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OPTING OUT: NON-PARTICIPATION IN AN EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Mary Elizabeth Lucal entitled "OPTING OUT: NON-PARTICIPATION IN AN EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Higher Education Administration.

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OPTING OUT: NON-PARTICIPATION
IN AN EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

Educational assistance programs have existed in the United States since as early as 1952. These programs, in which employers pay for employees to complete post-secondary coursework, are popular among employers as recruitment and retention tools (Babcock, 2009; Buddin & Kapur, 2002; Cappelli, 2004; Manchester, 2008; Meisler, 2004; SHRM, 2009). They are viewed by employees as a means to accomplish personal goals (Jacobs, Skillings, & Yu, 2001). Yet, at last count, only 8% to 9% of eligible employees participated in classes through educational assistance (General Accounting Office, 1996). Little is known about why employees choose not to participate in educational assistance programs, nor about the role of the supervisor in non-participation decisions. The purpose of the study was to examine the impact of supervisor support on non-participation in an educational assistance program.

Data were collected through interviews with 15 university employees who had not taken free college classes through a university’s educational assistance program. The researcher analyzed and coded transcripts on an individual basis and then comparatively to identify emergent themes and categories. It was found that these participants chose not to participate in educational assistance due to four reasons: time constraints, early career financial concerns, past educational experiences, and lack of interest, with time constraints as the predominant reason. This finding was fairly consistent with the existing research and literature. It was further found that supervisors did not play a role, or played a minor role, in the decision not to participate. This finding was surprising, in that the literature suggests that supervisors play a significant role in employee development decisions.

Cross’s (1981) Chain of Response (COR) Model was utilized as a conceptual framework for the study, and proved helpful in identifying processes and relationships underlying
participants’ non-participation decisions. It also provided a means through which to consider the interplay between individual motivation and environmental factors in participation decisions.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Adult education has been part of the American experience since the 1600s (Knowles, 1977). Though historically adult education has been considered of primary benefit to the individual learner, throughout the 20th century it has been recognized as contributing to personal, institutional, and social development (Apps, 1985; Bryson, 1936; Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Knowles, 1970; Lindeman 1961). Recently, much emphasis has been placed on adult education as it relates to the workplace. As Merriam and Brockett state in their updated *The Profession and Practice of Adult Education*, “Few areas of practice are more directly associated with contemporary adult education than the workplace” (2007, p. 296). Adult education in the workplace (often termed human resource development or HRD) departs from traditional adult education in that its focus is on learning which benefits the organization (Gilley & Drake, 2003; Gilley & Gilley, 2003; Hatcher, 2002; Marquardt, Berger, & Loan, 2004; Schied, Carter, & Howell, 2001).

One form of adult education which serves the ends of traditional adult education and HRD is educational assistance. Through educational assistance, employers offer eligible workers the opportunity to complete post-secondary coursework at little to no cost, much like the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 provided higher education for eligible military veterans. Educational assistance programs became popular following World War II, when labor unions gained strength and employers increasingly felt the need to compete to attract and retain high quality employees. Indeed, due to the expansion of employee benefits which marked this period, it came to be known as the “golden age” of benefits (Mitchell, 2003).
Educational assistance programs help employers recruit and retain talented individuals. On the basis of his research, economist Peter Cappelli suggests, “[W]orkers who have higher ability and motivation self-select into firms with tuition assistance plans” (2004, p. 220). He goes on to explain that employees then stay “to make use of the benefits and receive their education, a process that can take years” (Cappelli, 2004, p. 220). Thus, participating employees are retained at least for the time it takes them to complete their academic program.

From employees’ perspectives, there are multiple and complex reasons for participating in educational programs. Adult education researchers have posited adult learner motivations for participation to include such psychological and sociological factors as increased social relationships, cognitive interest, and personal goal attainment (Boshier, 1971; Courtney, 1991; Houle, 1988; Morstain and Smart, 1974). A recent study examining employee motivation for participating in courses through educational assistance affirmed that many employees participate because of their own personal enrichment goals (Jacobs, Skilling, & Yu, 2001). The following testimonial from a Kentucky corrections employee completing graduate coursework through her employee educational assistance program (EEAP) supports this conclusion:

My work in Corrections inspired me to complete my doctorate in Psychology. After several years in the Doctoral Program at University of Louisville, my sagging finances required that I return to work before completing my degree. The EEAP tuition assistance that I received in 2009 made it possible for me to continue meeting the requirements for my doctorate while continuing to work full time to support my family. I am now working on my dissertation and hope to complete my doctorate in 2010…I am quite grateful for the EEAP support that helps me meet my personal goals as well as improve in my
contribution to Kentucky Corrections. (Theresa Seitz, M. Ed., Psychologist, Kentucky Correctional Institution for Women)

While the benefit to Kentucky Corrections is retaining this employee at least for the duration of her coursework and dissertation, what appears to drive this employee is the ability to continue her education while still supporting her family.

Given the benefits of educational assistance programs to employers and employees, it is perhaps not surprising that they have grown in number since the days following World War II. The Society for Human Resource Management reports that between 61 and 68 percent of employers (small, medium and large publicly and privately owned, nonprofit, and government sector included) now offer educational assistance programs (2008, 2009). An estimated $8 to $16 billion is spent annually to fund these programs (Babcock, 2009; Meisler, 2004; Sperling & Tucker, 1997; U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

What is perplexing, given the financial resources committed and the potential benefit to participants, is that relatively few employees take part in educational assistance programs. In the most recent analysis of educational assistance participation rates, the General Accounting Office (GAO) examined data from the Internal Revenue Service, the Department of Education’s National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, and Department of Labor Statistics for the years 1992-1994. The GAO found that only 8-9% of eligible employees during the three year period participated in classes through educational assistance (General Accounting Office, 1996, p. 5).

What accounts for this low level of participation?

Adult education research provides important insights into why working adult learners might choose not to participate in educational activities. Early research established a typology of barriers to adult education participation: situational, institutional and dispositional (Cross, 1981).
Situational barriers were defined as “arising from one’s situation in life at a given time,” such as lack of money, child care and transportation (Cross, 1981, p. 98). Institutional barriers were those institutional practices and procedures that might discourage adults from participating in learning activities—inconvenient locations or class schedules, for example. In the category of dispositional barriers were included self-perceptions about oneself as learner, such as feeling one is too old to learn. Later research added a fourth category, informational barriers, to include both unavailability of and willingness to utilize information about educational opportunities (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982). This typology provided a helpful framework for considering, in a general sense, why working adults might not participate in educational activities.

Empirical studies have furthered thinking about what might deter adults from educational participation. Most of the extant research is quantitative and has utilized the Deterrents to Participation Scale-General (DPS-G), developed in 1985 by Darkenwald and Valentine. Meant to be applied to the general public, this survey instrument measures deterrents to participation in adult educational activities. The original DPS-G study identified six deterrent factors: a) lack of confidence; b) lack of course relevance; c) time constraints; d) low personal priority; and e) cost and f) personal problems (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1985). The DPS-G has since been utilized in studies to explore what deters various groups (teachers, higher education employees, new parents, members of the military, attorneys) from participating in educational activities (Drake, 1987; Fogerson, 2001; Johnson, Harrison, Burnett & Emerson, 2003; Korab, 2003; Martindale & Drake, 1989; Ratcliff & Killingbeck, 1989). For example, Drake (1987) used the DPS-G to examine deterrents to agriculture teachers’ non-participation in credit and non-credit courses. The study identified six deterrent factors: lack of confidence, lack of course relevance, time
constraints, cost, personal problems, and lack of encouragement. Five of these six factors were those identified in the original DPS-G study.

While it has proven useful in its original form, the DPS-G has been modified by other researchers to identify deterrents unique to specific populations. For example, Hayes and Darkenwald (1988) used the DPS-G as the basis for the creation of a new instrument, the DPS-LL, meant to study educational non-participation among low-literate adults. By modifying the original DPS-G instrument, they were able to identify deterrent factors unique to this population: social disapproval and negative attitude toward classes. One researcher explained the contributions of the DPS instrument this way:

[I]nvestigators who used various forms of Scanlan’s DPS repeatedly found: a) a multidimensional construct does exist; b) combinations of deterrents impacting populations are similar but vary in importance by population and subgroup; c) the DPS instrument can sometimes be used to assist in predicting participation behavior. (Hansen, 1999, p. 9)

Stated another way, DPS-G research has helped to establish empirically that, for any population, non-participation is likely due to multiple factors. It has also helped to establish that educational deterrents are unique to the personal circumstances of the population studied.

Qualitative work has also contributed to our understanding of what deters adults from taking part in educational activities. Whereas DPS-based studies have identified many personal factors that deterred adults from educational participation, relevant qualitative studies have found that social context may also be a contributing factor (Archer, Pratt, & Phillips, 2001; Gallacher, Crossan, Leahy, Merrill, & Field, 2000; Paladanius, 2007). For example, in an interview study of working class men in London who had chosen not to participate in university courses,
researchers explored participants’ perception of higher education (Archer et al., 2001). Through discourse analysis, they concluded that the study’s participants perceived their gender and class identities as incompatible with higher education. They wrote, “[U]niversity students were (unfavourably) conceptualised as middle-class men, against whom respondents positioned themselves as Other” (Archer et al., 2001, p. 435).

Socioeconomic context, in addition to gender and class, was also found to influence educational participation. In an interview study of Scottish non-participants in post-secondary education, researchers found that low incomes, unemployment, and single parenthood had many respondents living below the poverty line and concerned with basic subsistence issues (Gallacher et al., 2000). The structure of the national benefits system created difficulty for some respondents who had hoped to attend university courses. Stated the researchers of two non-participants in their 20s, “They had both worked hard to get places at two different colleges. At the time of interview they were awaiting decisions as to whether they could attend college and keep on the level of incapacity benefit needed…” (Gallacher et al., 2000, p. 25). For these individuals, participation in college courses was secondary to maintaining a particular level of financial support.

Another qualitative researcher (Paladanius, 2007) interviewed unemployed Swedish adults who had chosen not to pursue adult education. The researcher noted a perception among non-participants that education was simply a precursor to adult life. Of those unemployed adults he interviewed, he wrote, “The target group perceives that real life starts when they become an adult…meaning working life...” (p. 4). Education was viewed by these participants as of lesser value than working and establishing an income.
Adult education research has posited that adult learner decisions are strongly influenced by personal and/or contextual factors. Findings from research in the human resource development field are consistent with this premise, and suggest that supervisors play an important role in employees’ learning and development. First, they influence the degree to which employees participate in training and development activities (Green, 1991; Kozlowski & Farr, 1988; Maurer & Tarulli, 1994; Noe & Wilk, 1993; Tharenou, 2001). Second, supervisor support for career development has a positive effect on employee career development behavior (Noe, 1996; Tharenou, Latimer, & Conroy, 1994). Third, supervisors play a key role in creating organizational climates which foster employee knowledge and skill updating (Kozlowski & Farr, 1988; Kozlowski & Hults, 1988). Finally, supervisors have been found to influence training transfer (Brinkerhoff & Montesino, 1995; Burke & Baldwin, 1999, Burke & Hutchins, 2008; Foxon, 1997, Martin, 2010). Given that supervisors play such a critical role in employee learning and development, it is curious that only one study has examined the role of supervisor support in educational assistance program non-participation.

