresses. The screening questionnaire determined eligibility to participate in the study and gathered information on demographic and background characteristics of individuals to enable selection with maximum variation (see Appendix G). Once eligibility had been determined and the participants willingness to engage in an interview was indicated, an invitation to schedule a face-to-face interview via video-conferencing was sent by email (see Appendix H). This interview invitation also included a written informed consent attachment (see Appendix E) that outlined what involvement entailed and emphasized that participant in the interview was voluntary and that participation could be terminated at any point.

Once participants agreed to be interviewed and scheduled a time with the researcher, the signed written consent form was procured from each participant to document their understanding and willingness to participate in the study. Verbal consent immediately prior to commencing the interview was also obtained. The semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with selected participants and involved a series of questions that explored explanations for pursuing development work; thoughts, feelings, and reactions to performing solicitations, and motivations and self-talk involved in overcoming challenges, rejection, or disappointments. Additional clarifying questions or probing questions were employed as necessary.

Approach to Data Collection

A special feature of qualitative research is that its outcomes are richly descriptive, holistic, and rooted within the phenomenon's unique context. Such an inquiry benefits from the use of multiple credible data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The primary method of data collection for the study was through semi-structured interviews, with supporting data from participant observations (Merriam, 2009).

Semi-Structured Interviews

Since the phenomenon of interest, grit, cannot be easily observed, the principle method of data collection took place through semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002). Interviewing in qualitative inquiry often utilizes a semi-structured format and, in phenomenology, is focused on the life story of the participants (Starks & Trinidad, 2007), allowing the participants to "define the world in unique ways" (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). The interview was guided by a mix of more and less structured questions, and was flexible depending on the responses received from the participant and the need for probing for additional details (Cohen, 2013; Stake; 2010; Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

Development of the interview protocol. The interview protocol was developed to address the research questions and included interview questions that revealed participants' experiences and behaviors, opinions and values, feelings, knowledge, sensory perceptions, and background questions that reveal demographic characteristics (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In a semi-structured approach, a short set of pre-determined interview questions were developed that were designed to reveal information related to the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

For the study, an interview protocol guided the semi-structured interviews (see Appendix I). The interview protocol consisted of the following pre-determined questions:

Personal Questions – Background Questions

1. Which generational cohort (Baby Boomer, Gen X, Millennial, other) do you identify with?
2. What is your relationship status?
3. Do you have children?
4. How did you become a major gift development officer?
5. Why here [at research setting organization]?
6. How long have you been at this organization?
7. What did you do for work before development/fundraising?
8. Tell me about where you attended university.
9. What is your highest level of education achieved?

Interview Questions related to Grit

10. Tell me about a recent major gift solicitation.
    a. If successful, ask for a subsequent story of an unsuccessful solicitation.
    b. If unsuccessful, ask for a subsequent story of a successful solicitation.

11. What did you do?
12. How did you feel?
13. How did you know how to respond?
14. What was it like to experience that result?
15. Why do you continue to do major gift fundraising?
16. Where does your motivation to do it come from?
17. What motivates you?
18. How do you motivate yourself?
19. When you have been disappointed, how do you re-motivate yourself?
20. How do you decide what is most important to you in your work?
21. When you look back on your career, what will make you feel successful?
22. How has your motivation impacted your ability to be successful?

Interview Questions related to Self-Talk when Overcoming Challenges

23. Tell me about the biggest disappointment in soliciting a major gift you have experienced.
24. What did you do?
25. How did you feel?
26. What were you saying to yourself during?
27. What were you saying to yourself afterward?
28. What would you say differently to yourself now about it?
29. What would you do differently now?
30. What would you say to a new development officer going through a challenging experience?

In addition to these pre-determined questions, probing questions were utilized to gather additional details, to clarify responses, and to explain meaning (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Merriam, 2009).

Conducting the interviews. Once individuals were recruited to participate in the study, face-to-face interviews via a video-conferencing platform were scheduled one at a time, preferably at the work space of the development officer. This arrangement provided an opportunity for the researcher to observe the space and surroundings where the participant did some of their work, noting any elements that seemed relevant to the study. If reasonable privacy was not possible at the participant's work space or the participant was traveling, a neutral, quiet alternative was suggested. Interviews were scheduled for 60 minutes each. Once the participant logged in to the video-conferencing platform for the interview, the purpose of the interview was articulated, and the informed consent details were confirmed with the participant (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The researcher reviewed the measures taken to protect the participant's confidentiality and requested permission to audio record the interview.

The interviews were audio recorded, which ensured data accuracy and allowed the researcher to evaluate the interviewing skills and effectiveness (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). The researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim immediately following the conduct of the interviews; this approach allowed the researcher to capture reflections from the interview while the conversation was still recent (Merriam, 2009) and also adhere to the iterative and recursive nature of qualitative research (Anderson, 2017; Merriam, 2009).

Observations and Field Notes

For the main study, interviews typically took place in the real-life work setting of the participants, thus "creating the opportunity for direct observations" (Yin, 2014, p.113). When conducted systematically, observations can reveal initial impressions about a phenomenon of interest, develop new dimensions of understanding the phenomenon, and convey important nuances and details about the physical setting and context of the study, as well as indications of patterns of behavior, relationships, and interactions that recur (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). Observational data also enabled data triangulation in the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). While conducting observations, the researcher maintained field notes, which had two different purposes: the first was to capture, in a highly descriptive way, the setting and observed activities and behaviors, and the second was to provide a reflective component to the research so that the observer commentary could be captured and separated from the observation (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). In this way, observational data provided a method for collecting nonverbal data, such as symbolic and connotative meaning, facial expressions and body language, and informal and unplanned interactions (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002).

The data through observation was documented in the form of field notes. The first job of the researcher was to see and hear what was happening in the research context, then to make sense of it (Stake, 2010). For this reason, some descriptive field notes were planned to be taken in real-time as the interviews are underway; other more detailed and inferential notes from direct participant observation and reflective practice were documented immediately following the interviews (Merriam, 2009; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Field notes were collected according to the observational protocol (Appendix J) suggested by Creswell (2014) such that phenomenological vignettes could be later constructed from the interview data and observational field notes collected (Terrell, 2016).

Following the transcription of an interview, additional observational data from the field notes were combined with the transcript to create an initial interpretation of the data. Transcripts were provided back to the participants to validate the accuracy and completeness of their responses. All data collected in the course of the study was secured on a password protected computer and an encrypted hard drive to protect the security and integrity of the information.

Data Analysis

In qualitative analysis, "research involves both analysis (the taking things apart) and synthesis (the putting things together)" (Stake, 2010). Data analysis and collection overlap temporally (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 2009; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014), and the analysis "consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining evidence to produce empirically based findings" (Yin, 2014, p. 132). Further, the analysis of data in a qualitative study is inductive, comparative, and iterative with the end result of making meaning from the data (Merriam, 2009). The data analysis provides understanding, set in the context of the phenomenon, that is particular, descriptive, and rooted in the background of the case that so that pattern-matching and summarization can occur (Terrell, 2016).

An initial consideration in data analysis was the management and organization of the volume of information that was produced from qualitative research and deriving meaning from what the data reveal (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). To assist in the organization, management, and retrieval of data for the main study, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) - QSR International's NVivo 12 Suite for Mac – was utilized. This software has been previously used as a tool for managing and analyzing large sets of data within research (Ellinger & McWhorter, 2016). While NVivo promotes the analytical functionality of its program, Yin (2014) cautioned that "the software will not do the finished analysis on its own" (p. 134). Instead, the research will serve as the key instrument in analyzing the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and leveraged NVivo to manage, organize, and display data material into the codes and themes that were assigned by the researcher (Klopper, 2008). This method preserved the value that comes from "the researcher's emerging map of what is happening and why" (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Thematic Analysis

The approach to analyzing the data was thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns in data" (Clarke & Braun, 2006, p. 79) that provides the flexibility and utility in bridging differing perspectives, research orientations, and approaches (Boyatzis, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Miller & Crabtree, 1992). This method, while among the most popular in qualitative inquiry (Anderson, 2017; Ellinger & McWhorter, 2016; Merriam, 2009), is also among the vaguer approaches due to the lack of defined process or practice (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Echoing the above critique, Boyatzis (1998) observed that "thematic analysis is a process that many have used in the past without articulating the specific techniques" (p. vi).

To avoid this problem and to ensure the treatment of rigor and robustness during the analysis, the six-stage thematic analysis process proposed by Clarke and Braun (2006) guided the analysis of the main study (see Table 2). Clarke and Braun's process allowed for the integrated analysis of meanings and contexts (Loffe & Yardley, 2004).

Table 2

Thematic Analysis Process

Phase	Description of the Process
1. Familiarizing yourself with the data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the code extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating the analysis back to the research questions and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Note. From Clarke & Braun, 2006, Using thematic analysis in psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology 3*(2), p. 98. Copyright 2016 V. Clark and V. Braun. Reprinted with permission.

The process of thematic analysis is flexible enough to allow an inductive or a deductive approach (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013) to data analysis. Inductive techniques allow codes and themes to emerge from the data itself which then help to create generalizations (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). While Merriam (2009) characterizes qualitative research as an inductive process, "research is very rarely entirely inductive" (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 573) since the review of literature and the conduct of pilot studies inform the researcher's analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2006). A deductive approach involves evaluating the data for the presence of codes and themes that may come from prior literature, prior research, or the researcher's experience (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shulman, 2004). These deductive codes may also be called *a priori* codes and provide a provisional starting place for collecting and analyzing data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This approach is in line with established methods since, as Ravitch and Carl (2016) proposed, "inductive and deductive codes are not mutually exclusive, and in many studies, the strategic combination happens through multiple readings for each kind of coding" (p. 249). Due to the influence of the pilot study findings and the conceptual framework derived from the literature, the analysis of the main investigation utilized both inductive and deductive thematic analysis.

Another consideration when conducting thematic analysis is the level to which the researcher focuses on the analysis, whether semantic (manifest) or latent levels (Boyatzis, 1998; Clarke & Braun, 2006). In the semantic level approach, the data is coded based on the surface meaning and is not evaluated for interpretive meaning (Boyatzis, 1998). On the other hand, latent coding moves beyond only describing the data and produces an interpretation of meaning and a discussion regarding the implications of the patterns (Patton, 1990; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In thematic analysis, the researcher is encouraged to consider both manifest and latent content in the data (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). By following this approach, the researcher considered both levels of meaning in the analysis.

Coding Process

The coding process in thematic analysis involves assigning codes, or a short word or phrase that represents a "summative, salient, essence-capturing and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language" (Saldaña, 2016) to sections of data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To initiate the coding process, the researcher became familiarized with the data. This first occurred during the transcription of the interviews and continued with a thorough reading of each transcript to get a sense of the breadth and depth of the data (Clarke & Braun, 2006; Riessman, 1993). During this phase, initial thoughts and interpretation were captured by research memos (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Strauss; 1987).

In the next phase, initial codes were generated by open coding as the first cycle of coding. The transcripts were open coded line-by-line, one at a time, and systematically across all interviews. Then, an analysis of the initial codes that were inductively generated — emergent — codes were analyzed with those that were deductively-inspired — *a priori* (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Codes should address "the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 63).

As the participants' interviews were coded, the researcher began clustering the data into potential themes (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Merriam, 2009; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Themes are outcomes, not coded data itself. Stated another way, themes are the result of "coding, categorization, and analytic reflection" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 198). This comprises the third stage of thematic analysis, searching for themes, and involves the second cycle of coding that begins to summarize open codes into patterns (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Saldaña, 2016). The thematic clustering of codes is also referred to as axial coding (Merriam, 2009; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 2015) and helps establish preliminary themes, configurations, or interpretations of the data. Caution should be exercised against committing to naming a pattern too strongly or too quickly (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014), and the researcher should expect to go through several revisions and refinements of coding (Merriam, 2009).

As data underwent a first and second cycle of coding, the next step was to review each theme, looking for congruence and incongruence between the coded extracts and the entire data set (Clarke & Braun, 2006; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Saldaña, 2016). At this stage in the analysis, the tentative axial codes, or themes, were arranged into categories that were "responsive to the purpose of the research… exhaustive… mutually exclusive… sensitizing… and conceptually congruent" (Merriam, 2009; p. 185-186). Patton (1990) suggested other criteria for judging the appropriateness of categories: internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. The review of the themes included two different levels of analysis suggested by Clarke & Braun (2006), the first of which ensured that the coded data fits the categorical construction of themes and the second of which confirmed that the thematic structure reflects the entire data accurately.

The penultimate stage in thematic analysis involved defining and naming the themes such that the essence of each theme was preserved and meanings were determined (Clarke & Braun, 2006). Further, a theme is "an *extended phrase* or *sentence* that identifies what a unit of data is *about* and/or what it *means*" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 199) and "brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its variant manifestations" (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000, p. 362). Interpreting manifest data and "winnowing down" the latent themes to only what is essential to the experience meant that the themes served the phenomenological inquiry into "the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (van Manen, 1997, p. 9). For each theme identified in the main study, the researcher conducted a detailed analysis of the "story that each theme tells" so that a structure and hierarchy of meaning was demonstrated for each theme (Clarke & Braun, 2006).

Finally, the thematic analysis process ended with producing the report and was the final opportunity to conduct data analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2006). Vaismoradi et al. (2013) encouraged researchers to incorporate creativity into the presentation of results by crafting a storyline of the data or visualizing data as a map or model. Throughout the coding process of thematic analysis, the raw data was reduced and subsequently needed to be shaped into a form that could be shared or displayed (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). With the goal of providing rich "thick description" (Denzin, 2001), the researcher produced a thematic map of the results that presented the themes, codes, and their relationships (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). The final report should be as objective and as free from the researcher's projection, emotion, and mood as possible (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Boyatzis, 1998).

The results of the study will be presented in Chapter Four of the dissertation report. Chapter Five will present a discussion of the findings and the implications for practice, theory, and future research. The phenomenological study findings provided "rich and revealing insights into the social world" (Yin, 2012, p. 49) of participants and their work contexts. The researcher presented results with examples including: textual vignettes that serve as a “concrete focused story” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) to relay important findings, and visual displays of condensed data, like matrices and networks, that allow readers to form their own conclusions about the analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Research

To be of any value to practice or theory, the results of the study “must be rigorously conducted” (Merriam, 2009, p. 210). Within the qualitative tradition, validity and reliability are established differently than in experimental or quantitative research; in this case, rigor and trustworthiness are established by “careful design of the study, applying standards well developed and accepted by the scientific community” (Merriam, 2009, p. 210). Validity in qualitative inquiry concerns itself with whether the findings are accurate, and reliability questions whether the research approach is consistent across the study (Creswell, 2014). Despite Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) recommendation that researchers call concepts related to the trustworthiness of the study different names, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) later questioned whether doing so creates legitimation issues and confusion. In keeping with the terminology most prevalent in the research community, this study addressed validity and reliability in the qualitative sense to provide support for the trustworthiness of the investigation.

In terms of validity, Merriam (2009) argued that “internal validity deals with the question of how research findings match reality” (p. 213). Similarly, Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) described validity as the affirmation that “findings are faithful to participants’ experiences” (p. 186). Common techniques for demonstrating validity in qualitative research include: data triangulation, participant validation, also referred to as "member checks," strategic sequencing of methods, thick description, peer debriefing, multiple coding, and structured reflexivity processes (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Bryman & Bell, 2011; Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009).

Multiple approaches to safeguard the reliability and validity of the study in accordance with the qualitative tradition should be combined (Creswell, 2014). For this study, the researcher engaged in data triangulation by collecting data primarily through interviews, supplemented by participant observation. Member checking improved validity at two points in the study: at the time of data collection to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the raw data, and again at the time of thematic analysis as themes emerge from the data to corroborate that the interpretations are appropriate (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Merriam, 2009). Interview transcripts were provided back to participants to ensure their accuracy, and vignettes about the participants containing thematic elements were provided for their review and clarification of researcher interpretations (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

While external validity — or generalizability — is not typically an expected result of qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2011), there is value in qualitative researchers establishing avenues for readers to assess the transferability of a study's findings to other contexts. Rich, thick detailed description allow for applicable "extrapolations" of the possible situations to which readers can apply the results (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Merriam, 2009). To this end, the researcher provided highly descriptive detail of the research population, participants, and the phenomenon to permit readers to evaluate the transferability of the findings to other contexts. This treatment of validity has been supported by prior research (Geertz, 1973; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Another technique for reinforcing validity of the study comes through peer examination of the data (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Throughout the data collection and analysis, the researcher engaged in debriefing with the research experts and peers.

Another important criterion for evaluating the reliability of research is the "extent to which research findings can be replicated" (Merriam, 2009, p. 220). A consideration in qualitative research, however, is that the experiences and unique contexts of the case and study cannot be frozen in time or isolated (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Merriam, 2009). For this reason, the more important threshold of reliability is whether the findings and conclusions of the study are consistent with the data collected (Merriam, 2009). Nevertheless, Yin (2014) suggested that researchers document their processes in conducting research in detail. Techniques for establishing the consistency of the findings from the data collected include: keeping a codebook with code definitions and meanings so that there is a not a drift in coding, incorporating interrater reliability or cross-checking the coding process with peers, data triangulation, peer examination, and maintaining an audit trail (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009).

To reinforce the reliability of the study, the researcher kept a codebook in NVivo to monitor the development and refinement of codes (Saldaña, 2016). This codebook was subjected to peer evaluation by the dissertation committee. Further, a detailed audit trail, or research log, was maintained throughout the data collection and analysis of the main study such that the researcher provides enough detail "to explain how we arrived at our results" (Dey, 1999, p. 251). All correspondence with the gatekeepers of the research settings and the study participants were maintained, including all data collected in the course of the investigation. Further, all correspondence with the dissertation committee related to the proposed study was also retained.

The Researcher Role

Often in a qualitative study, the researcher serves as the primary instrument for the collection and analysis of data (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). For this reason, it is paramount to the trustworthiness of the study that I examine my own experiences, familiarity, bias, and assumptions, and make them evident to the audience of this report. My background includes being employed as a development officer in an institutionally-related foundation in higher education for seven years. While I am no longer employed in the profession, during my time as a development officer, I experienced soliciting donors for major gifts and overcoming rejection and challenges inherent to that role. I observed, first-hand, the demands placed on development officers; the sensitivities of navigating between donors, alumni, faculty, and foundation and university administrators; and the opportunities to provide improved organizational support for individuals engaged in the work of raising private funds to advance higher education.

My understanding of the role of development officers and the context of working within a research-intensive university foundation is both a help and a hindrance to this study. On one hand, I have an expertise in the kind of work that the study participants perform and the types of institutionally-related organizations they operate within. I have also lived experiences associated with the phenomenon of interest, grit. This knowledge aided me in collecting and analyzing relevant information for this study.

Alternatively, my experiences, potential bias, and assumptions may disrupt my ability to serve as an instrument in the study. Instead of capturing and analyzing the participants' lived experiences, there is a risk that I neglected or misunderstood their unique perspectives and meanings. To minimize the negative risks of my familiarity, I used a combination of participant member checks, peer and expert evaluation, a research audit trail, and bracketing to reinforce the trustworthiness of the study. For this study, I practiced bracketing my own experiences, knowledge, and prejudices toward the phenomenon of interest, the prior research on the topic, and the lived realities of the participants. These steps minimized my personal influence on shaping interpretations of and assigning meanings to the data (Creswell, 2014). Ultimately, my intent was to uphold the standard expressed by Stake (1995) that "we have ethical obligations to minimize misrepresentation and misunderstanding" (p. 109).

Limitations

No matter how carefully designed, limitations will always constrain the usefulness of the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Merriam, 2009; Terrell, 2016). In this study design, a number of limitations were acknowledged. First, the study relied on participant interviews as the primary source of data. This approach assumed that participants were able to accurately recall their thoughts, feelings, and experiences when performing major gift solicitations and that the meanings they expressed in the interviews could be accurately collected and analyzed by the researcher. For one, the risk of error with retrospection has been recognized in the literature as an issue with interview data (Golden, 1997; Sun, 2011). Further, as Wang and Roulston (2007) showed, "interviews are accounts, morally laden portrayals, and socially situated occasions" (p. 199). Thus, the proposed collection of data through interview presented a limitation to the study's eventual findings.

Second, the inclusion of observational data presented a limitation since data collected through observation was subject to the researcher's interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The accuracy and objectivity of observational data is invariably distorted by the researcher (Merriam, 2009), and thus, such observations may not provide a reliable source of data. While techniques were proposed to mitigate the influence of the researcher on the data collected, nevertheless, the limitation remained.

A third limitation to the study was related to the researcher's role and background. Given the researcher's past experience as a major gift development officer and continued interest in the professionalization of the nonprofit sector, the potential for bias, projection, and prejudice persisted as a recognized constraint. The potential for bias may have impacted aspects of the study during data collection, especially observation, and data analysis, particularly when it came to interpreting meaning. A combination of reflexivity and articulation of the role of researcher, as well as member checking and peer examinations were conducted to ensure the credibility of the study (Patton, 2002).

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented an introduction and the purpose of the study, along with the guiding research questions. An overview of the pilot study and its influence on the design of the main study was described. The rationale for the phenomenological methodological approach and research design of the main study was presented, along with a description of the proposed research population and participant selection strategy and criteria. Next, a discussion of the approaches to data collection, techniques for data collection, and approaches to data analysis followed. Issues of validity and reliability from a qualitative perspective were acknowledged. The role of the researcher as a former professional development officer in an institutionally-related foundation in higher education was described and the potential influence of this role was expressed. Finally, a discussion of the limitations of the design of the study followed. The chapter concluded with a summarization.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings that resulted from the data collected and analyzed for this study. To begin, a review of the purpose of the study and the guiding research questions add clarity and a basis for understanding the findings. Second, an overview of the research participants and their demographic characteristics is provided. Next, initial codes that addressed the research questions are described in detail and the process by which those codes were collated into themes is explained. Finally, relevant themes that were defined and named are presented, with substantive support from the coded data. This chapter concludes with a summary of Chapter 4.

Purpose of the Study

The overall purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of grit by development officers in the higher education foundation context as these professionals established and pursued their goals and processed their obstacles and disappointments in the course of soliciting major gifts.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

(1) What is the essence of grit as experienced by development officers in higher education?

   (a) How do development officers in higher education describe their experiences of passion?

(b) How do development officers in higher education describe their experiences of perseverance?

(2) What role does self-talk play for development officers in higher education as they reflect on overcoming the challenges they face?

Research Participants

The participants were purposefully selected using a maximum variation strategy from a pool of 46 eligible candidates that were recruited for the study in order to provide a wide range of experiences and perspectives as it related to the phenomenon of grit and the role of self-talk. From that pool, 18 participants agreed to participate in interviews. Of the 18 development officers, 10 were female (56%) and eight (44%) were male. Each of the participants were employed full-time in major gift development work within an eligible institution of higher education. Of these professionals, 14 were employed by a foundation (78%) and four were employed by the university directly (22%). One participant identified their age in the 18-25 range (5%), seven were 26-35 years of age (39%), three were 36-45 (17%), five were 46-55 years of age (28%), and two were 56-65 (11%). All participants had obtained at least a bachelor's degree, while 10 of the participants had achieved a master's degree (56%), and one had acquired a doctorate (5%). Further, 10 of the participants were alumni (56%) of the institution where they now raised philanthropic gifts and eight were not (44%). The majority of the participants identified as white/Caucasian (90%), while one participant (5%) identified as black/African-American and one participant (5%) identified as Asian/Pacific-Islander. Geographically, six participants (32%) were located in the Southeast region. Three participants (17%) represented each of the Pacific, Northeast, Southwest, and Central regions (see Figure 4). Hour-long semi-structured interviews with participants were conducted individually over a video-conferencing platform. Each participant provided a signed IRB-approved consent form (see Appendix E) prior to the interview. Furthermore, each participant was provided a verbatim transcript of the interview to ensure accuracy and clarity in the data collection process.

Figure 4. Geographic Location of Participants N=18

A brief description of the participants is presented in Table 3. All participants were given a pseudonym to protect their identities.

Table 3

Description of Research Participants

Name	Employed at Foundation?	Years of Experience	Profile
Keith	Yes	5	Male, age 18-25, single. Currently in his second development position with past professional roles in marketing. Estimated he has completed 500 face-to-face solicitations. Currently raising money in a nursing college at a university in the Southwest region. Former collegiate athlete, though not at the university for which he now works.
Gina	Yes	7	Female, age 46-55, divorced. Currently in the same development role in which she started; formerly a journalist and external relations professional. Got into development when she was laid off from another university position. Raising money for a public policy school at a university in the Pacific region. Preparing to take a promotional development position outside the United States. Estimated she has conducted 200 solicitations.
Susan	Yes	5	Female, age 26-35, married. Has always worked in some development capacity; currently with a college of engineering at a university in the Southeast region. Not an alumna of her employer university and she mentioned some cultural awareness challenges with that. Estimated she has conducted 100 face-to-face solicitations.
Brenda	Yes	23	Female, age 56-65, married. Became interested in development work when she was doing freelance grant-writing while raising her children. Before that, she was a dental hygienist, a journalist, and worked in marketing and public relations. Currently with a school of medicine in the Southeast region asking for gifts from grateful patients. Estimated she has conducted 550 solicitations.

(Continued on next page)

Table 3 *(continued)*

James	Yes	5	Male, age 26-35, married. Worked in the athletics department of the university and pursued an internship in development. He liked the flexibility and growth potential in the field and sought full-time employment after the internship. He is an alumna of the university where he now works in a college of liberal arts & sciences in the Central region. Estimated he has conducted 100 face-to-face solicitations.
Virginia	Yes	3	Female, age 26-35, married. She was always interested in voluntarism and started in development with an internship. She is an alumna of the university where she works in a college of art in the Southeast region, however, she did not credit that fact with being important in her decision to do so. She described philanthropy as a passion and estimated she has conducted 75 major gift solicitations.
Tiffany	Yes	7	Female, age 46-55, single. She called development a second chapter of her professional life after a career in sales and sales leadership. She started her development career at her alma mater and has since moved to another university because of a promotion. She currently raises funds for a health science center affiliated with a university in the Southeast region. Estimated she has conducted 150 solicitations.
Brian	Yes	5	Male, age 26-35, single. Worked outside of development previously and came to be interested in fundraising through a personal connection. Currently doing development for historic preservation at his alma mater, located in the Northeast region. Interested in leaving development in the future for entrepreneurial pursuits. Estimated he has conducted 95 face-to-face solicitations.

(Continued on next page)

Table 3 *(continued)*

David	Yes	17	Male, age 36-45, partnered. Started his career in development with an annual giving program at his alma mater. Pursued his current position because of the opportunity to expand his skills and fundraise in a new cultural context. Currently raising funds for a social sciences college at a university in the Pacific region. Estimated he has conducted 400 solicitations.
Harry	Yes	5	Male, age 36-45, married. Working in the annual giving department of his alma mater during his graduate degree introduced him to the development career. He now works in a school of public health at a university in the Northeast region after his wife's career brought them to the area. He mentioned being a recipient of philanthropic support himself and a desire to move into higher education administration in his future. Estimated he has conducted 200 face-to-face solicitations.
Katie	Yes	20	Female, age 46-55, married. Worked in the arts and arts administration before development. She now does gift planning (estate giving) at her graduate alma mater in the Central region. She credited her musical performance background with preparing her for the rejection of development work. Estimated she has conducted 500 solicitations.
Jennifer	No	6	Female, age 36-45, married. Became interested in development work through an internship in her graduate program. She currently works in regional development at her husband's alma mater, a university in the Central region. She works remotely and mentioned the flexibility as a key feature in her ability to continue the work. Estimated she has conducted 1000 major gift solicitations.

(Continued on next page)

Table 3 *(continued)*

Blair	Yes	15	Female, age 46-55, single. Previously worked as a journalist and in nonprofit public relations and marketing. Has held a few development positions; currently raising principal gifts for a university in the Southwest region. Emphasized the importance of loving the work in her success. Estimated she has conducted 100 face-to-face solicitations.
Michael	Yes	5	Male, age 26-35, married. Started his career in community business development and became involved in a capital project at his alma mater. He is now employed there full-time in a college of engineering in the Southeast region. Discussed the economic importance of higher education for national, state, and local economies. Estimated he has conducted 150 major gift solicitations.
Rachel	Yes	10	Female, age 26-35, married. Been in development her entire career; started with an internship in graduate school. She currently works in a college of engineering at her alma mater in the Southeast region, where she was also a collegiate athlete. Realized she was good at philanthropic work in her undergraduate experience and pursued development specifically. Estimated she has conducted 100 face-to-face solicitations.
Meaghan	No	22	Female, age 46-55, divorced. Was an interior designer who worked on a university administrator's house. He introduced her to development. She started at the college she graduated from at her alma mater, and later transitioned to a college of business where she felt there were more fundraising opportunities. Estimated she has conducted 400 solicitations.

(Continued on next page)

Table 3 *(continued)*

Ian	No	15	Male, age 56-65, married. Started his career as a city administrator, doing business development. Left his alma mater after 15 years to finish his career as a chief development officer at a college of nursing in the Pacific region. Estimated he has conducted 150 major gift solicitations.
Kevin	No	5	Male, age 26-35, single. Applied to development position at his alma mater university after he was not hired for a student affairs position. Currently raises funds for corporate and foundation giving in the Southwest region. Mentioned a passion for higher education and the social equality that it fosters. Estimated he has conducted 600 solicitations.

Research Findings

In order to gain perspective into the lived experiences of the 18 participant professional development officers in higher education, semi-structured interviews were conducted utilizing an interview protocol to guide the interview (see Appendix I). Furthermore, observational data via video conferencing was collected using an observation protocol (see Appendix J) and the researcher's field notes. The interview questions were developed to address the two main research questions: the essence of grit as experienced by development officers in higher education, and the role of self-talk in overcoming challenges and setbacks. After obtaining written and verbal consent from each participant, the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. All transcriptions were shown to the participants to confirm their accuracy and completeness. QSR International's NVivo 12 Suite for Mac was used to manage the data and the analysis process, which included performing manual open coding, identifying patterns and relevant segments of raw data that comprised subthemes, and organizing those subthemes into overarching themes that responded to the guiding research questions.

A defined process of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) was employed. After transcribing and familiarizing the data, a process of manual open coding the data ensued, generating 76 unique initial codes. These initial codes highlighted an interesting or seemingly relevant feature or segment of data from the raw information provided in the interviews, observational data, and researcher's field notes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The raw data comprising the initial codes are coded extracts, and representative coded extracts are provided in the particular words of the participants in support of the analysis.

Through an iterative and recursive process that included data reduction, the codes were analyzed for themes, patterns and "keyness" (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to the phenomenon of interest. Similar codes were grouped together to explore whether they formed overarching themes or subthemes, and those themes and subthemes were reviewed and refined to address the particular research questions of the study. Next, a map of themes and subthemes was evaluated to define and name the relevant patterns, their relationships, and how they "told the story" (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the data.