Fogerson (2001) explored the impact of supervisor support on employees’ decisions not to participate in an educational assistance program. In this quantitative study, the researcher modified the DPS-G to include an item which read “My supervisor did not encourage or support my participation.” The results suggested four deterrent factors: a) lack of confidence; b) low personal priority; c) time choices; and d) lack of support. Lack of support included lack of family support as well as lack of supervisor support. Notably, though grouped together into one of four significant deterrent factors identified in the study, lack of family support and lack of supervisor support each had relatively low item means (less than 2.00 on a Likert scale measuring from 1.00 to 5.00). This population, the researcher stated, “gave generally low importance to their reasons
for not participating…” (Fogerson, 2001, p. 91). This finding may mean that non-participation is due to a confluence of low-level deterrents. Another possibility is that the items on the modified DPS-G were not of particular importance to the respondents in the study. Still another possibility is that supervisors have some effect on employee non-participation, but it is not perceived by employees as lack of support. It is difficult, from this finding, to conclude much about the relationship between supervisor support and non-participation.

In summary, we know from the literature that adults can be deterred from educational participation by personal factors, such as time or cost, or by broader contextual factors such as gender or class. Further, extant literature has established that supervisor support plays a critical role in employee learning and development. Yet the single study focusing on supervisor support and educational assistance participation yielded results which were only partially in keeping with these findings. The study confirmed that contextual factors deterred employee participation, yet positioned supervisor support as relatively inconsequential among these factors. This quantitative finding does little to help us understand the relationship between supervisor support and non-participation. To examine this relationship and provide depth to employees’ experiences, additional, qualitative study is essential.

**Statement of the Problem**

Vast resources are committed to educational assistance programs as a means of recruiting and retaining employees. Yet we know little about why so few employees choose to participate in these programs. Existing research suggests that supervisor support plays a critical role in employees’ decisions to participate in educational activities, but the impact of supervisor support on educational assistance program participation remains unclear. This impact of supervisor support is the problem to be addressed in this study.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore employees’ decisions not to participate in an educational assistance program, and to examine the impact of supervisor support on those non-participation decisions.

Research Questions

1. How do employees describe their decision not to participate in an educational assistance program?
2. What role, if any, does the supervisor play in employees’ decisions not to take college classes through educational assistance?

Significance of the Study

We know little about the impact of supervisor support on employees’ decisions not to take college classes through educational assistance programs. This study will provide insight into that impact, thus adding to the limited knowledge about this topic.

Findings from this study could help guide campus leaders and administrators in how to make educational assistance a more effective recruiting and retention tool. It will speak to the extent to which supervisor support is a deterrent to employee participation. If it is found to be a deterrent, the researcher will be able to suggest what organizations might do to make supervisors more encouraging of employee participation. These suggestions will include a better understanding for supervisors of the role they play in recruitment and retention, increased comprehension of why the organization offers educational assistance benefits, and improved training for supervisors in employee development.
Conceptual Framework

Cross’s Chain of Response (COR) Model (1981) provided the conceptual framework for this study. The COR Model, built by Cross but integrating the previous work of Miller (1967), Rubenson (1977), and Boshier (1973), holds that individual participation can best be understood by exploring the interaction between the individual and his/her environment. It further posits that decisions about participation are the result of a complex interplay among six variables: 1) self-evaluation, which defines an individual’s confidence in their own abilities; 2) attitudes about education, arising from past experience and attitudes of family and friends; 3) importance of goals and the expectation that participation will meet goals; 4) life transitions, which acknowledges phases of human development; 5) opportunities and barriers, which may help or hinder advancement to the final phases; 6) information, linking motivated learners to appropriate opportunities; and 7) participation (Cross, 1981).

Cross’ Chain-of-Response (COR) Model holds that participation decisions flow first from internal motivation (1-3) and then may be influenced by external factors (4-7). Cross points out that “in any interaction situation, forces flow in both directions,” suggesting a nonlinear interplay between internal and external factors as an individual considers participating in adult education (1981, p. 125). This cognitive model acknowledges that individuals have control over their own decisions and are not predestined to behave in one way or another. In it, each response is based on an individual’s evaluation of environmental factors.

Relating the COR Model to supervisor impact on educational non-participation decisions, it might be expected that non-participants base their decisions on some combination of internal and external factors. The model suggests that if non-participants have negative self-perception and/or attitudes about education (a lack of internal motivation) external factors such as lack of
supervisor support may strengthen an individual’s inclination not to participate in adult
education. Those with strong internal motivation, according to the model, will overcome modest
barriers. Lukewarm supervisor support would be an example of a modest external barrier.

Theoretically, it may be possible to describe the impact of supervisor support on non-
participants by the way non-participants characterize the interaction between their internal
motivation and their supervisors’ support. If the COR model holds true, those with low internal
motivation will be dissuaded by lack of supervisor support from participation in educational
assistance programs. Those with high levels of internal motivation may not view lack of
supervisor support as a deterrent to participation. Thus, the Chain of Response Model will act
both as a conceptual framework and as a tool for interpreting participant data.

**Delimitations of the Study**

This study will examine the relationship of supervisor support to non-participation in an
educational assistance program at a single organization. Findings will speak to employees of this
institution and may not be representative of perceptions of employees at other organizations.
The study’s findings will also not be generalizable to employees choosing not to participate in
other types of employer-provided benefit programs. Only non-exempt employees will
participate in this study; thus, findings will be reflective of this employee designation. The study
was delimited to non-exempt employees because exempt staff and faculty at this institution are
likely to already possess post-secondary degrees and so might find educational assistance less
compelling.
Limitations of the Study

This is a qualitative case study and will explore the perceptions of a relatively small group of respondents. It is, therefore, not generalizable to all non-participating employees in the institution.

Also, in using a qualitative case study design, the goal is to gain firsthand accounts of non-participant decision-making. Emphasis is thus placed on securing a depth of knowledge at the sacrifice of breadth. The decision to conduct a qualitative study will necessarily limit the applicability of the findings.

Organization of the Study

The study is presented in five chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction and background to the study, states the problem and purpose of the study, posits research questions which will guide the study, describes the significance of the study, the conceptual framework guiding the study, and the delimitations and limitations of the study. The second chapter contains a review of the literature on deterrents to participation in adult education and, more specifically, to employee education. The third chapter describes the method and procedures used in the conduct of the study, including the research design, site and population, data sources, procedures, and information on trustworthiness and dependability. The study’s findings are reported in the fourth chapter. The fifth and final chapter details a summary of the findings, discussion of findings and implications, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.
 Definitions

 **Educational Assistance Program**- A benefit program through which employers pay for employees to complete educational courses. This term is used interchangeably with **Tuition Assistance Programs**. Eligibility and requirements vary from employer to employer, including:

- **Eligibility**. In some cases, employees must work a certain number of years for the organization before becoming eligible.

- **Grade requirements**. Some employers require a minimum letter grade in order to pay for the course.

- **Types of Courses**. Some organization fund only for-credit post-secondary coursework while others will pay for a broad range of educational activities.

- **Form of Payment**. Some organizations pay the course provider directly; others may require the employee to pay the fees up front and submit grades and proof of course completion in order to be reimbursed.

 **Non-Exempt Employees**- Employees who are entitled to overtime pay. These employees are sometimes referred to as “hourly” workers.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of the study was to explore employees’ decisions not to participate in an educational assistance program, and to examine the impact of supervisor support on those non-participation decisions. The relevant research and literature on this topic are presented in this chapter. First, literature on the history of educational assistance programs is reviewed. Second, the benefits of educational assistance programs are discussed. Next, research on deterrents to participation in adult education is examined. This is followed by a review of research on supervisor impact on training and development decisions. Finally, the Chain-of-Response Model, the theoretical framework for the study, is discussed.

History of Educational Assistance Programs

Educational assistance programs stem from a long tradition of adult education in America. As two historians of adult education explain, “The history of adult education in the United States covers over three centuries, beginning with the colonial period…” (Stubblefield & Keane, 1989, p. 26). Worker education has held a prominent position within this history, from the apprenticeship system of colonial America to the farmers’ institutes of the 1860’s to the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944. Private businesses, individual citizens, and the federal government have all recognized the importance of job-related worker education (Knowles, 1977; Merriam & Brockett, 2007; Thelin, 2004).

General (non-job-related) education has also gained a foothold in the American workplace. One common program which encourages general education for employees is the educational assistance program. Through educational assistance programs, employers pay for their employees to complete college coursework which may or may not be related to their current
job role. (Such programs are alternately called tuition assistance, tuition refund, tuition reimbursement, or educational assistance programs. In this study, the term “educational assistance” will be used to refer generally to these employer-funded post-secondary education programs.) Educational assistance programs have become popular; two recent studies completed by the Society for Human Resource Professionals estimated that between 61 and 68% of U.S. employers now offer educational assistance programs to their employees (Society for Human Resource Professionals, 2008, 2009).

While these programs are common in today’s workplace, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact year they began. The earliest reference to employer-sponsored post-secondary education came from Howard Dressner, then Director or Employee-Education Planning for New York University, who in 1952 made reference to “Standard Oil (New Jersey) and Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, [who] have had their plans in continuous operation for more than 25 years” (p. 271). He went on to say that “[i]n the New York area, at present, there are at least 25 active tuition refund plans” (Dressner, 1952, p. 271). Dressner’s remarks help to establish that some sort of employer-sponsored post-secondary education program has existed in the United States since at least 1927. Dressner explicitly advocated using tuition refund plans for general education, not only job-related coursework:

Doesn’t it seem unwise to declare courses in psychology, sociology, history, and government as being ‘out of bounds’ for a business employee? The relationship of such courses to his job may not be direct, but I believe most employers would agree that these courses help to produce better citizens, better thinkers, and better leaders. And, in most cases, better citizens, better thinkers, and better leaders make better employees. (1952, p. 273)
While educational assistance plans existed in one form or another since as early as 1927, the United States Congress codified the existence of educational assistance programs when it established Section 127 of the Internal Revenue Code in 1978. This regulation stated:

Amounts paid or expenses incurred by an employer for educational assistance for an employee are excludable from the wages of the employee, if certain requirements are met. Education may be for undergraduate or graduate courses. The education is not required to be job-related. (Internal Revenue Service, 2011, p. 81)

Section 127 outlined the following requirements for those employers hosting an educational assistance program:

- Employer must have a written plan
- The plan may not offer alternative benefits to education
- A dollar limit of $5,250 per calendar year applies for all employers combined
- The plan must not discriminate in favor of highly compensated employees.

(Internal Revenue Service, 2011, p. 81)

Prior to the inclusion of Section 127 in the Internal Revenue Code, only job-related educational assistance could be excluded from employee wages. After 1978, those workers whose employers offered educational assistance programs could take non-job-related post-secondary courses at little to no cost to themselves. The related tax benefits are estimated to have saved employers $1.9 billion from 2007 to 2011 (U.S. Congress, 2007, p. 31).