Using this process of thematic analysis, 11 major themes emerged. Five of the themes address Research Question (1a): How do development officers in higher education describe their experiences of passion? Four of the themes respond to Research Question (1b): How do development officers in higher education describe their experiences of perseverance? The final two themes relate to Research Question (2): What role does self-talk play for development officers in higher education as they reflect on overcoming the challenges they face? An overview of the themes, the initial codes, and the frequency of coded extracts comprising each theme are reported in the Table 4.

Table 4

Overview of Themes, Initial Codes, and Frequency of Coded Extracts

Research Question	Theme	Initial Codes	No. of Coded Extracts
1(a) Experiences of Passion	Motivational Aspects of Development Work	15	200
	Personal Characteristics Involved in Development Work	11	103
	Values Emphasized in Development Work	6	138
	Importance of Development Work	5	105
	Path to Development	2	24
	Subtotal	39	570
1(b) Experiences of Perseverance	Coping Strategies	13	123
	Challenging Situations	5	86
	Nature of Fundraising	3	66
	Persistence/Determination	6	60
	Subtotal	27	335
(2) Role of Self-Talk	Optimistic Self-Talk	7	102
	Pessimistic Self-Talk	3	45
	Subtotal	10	147
	Total	76	1052

Themes about Experiences of Passion

Participant development officers in higher education were asked about their inspirations for pursuing work in the development field and their motivations for doing such work, especially in the face of the challenges involved in the role. The researcher never used the word “passion” in the interview questions because of the common misinterpretation of its meaning. In the grit literature, “passion” refers to the long-term and consistent focus on a goal, not an intensity of feeling or interest. Instead, the interview questions were designed to elicit insight into the motivation and goal hierarchies of professional development officers.

After an iterative and recursive process of manual open coding and further analysis looking for patterns among the initial codes, five themes emerged that revealed the experiences of passion among development officers. These themes were: (a) paths to development, (b) values emphasized in development work, (c) motivational aspects of development work, (d) personal characteristics involved in development work, and (e) importance of development work. Each theme was further described by subthemes that captured the nuances of experiences of development officers. A summary of the themes and subthemes for Research Question (1a) is reported in Table 5 along with the number of coded extracts that reflect particular subthemes and the representation of each subtheme within the sample.

Table 5

Themes and Subthemes for RQ (1a) with Frequencies and Sample Representation

Theme	Subtheme	No. of Coded Extracts	*N*
Path to Development	Accidental	13	9
	Intentional	11	9
Values Emphasized in Development Work	Relationship with donors	63	17
	Being manager/leader/on team	30	13
	Relationship with Dean/faculty	25	11
	Creativity/flexibility	11	7
Motivational Aspects of Development Work	Achieving career advancement	43	16
	Meeting goals and metrics	49	15
	Personal satisfaction/happiness	31	15
	Compensation and benefits	18	10
	Fulfilling duty	16	11
	Helping others, altruism	15	11
	Competition with self/others	11	9
	Driven by mission	9	5
	Inherent motivation/habit	8	4
Personal Characteristics Involved in Development Work	Innate personality traits	24	13
	Work ethic	23	12
	Loyalty to alma mater	14	9
	Ethical/doing the right thing	11	5
	Gratitude	10	6
	Empathy	9	5
	More diversity needed	7	3
	Personal beneficiary	5	4
Importance of Development Work	Making a difference	50	16
	Opportunities via education	28	12
	Passionate about philanthropy	19	7
	Leaving a legacy	8	6

Path to Development

When discussing the inspiration or generating circumstances that led to their pursuing careers in higher education development, half of the participant sample described intentionally seeking out employment in the field while the other half recalled accidentally finding themselves in the role. Of those who reported intentionally pursuing development, each had exposure to the field through either an internship or previous employment as a student worker in an annual fund capacity. A selection supportive data in the words of the participants is presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Responses for RQ (1a) Theme: Path to Development

Research Question (1a), Theme One: Path to Development
Accidental
• *I loved it and really had a passion for the work and feel lucky that I accidentally stumbled upon the work.* (Participant: Blair) • *I didn't come into this with the initial desire to do it. It was not my initial intent or priority.* (Participant: Michael) • *I think a lot of people probably say this, but I accidentally fell into this role.* (Participant: Kevin)
Intentional
• *This is exactly what I wanted to do with my life.* (Participant: Katie) • *The short version is that I leveraged my annual fund experience in the arts to obtain a position in higher education. And once I was in the higher education system, I saw other development opportunities within the institution and leadership encouraged me to pursue major gifts.* (Participant: David) • *I've done all kinds of development fundraising from grant writing and managing annual fund. I started as a development coordinator doing database data entry, reporting, and that kind of thing. So, I've always worked in development.* (Participant: Jennifer)

Values Emphasized in Development Work

After talking about why they decided to pursue careers in higher education development, the participants were asked about why they continue to stay in the field. A range of different reasons were given, and four patterns emerged in the data that resulted in the following subthemes that focused on what development officers in higher education value about the work they do: (a) building relationships with donors and prospective donors, (b) being a manager or leader or part of a cohesive team, (c) developing a relationship with the Dean and faculty, and (d) enjoying creativity and flexibility in the development role. Coded extracts that support these subthemes are reported in Table 7.

Table 7

Responses for RQ (1a) Theme: Values Emphasized in Development Work

Research Question (1a), Theme Two: Values Emphasized in Development Work
Relationship with donors
• *I get to have lunch and hang around with people that I shouldn't even be in the same room with. I'm not a millionaire, and I get to not only hang out with millionaires, I get to have the trust and get inside looks into their lives and their businesses and a lot of them lead really exciting lives.* (Participant: Meaghan)
• *I'm just so thrilled to be that arbiter with donors who have their own passion and want to see things happen with their resources. I get to help bring that to bear for the benefit of our students and our faculty.* (Participant: Virginia)
• *I do this because I develop long-term relationships and friendships with a lot of these folks.* (Participant: Keith)
Being manager/leader/on a team
• *I'm motivated by working with a team that I really like and admire and want to work with.* (Participant: Gina)
• *I feel good about doing good for the university, but I feel better about specifically the people I work with. I derive energy from being of value to the people I work with.* (Participant: James)
• *Now that I'm in leadership, if I could take employees and learn what they want to do long-term, I could help them grow their careers and be remembered as the leader who was inspiring. If I'm able to do that for my team, that's how I want to be remembered.* (Participant: Tiffany)

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Table 7 *(continued)*

Relationship with Dean/faculty
• *If we aren't inspired by our Deans and have faith in the people running the university, we can't do this work.* (Participant: Gina) • *I love to please the Dean.* (Participant: Meaghan) • *The reason I came here was I was curious and intrigued by the Dean that I'm working for. I'm working for an international economist and part of my motivation to work here was to work with him.* (Participant: David)
Creativity/flexibility
• *I do enjoy the flexibility. I have the ability to create my own work and my own schedule, so that's part of the advantage. I do half the work I did before.* (Participant: Michael) • *I think it's honestly the freedom. I consider myself to be a very entrepreneurial person, and I love that about major gifts. I can approach my constituency any way I choose, and I like that freedom.* (Participant: David) • *One thing we've done that I find magical is that I can work from anywhere. I'm allowed to work anywhere, at any time. Nobody is micromanaging me, so I can work where I need to, when I need to. I cannot imagine going to another organization and having to be at my desk at 8:30. I shiver at the thought of that.* (Participant: Katie)

Motivational Aspects of Development Work

A number of interview questions were aimed at probing the participants' motivations, in the fundraising work they do and more generally in their lives. Several subthemes emerged as development officers described what motivated them. The most pervasive subtheme among the sample (*N=16*) was (a) achieving career advancement. Behind career advancement, (b) meeting goals and metrics and (c) attaining personal satisfaction and happiness were highlighted by 15 of the participants. Other subthemes included: (d) compensation and benefits, (e) fulfilling duty, (f) helping others or altruism, (g) competition with self or others, (h) driven by mission, and (i) inherent motivation or motivation as habit. Data is provided in Table 8 to support these subthemes.

Table 8

Responses for RQ (1a) Theme: Motivational Aspects of Development Work

Research Question (1a), Theme Three: Motivational Aspects of Development Work
Achieving career advancement
• *I was an associate director, and I felt like I deserved to be a development director. And that was being withheld from me. That was very frustrating for me for a long time.* (Participant: Susan)
• *I've moved into more of a team leader role, leading a big team. If I was straight front-line fundraising, I would not still be doing this.* (Participant: Rachel)
• *I saw the opportunity to grow. I saw an opportunity to close larger gifts and achieve more managerial, administrative type roles. From a personal standpoint, if you do the job well, you get rewarded for it through promotions and things like that. It's great for our family's livelihood.* (Participant: Harry)
Meeting goals and metrics
• *I'm a priority person. I'm very organized, to a fault. I know what my goals are and I know where I am toward meeting them.* (Participant: Ian)
• *They're pretty big on numbers here, so I've got numbers to hit. That's pretty motivational.* (Participant: Brian)
• *We always have metrics. I've always had metrics, like number of visits to have, number of proposals to submit. Looking at those metrics and trying to clear all the obstacles to make sure I achieve those metrics motivates me.* (Participant: Blair)
Personal satisfaction/happiness
• *I received a million-dollar donation from a woman who had a kidney transplant and she said, "I appreciate you helping me make this gift because it's just exactly what I wanted to do." You can't put a price on that. It really does touch your heart.* (Participant: Brenda)
• *Financial motivation is great and all, but there's got to be a bigger purpose in your life for why you do something. If I can put a smile on someone's face, that's all that matters. It means I'm doing a job well done.* (Participant: Keith)
• *I try to think about what ultimately makes me happy and how can I make decisions and position myself to do more of that.* (Participant: James)

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Table 8 (*continued*)

Compensation and benefits
• *In a practical sense, certainly when I get a raise, I feel very good about it and I'm motivated.* (Participant: Kevin)
• *I don't expect to be the highest paid because I don't have the tenure, but it's really insulting to be the lowest paid when you're outperforming your peers. I think compensation and benefits are a big part of motivation.* (Participant: Jennifer)
• *It's a pretty good living. None of us are going to get rich doing this, but in terms of working in academia, I enjoy being in a university climate and working in that landscape, and this is a pretty good way to make a living.* (Participant: Brian)
Fulfilling duty
• *It is very rewarding to me to know that I'm being a good steward of both my time and my funds, and I'm not wasting my energy or the organization's resources on things that aren't going to yield a high profit.* (Participant: Susan)
• *My faith comes into it. I feel like it's a calling, a God-given calling.* (Participant: Jennifer)
• *I thought God had put me in that position, trying to teach me something, and I needed to do the best job I possibly could to keep things together for the staff and for everybody involved.* (Participant: Harry)
Helping others/altruism
• *My motivation is to help people, to be with people. It's all about people.* (Participant: Ian)
• *Helping others motivates me, that altruistic spirit.* (Participant: Gina)
• *I felt like I was happy to help.* (Participant: Katie)

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Table 8 (*continued*)

Competition with self/others
• *My first instinct is I'm competitive with myself. First and foremost, I like to try to raise more money than I did the year before. Then, I want to raise more money than my peers.* (Participant: Meaghan)
• *I'm motivated by competition. I want our team to be the top fundraising team.* (Participant: Rachel)
• *Fundraising is kind of a competitive thing at times. If you can find the competitive spirit in development work, it can drive you It reminds me of my time when I was an athlete.* (Participant: Keith)
Driven by mission
• *I'm so much more driven by the mission and what we're doing than I am by metrics.* (Participant: Virginia)
• *You really need to find your North Star, whatever it is. Because if you don't believe in the mission that you're working toward, you're never going to get me to give money. It's not genuine. Your passion will show through and you will connect with people when you find that North Star.* (Participant: Blair)
• *I keep my purpose at the front of my mind. Having that strong understanding of what I'm doing this work for, the mission, makes me have a deeper passion. Then, I'm able to tell a stronger story.* (Participant: Keith)
Inherent motivation/habit
• *I think it's just become a habit. I'm a highly motivated person, and I think maybe it's part of my upbringing.* (Participant: Susan)
• *I have strong internal drive. I don't have to make myself, it's just in my nature. It's not something I have to talk myself into.* (Participant: Rachel)
• *It's subconscious at this point, but my motivation has helped me be successful.* (Participant: Michael)

Personal Characteristics Involved in Development Work

In talking about their passion, motivations, and sense of agency for higher education development work, the participants described a number of personal characteristics they viewed as essential to the ability to successfully perform the fundraising job. Most common was a belief that there were (a) innate personality traits (*N=13)*. Other subthemes that occurred in the data around personal characteristics involved in development work were: (b) work ethic, (c) loyalty to alma mater, (d) ethical, or the propensity to do the right thing, (e) gratitude, (f) empathy, (g) more diversity needed, and (h) personal beneficiary of philanthropy. A sample of the coded extracts that inform the fourth theme around experiences of passion are offered in Table 9.

Table 9

Responses for RQ (1a) Theme: Personal Characteristics Involved in Development Work

Research Question (1a), Theme Four: Personal Characteristics Involved in Development Work
Innate personality traits
• *I think a lot of people have a really innate sense of whether or not they are motivated to do this type of work.* (Participant: Virginia) • *No one goes to school to be a fundraiser. For some reason, it has always come naturally to me.* (Participant: James) • *Some of it is just part of who I am. I'm a doer. I'm courageous. I make decisions quickly. I stay focused. Those are things I think are inherent to me as an individual.* (Participant: Tiffany)
Work ethic
• *I have a reputation as being the hardest working development person.* (Participant: Meaghan) • *You really need to love your work and work tirelessly for it.* (Participant: Blair) • *I have a very strong work ethic. I've worked since I was 12 or 13 and was raised in a single-parent household. Working really hard for a goal is absolutely thrilling to me.* (Participant: Kevin)

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Table 9 *(continued)*

Loyalty to alma mater

- *I've stayed at my alma mater because they have taken really good care of me. They've been loyal to me, so I've been loyal to them.* (Participant: Rachel)

- *The big factor was the fact that it was my alma mater. Being an alumna of the university is not a requirement to work in development, but it certainly helps.* (Participant: Brian)

- *I am an alum of the institution. I also have a lot of family connections to the institution.* (Participant: James)

Ethical/doing the right thing

- *In a practical sense, certainly when I get a raise, I feel very good about it and I'm motivated.* (Participant: Kevin)

- *You have to go into this with the right head space and the right goals and the right intentions. Then it will be fine.* (Participant: Katie)

- *You have to have the reputation. If you're unethical, you're not going to do well in this business.* (Participant: Ian)

Gratitude

- *I'm grateful to wake up every day and go to work and do something that's putting something really positive into the world.* (Participant: Virginia)

- *A good fundraiser has to have a spirit of gratitude.* (Participant: Katie)

- *The lessons have been rich, and I'm grateful.* (Participant: David)

Empathy

- *Showing a great deal of empathy. I try to be very empathetic with people and make an emotional connection.* (Participant: Tiffany)

- *You always have to respond with empathy.* (Participant: Jennifer)

- *I put myself in the donors' shoes. It helps me empathize with what they're going through.* (Participant: Keith)

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Table 9 (*continued*)

More diversity needed
• *For me to be successful, I need to help make the field more diverse. I haven't figured it out yet, but we need a lot more diversity in our field. It's very, very white. If you look at positions of fundraising leaderships, even though it's a very female-focused profession, a lot of the leaders are males. We've got to change that too.* (Participant: Blair) • *At this institution, we have very Western standards and metrics, but that doesn't match the Eastern culture that we're in. As development officers, we're constantly trying to honor both sides of that, and I think we have varying degrees of success.* (Participant: David) • *I'm one of the very few people of color in my profession at this university and one of the very few LGBT people at this university in my profession. There is a lot of room for diversity in development, and we need to be really intentional about how we create diversity and inclusion in this profession.* (Participant: Kevin)
Personal beneficiary
• *I was a first-generation college student, and I got a few scholarships that enabled me to go to university. I thought if I ever had the opportunity to do work that would allow someone to have the chance to go to college, I definitely wanted to do that.* (Participant: Blair) • *I was a recipient of a scholarship in my undergrad days, so I know how impactful that can be and how life-changing that can be. So, it's my way of paying it forward.* (Participant: David) • *I went to college in my 30s, because I couldn't afford to go after high school. I have pushed the next generation of my family to go to college. I'm one of those people who want to help give people a better life and improve their economic standings like I experienced. (Participant: Gina)*

Importance of Development Work

The final passion-related theme that analysis of the participant interviews revealed was related to the importance that development officers in higher education place on the work that they do. Of the 18 participants, 16 expressed finding importance in their work by (a) making a difference. Other subthemes included: (b) opportunities via education,

(c) passionate about philanthropy, and (d) leaving a legacy. Support for these subthemes in the participants' own words are provided in Table 10.

Table 10

Responses for RQ (1a) Theme: Importance of Development Work

Research Question (1a), Theme Five: Importance of Development Work
Making a difference
• *I feel like what I do makes a difference. I'm not the one in the spotlight, but I can help other people be in the spotlight. That's really gratifying.* (Participant: Meaghan) • *I think I have the talent coupled with the skills to be able to make a difference. A significant difference.* (Participant: Brenda) • *I enjoy being a part of creating something that isn't already there. I really feel like the work we're doing is impactful.* (Participant: Harry)
Opportunities via education
• *There is nothing more satisfying than seeing students get an education who may not have gotten it before.* (Participant: Gina) • *I really believe and appreciate what higher education can do for people, particularly for minorities. Black and brown people who are under-represented, LGBTQ people, women, people who've been disenfranchised. I think higher education can be helpful.* (Participant: Kevin) • *I really believe deeply in higher education and the importance of it being accessible to people from all walks of life within the United States.* (Participant: Susan)
Passionate about philanthropy
• *I'm very passionate about philanthropy and the impact it can have on our world.* (Participant: Virginia) • *I really enjoy philanthropy. There are people out there who think philanthropy is for the Rockefellers, but they don't realize that middle class and upper-middle class and lower tier wealthy people can still make a tremendous impact and can make major gifts.* (Participant: David) • *In philanthropy, I like the silent impact that I have.* (Participant: Michael)

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Table 10 *(continued)*

Leaving a legacy
• *To me, I'm leaving a little legacy by helping establish a program.* (Participant: Gina)
• *Helping people ensure a legacy and paying it forward. That is really satisfying to work on.* (Participant: David)
• *That personal legacy makes me proud to do what I do.* (Participant: Michael)

Themes about Experiences of Perseverance

In combination with passion, the other element of grit involves individuals' willingness to persevere toward their goals, despite setbacks and challenges. In the way that Duckworth (2016) made the case for grit, setbacks and disappointments were inevitable. The test of grittiness was how people interpret and respond to these challenges. Development officers in the study were asked specifically about how they experience disappointments in their work. Questions related to how they think, feel, react, and give meaning to rejected solicitations and other professional disappointments were explored (see Appendix I). Four main themes emerged from the data related to development officers' experiences of perseverance after a process of manual open coding and further thematic analysis. The largest theme in terms of number of coded extracts was the (a) coping strategies that development officers utilize to persevere. Other themes included: (b) situations that the participants described as being challenging, (c) how participants framed the nature of fundraising work, and (d) factors of persistence and determination for doing development work.

Each of the four main themes was comprised of a number of subthemes. A summary of the themes and subthemes for Research Question (1b) is reported in Table 11 along with the frequency and sample representation of each subtheme.

Table 11

Themes and Subthemes for Research Question (1b)

Theme	Subtheme	No. of Coded Extracts	*N*
Coping Strategies	Focus on what can be controlled	20	8
	Prepare for the next meeting	17	10
	Dialogue with peers	15	10
	Compartmentalization	14	7
	Celebrating successes & losses	14	6
	Destigmatizing rejection	13	7
	Self-care	11	7
	Focus on the big picture	6	5
	Focus on metrics	5	3
	Toughen up	4	4
	Focus on the small details	3	1
Challenging Situations	Emotional response to rejection	53	16
	Difficult colleagues	12	8
	Issues with Dean/faculty	9	5
	Feeling pressure to ask	7	5
	Difficulty getting meetings/networking	5	3
Nature of Fundraising	Fundraising about timing	28	15
	Fundraising a result of many factors	21	12
	Fundraising not personal	17	11
Persistence/ Determination	Resilience necessary for success	14	8
	Keep going/keep moving forward	12	8
	Burnout imminent	12	8
	Determination to make a gift happen	8	5
	Adaptability	2	2

Coping Strategies

When talking about their experiences facing setbacks and challenges, the development officers who participated in this study provided a wide range of strategies that they used in overcoming obstacles. Thematic analysis reduced the data to the most prevalent patterns, and a comprehensive outline of the 11 subthemes with support coded extracts from the data are provided in Table 12.

Table 12

Responses for RQ (1b) Theme: Coping Strategies

Research Question (1b), Theme One: Coping Strategies
Focus on what can be controlled
• *I think you control what you can control. Having separation between stuff I can control and what their stuff that I can't control is important for me psychologically.* (Participant: Jennifer) • *It keeps me centered on what I can control and what I cannot control. I only focus on the things I can control.* (Participant: Rachel) • *Some things are out of my control and some things I can control. Right now, I'm trying to be more proactive in the things that I can control.* (Participant: Michael)
Prepare for the next meeting
• *If I get a "no" or "not now," whether it's internally or with a donor, I just shrug it off and go "oh, that's too bad." Then I turn my attention to whatever is next that is more likely.* (Participant: Katie) • *Whenever someone tells me "no," I thank them for their candor and I move on to the next person because the trick is to find the person who is ready.* (Participant: Virginia) • *Let's analyze it, but let's move on to the next thing.* (Participant: Brenda)
Dialogue with peers
• *You've got to be able to share with colleagues. You've got to give knowledge, pass knowledge on, and receive it.* (Participant: Ian) • *If you feel like you aren't motived, being able to talk to somebody helps. I've got another guy in the office with me, and I'm able to talk with him through the prospects or things I'm going through.* (Participant: Harry) • *Talking with colleagues about how they approach these conversations has always been helpful.* (Participant: Virginia)

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Table 12 *(continued)*

Compartmentalization
• *You just compartmentalize it in your brain and realize that didn't work out.* (Participant: Brenda)
• *I shift focus and focus on another piece of something. I retreat on that issue and move on.* (Participant: Kevin)
• *I focused elsewhere on my outside community involvement instead.* (Participant: Virginia)
Celebrating successes & losses
• *I actually like "no's" in a sense. I prefer a "yes," but "no" can be a useful outcome too.* (Participant: Michael)
• *I tend to make a game out of it, and I say that every "no" gets you that much closer to a "yes." If you look at the law of averages, it takes seven "no's" to get to a "yes." So, when you get a "no," you can celebrate it.* (Participant: Tiffany)
• *You're not a good development officer if you don't have a certain amount of "no's," because that means you're not being aggressive enough.* (Participant: Susan)
Destigmatizing rejection
• *I don't ever take rejection as I did anything wrong. It's fine. You just move on.* (Participant: James)
• *Rejection is something with deal with every day. I've gotten plenty of practice.* (Participant: Brian)
• *It's going to happen. People are going to say "no."* (Participant: Keith)
Self-care
• *Balance out your energy. Self-care is very important.* (Participant: Virginia)
• *Taking care of yourself in important too. This is hard work. You put a lot of yourself out there with your donors, and you really need to make sure you're refilling your tank after that.* (Participant: Blair)
• *I practice stress management. I've been doing more meditation throughout the day, which has helped me stay more in touch or being more aware of my feelings.* (Participant: Brian)

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Table 12 *(continued)*

Focus on big picture
• *It's a "see the forest, not the trees" type of thing. Think about this from a three-year plan.* (Participant: James)
• *Always have your eye on that 50,000-foot view. In our work, it's easy to get into the nitty-gritty, but it's really important to stay focused on the big picture.* (Participant: Blair)
• *In order to keep things moving on the big picture, I try to do things every day that are proactive with a donor in terms of moving something forward.* (Participant: Katie)
Focus on metrics
• *I feel like I have an unwritten contract with the foundation to not be distracted by other things and to make sure my metrics are my top priority.* (Participant: Susan)
• *I'm always looking at my metrics. I really lean on the data that I'm given about my performance to prioritize.* (Participant: Jennifer)
• *Trying to clear all the obstacles to make sure I get to my metrics and achieve my metrics. I always have that at the forefront.* (Participant: Blair)
Toughen up
• *For a development officer, I'm super low empathy. I'm just like, "toughen up. 'No's' are a part of the game."* (Participant: Susan)
• *You "cowboy up" and you take it.* (Participant: David)
• *If I've gone on for too long about something, it's probably me. I need to just suck it up and adapt to the situation that is at hand.* (Participant: Michael)
Focus on the small details
• *The importance is in the small details. Copious notes are never a bad idea.* (Participant: Keith)

Challenging Situations

When asked about facing setbacks or disappointments, development officers shared experiences about situations they found challenging. Five subthemes related to these challenging situations emerged: (a) emotional responses to rejection, (b) working with difficult colleagues, (c) issues with the Dean or faculty, (d) feeling pressure to ask for a gift prematurely, and (e) difficulty getting meetings or networking. A sample of the participants' direct responses that support this analysis are reported in Table 13.

Table 13

Responses for RQ (1b) Theme: Challenging Situations

Research Question (1b), Theme Two: Challenging Situations
Emotional response to rejection
• *Angry. Very angry. Upset. Disappointed. Undervalued. And unfair.* (Participant: Susan) • *I went through the whole gamut of feeling frustrated, feeling sad, doubting myself, those kinds of negative feelings.* (Participant: Harry) • *Getting "no's" and being disappointed causes me stress. At its core, I actually have a hard time dealing with rejection.* (Participant: Brian)
Difficult colleagues
• *It was lunch with the donor, the Dean, me, and a planned giving officer. The planned giving officer went totally off-script. He didn't prepare. He said some inappropriate things and embarrassed himself in front of all of us. I didn't know he was capable of that.* (Participant: David) • *The DO I was working with had a real reputation of being very aggressive. Her work was littered with people who were mad at the university because of her aggressiveness.* (Participant: Gina) • *I had an employee who accepted a personal monetary gift from a donor, and I was very disappointed, needless to say. I spoke to the CEO right away. I reported it to the Ethics Committee. We had to navigate returning the gift and transferring the employee out of development. It was tricky all the way around.* (Participant: Brenda)

(Continued on next page)

Table 13 *(continued)*

Issues with Dean/Faculty
• *There were leadership conflicts. No one was talking to each other. The donors became disillusioned because it became clear the leadership didn't care.* (Participant: Virginia)
• *The university should all be one big unit, but that's not the way it works. I'm a little frustrated with the university because there is nothing I can do from my end to resolve this.* (Participant: Brian)
• *We had an interim Dean at the time, and I had to be careful about promising something in writing that the future Dean would have to live with.* (Participant: Meaghan)
Feeling pressure to ask
• *I tried to fight the issue, and I didn't win. I was pushed to make an ask. I believe that 95 percent of major gift asks fail because we rush the prospect.* (Participant: Ian)
• *It was a great lesson in something I knew already. Don't ask on the first visit, even though your boss is telling you to do that.* (Participant: Blair)
• *I didn't trust my gut, and looking back, we didn't do any of the preliminary work we should have done. We took the advice of a faculty member to ask for $5M, and it went terribly.* (Participant: Gina)
Difficulty getting meetings/networking
• *I think the hardest or most demotivating part of our job is working through a list of people and trying to get those first visits with someone. You spend a day leaving 40 voicemails.* (Participant: Virginia)
• *The hardest part is just getting myself in front of the donors and continuing to get face-to-face interactions.* (Participant: Keith)
• *It's sometimes really hard to get meetings or to get in front of people when you really don't know them.* (Participant: Kevin)

Nature of Fundraising

As the participants discussed their experiences in soliciting major gifts, a theme emerged around the beliefs that development officers in higher education have about the nature of fundraising. Of the 18 participants, 15 expressed a belief that (a) fundraising is about timing. Other subthemes were: (b) fundraising is a result of many factors and (c) fundraising is not personal. A selection of coded extracts demonstrating these subthemes, in the participants' own words, follows in Table 14.

Table 14

Responses for RQ (1b) Theme: Nature of Fundraising

Research Question (1b), Theme Three: Nature of Fundraising
Fundraising about timing
• *It's never a "no." It's always, "not right now."* (Participant: Susan)
• *"No" doesn't mean "never." It just means they have some stuff going on right now.* (Participant: Blair)
• *He liked the proposal; he liked the idea. He had multiple medical procedures done in a short amount of time, so now wasn't the time. I had to realize that is just part of the nature of what we do.* (Participant: Harry)
Fundraising a result of many factors
• *Lots of times I'll find out five or six months later that they were going through a divorce and I didn't know. Or he was selling his company or his company had a downturn or whatever. Oftentimes I find out information later on and it makes sense.* (Participant: Brenda)
• *You understand "no" means "not right now" and there are lots of reasons for that. It's either money or timing or desired impact. You've got to play with those variables to see which ones you can influence.* (Participant: Jennifer)
• *Every time I get a "no," I try to run the 'IPAT': institution, project, amount, timing. In that order.* (Participant: Brian)
Fundraising not personal
• *It's all about finding the right fit. It's not a personal rejection in any way, shape, or form.* (Participant: Kevin)
• *I don't take it personally, because when they say "no," they don't say, "I'm not giving because I don't like you, Harry." You've got have confidence to know that it isn't about you.* (Participant: Harry)
• *I don't take it personally, so it's not a big deal.* (Participant: Rachel)

Persistence/Determination

In the final theme related to perseverance, development officers in higher education shared experiences that demonstrated persistence and determination. This theme revealed some nuances through subthemes to deepen the understanding of their experiences of perseverance. Subthemes emergent in the data were: (a) resilience necessary for success, (b) advice to keep going or keep moving forward, (c) fears that burnout was imminent, (d) determination to make a gift happen, and (e) the need for adaptability. Data in the form of the coded extracts are provided in Table 15 to support these subthemes.

Table 15

Responses for RQ (1b) Theme: Persistence/Determination

Research Question (1b), Theme Four: Persistence/Determination
Resilience necessary for success
• *For me, it's persistence. If I am persistent enough, people will notice that.* (Participant: Keith) • *It's simple, but it works because it reminds me that I have the power to find a solution, to find the pathway. I have to be persistent.* (Participant: Kevin) • *I'm pretty resilient, and that's helped me be successful. I think being in music and having to be judged a lot helped with that.* (Participant: Katie)
Keep going/keep moving forward
• *Keep going. Especially if it's a gift conversation that is going south, there's going to be another one around the bend. You have to keep going.* (Participant: Virginia) • *When challenges happen, you realign and move forward. Clean up the mess and offer a new strategy when the time is right.* (Participant: David) • *It gets easier. You get into a flow and you just get used to it. Keep going, don't let the disappointments impact you that much.* (Participant: Michael)

(Continued on next page)

Table 15 *(continued)*

Burnout imminent
• *I'm on track to burnout sooner than I want to. I love my job, but I just wish it was about 70 percent the pace that it is.* (Participant: Meaghan) • *I'm a little concerned with what this looks like when we have a couple more kids because I travel in my position. I worry about balancing that.* (Participant: Virginia) • *I'd love to be off the road and not traveling so much so I could be with my daughter. Sometimes I wonder why I'm doing this.* (Participant: Michael)
Determination to make a gift happen
• *I'll figure out a way. You're going to have to look into the whites of my eyes and tell me "yes" or "no."* (Participant: Susan) • *If you get a "no, not now" or "no, not this amount," you try to pivot in the conversation to position yourself for continued dialogue.* (Participant: James) • *Let's figure out what it is to get to that "yes." I don't think it's defeating or any of that. To me, it's like a puzzle.* (Participant: Rachel)
Adaptability
• *You have to adjust to the moment. Every day is different. Every person is different.* (Participant: Ian) • *We are used to having to shift focus or shift interest. We adapt and reach to talk about other projects that might resonate better.* (Participant: Kevin)

Themes about the Role of Self-Talk

Within the study, Research Question (2) explored the role of self-talk for development officers in higher education as they reflected on overcoming the challenges that they face in the role. Similar to what Martin Seligman (1990) found, both optimism and pessimism have a place in experiencing setbacks. The two themes related to self-talk involved optimistic self-talk and pessimistic self-talk, with much more emphasis placed on optimism among the sample. An overview of the themes, subthemes, frequencies, and sample representation are reported in Table 16.