Benefits of Educational Assistance Programs to Employers

The literature suggests that organizations implement educational assistance programs as a tool for improved recruitment and retention of employees (Babcock, 2009; Buddin & Kapur, 2002; Cappelli, 2004; Meisler, 2004, SHRM, 2009). As a global work/life consultant for Hewitt
explained, “Employers have traditionally seen [educational assistance] as a ‘nice to do’ benefit. But in today’s economy, it’s becoming an important recruitment and retention tool as well” (Robbins, 2008, p. 62). Extant literature examines the extent to which educational assistance programs are, in fact, an effective means of attracting and keeping employees.

**Recruitment**

There is little research regarding the effect of educational assistance on recruitment of employees. Rosen (1986) advanced a theory about how non-wage benefits (like continuing education) might impact the types of workers attracted to a certain employer. He posited that employers might try to attract those interested in continuing education if they correlate ability or motivation with that interest. Though Rosen stopped short of testing his theory, Cappelli (2004) explored empirically the effect of educational assistance programs on recruitment. He created a “separating equilibrium” model in which he theorized that only high-ability individuals chose to work for organizations which offered the benefit. Cappelli tested his model using the 1997 National Employer Survey. He found that the average pre-hire educational attainment of new hires was higher at those organizations which offered educational assistance programs. This finding supports the notion that educational assistance programs aid in the recruitment of high ability employees, if educational attainment is viewed an indicator of ability. Cappelli explained the relationship between educational attainment and ability this way:

Self-selection seems especially applicable to tuition assistance because the general skills provided by post-secondary education are the ones that employees understand will benefit them most. Poorer-quality applicants who lack the ability, discipline, or motivation to succeed in post-secondary education will see no advantage in taking jobs.
with such a benefit (unlike employer-provided general skills training, it is possible to fail post-secondary courses). (Cappelli, 2004, p. 218)

Cappelli (2004) offers one way of considering how educational assistance might contribute to the recruitment of highly motivated employees.

**Retention**

Empirical work on the link between educational assistance and employee retention is more plentiful than for recruitment, yet is slightly less conclusive. Buddin and Kapur (2002), in a study of the tuition assistance program used by the Department of Defense, explored whether tuition assistance users were more prone to reenlist than those who did not utilize the program. (In 2000, the Department of Defense’s Tuition Assistance program reimbursed service members for up to 75% of tuition expenses up to $3,500 per year.) They studied only those who had completed their initial enlistment period of four years and were in the process of deciding whether or not to reenlist. The researchers used two data sets to complete their analysis: personnel records which contained service member’s reenlistment decisions and course enrollment information for the Tuition Assistance program. By merging these two sets of data, the researchers found that Tuition Assistance usage negatively affected reenlistment decisions by 4 percentage points in the Marine Corps and 9 percentage points in the Navy. In other words, those taking part in the Tuition Assistance program were less likely to reenlist and be retained by the U.S. military. The researchers posited that those who participated in Tuition Assistance did so in preparation for education or work after they left military service (Buddin & Kapur, 2002).

The Buddin and Kapur finding that educational assistance negatively affected retention contradicted the findings of researchers who earlier studied military Tuition Assistance and retention and who concluded that Tuition Assistance had a positive effect on retention (Boesel &
Johnson, 1988; Garcia & Joy, 1998). Buddin and Kapur, acknowledging these contradictory findings, noted that the prior studies included in their study populations both those who completed their initial enlistment term and those who left military service prior to the end of their initial enlistment period. Buddin and Kapur argued that “stayers” had more access to Tuition Assistance and, as a result, would naturally reflect greater usage. Simply put, they posited that prior authors may have incorrectly linked Tuition Assistance usage to increased retention. Buddin and Kapur (2002), by studying only those who completed their initial term, argued that their study “avoids the problems of previous research in which the period of eligibility for TA usage differed across individuals in the analysis” (p. 16).

In a case study analysis of approximately 8,000 workers at a non-profit institution, Manchester (2008) found that participation in an educational assistance program positively impacted employee retention. The institution featured in the study implemented an educational assistance program in September 1999. The researcher completed seven “point in time” observations of employee administrative records for employees hired between December 15, 1999 and September 1, 2001. Individuals were “observed” on each December 15 from 1999 to 2005. Using bivariate analysis, the researcher concluded that for those hired after September 1, 1999, pursuing an undergraduate degree using educational assistance reduced by 60% the likelihood of separating from the organization within five years. For those hired before September 1, 1999 and pursuing an undergraduate degree using educational assistance, the probability of leaving within five years was reduced by over 40%. This suggested a strong link between educational assistance participation and employee retention.
Benefits of Educational Assistance Programs to Employees

There is little empirical evidence explaining why employees participate in post-secondary courses through educational assistance programs. As one group of researchers studying tuition assistance programs (TAPs) observed, “TAPs are among a growing number of self-directed workforce development efforts…However, there appears to be a limited amount of research on TAPs, especially as they relate to the intents and goals of individuals who participate in such programs” (Jacobs, Skillings, & Yu, 2001, p. 18). This same group of researchers carried out the only empirical study to date which has analyzed the expectations and perceived goal-attainment of employees who chose to take part in an educational assistance program.

Jacobs, Skillings, and Yu (2001) completed an interview study as part of an ongoing evaluation of the Workforce Development Programs supported by the state of Ohio and the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association (OCSEA). The Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) under study was designed to help bargaining unit employees increase educational opportunities. Employees could choose any courses they wished and could attend classes during work hours. The researchers completed telephone interviews with OCSEA members who participated in the TAP. From a pool of 4,942 individuals who had participated in FY1999, 50 were randomly selected to be interviewed.

Of the group of interviewees, 68% (34 individuals) indicated that they participated in TAP to complete a college degree. Twenty-six percent (13 individuals) noted that they participated to improve their employability. Sixteen percent (8 individuals) noted the enhancement of job-related skills as a motivating factor, and 4% (2 individuals) the enhancement of promotional opportunities. (Employees could indicate multiple reasons for participating.) The authors concluded “[T]he results generally showed that individuals participated in tuition
assistance programs because they primarily sought to achieve personal-enrichment goals” (Jacobs, Skillings, & Yu, 2001, p. 22). While future research will hopefully yield additional insights about why employees participate in educational assistance programs, this early work suggested that employees viewed educational assistance primarily as a vehicle by which to accomplish personal goals.

**Education Assistance Programs: Why So Few Participants?**

Extant literature suggests that employers may attract high ability employees by offering an educational assistance program. There is also some research to support a link between educational assistance participation and employee retention. Interest in educational assistance is such that employers spend between $8 and $16 billion annually to fund them (Babcock, 2009; Meisler, 2004; Sperling & Tucker, 1997; U.S. Department of Education, 2009). A study of participation rates completed by the General Accounting Office (GAO), however, found that found that only 8-9% of eligible employees participated in classes through educational assistance during the three year period under study (General Accounting Office, 1996, p. 5). The GAO examined data from the Internal Revenue Service, the Department of Education’s National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, and Department of Labor Statistics for the years 1992-1994. Thus, according to the only existing analysis of participation rates, fewer than 10% of eligible employees choose to participate in educational assistance programs.

**Deterrents to Participation in Adult Education**

Research from the adult education field provides insight into why adults might choose not to participate in educational experiences. Cross, in her seminal work, *Adults as Learners* (1981), assembled the first typology of barriers to participation in adult education. This typology became the foundation for future work in this area of study. In creating the typology, Cross
examined the results of a national survey for the Commission on Non-traditional Study (Carp, Peterson, & Roelfs, 1974). To identify participants, the authors of that study subcontracted with the Response Analysis Corporation, which in turn derived a national probability sample of 2515 households containing adults aged 18 to 60 who were not full-time students. These households were mailed up to two questionnaires, to allow for multiple adult respondents who might live in the residence. The survey contained a variety of questions about a broad range of topics related to adult education, including learning interests, preferred methods of learning, and perceived barriers to learning. It listed 24 possible reasons why adults might choose not to take part in organized instruction and asked respondents to circle all of the reasons they felt might act as barriers to their own participation. A total of 1893 respondents completed the survey. Cross organized the data on perceived barriers to participation into the first typology of adult learner barriers.

Cross (1981) categorized the barriers identified into three areas: situational, institutional, and dispositional. Situational barriers were related to an adult’s life context at a given moment, for example, lack of money or lack of time due to job constraints. Institutional barriers Cross defined as those practices and procedures that make it difficult for adult learners to participate in educational opportunities. These included inconvenient schedules or class locations, inappropriate courses of study, or other bureaucratic obstacles. The third category Cross identified was dispositional barriers, and it encompassed attitudes and self-perceptions held by the learner. Stated Cross, “Many older citizens, for example, feel that they are too old to learn. Adults with poor educational backgrounds frequently lack interest in learning or confidence in their ability to learn” (1981, p. 98).
An important fourth category, informational barriers, was later added to this typology by Darkenwald and Merriam (1982). Informational barriers, they proposed, represented the lack of information about educational opportunities available to adults. This category of barrier referred to the challenge of marketing appropriately to adult audiences. In summary, Cross’s typology (including Darkenwald and Merriam’s later contribution) was the first major attempt to organize the multiple reasons that adults might decide not to take part in adult education settings. It provided a starting point for future empirical work on deterrents to participation in adult education.

Our understanding of what prevents adults from participating in educational experiences was extended by a seminal study by Scanlan and Darkenwald (1984). While acknowledging the importance of typologies to understanding non-participation in adult education, Scanlan and Darkenwald “approached the question from a strictly empirical, inductive stance” (p. 157). Their survey involved 479 physical therapists, medical technologists, and respiratory therapists who were credentialed in their fields in New Jersey. These participants were selected through sampling of 1981 credentialing rosters. Participants were mailed a questionnaire containing an embedded Deterrents to Participation Scale, which they had developed, and were asked to complete the questionnaire and return it in an accompanying pre-paid return envelope. Using factor analysis, the researchers identified six factors which significantly influenced non-participation decisions: a) disengagement; b) cost; c) family constraints; d) lack of benefit; e) quality of courses available; and f) work constraints. The authors noted that individual item means were generally low (most ranging from 2.0 to 3.0 on a 5.0 scale). They wrote, “Thus the majority of items were related by respondents as having relatively little influence on their decision(s) not to participate in continuing education” (Scanlan & Darkenwald, 1984, p. 159).
Scanlan and Darkenwald’s study (1984) is significant to our understanding of non-participation because it represents the first empirical study of the phenomenon. It was also notable for the instrument the researchers designed and utilized. The Deterrents to Participation Scale (DPS) was the first quantitative instrument developed to measure non-participation factors. To design it, the authors interviewed 21 volunteer health professionals, then created a prototype DPS based on interview data and an extensive literature search. Sixty items were pretested on 72 health professionals, whose comments on the survey were also gathered. Based on these comments, the instrument was shortened by 20 questions. The 40-item DPS was found to have a reliability coefficient of 0.91.