Table 16

Subthemes for Research Question (2)

Theme	Subtheme	No. of Coded Extracts	*N*
Optimistic Self-Talk	Commitment to getting better	47	16
	Learning from mistakes	14	10
	Open to being challenged	12	7
	Reinforce personal agency	10	7
	Less afraid of hearing "no"	8	5
	Find personal inspiration	6	4
	Boost confidence	5	4
Pessimistic Self-Talk	Dissatisfaction upon reflection on past	23	12
	Self-doubt	11	10
	Critical of situation/organization	11	9

Optimistic Self-Talk

Of the two that emerged from the interview data, optimistic self-talk was the more prevalent theme. A range of subthemes captured the experiences of self-talk and included: (a) commitment to getting better, (b) learning from mistakes, (c) open to being challenged, (d) reinforcing personal agency, (e) less fear of hearing "no," (f) finding personal inspiration, and (g) boosting confidence. A sample of participant responses the support these subthemes are presented in Table 17.

Table 17

Responses for RQ (2) Theme: Optimistic Self-Talk

Research Question (2), Theme One: Optimistic Self-Talk
Commitment to getting better
• *I want to see if I can break my personal best.* (Participant: Brian) • *How can I improve if I am in this situation again?* (Participant: James) • *I learn from other people and make myself better.* (Participant: Meaghan)

(Continued on next page)

Table 17 *(continued)*

Learning from mistakes

- *That was a really good learning moment. Only for a moment did I let my values get compromised.* (Participant: Katie)
- *I felt challenged, which was a good learning opportunity for me.* (Participant: James)
- *I took it as a learning experience. I didn't really have anything to lose, so I gave it my best effort just to see what happened.* (Participant: Harry)

Open to being challenged

- *I thrive on doing a good job and challenging myself, getter better, and leaving it better than I found it.* (Participant: Meaghan)
- *I love the challenge.* (Participant: Katie)
- *I look at it as a game or a challenge.* (Participant: David)

Reinforce personal agency

- *What motivates me is to say, "that over there is a mess that I have no control over. Here's what I have control over."* (Participant: Gina)
- *There are certain things I can't control, so I have to look at it and say, "Ok, I like the challenge of it. How can I navigate this bureaucracy of this culture and be successful?"* (Participant: David)
- *I was telling myself, "You've got to get this right. You've got to fix this."* (Participant: Brenda)

Less afraid of hearing "no"

- *Getting a lot of those "no's" has made me less afraid to get a "no."* (Participant: Virginia)
- *I'm not really afraid of the "no" because I feel like if you build it together, it becomes more of their idea and they take ownership of it.* (Participant: Rachel)
- *I got so numb to hearing "no."* (Participant: Harry)

(Continued on next page)

Table 17 *(continued)*

Find personal inspiration
• *I have a really great place and it's worth working at this great place even if we don't raise as much money as other places on campus. This place is wonderful.* (Participant: Meaghan)
• *I think to myself, "wasn't that great? That was a really wonderful time. That was so exciting. That was so positive." At the end of the day, when I retire, I'll still have that little folder following me around and I'll be able reflect and feel good about what I did.* (Participant: Brenda)
• *I put it in the back of my mind and said, "I'll take this and use it as motivation."* (Participant: Harry)
Boost confidence
• *I get this. I'm ready for the next thing. I can do this.* (Participant: Blair)
• *You said we couldn't do it, but here we are, and we did it.* (Participant: Harry)
• *If I don't have confidence, I can't do this work.* (Participant: Gina)

Pessimistic Self-Talk

On the other hand, participants also shared experiences of pessimistic self-talk in response to interview questions designed to address the second research question. Subthemes related to pessimistic self-talk included: (a) dissatisfaction upon reflection on the past, (b) self-doubt, and (c) self-talk that was critical of past situations or the organization itself. Examples of coded extracts related to these subthemes are provided in Table 18.

Table 18

Responses for RQ (2) Theme: Pessimistic Self-Talk

Research Question (2), Theme Two: Pessimistic Self-Talk
Dissatisfaction upon reflection on past
• *I should have handled myself differently. I've created a reputation for myself within the organization as a result of that. I've had to do some damage control.* (Participant: Susan) • *I should have dealt with the stress better.* (Participant: Harry) • *I wouldn't have taken the job. I would have done my homework.* (Participant: Ian)
Self-doubt
• *I wonder if the university even sees this work I'm doing. I wonder if I will ever really move the needle and make a difference here.* (Participant: Meaghan) • *I kept saying, "what am I doing here? Is it time to think about getting out of fundraising? Is it time to think about doing something else?"* (Participant: Virginia) • *Why didn't I think about this? What didn't I take more initiative regarding my future?* (Participant: James)
Critical of situation/organization
• *Why doesn't this institution know what kind of person she is? She's crazy. How does she have this job?* (Participant: Tiffany) • *It's unfair, but being a woman in the workplace, this is something we all experience. Do we have to? Should we have to? No. But it's the way of the world.* (Participant: Rachel) • *There's definitely a victimization of myself, like, "none of this is your fault. People are just not good at their jobs."* (Participant: Kevin)

Summary of Findings

This study was guided by two main research questions:

(1) What is the essence of grit as experienced by development officers in higher education?

(a) How do development officers in higher education describe their experiences of passion?

(b) How do development officers in higher education describe their experiences of perseverance?

(2) What role does self-talk play for development officers in higher education as they reflect on overcoming the challenges they face?

In order to address Research Question (1) and determine the essence of grit for development officers in higher education, two secondary questions explored specific experiences of passion and perseverance. After conducting data collection to the point of data saturation, which entailed interviewing 18 participants, thematic analysis was conducted and nine related themes emerged from the data. Five themes described experiences of passion and four themes described experiences of perseverance.

Meta-themes are principal themes that gain their significance through the aggregation and implicit meaning-making of lower-level of themes (Armborst, 2017). In aggregating to the lower-level grit themes to more fully respond to the overarching first research question, the following meta-themes for Research Question (1) were identified:

- The role is personal; the performance results are not;
- Metrics motivate in the short-term; impact sustains for the long-term;
- Goal-directed behavior is applied to increasing individual values, not reaching career milestones;
- Relationships give the work meaning.

In the case of Research Question (2), two main themes responded to the role of self-talk for development officers in higher education as they reflect on overcoming challenges: self-talk was either optimistic or pessimistic. In later stages of thematic analysis, these two self-talk themes were considered in tandem, and an aggregate meta-theme surfaced:

- Constant optimism is not practical or ideal; eventual optimistic self-talk supports growth and development.

These five meta-themes will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings that resulted from data collection and analysis conducted with 18 professional development officers in higher education. An overview of the research purpose and guiding research questions began Chapter Four. A summary of the research participants, including demographic characteristics and brief profiles, was reported. Next, the 11 main themes that emerged from thematic analysis of the data were presented. Five themes were related to experiences of passion, four themes were related to experiences of perseverance, and two themes were related to the role of self-talk in overcoming challenges and setbacks. Each theme was presented individually, with related subthemes and evidence in the form of coded extracts from the data. A summary of the findings followed. In Chapter Five, a discussion of the manifest and latent meanings of the themes and meta-themes and their implications for practice, theory, and research, as well as the limitations of the study concludes this report. The chapter concluded with a summarization.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the study's findings and an explanation of the manifest and latent meanings of the themes and meta-themes that emerged from thematic analysis of the data. The implications of these findings for practice, theory, and research are reported. Next, limitations of the research study are presented. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research pathways and a brief summary of the chapter.

Purpose of the Study

The overall purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of grit by development officers in the higher education foundation context as these professionals developed and pursued their goals and processed their obstacles and disappointments in the course of soliciting major gifts.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

(1) What is the essence of grit as experienced by development officers in higher education?

   (a) How do development officers in higher education describe their experiences of passion?

   (b) How do development officers in higher education describe their experiences of perseverance?

(2) What role does self-talk play for development officers in higher education as they reflect on overcoming the challenges they face?

Discussion of the Meta-Themes

After an iterative and recursive process of thematic analysis, five main meta-themes emerged from the data. Four of those themes were associated with the essence of grit as experienced by development officers in higher education. The fifth theme was related to the role of self-talk for development officers in higher education as they reflect on overcoming challenges in their roles. These five themes included: (a) The role is personal; the performance results are not, (b) Metrics motivate in the short-term; impact sustains for the long-term, (c) Goal-directed behavior is applied to increasing individual values, (d) Relationships give the work meaning, and (e) Eventual optimistic self-talk supports growth and development.

The role is personal; the performance results are not. This meta-theme reflected an aggregation of coded extracts and themes related to passion and motivation. Of the 18 participant development officers, all 18 individuals discussed various personal characteristics that they believed were important to the role of development officer or that had contributed to their ability to be successful. Examples of such characteristics included having a particular personality type, having strong work ethic or loyalty for one's alma mater, or possessing gratitude and empathy. Even when asked about particular skills required to do fundraising work or what they look for in hiring development officers, the participants shared attributes and capabilities related to interpersonal skills and high emotional intelligence. Later in the interviews, when discussing elements of perseverance and attitudes about performance results, all 18 participants also shared perspectives that the nature of fundraising and fundraising success were related to timing, an amalgamation of situational factors, or not personal at all. One participant, Susan, said, “to be in development, you have to be pretty self-motivated and have strong interpersonal skills.” She later added, “when it comes to donors, if they say ‘no,’ I don’t take that personally.” When the outcomes of a gift solicitation are positive or a gift is made, again, the results were described with personal distance from that result. About a successful outcome, Susan said “I’m glad that the stars aligned to create a good situation.” This seemingly paradoxical relationship revealed an interesting negotiation for development officers in higher education. While the motivations and the work itself felt personal to them, they emotionally and psychologically separated their personal self and role from the outcomes and rejection — and even the success — that inevitably become a part of the job.

When it comes to actual personal characteristics, while all 18 participants expressed the importance of interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence, they did not agree about whether there were particular personality types required for success in the role. Some participants — Gina, Ian, and Susan — specifically stated the requirement that development officers be extroverts. Other participants — Harry and Brenda — felt that introverts could also be successful in the role as long as they were able to develop genuine relationships with donors. Four participants mentioned the fact that they looked for qualities like intuition and natural curiosity in potential development officers when considering hiring them, and they believed they could train those individuals on the fundraising process and mechanic of asking for a gift later.

Balancing these two perspectives – a sense that the role and the characteristics necessary to be successful in the role are deeply personal while also considering the results or outcomes impersonal – exposed something new about the essence of grit for development officers in higher education. For these professionals, their self-efficacy and achievement was more intertwined with the job-related behaviors and tasks that they were responsible for, and less related to the final results and outcomes in terms of dollars raised. Of the participants, 15 mentioned having goals or metrics that they were expected to meet, and seven of those participants stated that they were accountable for raising target total dollar amounts per year. Four of the participants expressly mentioned that their goals and metrics did not include annual dollar goals. Given the ways that development officers talked about their personal roles and the motivations for doing this work, it would seem that holding them accountable for annual dollar-goal metrics would not increase their motivation or feelings of self-efficacy. In fact, since they believed that that cases of fortunate timing and the alignment of other factors in donors' lives led to closed gifts, holding development officers responsible for this type of metric could likely be an expectation that reduced their motivation and made them feel less in control of their performance results.

Metrics motivate in the short-term; impact sustains for the long-term. Another way that metrics surfaced as being important in the essence of grit for development officers in higher education was their effect on motivating short-term behaviors and goal attainment. As a reminder, 15 of the participants particularly stated their attention toward their performance goals and metrics. To this end, David said he looked at his metrics daily to guide his task-prioritization: "I look at my metrics every day and ask myself how I'm going to move the needle today." The data and metrics that the participants described as being helpful to motivating their short-term behaviors were activities like: (a) number of face-to-face visits or hours of face-to-face time with donors, (b) number of gift solicitation proposals presented, and (c) number of prospective donors qualified for entering the cultivation pipeline toward a gift. These behavior-related guidelines appeared to effectively motivate development officers toward their short-term and lower-level goals.

Another important motivator for development officers in higher education was career advancement. In the study, 16 of the 18 participants talked about career advancement, whether that meant taking on leadership over a team or department, elevation in terms of job title, or promotion, or transitioning to other areas or foundations where the development officer had the opportunity to raise more money from a more lucrative pool of donors. This motivation reflected the mid-level or mid-term goals of the participant development officers. While metrics were looked at daily, weekly, monthly, and certainly annually, career advancement was expressed as motivational factor for every few years. Opportunity for growth was one thing that James mentioned as being an important reason he stayed in development: "I stay because of the continuous growth. Not just in title or salaries, but also in responsibilities." Further, one participant in particular, Rachel, discussed the challenges with keeping talented front-line development officers on her team engaged and feeling like they were advancing in their careers, without moving them into management roles.

Despite the fact that development officers in the study shared the importance of career advancement when describing their motivation toward their mid-level goals, not one of the participants expressed an ultimate career goal related to position, title, salary, or leadership responsibilities in development. The ultimate career goals that participants shared were related to making a difference and helping others. When discussing their long-term goals — or as Duckworth (2016) would call it, the top-level goal in an individual's goal hierarchy — metrics and career advancement disappeared from the responses of the participants. At this level, pursuing happiness, job satisfaction, and finding purpose and lasting impact in the work were prevalent themes among the participants. Keith said, "Me and my brothers were raised to think about others before ourselves and put others as a higher priority. If I'm able to help people, then I'm serving a bigger purpose." In total, 17 of the 18 participants described their definition of success as being an element of either having an altruistic impact on others, finding personal happiness in the work that they do, or being driven by the mission and transformational effects of the institution.

This meta-theme provided insight into how motivational factors shift for development officers in higher education. While describing their goal hierarchies, their motivation and desired achievements became increasingly abstract and of longer temporal impact. This long-range focus mirrored the enduring purpose and utility of the institutions and gifts for which development officers labor. An important feature of major gift fundraising was that the institutions they work for have long-standing missions and visions, and the gifts that donors make have long lifetimes as well, oftentimes into perpetuity. A potentially important nuance in the essence of grit for development officers in higher education was that because these organizations have stability and a reasonable expectation of continuing into perpetuity, the development officers themselves orient their ultimate career goals within that eternal landscape and developed aspirations and motivations that outlast their own personal careers.

Goal-directed behavior is applied to increasing individual values. Of the aspects of being a development officer that the participants valued, nurturing their relationships with donors and prospects was the most prevalent with 17 participants responding to this effect. Other valued elements of the role were reported as being part of a team or leading a team of others, developing collegial relationships with a respected Dean or other faculty members, enjoying the ability to be creative and entrepreneurial in the work, and engendering trust and respect in their profession. Development officers explained that they personally valued these job-related characteristics in the work that they did, and they articulated intentionally performing behaviors to increase their embodiment of them.

The development officers talked about how they set goals and performed their duties in a way that was aligned with their values. To this point, Virginia said, “I know major gift officers approach these things differently, and there are so many different ways to do it. I’ve been able to find my own comfort level and my own way of being successful.” This ability to comingle the personal and professional introduced another unique facet of grit in the experiences of development officers in higher education. Much of their work products have to do with who they are and how they think, so the consistency of focus on goals and the resilience to keep pushing forward — or the grit — that they experience was integrated with their own personal values and the way that they view themselves.

Another important finding in terms of the integration of personal and professional identities for development officers in higher education was revealed in the way they talk about their employment. In nearly 20 hours of talking about their employment, the development officer participants referred to their “work” three times more often than they used the word “job.” Furthermore, when they did reference their “job,” it was usually related to specific tasks and duties or they were talking about broader organizational features of their employment. When they were sharing perspectives about how they view their profession, they most often used “work” to allude to the broader aspects of what they do and the meaning they derived from their careers. Jennifer said, “I really enjoy the work. I especially love the donor work; that’s energizing and intriguing. Finding something else that is equally fulfilling would be an enigma.” When the participants talked about the values and the goal-behaviors that they pursued in service to their “work,” the integration of their selves with their profession provided a deeper understanding of how they experience grit in their roles.

Relationships give the work meaning. Chapter One presented Duckworth’s (2016) theory that effort was important at two different points in the equation of achievement — once when applied to talent, and once when applied to skill. Similarly, the responses from participants of this research suggested that relationships in development work were important at two distinct points as well. Relationships externally with donors and internally with colleagues, leaders, and team members led to experiences of satisfaction and meaning. Katie said, “I value the colleagues and the relationships that I’ve built with donors. It’s definitely the relationships. I’ve raised a lot of money, but that’s very secondary to me.” Another participant, Brian, put it this way: “I’m a people person, and this allows me to do that. It gives me a lot of energy." The centrality of relationships for these development officers likely had some influence on their experiences of grit, either because of the relationships that they had built with donors prior to asking for a gift or because of the cohesive networks they construct with other development officers who understand their profession. Previous researchers have suggested that group grit, or shared grit, was enhanced differently in collectivist cultures, and this could be similarly true for organizational or team grit.

Relationships also surfaced in the findings of the study in the ways that the participants described persevering and recovering from failed gift solicitations. All 18 participants mentioned refocusing on the relationship with prospective donors after they rejected a gift ask. Some development officers expressed gratitude for the consideration, and others talked about their reevaluation of the proposal to try to understand what prevented the donor from responding positively. In all cases, though, the development officers continued to engage the donor and attempted to nurture the relationship for the future. Virginia said, "At that point, I focus on keeping the relationship healthy and keeping him genuinely engaged with the school. I make sure he's aware of what is going on and make a point to visit when it's possible for both of our schedules." For development officers in higher education, this focus on relationships not only gave satisfaction and meaning, but the relationships also seemed to generate more resilient experiences.

Finally, another contribution of relationships to the experiences of grit for development officers was associated with the paths that led the individuals to do this work in the first place. Within the sample, half of the participants indicated they had intentionally pursued careers in development and half of the participants indicated they had accidentally stumbled upon the profession. Regardless of their intentionality, every participant described a relationship with someone who helped them obtain their first internship or full-time development position. Virginia knew she wanted to be in the nonprofit sector, and she approached a presenter at an event and said, “I have got to work for you. I need to learn from you. This is exactly what I want to do with my life.” That relationship led to an internship, and that internship led into a full-time major gift development position. For Ian, it was a friend who was the Vice President of Advancement at their alma mater. Ian said, “he was soliciting me for a gift, and he told me, ‘if you ever want to switch gears and think about our industry, you’re perfect for it’.” Perhaps these relationships, which presented the participants with an opportunity to pursue careers in development in the first place, reinforced their commitment to their professional goals in the field and sustained their perseverance. It could be that the participants wanted to avoid letting down people they cared about or respected. The findings of the study and this meta-theme certainly presented support for the fact that relationships enhanced grit for development officers in higher education.

Eventual optimistic self-talk supports growth and development. One of the important distinctions that Duckworth (2016) made about grit was that having a growth mindset led to more optimistic internal dialogue about setbacks and adversity. This could serve as one reason that development officers in higher education separate their personal selves from the outcomes of their solicitation activities; they were engaging in optimistic self-talk about their performance and exhibiting hope for the future. This study also overtly explored the ways that the participants used and reflected on their self-talk tendencies. The two themes that emerged from the data indicated that self-talk was either pessimistic or optimistic. More importantly, pessimistic self-talk usually came immediately in the moment of disappointment or closely thereafter as development officers were evaluating what had happened and what to do next. Eventually, all 18 participants arrived at a place where they demonstrated optimistic self-talk, viewing the setback or disappointment as an opportunity to learn and get better, reinforcing their own sense of agency or their level of confidence, and finding personal inspiration to keep working toward their goals. When sharing his experiences with self-talk, David said,

> When I've been disappointed, I have to take a step back and reevaluate. I'm a guest on a foreign land, so I've got to eat crow and play the game and realign. That pulls me out of it, because I know there are certain things I can't control. I have to look at it and say, 'OK, I like the challenge of this. How can I navigate this bureaucracy or this culture and be successful'?

For David, his self-talk first started with assessing his actions, his performance, and the environment. He recognized there were other elements of the situation that he could not influence, and there were some areas that he could influence. His self-talk encouraged his perceptions of his own self-efficacy and personal agency. He also reminded himself that he enjoyed the process of being challenged and that he believed that he could persevere toward a successful outcome.

This progression was consistent among the development officers who participated in the study. Undoubtedly, they expressed feeling negative emotions like disappointment, anger, bewilderment, and sadness when they faced challenges or rejection. They did not, however, dwell in those pessimistic emotions long. Instead, they quickly switched their internal monologue to concentrate on next steps and either improving the challenging situation or focusing on another, more promising situation. In their experiences of grit, it was noteworthy that optimistic self-talk is not a realistic expectation all of the time, in every occasion. What did seem useful, for these participants, was that they eventually developed positive self-talk after a brief period of self-doubt or pessimism and committed to moving forward.

Another important element in the role that self-talk played for the participants was that seven of the participants mentioned the encouragement and guidance of a fundraising mentor who helped shape their self-talk. They internalized the coaching, feedback, and advice to the extent that their mentor's words became the development officers' own self-talk monologue. To illustrate, Katie said, "I spent a couple of days being really down in the dumps about it. Then I had to recalibrate and think of what a mentor of mine told me — it's not about me, it's about the donor and what's right for them." She described how she resolved to move past her pessimism and sulking by saying to herself, "your mentor would be so disappointed in you." This finding reinforced what Duckworth (2016) and Dweck (2016) found, that hope, optimism, a growth mindset, and grit are malleable attitudes and could be intentionally coached, developed, and deployed.

Conceptual Model of Grit Related to Development Officers in Higher Education

The intent of qualitative inquiry is to understand multiple perspectives within their own context, not to generalize them into one common reality (Creswell, 2014). With that in mind, the associations and interactions between the meta-themes emergent in the study and grit are depicted in Figure 5. Caution should be taken against overstating the generalizability of this model since it is a representation of how these meta-themes related to grit in this particular study. Future research would be required to further test these concepts and their usefulness in understanding grit and achievement.

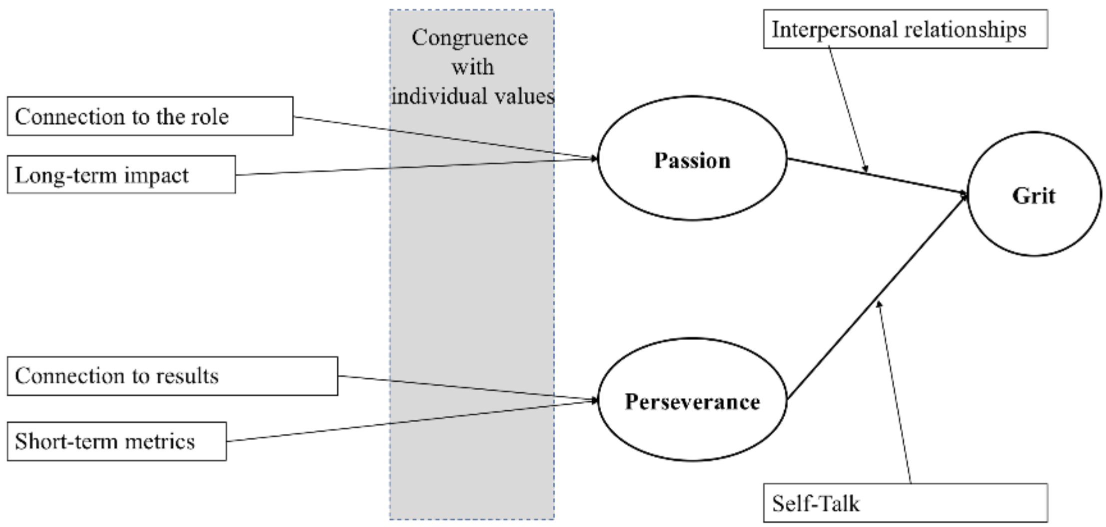

Figure 5. Conceptual Model of Grit in Development Officers in Higher Education

In the essence of the experience of grit for development officers in higher education, the meta-theme emerged that revealed that individuals saw their role as personal, and they expressed separation from the eventual results of their solicitations. By finding personal connection to their roles, they were able to enhance their consistency of effort and focus on their higher order goals over long periods of time. Likewise, by disconnecting themselves personally from the results of their fundraising efforts, they increased their perseverance, because they saw setbacks as “part of the job” and a necessary challenge to work through.

The second meta-theme revealed that development officers saw their long-term impact and making a difference as a key driver for their passion. This attention to the future helped them sustain consistent effort over time, and also gave them meaning and purpose to their work overall. On the other hand, performance metrics did play a role in their motivation; in fact, short-term metrics were an important element to how development officers described their perseverance and their attitudes about recalibrating their efforts after a disappointment. When an important solicitation did not result in success, development officers talked about going back to their performance expectations and metrics to help them prioritize what to focus on next.

Another interesting revelation from the study was that development officers spoke about their goal-directed behavior in the context of increasing their individual personal values, whether it was developing relationships, achieving work flexibility or trust, helping others, fulfilling duty, or finding personal happiness. Compensation and benefits were necessary — but not sufficient — for influencing their passion and perseverance. What increased their effort and resilience was to think about the values that they cherished and to live the values that were important to them. Development officers spoke about desiring to be known for having strong work ethic, for being loyal, and for conducting themselves with ethics, gratitude, and empathy. When they reflected on their motivation and their perseverance, living true to these values was a significantly more powerful and prominent concept than material rewards.

When it came to passion, or maintaining consistent effort over time, positive relationships gave development officers meaning, purpose, and a long-term focus on their highest order goals. The relationships that development officers described were with peers, mentors, supervisors, direct reports, university administration and faculty, and not least of all, with donors. When the participants in this study described their greatest joys in the work that they did, positive relationships were central. Alternatively, many of the participants also expressed that difficult relationships were the stimuli of some of their greatest professional frustrations as well. It seems that positive relationships can foster more passion — and hence, more grit — for development officers, and difficult relationships have the opposite effect.

Finally, the role of self-talk in bolstering perseverance was confirmed in this study. Interestingly, the development officers articulated negative self-talk and emotions like anger, frustration, disappointment, and sadness; however, they quickly moved on from those pessimistic examples to more optimistic messages. They told themselves that the rejection was not personal or even final. They engaged in dialogue with their peers or their mentors. Their growth mindset around getting better and improving their performance was revealed through their self-talk as well. Ultimately, the eventual optimistic self-talk boosted the confidence of development officers and helped them persevere despite challenges and setbacks.

Implications for Practice

People who engage in building deep and genuine relationships with constituents for the purpose of doing business face a complicated — even conflicted — professional space. They routinely invest their personal selves into these professional relationships, and sometimes, the boundaries between the personal and the professional are unclear or become intertwined. The integration of the personal and the professional spheres for people in this role affects their experiences of grit. Generally, they expressed experiences that exhibit consistent passion toward their top-level goals and perseverance toward that goal in spite of setbacks and challenges. For those who occupy roles that combine the personal and professional, motivation and resilience take on a new meaning and provide greater purpose. The results of this study explored the essence of grit as experienced by development officers in higher education and the role of self-talk in their reflections on overcoming challenges. The findings certainly applied to the particular context of nonprofit development work in higher education, and implications for other contexts — like nonprofit organizations in other cause-related areas and for-profit organization — are also provided. Essentially, grit and optimistic self-talk sustain commitment and performance for development officers, and these concepts can also be influenced and expanded with intention.

Development Officers in Higher Education

This study provided an opportunity for major gift development officers in higher education to reflect on their own experiences of grit and afforded them an awareness of where they could strengthen their passion, perseverance, and optimistic self-talk qualities. Dialogue with peers in their professional network was one of the prevalent coping strategies that development officers who participated in the study discussed. Being able to talk through situations and receive encouragement from other fundraisers improved their perceptions of their grit and their ability to continue doing the work. This study and its findings also serve as a resource for development officers to refer to as they process and give meaning to their experiences of rejection and motivations for pressing onward in the role.

When establishing who they are in the profession and how they think about their identities as development officers, people should create separation between themselves and relationships that they nurture and the eventual outcome of their gift solicitations. This study emphasized that development officers can do everything right and demonstrate exceptional skill and performance, and the donor may still elect not to fund a major gift. That divorcement between self and outcome is critical to the experience of grit for development officers. Training and mentorship could assist greatly with this conceptualization. It is important in the maturation of development officers that they have guidance and encouragement to see themselves apart from the dollars raised and that they have appropriate avenues of support to reinforce that divide.

In terms of how they organize and prioritize their work, development officers may consider using metrics, goals, and performance data to assess their short-term aspirations and success toward achievement. After that, pursuing career advancement may incent mid-range goals. Finally, a desire for making a lasting impact or leaving a legacy may help drive long-term and top-level goals. Development officers should ensure that the daily or monthly goals they set for themselves align with their desire to increase the elements of their roles that they value, like relationships and creativity. A common top-level goal among development officers is seeing a lasting impact of their work, so lower- and mid-level goals should also align with that ultimate concern. Development officers can also benefit from co-opting the mission and longevity of higher education institutions in their own feelings about the outcomes of their work. Visualizing the generations of future students and knowledge breakthroughs benefitting from their work can enhance their own grit in the short-, mid-, and long-term.

Another practical implication resulting from the study is that development officers have the opportunity to find meaning in the work they do that not only sustains their career grit, but also gives their life purpose. As the study revealed, making a difference, leaving a legacy, building genuine relationships, and feeling satisfaction from an altruistic endeavor are all experiences that the participant development officers described. Viktor E. Frankl (2014) wrote that when "people have enough to live by but nothing to live for" (p. 132) their abilities to overcome suffering or setbacks and find optimism is stunted. In the work of major gift solicitations, rejections and challenges are certain to occur. When development officers have a clear sense of meaning and purpose to the work that they are doing, they are able to persevere and maintain consistent motivation toward their goals. Meaning and purpose are beliefs that are rooted in an individual's value system, so development officers should deliberately ascertain what those concepts represent for them personally.

A final implication for development officers in particular relates to the ways in which they leverage their own self-talk. As previously discussed, negative emotions and initial pessimistic self-talk are normal and unavoidable, however, development officers who demonstrate grit changed their cognitive monologues to recognize their agency and self-efficacy. They employ self-talk that focuses on what they can do next and boosts their own confidence. Development officers should seek mentors and supportive networks who reinforce positive, optimistic self-talk and a growth mindset. They should also recognize when their internal monologue is becoming overly pessimistic and intentional self-correct to a more optimistic message.