The creation of the DPS was also critical because it led, shortly thereafter, to the development of the Deterrents to Participation Scale-General (DPS-G) (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1985). Unlike the DPS, which was designed by and for health professionals, the DPS-G was designed for use with the general adult population. The DPS-G was designed using the same comprehensive process used in the development of the DPS, except that it elicited interview data and pretest item feedback from 117 members of the general public. (The authors do not provide information about how these individuals were selected.) The 34-item DPS-G asked participants to describe participation barriers using a 5 point Likert-type scale. A sample question is provided below:

1. Because the course was scheduled at an inconvenient time

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<th>Slightly Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Quite Important</th>
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The DPS was found to have a reliability coefficient of 0.86. To date, it is the most commonly used instrument in quantitative studies of non-participation in adult education.
Darkenwald & Valentine (1985), using the DPS-G for the first time, surveyed a random sample of households in Somerset County, New Jersey. Two hundred and fifteen adults completed and returned the DPS-G. This represented a response rate of 10.7%. According to the researchers, the low response rate was of very little import for the purposes of the study. They explained:

First, no inferences were to be made to the total population of the county. Second, and more to the point, no sample, except a random national one, can be truly representative of the general adult population. The external validity of the study’s findings—that is, their stability across time and place—can only be established by replication. (p. 179)

Using factor analysis, Darkenwald and Valentine identified six significant non-participation factors: a) lack of confidence; b) lack of course relevance; c) time constraints; d) low personal priority; e) cost; and f) personal problems. Only one of these factors, cost, was identical to any identified in the study of health professionals using the DPS. According to the researchers, “The differing findings of the two studies suggest that modified or specially developed DPS instruments are needed to measure deterrents for distinctive sub-populations” (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1985, p. 185). As in the original DPS study (1984), the data collected in the DPS-G study (1985) contained low item means. Valentine and Darkenwald suggested that this supported the “synergistic effects of multiple deterrents,” instead of just one or two overarching reasons for non-participation. However, as Scanlan and Darkenwald (1984) suggested in the original DPS study, low item means could also mean that none of the items were of particular importance to the respondents.

Since the creation of the DPS-G, the instrument has been widely used to study non-participation in adult education among various populations: agriculture teachers, military
contractors, higher education employees, attorneys, Air Force enlisted personnel, and parents
(Drake, 1987; Fogerson, 2001; Johnson, Harrison, Burnett, & Emerson, 2003; Korab, 2003;
Martindale & Drake, 1989; Ratcliff & Killingbeck, 1989). Across populations, the results have
been fairly stable. Four of the six factors identified in the original DPS-G study (cost, time
constraints, lack of course relevance, and low personal priority) have been generally found to be
significant non-participation factors, regardless of population.

In two studies, researchers revised the instrument and, in so doing, identified deterrent
factors unique to their study sub-populations. Ratcliff and Killingbeck (1989) sent a revised
DPS-G to 500 attorneys randomly selected from membership in the American Judicature
Society. This instrument asked respondents to reflect upon why they chose not to participate in
continuing legal education, and included the additional deterrent reason “Because the program
did not apply to my area of practice.” As the researchers explained, “The law covers many areas,
and many attorneys now specialize in one particular area” (Ratcliff & Killingbeck, 1989, p. 180).
Of the 500 attorneys sent the revised DPS-G, 113 (22.6%) responded with completed
questionnaires. The researchers grouped responses into common themes and confirmed three of
the six deterrents areas identified in the original DPS-G study (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1985):
1) lack of course relevance; 2) time constraints; and 3) low personal priority. The addition of the
unique survey item yielded an additional finding. For this group of respondents, “didn’t apply to
area of practice” was among the four participation deterrents ($M=3.26$).

Hayes and Darkenwald (1988) followed design steps similar to those used the original
DPS study (Scanlan & Darkenwald, 1984) to develop the DPS-LL, an instrument to be used in
exploring what deterred low-literate adults from participating in adult education. The
researchers gathered information on deterrents through interviews with low-literate adult basic
education (ABE) students, teachers, and teachers’ aides. A preliminary version of the DPS-LL was designed using data from these interviews, as well as a literature search. A Likert-type scale was utilized. The pilot instrument was tested for clarity and reliability with 29 low-literate ABE students in two New Jersey ABE programs. All instructions and items were read aloud. Reliability of the pilot instrument was high (0.88), but, following respondent feedback, three items were deleted and the wording on five items simplified. The final instrument had a reliability rating of 0.82.

For the purposes of the study, the researchers defined low-literate adults as anyone 16 or older, not enrolled in full-time study, and who read at or below a sixth grade level. Given the difficulty of identifying respondents whose reading level had been measured, the researchers recruited respondents from seven urban New Jersey ABE programs. The instructions on the DPS-LL asked participants to rate deterrent reasons based on how they viewed those deterrents prior to beginning the ABE program in which they were enrolled. A total of 160 ABE students (68% female and 32% male) participated.

Exploratory factor analysis was employed to analyze the data. A five factor solution was deemed most conceptually meaningful. The five factors that most deterred these low-literate adults from education were: a) low self-confidence; b) social disapproval; c) situational barriers such as cost and transportation; d) negative attitude to classes; and e) low personal priority. Of these, two (social disapproval and negative attitudes toward classes) were unique to the population and did not correspond to items on the DPS-G.

The studies utilizing a revised DPS-G (Hayes & Darkenwald, 1988; Ratcliff & Killingbeck, 1989) reported results somewhat in keeping with the original DPS-G study (Valentine & Darkenwald, 1985). This suggests that the DPS-G is fairly applicable to a broad
spectrum of adult learners. In amending the DPS-G to include population-specific survey items, researchers contributed the finding that unique adult learner sub-groups may be deterred from participation due to factors unique to their circumstances. It is reasonable to conclude, then, that while the DPS-G yields fairly consistent results across population, it does not account for all factors that deter adults from participating in educational activities. Each adult learner population, it seems, has a unique story to tell.

Qualitative studies have provided additional insights about deterrents to participation (Archer et al., 2001; Gallacher et al., 2000; Paladaniuos, 2007). One set of researchers (Archer et al., 2001), in an interview study of working class men’s non-participation in higher education, found new understandings emerging from their exploration of non-participation. They pointed out that, in the United Kingdom, “[t]he severe and persistent underrepresentation of working-class students within further and higher education (particularly those from manual occupation backgrounds) has become an issue of increased national concern” (p. 433). In their project, they conducted focus group discussions in London with 64 working class men aged 16 to 30 living in north and east London. Participants were approximately one third African-Caribbean (black African, black Caribbean), one third Asian (Pakistani and Bangladeshi) and one third white (British, Turkish, and Italian). Focus groups were led by the co-authors and were organized around two main themes: decisions focus group participants had made about their own education, and perceptions they held about attending postsecondary institutions. Through discourse analysis, the researchers concluded that participants perceived their gender and class identities as incompatible with participation in higher education.

The researchers found that “university students were (unfavourably) conceptualised as middle-class men, against whom respondents positioned themselves as Other” (Archer, et al.,
2001, p. 435). Many participants agreed that it was rich, middle-class people who went to university (the ‘Richard Branson’ people, as one black Caribbean man put it). Higher education participants were also seen as bookish and unattractive. Steve, a white English builder, stated, “There’s a general stereotype, isn’t there? The Tefal man with a big head. Someone who needs glasses.” Derek, a 29-year-old white Irish laborer, put it this way: “If you’ve got to be swotting over a book, you can’t be out grafting can you? And you can’t have a social life…” The researchers concluded that, within this group of participants, participation in higher education was also associated with negative, undesirable images of masculinity (socially inadequate men who enjoyed studying).

Some respondents, most notably Bengali men, explained that higher education participation was not “for men like us” (p. 439). They described Muslim masculinity as ideologically incompatible with university life. Stated one participant, “To be a student you have to be a drinker, a druggie…” According to a 23-year-old Bengali hospital assistant, “If you are going to a rave, if you are going to pull chicks, you have to have certain standards—some chicks like hanging around with druggies and you know they hang around with those who drink a lot.” Their Muslim identities made these respondents fear exclusion from the social life of the university student and, therefore, they chose not to participate in higher education (Archer, Pratt, & Phillips, 2001, p. 439).

This same group of working-class men also described their non-participation decisions in terms of access to work and money. First, higher education was seen by participants “in terms of its relative (in)effectiveness as a route to secure employment and income” (Archer, et al., 2001, p. 437). Second, participants saw higher education participation as risky in terms of its ability to
help them secure employment and money. Drew, a 21-year-old black Caribbean shop assistant, stated:

At the end of the day, you can have the qualifications but you can’t go and buy no car.

You can’t go and buy no house or whatever. No clothes if you’ve got no job to get no money. That’s what it comes down to. (Archer, et al., p. 437)

Third, university life itself was seen as insecure and financially difficult. Brian, an 18-year-old white English male, explained his perspective this way: “[Y]ou hear about these students who come out with thousands of pounds of debt all the time, so it’s pretty scary.” Concerns about work and money were primary for these respondents.

A study by Gallacher et al. (2000) explored factors that kept Scottish adults from participating in Further Education (FE). (Further Education in the United Kingdom is similar to community college education in the United States.) The researchers interviewed 33 non-participants between the ages of 16 and 73. These non-participants came from four areas of Scotland in which an FE college was located. They were recruited through new entrants at the regional FE college and through community agencies (job centers, family centers) which served educationally excluded populations. Of these individuals, 48% were male and 51% were female. Many of those interviewed left school at a fairly young age ($M=15.45$ years of age at time of school separation). The interviews were semi-structured and the interviewers explored areas such as initial schooling, family life, and factors that had discouraged participation. Interviewees were also encouraged to share other areas of their lives which they felt were relative to their non-participation in FE. From these interview data, the researchers derived five distinct barriers: a) the impact of earlier school experiences; b) finances; c) childcare; d) location; and e) age.
Many interviewees shared that they had developed negative attitudes toward schooling which made participation in formal education unattractive. The researchers noted:

Several of the adults reported having learning difficulties at school, and had been labeled as failures. Some were moved from one school to another. As a result, many felt they were not capable of studying. Others had experienced bullying or viewed school as a laugh… One male non-participant described how he was labeled as having ‘special educational needs’ at school and was put where it was ‘convenient’ and where he was not properly supported. ‘I had been made to believe that I wasn’t capable of anything the way I had been treated.’ (p. 24)

Another interviewee explained his non-participation by saying, “Well if I think back on it the reasons I am apprehensive to go to college or a classroom situation must be based on past fears or experiences. I don’t seem to do too well in the classroom situation” (p. 25).

According to the researchers, several participants also mentioned finances as a factor in non-participation. Low incomes, unemployment, and single parenthood had many respondents living below the poverty line and concerned with more basic subsistence issues. Financial struggles also factored into another factor, the structure of the national benefits system. According to the researchers, the difficulty for those in this system who do want to attend FE … was illustrated by two non-participants in their 20s, living in supported accommodation for people with drug problems. They had both worked hard to get places at two different colleges. At the time of interview they were awaiting decisions as to whether they could attend college and keep on the level of incapacity benefit needed to complete their drug rehabilitation programme. Both saw college as playing an important part of their process
of rehabilitation but participation would depend on the outcome of their adjudication.

(p.25)

Many adults interviewed also perceived age as a barrier to participation. One woman involved in community work explained:

People keep saying why don’t you go to college and do social care, social science, childcare. Somebody from social work phoned me and said put in a form for social work to work in children’s homes—She phoned me and asked me what qualifications I had—I said I hadn’t any…She said I advise you to go to college. I said at 40?—but she said that didn’t matter. You think you’re too old to work with weans. I would come out of college with a degree, two years on, 42 and I might not get a job. That’s what puts me off because I’m too old now. (p. 26)

As exemplified in these life stories and concluded by the researchers, “Barriers to learning are complex, and are associated with people’s position within the social and economic structure” (Gallacher et al., 2000, p. 63).