HRD in Higher Education Foundations and Institutions

The results found in this study are useful for higher education foundations and institutions that employ major gift development officers. For those in the HRD function, this study revealed important aspects of motivation and goal-directed behavior that informs the way that organizations design and manage the work of professional fundraisers. These findings also provided insight for leaders and managers about ways in which they can support and develop their fundraising staff. Most importantly for HRD in foundations and higher education institutions, the results suggested that performance metrics related to short-term behaviors and specific job-related tasks were effective in motivating development officers. Of the participants, 15 specifically stated that their organization's expectations of performance goals and metrics were important to their experiences of motivation and passion. That being said, metrics solely involving resultant dollars raised or number of closed gifts may not be as motivational, since development officers themselves do not see those results as a factor which they can control. Instead, HRD departments should consider using dollar-raised goals for forecasting and making projections that help guide expectations and set broad targets for fundraising performance.

Another important implication for foundations and institutions involved the ways in which HRD departments set up and emphasize mentoring, leadership development, and peer support networks. Having constructive and strategic dialogue about challenges and setbacks or gathering suggestions were all situations that development officers reported as being integral to their experiences of grit. HRD within these organizations should explore how they can create and nurture grit-enhancing types of interactions, whether formally or informally, and how they develop managers and leaders in the organization to serve as those resources for development officers.

In Chapter One, issues around finding experienced talent in development were presented. Based on the results of this study, attracting and recruiting individuals with high emotional intelligence, relationship-building and interpersonal skills, and other personal characteristics like intuitiveness and altruism appeared to be more important than previous experience in fundraising. While experience certainly does matter, the war for talent in higher education foundations and institutions may be partially alleviated by organizations and HRD departments committing to hiring new professionals and developing them for success. Investment in training could include programs in: the cultivation process, the mechanics of asking for a gift, internship programs, rotational program with annual fund departments or grant-writing departments, responding to rejection, and interpersonal skill building.

Of potential concern was the number of participants in the study who expressed belief that being a successful development officer was due to naturally-born traits or skills. As Ian put it, “you have to have an outward personality. You can’t be an introverted person in this business, for sure.” A fundamental belief about grit and achievement in the literature is that effort and skill-development are critical to success in any field. The pervasive — and incorrect — belief that success in fundraising is related to personality type or an untrainable skill may be part of the issue with finding and developing talent. Much of what is perceived as “natural” skill can be explained by life experience and development. There will be talent and skill that individuals have acquired over the courses of their lives that help them be successful in fundraising roles, and the point to be made is that nearly anyone can learn those skills and become a talented development officer if they have the passion and perseverance.

In the study, seven participants specifically mentioned the need for more diversity in development roles in higher education. One person mentioned a lack of female leaders and executives in foundations and fundraising institutions despite the fact that women are widely represented in front-line development positions. Another participant mentioned feeling like the only development officer who identified as LGBTQ in the foundation.

Further, in recruiting participants for the study, 16 of the 18 participants were white/Caucasian. This is an area where HRD in higher education foundations and institutions can play a role in shaping the development of talent and leadership capabilities of women and minorities. Communities of respect and tolerance should be created and cultivated within organizations, and a greater emphasis on attracting, recruiting, and retaining qualified development officers from different backgrounds and demographic characteristics would be important.

Finally, HRD departments in higher education should explore reward programs beyond compensation increases. As noted in the findings, the ability to make an acceptable standard of wage is important to development officers; however, beyond that the participants expressed value in work flexibility, taking on leadership and mentoring capacities, and being invited to work on increasingly complex or transformational gifts. Also, some of these considerations may alleviate the feelings of burnout or concerns that development officers expressed about the demands of travel on their family and home lives. To be able to negotiate flexible work arrangements that recognize and reward exceptional talent could provide options for HRD to increase motivation and engagement and reduce burnout and turnover.

HRD in Nonprofit Organizations

Beyond the higher education sector, nonprofit organizations in general should benefit from the results of this study. While the history, tradition, and long-term stability of higher education institutions certainly affects the experiences of grit for development officers, the personal identification with mission and the drive to make a difference is not unique to higher education NPOs alone. Other kinds of nonprofit organizations can use these opportunities for fostering meaning and purpose in the work of their staff. The propensity to place value in altruism and having a lasting impact is likely higher in nonprofit employees across a variety of roles and causes. HRD practitioners in NPOs should consider initiatives that highlight the personal values and relationships among their employees and their constituents. Further, they can demonstrate how those values and relationships parallel the organizational mission and vision to reinforce those values. Creating greater cohesion between individual employees and the beneficiaries of the philanthropy could serve to heighten the personal connections that employees in nonprofit organizations feel in their roles.

HRD in For-Profit Organizations

Lastly, the results of this study can benefit for-profit organizations by providing greater insight into how people experience grit within an organizational context and how their self-talk contributes to their level of grit. A significant finding of the study showed that individuals re-centered themselves on their self-efficacy and personal agency after a setback by talking to peers, managers, and mentors. For-profit organizations can incorporate strategies of dialogue and mentoring to enhance the resilience and goal-orientation of their employees. Further, any organization can benefit from developing coaching and feedback processes that allow for brief periods of exploring negative emotions and critical perspectives during and immediately after a professional disappointment. That being said, guidance toward more positive and optimistic feedback should quickly follow. Training and leadership development should include features of coaching and feedback, whereby a growth mindset and grit are reinforced.

Implications for Theory and Research

This research explored the application of a contemporary model for explaining achievement, or grit, to an occupational context and utilized a qualitative treatment, both of which had not previously occurred in the existing body of literature. It also brought together, conceptually, theories of motivation, goal-setting theory, and grit within the context of development officers working in higher education foundations and institutions. The responses from the development officers in this study confirmed that aspects of grit, goal-setting theory and decisions about performing goal-directed behavior, and optimistic self-talk enhanced the meaning, purpose, and satisfaction that participants felt about their work and roles within their organizations.

This study also contributes to existing theory by providing an account of how people talk about their experiences of grit, their passion toward their goals, and the perseverance that they exhibit in the face of challenges. In the case of this research, evidence revealed that ultimate goals, or top-level goals, for people in this particular context are less individualistic than previous studies found, while lower-level goals seemed to be self-serving. Duckworth (2016) found that grit involved holding the same ultimate goal consistency over the long-term, with a series of mid- and low-level goals that built upon themselves to the top of the goal hierarchy. This was not necessarily the case in this study's findings. The top-level goals of the development officers were certainly connected to their organizational missions, altruistic values, and desire to leave a legacy; however, their lower-level goals were not expressly articulated as connected to that ultimate objective.

Some important elements surfaced that related to how individuals form and assign meaning to their goals and how they make decisions about persevering. Relationships were central to the essence of grit for development officers, and a belief in altruism and lasting impact also influenced grit. Chapter One identified a gap in the literature related to what is known about how individuals navigate tensions between the personal values and the mission of the organization. This study did not uncover a single development officer who articulated this conflict. In the case of all 18 participants, the development officers talked about congruence between their personal values and those of their institution. Their relationships exhibited disharmonious aspects between individuals within the institution, not with the institution itself. Strained working relationships between colleagues, managers, or higher education administrators provided the impetus for incongruence, and in at least three cases, led to the departure of the development officer from the role.

Finally, this study inhabits a void of HRD research oriented in the nonprofit sector. As this research found, individuals working in nonprofit organizations experienced their goals, achievement, and employment in different – in this case, deeply personal – ways than individuals in other for-profit jobs. The advancement in the nonprofit HRD knowledge creates an expanded framework for theory and future research.

Limitations

As noted previously, limitations will always constrain the usefulness of the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Merriam, 2009; Terrell, 2016). For this study, a number of limitations to the findings of the study were acknowledged.

First, the utility of the study was impacted by the selection criteria used to recruit eligible participants. Since research-intensive public universities were the only higher education institutions included in the scope of the study, this factor limited the experiences of grit collected and analyzed. Second, these institutions typically employ individuals with four-year college degrees as development officers, so again, their experiences of grit may not be generally reflective across other types of higher education institutions or organizations. Third, the study was also limited in terms of diversity of participants. This may have impacted the range of perspectives and background considered as it related to grit. To address these limitations, the report included descriptive demographic and profile information to give the audience the opportunity to determine the usefulness of the findings and discussion.

Finally, the role of the researcher may also have inaccurately influenced the analysis and discussion of the results of the study. In order to minimize the risk of this limitation, the researcher included a number of examples from the raw data, in the words of the participants. This enabled the audience to draw their own conclusions about the validity and reliability of the research given the data. Further, member checking and peer review of codes and themes enhanced the credibility of the findings and discussion.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study examined development officers in higher education located in the United States. A phenomenological treatment was employed to explore the experiences of grit broadly. Future research into the topic could consider case studies or other kinds of comparison within the profession. Also, other selection criteria could be considered to broaden the range of institutions and nonprofit development officers who have experiences and perspectives that would benefit what is known about grit in this context. Nonprofit employees of other types of cause-related organizations may have different experiences and perspectives that lend nuance to what is known about grit and self-talk, so expanding the study beyond higher education foundations and institutions may also be of theoretical value.

Of concern in this research, very few people of color were recruited. A deeper investigation into diversity and inclusion in nonprofit organizations generally and higher education foundations specifically would yield additional insights into the experiences of grit of these professionals. Further, the cultural implications of nonprofit work and major gift development should be addressed in future studies on the topic of nonprofit organizations. Knowing more about this sector remains important for the field of HRD.

While Duckworth (2016) outlined several techniques for increasing the level of grit in children, there has been no significant research published concerning techniques and strategies for increasing the level of grit in adults, and more specifically, for employees embedded in organizations. This study began exploring the experiences that individuals in this particular profession expressed as being important to their perceptions of grit, and future research should continue this line of inquiry to recommend interventions for adults and organizations.

While the aim of this study was not to test alternative models of grit, three related concepts emerged that should continue to be tested in future studies. The first is the role of altruism in the experience of grit. The findings of this study suggested that having a purpose greater than oneself led to higher levels of effort, sustained over longer periods of time. Another potentially insightful concept is adaptability, or the skill an individual has with navigating change and shifting priorities. Since goal hierarchies and a consistent focus on a top-level goal are central to grit, the ease with which an individual can reevaluate and realign their goal hierarchies may enhance their experiences of grit. Finally, the degree to which a person is motivated by challenge or avoidant of opportunities that stretch one's skills and abilities would likely influence their experience of grit. Grit is a contemporary and promising model for understanding why, given similar levels of talent and ability, some people succeed while others flounder. Continuing to augment the knowledge about this concept and how it is influenced by other factors is an important development for the theory.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Five opened with a brief overview of the purpose of the study and the research questions that guided the study. A discussion of the five meta-themes that respond the research questions followed. The chapter continued with a summary of the meta-themes and their relationship with grit. Implications for practice were provided for development officers, higher education institutions, nonprofit organizations, and for-profit organizations. The implications for theory and research were presented. Then, a report of the limitations of the study were followed by recommendations for future research. The chapter concluded with a summarization.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL (PILOT STUDY)

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT TYLER
3900 University Blvd. • Tyler, TX 75799 • 903.565.5774 • FAX: 903.565.5858

Office of Research and Technology Transfer

Institutional Review Board

March 15, 2017

Ms. McCann,

Your request to conduct the study: *Goal Motivation and Grit in Non-Profit Fundraising Professionals*, IRB#S2017-75 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.

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

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

Sincerely,

Gloria Duke, PhD, RN

Gloria Duke, PhD, RN
Chair, UT Tyler IRB

APPENDIX B: *A PRIORI* CODES FROM PILOT STUDY

Thematic Category	Definition	Participant Excerpts
Role expectations	Motivation or goal-setting that comes from the job role expectations established by the organization.	"It can be as simple and basic as your metrics and what you're trying to achieve… in your role within the organization."
		"A lot of the things that I'm learning about are not only just how we operate internally, but then also the industry [al]together."
Passion-driven goal setting	Goal-setting the comes from the individual's passion for achievement of goals	"I have another part of me that really enjoys helping and teaching people, so I thought maybe that would be maybe an opportunity later on."
		"Or it can be something greater, and I think every… fundraiser really likes to be successful."
Data-driven goal setting	Goal-setting that comes from fundraising data or metric information (either from the organization or from the individual)	"I think of goals in several different [ways]. I think of them in terms of length of time… so short-term, immediate… "what am I going to be doing today?" All the way up to… "what does the plan look like and strategy for the month?... Quarter?... Year?"
		"I guess fundraising goals and setting a true dollar goal was looking at some numbers and trying to formulate something that realistic and achievable."
Goal congruence	Satisfaction or happiness around the fact that work goals are in congruence with personal goal/values	"When I think about priorities outside of work, for me, are faith, family, and friends. Those definitely need to be number one. So I wasn't being true to myself in honoring those relationships. So it was really important for me to find something else that gave me flexibility to have that family time and have a health work balance."
		"I think a lot of it goes hand-in-hand. If you're successful at work, I think – it's not always the case – but it'll help you be successful in your personal life. If you're

		not happy in one or the other, I think it's going to affect the other."
Relationships and values	Passion/interest that derives from the relationships and personal values of the work	"I think some of the relationships that I have with some of the donors are very fulfilling."
		"Being loyal… leaders… selfless service… those are all qualities that I see in myself. And then to be part of an organization that mimics those values is… I don't think a lot of people get to have that… They spend a lot of time working in organizations that do not align with their values, but the organization is right in line with my values."
Individual, innate traits	Motivation or goal-directed behavior that individuals believe is part of their innate traits	"I think it comes from my upbringing with my family. My parents. They both really instilled this desire for me to always… I don't want to use 'competitive' as the word, but to always go above and beyond."
		"Most people are born with it. I'm not sure that's a trait you can learn… self-motivated… self-starter… kind of an entrepreneur. You've got to be constantly looking for better ways to do your job more effectively to be successful."
Job-related characteristics	Motivation or goal-directed behavior that individuals believe is part of the characteristics of the job	"Your interest and your passion for the organization helps you to want to do a better job. Be more successful. But to also do it the right way."
		"I want to put the best foot forward, because when I'm sitting in front of a donor, I am the University. As far as they know, they see me as the University."
Career advancement	Motivation or goal-directed behavior that relates to desire for career advancement	"I actually enrolled in [graduate certificate] to take on some additional educational courses related to my field in hopes that would help give me a little bit of a leg up internally and also to have a better understanding of the bigger picture of things."
Visual cues	Motivation or goal-directed behavior that is enhanced through visual cues (a form of self-talk)	"I even, in my office, have a big whiteboard and have my favorite quotes. I update it every week and just as I hear different things. It could be from church or it could be a Bible verse or something I heard in a speech. I try to keep little things like that

		around my my office. It helps to keep me motivated.”
Fundraising as separate from “self”	Motivational coping technique to persevere related to separating the act of fundraising from the “self” of the development officer	“To take ‘no’ personally is not a good thing.”
		“You’re not asking them for money for yourself. It’s for your organization and it’s for probably a very good cause.”
		“I felt rejected, in a sense. And felt like, ‘oh man, what did I do?’ But I think it’s important to keep in mind that I don’t know all of the dynamics. I don’t know everything that going on on their side. So the important thing is that I asked.”
Optimistic mindset	Motivational coping technique to persevere related to maintaining a positive or optimistic mindset	“I try to be positive and look forward to the next discussion. Because a lot of time, it’s not just the one meeting. You might get a ‘no’ and then you’re on to the next… so a lot of times you have to shelf those feelings and think about it another time.”
		“Being the eternal optimist as I am, they could change their mind. So we continue to treat them well, and move on to some other donor.”
Dialogue with peers	Motivational coping technique to persevere related to engaging in dialogue with others who understand the nature of the work	“You’ve got to sit down and talk through the situations with them and encourage them. Reinforce the decision that they’ve made and the actions that they’ve taken, and make them realize that what they did was correct and that sometimes things just don’t work out, again, for many reasons that we may not even know about.”
		“So having an open dialogue and being comfortable with your colleagues enough to say, ‘hey, you know, when you said the to me, maybe I misinterpreted it, but this is how it made me feel and I want to talk to you about that.’ Being very straightforward.”