Paladanius (2007), in a qualitative study in Sweden, took a different approach in exploring non-participation in adult education. He pointed out that most studies begin from the assumption that adults want to participate in educational experiences but are prevented by tangible barriers from doing so. “Can it be,” he wrote, “that the basic assumptions are faulty?” (p. 2). He reasoned that, because educational recruiters reported a lack of interest from some non-participants, reluctance was an area worthy of study.

The researcher interviewed 34 unemployed adults (representing the reluctant target group) and 30 educational recruiters. The study does not indicate how these individuals were selected nor any relevant demographic information. Many of the respondents did not report
discrete barriers to participation in adult education. Rather, they described what the researcher termed “reluctance and indifference.” He wrote:

For most of the agents in the target group education [was] described as something that had to be done while waiting to get to…real life (work life)… [T]he period of education was not hard but rather easy…but more often downright boring. The target group perceives that real life starts when they become an adult… meaning working life and responsibility. Interestingly enough they describe education as important, but mostly for kids…To many of them, education means to be a pupil, an underaged or an incapacitated person compared to their own preferable status, which is to be employed and have a profession (to occupy a recognized position). (p. 4)

In other words, at least some of the non-participants interviewed felt no inclination toward participation, so the concept of barriers did not apply. A middle-aged male interviewee reflected this lack of interest in participation:

Learning for the sake of learning, never, I have much more important stuff to do, for instance I can plant onions and then I know that it will take so and so long time until I see the results of my actions, I have actually made something, manufactured something. (p. 4)

According to Paladanius, in the case of many of the individuals in this study, “[t]heir motivation is almost always directed toward a job” and educational recruitment efforts needed to shift accordingly to gain reluctant learners’ interest (p. 5).

Extant quantitative and qualitative studies have underscored the complexity of non-participation in adult education. Quantitative studies have identified personal deterrent factors such as cost, lack of confidence, time constraints, low personal priority, lack of course relevance,
social disapproval, and negative attitudes toward classes. Qualitative studies have posited that contextual factors such as gender and class identities and social and economic structures may also deter adults from participating in educational experiences. These varied findings suggest that neither personal nor contextual factors alone can tell the whole non-participation story.

**Supervisor Impact on Employee Development**

While the adult education field provides insight into why adults choose not to participate in educational experiences, research from the human resource development field also contributes to our understanding of employee learning. The relevant HRD literature suggests that supervisors play a significant role in employees’ decisions regarding personal and professional development. First, they influence employee participation in training and development activities. Tharenou (2001) carried out a longitudinal study examining how training motivation explained participation in training and development. In the study, 1705 respondents from public and private sectors completed questionnaires, and repeated duplicate questionnaires 12 months later, measuring perceptions of their supervisor’s support for training and development. The questionnaires also measured respondents’ average participation rates in 23 training and development activities over the course of the 12 months. Using regression analyses, Tharenou found that only supervisor support predicted training and development participation ($B=0.14$, $p<.001$). “The results,” wrote the researcher, “suggested that the behavior of the supervisor as perceived by the subordinates of this sample is the most important aspect of the work environment for their participation in training and development in the next 12 months” (2001, p. 618).

Tharenou’s finding that supervisor support strongly influences individuals’ participation in training and development confirms earlier work which explored organizational predictors of
employee participation in training and development (Green, 1991; Kozlowski & Farr, 1988; Maurer & Tarulli, 1994; Noe & Wilk, 1993; Tharenou, 1997; Tharenou, Latimer & Conroy, 1994). Training policies, individual attitudes, and demographic factors have all been found to have only a weak effect on training and development participation (Green, 1991; Koxlowski & Farr, 1988; Maurer & Tarulli, 1994; Noe & Wilk, 1993). Supervisor encouragement, on the other hand, has been found to be a stronger predictor of participation. An illustrative longitudinal study (Tharenou, 1997) looked at two sets of survey data, collected one year apart, from employees in the public administration, finance, and community service industries (Time 1 n=5,284; Time 2 n=3,453). In analyzing increased participation in training and development among those who participated in both surveys, the researcher found that change in career encouragement from superiors was more important than change in job, demographic, or attitude (Tharenou, 1997, p. 130). Supervisor encouragement, more than any other workplace factor measured, predicted participation in training and development activities.

The literature suggests that, in addition to being instrumental in employees’ decision to participate in learning activities, supervisors are an important factor in individuals’ career development behaviors (Noe, 1996; Tharenou, Latimer, & Conroy, 1994). Noe (1996) carried out a study of 72 employees and managers in a midwestern state agency. The participating agency had no formal career planning program and thus agreed to participate as a means of gathering baseline data. Data were collected using surveys and evaluations collected simultaneously from both employees and their managers at two time periods, six months apart. In the first survey, employees were asked to assess their own personal characteristics, including use of career strategies, career exploration behavior, career goal focus, and distance from career goal. The second survey, six months later, asked employees to assess their willingness to
participate in career development activities and perceptions of their managers’ support for career development.

Managers in the first survey completed individual evaluations for each employee they supervised. Six months later, these managers were asked to provide another evaluation of these employees, as well as a set of ratings of these employees’ development behaviors. Using hierarchical regression, the researcher found that “manager’s support for development \( B=0.37, p<0.05 \) had a significant positive effect on employees’ development behavior” (Noe, 1996, p. 129-131). The study confirmed that supervisor support was instrumental to employee career development activity.

Supervisors have also been found to impact employees’ knowledge and skill updating, also known as updating behavior (Kozlowski & Farr, 1988; Kozlowski & Hults, 1987). In a seminal study on knowledge and skill updating behavior, Kozlowski and Hults (1987) proposed that, given the pace of technical innovation in the modern workplace, simply purchasing new technologies did not guarantee innovation within the organization. Instead, they stated,

The key to institutionalizing innovation effectively is the development and maintenance of technically competent and up-to-date personnel—engineers with current knowledge and skills…Thus organizations must develop strategies that will foster continual knowledge and skill updating among their incumbent technical professionals. (1987, p. 539)

One of the strategies they proposed was the establishment or enhancement of an organization’s “updating climate,” that is, shared perceptions of such factors as open communications, nonroutine assignments, recognition for excellence, and an orientation to creativity (Kozlowski
& Hults, 1987, p. 542). Such perceptions, according to the researchers, were important to fostering innovative and updating behaviors such as continual knowledge and skill updating.

In their study of research and development engineers (n=447), Kozlowski and Hults asked participants to assess the organizational context and updating climate within their employing organizations. The researcher surveyed participants’ supervisors to assess the organizational contexts, including technology, structure, and reward practices. Non-supervisor engineers were asked to respond to 62 survey items describing specific organizational areas that would inhibit or foster updating. These items were developed from previous updating research and through the input of 960 engineers and engineer supervisors. Each item used a 6-point rating scale, from 1, or “a very inaccurate statement” to 6, or “a very accurate statement.”

Though the study failed to explain how participants for the study were identified, its results contribute to our understanding of the relationship between supervisor support and updating behaviors. Using cluster analysis, the researchers identified seven updating climate subscales, one of which was termed “supervisor support for professional development.” This subscale was defined as “the extent to which supervisors provide performance feedback, career counseling, opportunities for updating, rewards for updating, and participative goal setting” (Kozlowski & Hults, 1988, p. 546). The supervisor support subscale correlated positively with updating climate ($r=0.65; p<0.05$). In other words, supervisors’ proactive support was an important contributor to a perception of updating climate within this organization, which in turn led to innovative and updating behaviors on behalf of employees.

The ability of supervisors to influence training transfer has also been widely supported in the literature (Brinkerhoff & Montesino, 1995; Burke & Baldwin, 1999, Burke & Hutchins, 2008; Foxon, 1997, Martin, 2010). Manager support before and after training has been found to
result in greater transfer of training (Brinkerhoff & Montesino, 1995). Foxon (1997) showed manager support positively correlating with initiation of training transfer, frequency of transfer, and overall transfer. Supervisors were also found to be central to transfer climate and effective training transfer strategies (Burke and Baldwin, 1999).

A recent study by Martin (2010) examined the effects of supervisor support on training transfer at a large manufacturing company in the Midwestern United States. The company was in the process of shifting daily oversight duties from managers to hourly employees in individual work teams. Martin analyzed the process of transitioning the former managers into “process managers” who would provide support to the work teams. Transfer of learning was a key component of the process and was addressed through several avenues: program design, trainee motivation, and organizational initiatives.

In the program design phase, company human resource managers and stakeholder groups identified 13 skill dimensions that would be required of the new process managers. A training program was built around these dimensions, thereby assuring the credibility and relevance of the training. In addition, prior to the training, informational meetings were held with middle and upper-level managers to familiarize them with the program, explain their role in supporting the process managers’ application of their new skills, describe how to reinforce skill use, and share methods of provide feedback to trainees.

Each of the company’s 12 divisions was led by a general manager, and support among these managers for the new program varied. The researchers analyzed each general manager’s support for the new program by asking the head of the training program (with whom the general managers had had extensive contact) to rate their level of support. They concluded that, of the
12 divisions, five divisions with 102 trainees were designated as having manager support and seven divisions with 135 trainees were seen as lacking in manager support.

A total of 237 process managers attended one of 12 week-long training sessions. Performance feedback about each process manager was collected from immediate supervisors one week before the person’s training session, and at 6 weeks and 3 months following training. The rating instrument used included the 13 dimensions around which the training was designed. Supervisors were asked to rate behavior change from process managers in each of the 13 dimensions, using a 7-point rating scale. It was assumed that any behavior change occurred as a result of training transfer.

Through use of a 2x2 ANOVA analysis, the researchers found that trainees in a more favorable workplace environment (as evidenced by level of general manager support) showed greater transfer of training and performance improvement than those in an unfavorable climate ($F[1, 156]=3.71, p<0.05$). This finding suggested a positive correlation between supportive managers and transfer of training.

The findings in Martin (2010) reinforced those of Burke and Hutchins (2008). In this study, the researchers administered an online survey to HR practitioners, all of whom were members of the American Society of Training and Development in the southern United States ($n=139$). The survey contained an undisclosed number of scaled items. At the end of the survey, participants were asked to write down in free text what they considered to be best practices in training transfer. Specifically, this item stated, “We are very interested in what you consider to be ‘best practices’ in supporting training transfer. Please type a brief statement about what practices you consider effective for supporting training transfer” (Burke & Hutchins, 2008, p. 111). This question resulted in 195 responses, which were coded according to a previously
piloted and validated coding scheme. The single most frequently reported best practice in support of training transfer was supervisory support and reinforcement (Burke & Hutchins, 2008, p. 117).

In summary, adult education research confirms the importance of context to participation. HRD research confirms that, for employees, supervisors are a key part of their context and, by extension, have a strong impact on employee learning. They impact employees’ participation in learning activities and employees’ development behaviors. They have a strong influence on climate, which in turn affects employee updating behaviors and training transfer. Given that supervisors play such a critical role in employee learning and development, it is curious that only one study has examined the role of supervisor support in educational assistance program non-participation.

Fogerson (2001) explored the impact of supervisor support on employees’ decision not to participate in an educational assistance program. The researcher examined the factors that a group of higher education employees identified as barriers to their participation in an educational assistance program. Participants worked for a large research institution in the southeastern United States (n=88). The instrument used in the survey study was the Deterrents to Participation Scale-General (DPS-G), developed by Darkenwald and Valentine (1985).

The researcher modified the instrument to include an additional item about supervisors, “My supervisor did not encourage or support my participation.” This item was added, according to Fogerson, because it “acknowledged the cooperation required by university policy” (Fogerson, 2001, p. 56). At the university where the participants worked, organizational policy required that all class attendance which took place during the workday had to be approved by the employee’s supervisor. For courses outside of work hours, no supervisor approval was required. By adding a
supervisor support item to the DPS-G, Fogerson (2001) was able to measure supervisor support as a possible deterrent factor for those requiring and those not requiring supervisor approval. No previous study had examined supervisor support as a possible barrier to participation in an educational assistance program.

The four factors identified as deterrents to participation in the educational assistance program were: a) lack of confidence; b) low personal priority; c) time choices; and d) lack of support. Lack of support included lack of family support as well as lack of supervisor support. Notably, though grouped together into one of four significant deterrent factors identified in the study, lack of family support and lack of supervisor support each had relatively low item means (less than 2.00 on a Likert scale measuring from 1.00 to 5.00). This population, the researcher stated, “gave generally low importance to their reasons for not participating…” (Fogerson, 2001, p. 91). Does this mean that non-participation in due to a convergence of low-level deterrents? Or were the items in the modified DPS-G of little importance to those respondents included in Fogerson’s study? This study’s findings do not contribute significantly to our understanding of the relationship between supervisor support and the decision not to participate in the educational assistance program.

**Chain-of-Response (COR) Model**

Cross’s Chain-of-Response Model (COR) served as the theoretical framework for this study. Developed in 1981, the COR was built upon previous work by Rubenson (1977), Boshier (1973) and Tough (1979), researchers in adult learning and motivation. Cross, examining then-current understandings of adult learners, stated that of these three researchers, “…none would lay claim to a fully developed theory regarding participation in adult education. Nevertheless, all have helped to develop a preliminary framework for ordering research on who participates in
adult learning and why” (1981, p. 122). While Cross acknowledged some differences amongst Rubenson, Boshier and Tough, she also noted areas of convergence. It was upon this common ground that she began constructing her theory of adult education participation, or COR Model.

Cross identified the following eight areas of commonality in Rubenson (1977), Boshier (1971) and Tough’s (1979) work:

1. All three researchers found that participation could best be understood by examining the interaction between an individual and his or her environment.
2. All supported the concept that motivation to participate is the result of the individual’s perception of positive and negative forces in the situation.
3. All three were cognitivists and believed that the individual exerts some control over his or her destiny.
4. All three researchers believed that context and background (socioeconomic status, self-esteem, for example) play a role in participation decisions.
5. All agreed that adults order their experiences according to their membership in particular groups.
6. All made some use of the concepts of incongruence and dissonance.
7. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs figured into the work of all three researchers.
8. All viewed expectation of reward as a key motivator.

Cross created the Chain-of-Response Model as a way to, in her words, “identify the relevant variables and hypothesize their interrelationships” (1981, p. 124). These variables, according to Cross, included 1) self-evaluation, which defines an individual’s confidence in their own abilities; 2) attitudes about education, arising from past experience and attitudes of family and friends; 3) the importance of goals and the expectation that participation will meet goals; 4)
life transitions, which acknowledges phases of human development; 5) opportunities and barriers, which may help or hinder advancement to the final phases; 6) information, linking motivated learners to appropriate opportunities; and 7) participation (1981, p. 124). (See Figure 1 for an illustration of these six variables).

The COR assumes that participation in adult education is not a single act or decision, but rather the result of a “chain of responses, each based on an evaluation of the position of the individual in his or her environment” (Cross, 1981, p. 125). The order of the model pre-supposes

Figure 1: Chain-of-Response (COR) Model.

that participation decisions begin inside of the individual and flow gradually toward more external forces. According to the model, if an individual participates in an adult education situation, this in turn influences his or her attitudes about education, self-evaluation, and so on. The model illustrates what is a flowing, dynamic process of evaluation and decision-making.

To illustrate how the COR might reflect lived experience, consider the following fictional story of an adult learner: Greta was a confident woman (positive at point A in the COR model) who enjoyed primary and secondary school and was reasonably successful in it (positive at point B). Greta would like to pursue a bachelor’s degree, partly to be qualified for a higher level job and partly for the sake of her own interest, and she is confident that she would be a successful student (positive at point C). However, her husband is mildly opposed to this idea, decreasing her overall motivation toward the goal of participation.

According to the COR Model, if Greta’s husband’s opposition were stronger or Greta’s prior experiences with education extremely negative, this might end her interest in pursuing the opportunity. Her motivation might be too weak to overcome the significant barrier. But, as Greta is considering the matter, she learns from a peer that she can enroll in college courses at no cost thanks to a special program offered by her employer. In addition, a friend of Greta’s is considering the same idea and urges Greta to join with her in a degree program. These positive forces at point E (Opportunities and Barriers) might inspire her participation despite some light opposition from her husband.

In a different scenario, Greta becomes divorced (a life transition at point D), removing her husband’s opposition to her educational interests and increasing the importance of qualifying for a higher-paying job (point C). The momentum for participation is quite strong now, and Greta may even seek out literature from the local college (positive point F). But now, Greta
learns that most of the prerequisites for her program of interest take place between 1 and 3:30 p.m., hours that fall directly within her work shift (negative force on point E). If her supervisor insists that she cannot leave work at that time to attend class, she may decide against participation altogether.

These two examples show the dynamic interplay between internal motivation and external factors. It is too simplistic to conclude that if internal motivation is high, participation will take place. Nor, conversely, can it be assumed that if barriers are modest, participation will take place. The COR Model suggests that, in each situation, potential learners weigh a number of factors, both internal and external, and make participation decisions based on all relevant data.

The complex interplay of external and internal factors within the model allows researchers to examine a variety of issues. First, the COR Model allows researchers to explore how factors unique to the learner affect the type of learning setting selected by the learner. For example, Adamuti-Trache and Sweet (2008) examined the institutional training choices of Canadian women, with particular attention given to respondents’ life-course positions. Using factor analysis, the researchers analyzed data from the 1998 Adult Education and Training Survey (AETS). This survey, which measured demographics as well as training activities, was given to individuals 17 to 24 years of age. The sample used in the study comprised 2,555 female respondents who were enrolled in a vocational training program in 1997. The findings indicated that, despite similar training goals, women’s backgrounds and situations were associated with distinct institutional choices. The study suggested the possibility of using one or more of the COR elements (dispositional and situational factors) to examine the effect of those factors on choice of training institution. For example, a researcher could examine how particular
supervisory styles impact the type and frequency of professional development activities engaged in by employees.

Second, researchers can use the COR Model to examine paths to participation. Salomonson, Moss, and Hill (2001) examined community college retention in a 4-year cohort study at a multi-campus community college. The researchers gathered student survey data related to four elements of the COR Model: attitudes toward education, barriers and opportunities, expectations and goals, and participation. Results of an ordinary least squares path analysis suggested positive paths for each of the elements explored. That is, students who have positive attitudes about education are more likely to make progress toward their educational goals. Those who make great progress tend to see greater opportunities and fewer barriers and persist in their educational goals. The primary finding in the study was that retention was not a solitary act, but rather is a complex set of responses to present circumstances. The COR was useful in this study in that it allowed researchers to explore a path of participation among community college students. As it relates to the study of adult employees who are non-participants in adult education, a researcher might posit and test a path of non-participation stemming from lack of supervisor support.

Third, utilization of the COR Model allows researchers to explore the relationship between learning motivation and context. MacBrayne (1995), in a study of rural adults in community college distance education, designed a questionnaire to study motivations for enrolling in adult distance education courses. Approximately 75% of the respondents (n=672) were women, and one third had completed high school. Four distinct enrollment reasons emerged from the data: a) location; b) course content; c) the desire to obtain a degree; and d) the importance of the program to a future career. The researchers also interviewed a subsection of
respondents (n=30), and found that the four enrollments factors identified through factor analysis were supported by qualitative interview data. Interviews conducted by the researcher underscored the importance of location for the group of respondents. “For most of these rural adult students,” she wrote, “it would not have been possible to pursue their goals or act upon their underlying motivations had college courses not been conveniently available, despite the strength of their aspirations” (MacBrayne, 1995, p. 90). The COR Model helped make sense of the relationship between motivation and environmental context for those who decided to enroll in courses. It could also be used to investigate how environmental factors and motivation interact in non-participation decisions. For example, a researcher might examine the impact of supervisor support on the non-participation decisions of employees who are motivated to participate in college courses.

**Critiques of the Chain of Response Model**

Researchers writing about participation in European adult education have provided an important critique of Cross’s model of adult education participation. They have pointed out that the COR, like other models, focuses on the individual and his or her perception of the immediate environment (Boeren, Nicaise, & Baert, 2010, p. 56). Such a model, according to these researchers, precludes consideration of the impact that educational institutions and government regulating authorities can make on participation decisions. They pointed out that the COR Model does not account for macro-levels of the environment, namely, the economic, labor, and educational systems within individual European countries.

Another critique of Cross’s COR Model came from a study of the effects of family role and schooling on participation in adult education (Cervero & Kirkpatrick, 1990). In this study, the researchers utilized the National Longitudinal Survey of the High School Class of 1972
(NLS). The NLS, which was sponsored by the Center for Educational Statistics, was originally conducted in 1972 and used a sampling rate of 18,000 students graduating from 1,200 high schools. The same sample was surveyed again in 1973, 1974, 1976, 1979, and 1986. Analyzing each participants’ a) father’s educational attainment; b) type of high school program; c) percentile rank in high school; and d) educational aspirations, the authors found significant associations between preadult factors and later decisions about adult education participation. For example, those participants whose fathers did not complete high school were more likely not to participate in either credit (67.4%) or noncredit (65.1%) adult education (Cervero & Kirkpatrick, 1990, p. 85). The researchers pointed out that “By looking only at the present circumstances of adults, researchers have lost sight of the fact that these conditions are conditioned by a dynamic historical process.” Thus an additional criticism of the COR Model is that it does not examine closely the effect of preadult factors on educational participation decisions.

Despite these critiques of the COR Model of adult education participation, Roger Hiemstra posited that the COR “…attempts to organize existing knowledge about adult involvement with learning into a visible or usable framework…[A] better understanding of the interrelationship among various participation factors is possible through more work with the COR model” (1993, p. 44).

The aforementioned benefits of the COR Model provide ample support for its use in a study to determine the relationship between non-participation and contextual factors such as supervisor support. Most important in the context of the present study is that the model is designed to explore participation within the context of adult learners’ environments. The ample evidence from the literature and the aforementioned examples that indicate environmental factors influence adult education decisions suggest that the same might be true for adult employees.
Since employee participation in educational assistance programs appears to benefit both employees and organizations, examining the relationship between supervisor support and non-participation in educational assistance programs would be a valuable effort, particularly given that there appear to be no such studies in existence.