APPENDIX C: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL (MAIN STUDY)

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT TYLER
3900 University Blvd. • Tyler, TX 75799 • 903.565.5774 • FAX: 903.565.5858

Office of Research and Technology Transfer

Institutional Review Board

February 26, 2018

Dear Ms. McCann,

Your request to conduct the study: *Exploring Grit in the Experiences of Higher Education Development Officers: A Phenomenological Study*, IRB #SP2018-109 has been approved by The University of Texas at Tyler Institutional Review Board under expedited review. This approval includes the use of signed informed consent, 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.
- Expedited approval with signed 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

Gloria Duke, PhD, RN
Chair, UT Tyler IRB

APPENDIX D: LIST OF PUBLIC RESEARCH-INTENSIVE INSITUTIONALLY-RELATED FOUNDATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

University Name	City	State
Arizona State University	Tempe	AZ
Clemson University	Clemson	SC
Colorado State University – Fort Collins	Fort Collins	CO
CUNY Graduate School and University Center	New York	NY
Florida International University	Miami	FL
Florida State University	Tallahassee	FL
George Mason University	Fairfax	VA
Georgia Institute of Technology – Main Campus	Atlanta	GA
Georgia State University	Atlanta	GA
Indiana University – Bloomington	Bloomington	IN
Iowa State University	Ames	IA
Kansas State University	Manhattan	KS
Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College	Baton Rouge	LA
Michigan State University	East Lansing	MI
North Carolina State University at Raleigh	Raleigh	NC
Ohio State University – Main Campus	Columbus	OH
Oregon State University	Corvallis	OR
Pennsylvania State University – Main Campus	University Park	PA
Purdue University – Main Campus	West Lafayette	IN
Rutgers University – New Brunswick	New Brunswick	NJ
Stony Brook University	Stony Brook	NY
SUNY at Albany	Albany	NY
Temple University	Philadelphia	PA
Texas A&M University – College Station	College Station	TX
Texas Tech University	Lubbock	TX

The University of Tennessee – Knoxville	Knoxville	TN
The University of Texas at Arlington	Arlington	TX
The University of Texas at Austin	Austin	TX
The University of Texas at Dallas	Richardson	TX
University at Buffalo	Buffalo	NY
University of Alabama at Birmingham	Birmingham	NY
University of Arizona	Tucson	AZ
University of Arkansas	Fayetteville	AR
University of California – Berkeley	Berkeley	CA
University of California – Davis	Davis	CA
University of California – Irvine	Irvine	CA
University of California – Los Angeles	Los Angeles	CA
University of California – Riverside	Riverside	CA
University of California – San Diego	La Jolla	CA
University of California – Santa Barbara	Santa Barbara	CA
University of California – Santa Cruz	Santa Cruz	CA
University of Central Florida	Orlando	FL
University of Cincinnati – Main Campus	Cincinnati	OH
University of Colorado Boulder	Boulder	CO
University of Connecticut	Storrs	CT
University of Delaware	Newark	DE
University of Florida	Gainesville	FL
University of Georgia	Athens	GA
University of Hawaii at Manoa	Honolulu	HI
University of Houston	Houston	TX
University of Illinois at Chicago	Chicago	IL
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	Champaign	IL
University of Iowa	Iowa City	IA
University of Kansas	Lawrence	KS
University of Kentucky	Lexington	KY
University of Louisville	Louisville	KY
University of Maryland – College Park	College Park	MD
University of Massachusetts – Amherst	Amherst	MA

University of Michigan – Ann Arbor	Ann Arbor	MI
University of Minnesota – Twin Cities	Minneapolis	MN
University of Mississippi	University	MS
University of Missouri – Columbia	Columbia	MO
University of Nebraska – Lincoln	Lincoln	NE
University of New Mexico – Main Campus	Albuquerque	NM
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	Chapel Hill	NC
University of North Texas	Denton	TX
University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus	Norman	OK
University of Oregon	Eugene	OR
University of Pittsburgh – Pittsburgh Campus	Pittsburgh	PA
University of South Carolina – Columbia	Columbia	SC
University of South Florida – Main Campus	Tampa	FL
University of Utah	Salt Lake City	UT
University of Virginia – Main Campus	Charlottesville	VA
University of Washington – Seattle Campus	Seattle	WA
University of Wisconsin – Madison	Madison	WI
University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee	Milwaukee	WI
Virginia Commonwealth University	Richmond	VA
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	Blacksburg	VA
Washington State University	Pullman	WA
Wayne State University	Detroit	MI
West Virginia University	Morgantown	WV

APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH FOR MAIN STUDY

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT TYLER

Informed Consent to Participate in Research
Institutional Review Board # SP2018-109
Approval Date: February 26, 2018

1. **Project Title**: Exploring Grit in the Experience of Higher Education Development Officers: A Phenomenological Study

2. **Principal Investigator:** Jessica A. McCann

3. **Participant's Name:**

To the Participant:

You are being asked to take part in this study at The University of Texas at Tyler (UT Tyler). This permission form explains:
- Why this research study is being done.
- What you will be doing if you take part in the study.
- Any risks and benefits you can expect if you take part in this study.

After talking with the person who asks you to take part in the study, you should be able to:
- Understand what the study is about.
- Choose to take part in this study because you understand what will happen

4. Description of Project

The purpose of this study is to talk to major gift fundraising professionals about their experiences of motivation, working toward their goals, and facing rejection in their work. Human Resource (HR) professionals and others in organizations who support development officers may use your story to improve practices around developing goals and working through challenges.

5. Research Procedures

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

- You will be asked to set up a meeting with the researcher to talk about your experiences developing personal and professional goals and working through challenges.

- The interview will last about an hour and will be voice-recorded.

IRB approved October 2011; rev 03-26-12

- Your name and institution/foundation will <u>not</u> be identified in any report or analysis.

- You may be asked to meet again if more information is needed.

6. Side Effects/Risks

You may become slightly distressed when discussing your thoughts and feelings about your motivation toward your goals and facing challenges, though the researcher does not expect this to be a common problem. Should you become distressed, the researcher can pause the interview if you need a break, reschedule the interview, or discontinue the interview if you no longer want to participate.

7. Potential Benefits

Leadership and HR professionals in organizations that rely on professional development officers to raise funds for their causes may use the information from this study to support nonprofit fundraisers as they navigate their goal motivation process and persevere through challenges.

<u>Understanding of Participants</u>

8. I have been given a chance to ask any questions about this research study. The researcher has answered my questions.

9. If I sign this consent form I know it means that:

- I am taking part in this study because I want to. I chose to take part in this study after having been told about the study and how it will affect me.

- I know that I am free to not be in this study. If I choose to not take part in the study, then nothing will happen to me as a result of my choice.

- I know that I have been told that if I choose to be in the study, then I can stop at any time. I know that if I do stop being a part of the study, then nothing will happen to me.

- I will be told about any new information that may affect my wanting to continue to be part of this study.

- The study may be changed or stopped at any time by the researcher or by The University of Texas at Tyler.

- The researcher will get my written permission for any changes that may affect me.

10. I have been promised that that my name and institution will not be in any reports about this study unless I give my permission.

11. I also understand that any information collected during this study may be shared as long as no identifying information such as my name, address, or other contact information is provided). Information may be shared with:

- Organization giving money to be able to conduct this study
- Other researchers interested in putting together your information with information from other studies
- Information shared through presentations or publications

12. I understand The UT Tyler Institutional Review Board (the group that makes sure that research is done correctly and that procedures are in place to protect the safety of research participants) may look at the research documents. These documents may have information that identifies me on them. This is a part of their monitoring procedure. I also understand that my personal information will not be shared with anyone.

13. I have been told about any possible risks that can happen with my taking part in this research project.

14. I also understand that I will not be given money for any patents or discoveries that may result from my taking part in this research.

15. If I have any questions concerning my participation in this project, I will contact the principal researcher: Jessica A. McCann at 713-382-7710 or email jmccann4@patriots.uttyler.edu.

16. If I have any questions concerning my rights as a research subject, I will contact Dr. Gloria Duke, Chair of the IRB, at (903) 566-7023, gduke@uttyler.edu, or the University's Office of Sponsored Research:

The University of Texas at Tyler
c/o Office of Sponsored Research
3900 University Blvd
Tyler, TX 75799

I understand that I may contact Dr. Duke with questions about research-related injuries.

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

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

_________________________________ _______________
Signature of Participant Date

18. I have discussed this project 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 this explanation.

_________________________________ _______________
Researcher/Principal Investigator Date

APPENDIX F: EMAIL INVITATION TO SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Development Officer,

I hope this email finds you well!

I am looking for major gift development officers employed full-time in higher education foundations to take a short screening questionnaire. It will only take about five minutes.

This questionnaire will help with a Ph.D. research study focused on understanding how and why DOs are motivated to do the work they do – and how they stay motivated despite challenges, rejections, and disappointments.

Ultimately, the findings from this project will help HR professionals and foundation leaders know how to better train and support DOs as they engage in the work of soliciting major gifts from donors.

If you would like to participate, please complete this short screening questionnaire.

Thank you for sharing your perspective!

Jessica

Jessica A. McCann I *PhD Candidate*
COLLEGE OF BUSINESS & TECHNOLOGY
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT TYLER
JMcCann4@patriots.uttyler.edu
Cell: 713-382-7710

UT TYLER College of Business & Technology
BUILDING DISTINCTION

APPENDIX G: DEVELOPMENT OFFICER SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

Major Gift Development Officer

Screening Questionnaire

The following questionnaire will be used as a screening tool for potential participants in a study about the experiences of major gift development officers working in higher education foundations. The first step is to make sure you understand the purpose and to seek your consent to participate. This is a research project conducted to fulfill the dissertation requirement at The University of Texas at Tyler.

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you initially decide to participate in this research questionnaire, you may withdraw your consent at any time. If you choose to participate, you may be contacted for further questions and to participate in a research interview.

The procedure involves completing the questionnaire with multiple choice questions about you and your development experience. You are being asked to participate in a survey that will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. After you read each question, select the answer that best corresponds to your response.

To protect your confidentiality, your responses and contact information will not be made public. The researcher anticipates no negative side effects or risks associated with your participation in this study. Only a summary of the data gathered during this study will be shared with The University of Texas at Tyler representatives and will only be used for scholarly purposes.

Please answer the following questions about your development experience. All information provided will be kept confidential.

* Required

Are you currently employed full-time in major gift development work with an institutionally-related higher education foundation in the U.S.? *
Yes
No

Do you engage in face-to-face solicitation of major gifts from donors? *
Yes
No

How many years have you been involved in major gift development work? *

How many years have you been employed at your current foundation?

What higher education institution is your employer foundation associated with? *

If you had to guess, how many solicitations have you conducted in your development career? *

Do you intend to stay in major gift development work long-term? *
Yes
No

What is your age?
18-25 years
26-35 years
36-45 years
46-55 years
56-65 years
66+ years

What is your gender?
Female
Male
Prefer not to say

What is your race/ethnicity?
American Indian / Alaskan Native
Asian / Pacific Islander
Black / African American
Hispanic
White / Caucasian
Other:
Prefer not to say

What is the highest level of schooling you have completed?
High school
Some college, no degree
College degree

If you are selected, would you be willing to participate in a 60-minute interview about your major gift development experience? *
Yes
No

If yes, please provide your name and contact information (email and phone number)

APPENDIX H: EMAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERVIEW

Dear Participant:

Thank you for taking the time to complete the Major Gift Development Officer screening questionnaire!

Based on your experience and perspective, I would like to invite you to further participate in this research study designed to better understand the experiences of motivation and perseverance of development officers. Ultimately, your involvement may improve the way that organizations are able to train and support DOs engaged in major gift solicitations.

The interview will last for about an hour, and we can schedule a time that works best for your schedule. **If you are still willing to participate, please reply at your earliest convenience with <u>three</u> options for days/times (including your time zone) that work best with your schedule for us to meet <u>within the next three weeks</u>.**

After hearing from you, I'll send a meeting request with an invitation to connect via Zoom, a video conferencing platform. Please let me know if you do NOT want to appear on camera, and we will talk via audio conference only.

I have also attached the informed consent that you will need to review and return to me signed so that you are aware of why the study is being done, what you will be doing if you take part in the study, and any risks and benefits that you can expect from your participation.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you!

Jessica

Jessica A. McCann, Ph.D. Candidate
The University of Texas at Tyler
College of Business and Technology
JMcCann4@patriots.uttyler.edu
Cell: 713-382-7710

College of Business & Technology
BUILDING DISTINCTION

[Email included attachment of written informed consent]

APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The University of Texas at Tyler
Tyler • Longview • Palestine • Houston

Interviewee Name:		Date of Interview:	
Interview Start & End Times:		Notes Taken By:	

<u>Interview Guide – Part One</u>

- Thank you for volunteering for this study.
- Establish informed consent.
- Explain the interview protocol.
- Reiterate that all information will be kept confidential.
- At any time, if you have a question, feel free to ask or stop the interview at any time, for any reason.

<u>Interview Guide – Part Two – Semi-Structured Interview Questions</u>

<u>Personal Questions – Background Questions</u>

1. Which generational cohort (Baby Boomer, Gen X, Millennial, other) do you identify with?
2. What is your relationship status?
3. Do you have children?
4. How did you become a major gift development officer?
5. Why here [at research setting organization]?
6. How long have you been at this organization?

7. What did you do for work before development/fundraising?
8. Tell me about where you attended university.
9. What is your highest level of education achieved?

<u>Interview Questions related to Grit</u>

10. Tell me about a recent major gift solicitation.
    i. If successful, ask for a subsequent story of an unsuccessful solicitation.
    ii. If unsuccessful, ask for a subsequent story of a successful solicitation.
11. What did you do?
12. How did you feel?
13. How did you know how to respond?
14. What was it like to experience that result?
15. Why do you continue to do major gift fundraising?
16. Where does your motivation to do it come from?
17. What motivates you?
18. How do you motivate yourself?
19. When you have been disappointed, how do you re-motivate yourself?
20. How do you decide what is most important to you in your work?
21. When you look back on your career, what will make you feel successful?
22. How has your motivation impacted your ability to be successful?

Interview Questions related to Self-Talk when Overcoming Challenges

23. Tell me about the biggest disappointment in soliciting a major gift you have experienced.
24. What did you do?
25. How did you feel?
26. What were you saying to yourself during?
27. What were you saying to yourself afterward?
28. What would you say differently to yourself now about it?
29. What would you do differently now?
30. What would you say to a new development officer going through a challenging experience?

APPENDIX J: OBSERVATIONAL PROTOCOL

The University of Texas at Tyler

Tyler • Longview • Palestine • Houston

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">OBSERVATIONAL PROTOCOL</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Research Topic: Exploring Grit in the Experiences of Higher Education Development Officers: A Phenomenological Case Study</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Setting Observed:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Individual Observed:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Duration:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Observer:</td></tr>
<tr><td>Descriptive Notes
(What occurred at the site chronologically, the physical setting, a sketch of the site, portraits of individuals, activities, etc.)</td><td>Reflexive Notes
(Observer’s experiences, hunches, insights, feelings, themes, etc.)</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td></tr>
</table>