In summary, we know from the literature that adults can be deterred from educational participation by general factors, such as time, or by factors which are more narrowly defined, such as lack of relevance to a particular area of professional practice. Extant literature has also established that supervisors play a critical role in employee learning and development, and play some role in employees’ decisions not to participate in courses through educational assistance. However, it remains unclear what that role is as perceived by employees. To understand the impact of supervisor support on educational assistance non-participation, much more needs to be understood: What is the nature of supervisor support? What does lack of support look and feel like to employees, and how does it figure or not figure into decisions about educational assistance program participation? Is supervisor support of relatively low importance as a single study (Fogerson, 2001) suggests, or does it figure more prominently in the non-participation decisions of a different set of respondents? Further and different study is required to answer these questions.
CHAPTER III

METHOD AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of the study was to explore employees’ decisions not to participate in an educational assistance program, and to examine the impact of supervisor support on those non-participation decisions. The research questions which framed the study were:

1. How do employees describe their decision not to participate in an educational assistance program?
2. What role, if any, does the supervisor play in employees’ decisions not to take college classes through educational assistance?

Research Design

A qualitative approach, specifically, an interview study design, was employed to examine the impact of supervisor support on non-participation in an employee assistance program. Firestone (1987) pointed out that qualitative research is constructed using a phenomenological view of the world. It holds that reality “is socially constructed through individual or collective definitions of the situation” (p. 16). Qualitative researchers, then, become “immersed” in those constructions in order to understand a phenomenon from participants’ perspectives. Because this study sought to understand non-participation in educational assistance from the view of the non-participants, a qualitative approach was appropriate.

An interview study was fitting because it sought to understand participants’ experiences in their own words. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) stated that “Within education and the health sciences, qualitative interviews have been a common research method for decades” (p. 9). They go on to explain the relationship of interviewer and interviewee as follows:
Interviewing is an active process where interviewer and interviewee through their relationship produce knowledge. Interview knowledge is produced in a conversational relation; it is contextual, linguistic, narrative, and pragmatic…Some see the practice of qualitative research interviewing as involving an unearthing of preexisting meaning nuggets from the depths of the respondent, while others argue that it should be an unbound and creative process where the researcher is free to construct appealing stories…[W]e argue…that the process of knowing through conversations is intersubjective and social, involving interviewer and interviewee as co-constructors of knowledge. (p. 17-18)

This interview study emerges from a constructivist viewpoint which emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between researcher and participant, as well as the construction of knowledge which emerges from this partnership.

Methods and Procedures

This section describes the method and procedures used in the conduct of the study. It includes a discussion of the site, population, sources of data, and procedures used. It also addresses ways in which trustworthiness and dependability were enhanced.

Site and Population

The site for the study was the flagship campus of a land grant university with locations across a southeastern state. Founded in the late1800’s, the campus employed just over 3,400 staff and had over 25,000 students enrolled. The site’s employee population was approximately 53% male and 47% female. The racial makeup of the staff was approximately 79.6% white and 20.4 % minority.
This site was selected because of its established, well-publicized tuition assistance program. Tuition assistance at this institution was first offered to eligible employees in the 1970s. The program was marketed in promotional materials to potential and current employees, including on the school’s employment website and employee intranet. Policies were clearly articulated to address eligibility and procedures for enrollment. These policies stated that full-time employees could take up to nine hours of undergraduate or graduate hours per semester. They further stipulated that classes could be taken during work hours as long as supervisors approved the arrangement.

The specific population for this study was a group of approximately 1,900 non-exempt university employees who were eligible to participate in this educational assistance program yet had thus far decided not to participate. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend sampling (in this case, interviewing) until saturation is reached. They explain, “In purposeful sampling the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations. If the purpose is to maximize information, the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sampled units; thus redundancy is the primary criterion” (1985, p. 202). An initial goal of 9-12 interviews was established, with the understanding that this number would change depending on when saturation was reached.

A total of 15 participants were interviewed over the course of the study. All were non-exempt employees currently working at the university. Of this group, 10 were women and five were men. The age of participants ranged from 33 to 74. All self-identified as Caucasian. The average years of service for the group was 17. No participants worked directly together or shared the same supervisor.
Sources of Data

This study utilized semi-structured interviews as its primary source of data. Semi-structured interviews with employees were conducted to gather data about the decision not to participate. These interviews were used to gain an in-depth understanding, from the participants’ perspectives, of the decision not to participate in an educational assistance program. A semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix A) was utilized in the present study. This protocol included asked one question: Why have you chosen, thus far in your career at [institution] not to take a free college class through the educational assistance program? This question addressed the researcher’s first research question. If participants did not mention supervisor support in answer to this question, the researcher use a probe to explore what role, if any, the participant’s supervisor played in his/her decision. The reason for using this probe was to help answer the researcher’s second research question.

This protocol was tentative and emergent, allowing for the exploration of new themes if they arose during interviews. As Creswell (2009) noted,

The research process for qualitative researchers is emergent. This means that the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, and all phases of the process may change or shift after the researcher enters the field and begins to collect data. For example, the questions may change…(p. 176).

In other words, though the researcher had prepared an interview question with an optional probe, it was possible to amplify that schedule to best address the research questions. Indeed, the researcher did need to ask other clarifying questions of participants during the interviews. This was, for the most part, because the participants assumed that the researcher had understanding of areas of the university which she did not. For example, the researcher needed to ask background
questions about how the executive education program year worked, and also about how contract-based projects functioned. The responses to these interview questions and clarifying probes acted as the main source of data for the study, and themes derived therein contributed to analysis of findings.

**Procedures**

IRB approval was obtained from the University of Tennessee to conduct the study. Following IRB approval, a letter was sent electronically to all employees at the site who were eligible to enroll in the organization’s educational assistance program. These employees were selected through utilization of the site’s human resources information system. Those without an e-mail address were mailed paper copies through campus mail. The letter, available in Appendix B, explained the nature of the study and explained that the researcher was seeking individuals to interview. It also indicated that participation in the study was voluntary. The letter asked interested participant to complete a checkbox confirming that they had never taken a class through educational assistance, provide their contact information, and return the letter as evidence of their interest in participating in the study. Participants who confirmed that they had never taken a class and who provided contact information were considered study participants.

Participants were contacted by the researcher to arrange a date, time, and location that was convenient for the interview. At this meeting, participants were asked to review and sign an Informed Consent Statement (see Appendix C). This document explained the nature of the study, the participant’s role in the study, and the ways in which participant identity was protected by the researcher. It further contained the researcher’s contact information and explained that participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time with no penalty. The researcher retained the original of the signed document and mailed a copy to the participant following the
interview. Participants were reminded that all names and identifiable information were masked, that their participation was strictly voluntary, and that they could withdraw from participation without penalty at any point. The nature of the study was discussed, including how data would be handled. Participants were also asked their permission for an audio recording to be made during the interview. Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes.

**Data Analysis**

Interview responses were recorded on audiotape, using the pseudonym each participant chose, and were transcribed by the researcher following each interview. Field notes were also completed immediately following each interview. Once all interviews were transcribed, the researcher followed the eight steps suggested by Tesch (1990) for the handling of qualitative data: a) read all transcriptions to get the big picture; b) select and identify fundamental meanings; c) make a list of all topics that emerge from the meanings; d) code the information based on identified meanings; e) identify categories that emerge from the data; f) decide on a term to describe each category; g) assemble the data that belong to common categories; and h) record the data that matches the final categories that were identified (pp. 142-145). The researcher shared initial findings with interviewees to verify the accuracy of initial conclusions. The data were analyzed and coded on an individual basis and then comparatively to identify emergent themes. Iterations of theme development are recorded by research question in Appendix D.

More specifically, each interview transcript was coded shortly after it was completed. The researcher made notations in the margins of concepts, words, or ideas which might have helped to answer the research questions. After an entire transcript was coded, the researcher went back through the margin notes and tried to group those which corresponded or grouped together. The researcher proceeded to code each transcript and identify potential categories,
keeping a master list of categories and themes. Tentative categories were tested as new data were explored, moving the analysis process from inductive (deriving themes from the data) to deductive (examining whether or not a particular category applies to future data). Once categories were finalized, all pieces of corresponding data were collected together in an electronic file. These categories and pieces of supporting data were used to clearly present the study’s findings in Chapter 4.

**Trustworthiness and Dependability**

To enhance the trustworthiness and dependability of the study, the researcher’s steps for preparing, conducting, and writing the study were fully documented. This documentation formed an evidence log for the study. It was also important to the researcher to reassure readers that the themes identified in the study findings were credible. As one set of researchers warn,

> The reader is expected to take the word of the researcher that he or she did a credible job in data analysis—that the themes that emerged actually have some congruence or verisimilitude with the reality of the phenomenon studied. (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002, p. 29)

Code maps were utilized in this study to enhance the credibility of the themes identified by the researcher. These code maps are on display in Appendix E. Making the iterative process of theme development public in this way, the researcher created a chain of evidence that enhanced the reliability and dependability of the study findings.

The researcher also employed “member checking,” sharing emerging findings with interviewees. This, according to Maxwell (2005), is “the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective
they have on what is going on” (p.111). Transparently documenting research steps, mapping the development of themes, member checking, and triangulation all enhanced the trustworthiness and dependability of the study findings.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of the study was to explore employees’ decisions not to participate in an educational assistance program, and to examine the impact of supervisor support on those non-participation decisions. Using interviews, 15 non-exempt university employees were asked about their decision not to participate in free college classes through their employer’s educational assistance program. Data were analyzed individually and comparatively, and themes were derived from that data to illustrate the employees’ experiences.

This chapter delineates the study’s findings. First, a description of the study participants is provided. Second, the themes that emerged from the analysis of the data are identified and described. The themes are presented in terms of the research questions that guided the study:

1. How do employees describe their decision not to participate in an educational assistance program?

2. What role, if any, does the supervisor play in employees’ decisions not to take college classes through educational assistance?

Description of Participants

In total, 15 participants were interviewed for the study. All were non-exempt employees currently working at the university. Of this group, 10 were women and five were men. The age of participants ranged from 33 to 74. All self-identified as Caucasian. No participants worked directly together or shared the same supervisor.

Participants represented a broad range of educational backgrounds. The highest level of education completed, for the majority of the group (8), was high school. One individual had
completed a trade certificate. Two individuals completed associate’s degrees, two had bachelor’s degrees, and two held master’s degrees. Of those who held post-secondary degrees, the disciplines they had studied included German, anthropology, and environmental health and safety.

Participants’ current jobs were diverse. Four worked in academic units. Of these four, three worked in administrative capacities and one as the head of a technical laboratory. Two worked in the facilities area, one as a custodial supervisor and one as a heating and air technician. Two individuals worked in the transportation department, both in administrative support positions. Of the remaining seven, all worked in unique areas: environmental safety, media affairs, undergraduate programs, band, information technology, and literacy studies. Their areas of responsibility included, but were not limited to: accounting, photography, administrative support, and fire safety.

In terms of participants’ time at the university, only one person was relatively new; she had just completed her sixth month. Only one other person had less than ten years of service. The majority of participants (9) had between 11 and 20 years of experience working at the university. Two people had been at the university for 23 years, and two had worked there for over 31 years. The average years of service for the group was 17. A description of the participants (utilizing pseudonyms) is presented in Table 1.0.

Beyond descriptive statistics, this group of participants could be characterized as having very rich, active personal lives. This information is pertinent to the study because (as will be detailed later in this chapter) various aspects of participants’ personal lives played into their decisions not to participate in free college classes. Among the participants were a fluent German speaker who also did translation work (Monique), a woman who was putting her husband
Table 1.0: Description of Non-Exempt Employees Participating in Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Job</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Longevity</th>
<th>Education Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alec</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Technical Supervisor</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>30 years</td>
<td>Trade Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aster</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Technical Supervisor</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>M.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becky</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>Admin Specialist</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>H.S. Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Service Supervisor</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>B.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Admin Coordinator</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>H.S. Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hassel</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>Event Coordinator</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>31 years</td>
<td>Associate Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>Admin Assistant</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>H.S. Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucky</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Admin Specialist</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>H.S. Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Admin Specialist</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>B.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Admin Specialist</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>23 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monique</td>
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<td>Admin Coordinator</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Propal</td>
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<td>Craft Specialist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teddy</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>51</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>H.S. Diploma</td>
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<tr>
<td>Violet</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<td>54</td>
<td>31 years</td>
<td>H.S. Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ward</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>Admin Specialist</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>H.S. Diploma</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

through engineering school (Claire), the leader of a local chapter of the Boy Scouts (Hassel), a volunteer at a local HIV/AIDS center (Ward), a woman who was just accepted into the university’s Women’s Leadership Group (Becky), and an author of the first comprehensive book about the art of cornhusk dolls (Elizabeth). The group also included a woman caring for her elderly husband (Lucky), and a woman with 31 years of service (Violet) with custody of her grandsons who, she hopes, will someday attend the university where she cleans the dormitories.
All participants appeared eager to talk about their decisions and experiences, and shared very personal details about their lives with the researcher. Several commented that they were glad that someone was interested in what they had to say. One individual commented that she had been considering enrolling in college classes through educational assistance, and that the interview conversation was “like a therapy session” for her. Many were interested in the researcher’s experience with educational assistance, wanting to know more about how long she had been taking classes, when she hoped to graduate, and how she had balanced her professional and scholarly lives. By and large, participants appeared enthusiastic about being interviewed, gave clear answers to interview questions, and appeared engaged in the research topic.

Findings

The findings of the study are detailed in the following section. These findings are organized and presented by research question and theme.

Research Question 1: How do employees describe their decision not to participate in an educational assistance program?

There were four predominant reasons (themes) that explained participants’ decisions not to participate in the educational assistance program: time constraints, early career financial concerns, past educational experiences, and lack of interest. Also, several participants (11) mentioned more than one reason for not participating in free college classes.

Time Constraints was the most frequently cited reason for non-participation in classes, with 14 of the 15 participants mentioning some kind of time constraint as contributing to their decision not to participate in free college classes through educational assistance. Nine
participants described time constraints related to family. Nine talked about time constraints related to their jobs. Five described time constraints as related to other priorities in their lives.

Three participants mentioned financial concerns early in their university careers as bearing upon their decision not to take free classes. Past educational experiences were mentioned by two participants, while one participant indicated a lack of interest as her reason for not participating. These findings (grouped by theme) are displayed in Table 2.0.

**Theme 1: Time Constraints**

As stated above, a majority of participants (14 out of 15) mentioned some type of time constraint as contributing to their decision not to participate in free college classes through educational assistance. Nine people mentioned more than one type of time constraint and five mentioned a single type of time constraint. The following sections detail the three types of time constraints mentioned by participants: Family, Job, and Other Priorities.

Table 2.0: Reasons for Non-Participation in Educational Assistance, Grouped by Theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Constraints: Family</th>
<th>Time Constraints: Job</th>
<th>Time Constraints: Other Priorities</th>
<th>Early Career Financial Concerns</th>
<th>Past Educational Experiences</th>
<th>Lack of Interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>x*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aster</td>
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<tr>
<td>Becky</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td>Hassel</td>
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</tr>
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<td>x</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucky</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Mary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monique</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td>Teddy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Violet</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ward</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

*In several cases, participants mentioned more than one reason for choosing not to participate in college classes.
Family. Time constraints related to family were mentioned by 9 of 15 participants. These participants felt that the needs of family—children, parents, or spouses—precluded the possibility of taking classes. It is notable that participants of both genders and of various ages (30’s, 50’s, 60’s and 70’s) shared concerns related to time and family.

The oldest participant framed her time constraint in terms of putting her family’s needs ahead of her own. Lucky explained that her emphasis had always been on her family. She noted, “Of course I could have done it at night but I was busy and I’m from the old school where you put your family, your husband, his career, his needs and your children’s needs first, and although I always wanted to take classes I just never had the time.” In Lucky’s case, family was primary and education was something that would only have happened if there were extra time—which there never was.

Four participants expressed that while they could have made the tradeoff between family time and school time, they were simply unwilling to do so. Lauren, an assistant in a parking and transportation office, noted that it was more important to put her son’s needs ahead of her own: “I’ve really never missed anything he’s done, any game, any anything…I never wanted to give up anything that was going on with him.” She went on to explain that she and her husband both had very troubled childhoods and as a result did not have fond memories of their younger years. “We didn’t want him to have the same life we had,” she explained. She viewed taking college classes through educational assistance as something she would have to devote time to in the evenings, thereby sacrificing time she would otherwise have spent with her son.

Similarly, Monique described her decision not to take classes in terms of a time tradeoff she was unwilling to make. She added that this tradeoff was specific to this time in her
children’s lives, and that it might not always be the case. At the moment, though, she was focusing her free time on her children:

> With two small kids the focus now is on them and their development and not on myself. Kind of like I’m saying well I’ve had my time and now it’s time for them… I live far away, I live about 45 minutes away and by the time I get home it can be close to 6:30 or 7:00 at night. Suppose I needed to read something or do some homework or deliverable or something like that, when am I going to get time to spend with my kids? They’re not with us very long. So I would rather play with my kids and go outside with my kids and do some gardening with them than to sit in front of a book...

Like Lauren, Monique described an unwillingness to sacrifice time with her children in favor of coursework.

Male participants also voiced concern over trading family time for school time. Propal, a heating and air specialist, explained that he felt he would need to take classes at night if he participated in educational assistance. But, he described, “I am kind of of the philosophy that you put family first and I don’t feel like trading that time off.” Another person, Alec, recalled that he was interested in taking classes early in his career, but also had small children at that time and so could not trade time outside of work for time with his family. The primacy of family needs echoed through the experiences of both male and female participants.

Two participants were simultaneously primary caregivers for children and parents and described the impact of that care on their ability to consider course attendance. When Aster began working at the university in 1992, she had two young children. Just as she began working fulltime, both of her parents became ill with lung cancer. As she described, “[A]ny free time that I would have was filled up with small children and sick parents.” Though she said she had the
desire at that time to take college classes, as the years went by and her parents became more ill and her children got older, she “didn’t have the passion…other things were more important.” It may be that if interest in free classes is thwarted for any reason, employees find it difficult to rekindle that interest in future years.

Violet also experienced time constraints due to family needs, but her story illustrated how time constraints related to family might continue for years or even decades. What began as years spent caring for her elderly mother turned into years of caring for her grandchildren. Early in her employment at the university, Violet’s mother became ill. Over a period of eight years, Violet and her sister and their two husbands took turns caring for her. Violet said, “[w]e did everything we could to help her, push her, and keep her going. My evening and my weekends were tied up with her because anything she needed we just did it.” This left her no free time to do things like attend school or complete assignments. As with other participants, Violet’s obligations to her mother were more pressing than her interest in classes.

Some time later, Violet’s mother passed away. In the meantime, Violet’s daughter had gotten married and had three children. “And this,” according to Violet, “this is really what tied us up the last years.” Violet and her husband spent time with the children on the weekends but were free (besides work) during the week. They had even begun talking about going back to school through educational assistance before they retired. And then one night they got a call from a detective. He informed them that their daughter had been a victim of domestic abuse and that the children were being removed from the home:

It was kind of like…are you coming or do we need to call someone else and naturally we dropped everything. I missed almost a month of work because we were not set up to raise
children…We had them on the weekend but it was different…We still have them and the
7-month-old is now 10…

Any free time Violet has is now taken up with homework, grocery shopping, and family care.
There is, again, just no time for classes. Ironically, after over 30 years of employment at the
university, she intends to continue working so that her grandchildren might one day be able to
attend the university at a reduced rate. It was interesting to note that not a single participant
complained or made any negative comments about the need to fulfill these obligations. They
simply placed family needs above educational pursuits.

**Job.** Nine participants indicated that time constraints related to their jobs influenced their
decisions not to enroll in free college classes. They perceived that the time constraints inherent
in certain aspects of their jobs made course participation impossible. Of these nine participants,
three described work schedules as the sole reason for not participating in college courses through
educational assistance. Elizabeth, who early in her career at the university worked in the
bookstore, articulated how her work schedule made class attendance very difficult: “[A]t the
bookstore, because it’s a retail establishment, you have very fixed hours and you need to be there
because the customers are coming in whether you’re there or not.” In her case, it was impossible
to leave work to attend daytime classes due to the hours she was required to be in attendance at
her job. Hassel, an event coordinator, experienced similar challenges with a work schedule that
precluded class participation. He was the only event coordinator and was required to be
available almost 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to provide assistance at various university
functions.

Claire faced time constraints due to work schedules in both positions she has held at the
university. Starting in 2000, she worked all around the state for an academic department. In
2004, she signed up for a class through educational assistance. “But I signed up to audit,” she stated, “because I was afraid that I might have to miss classes because if I had to go down south and do a project I had to be gone for two weeks.” Indeed, she attended only a few classes. Very soon, as she put it, “I realized, Oh! I’m not going to be able to do this because there were at least two times that I had to go away for projects.” She dropped the class and did not pursue another. “I can’t speak for others but…having that kind of job it is really kind of tough to see a true education outside of work.” In that job, though she tried, she could not attend class due to her work schedule.

When she assumed a third shift position in a different department at the university some years later, Claire again found her work schedule to be a factor in her decision not to pursue free college classes. She explained that working third shift “didn’t work out for my biorhythm…I couldn’t ever adjust right.” She also added that third shift work had a physical element that would leave her too exhausted for daytime classes. She relayed the experiences of some co-workers who worked second shift and were taking classes:

They come in around 3:00 p.m. and work until 11:30 p.m. or 12:00 a.m. and then they are able to sleep some at night and then take classes early on in the day and that kind of works…I would have to consider that kind of schedule change before I could ever really consider going back to school.

For one person, Monique, her day-to-day work schedule created less of a conflict than did the peak periods she experienced during the year working in an adult education program:

We have residence periods where our students (they don’t live here in town) come to town five times during the year and the sixth time we are overseas. Each of these
residence periods lasts 10 days. During those 10 days we work 12 to 14 hours a day so it would be very difficult for me with this kind of work schedule and work situation to take classes. I work weekends and you name it...I’m gonna miss class so that’s not gonna work out for me.

Three participants had not explored college courses because of the time required to accomplish their job duties. Elizabeth, an administrative assistant in the College of Business, stated, “[M]y first year in this position was very overwhelming. This is a position that has so many layers that it takes a long time to learn it and there was just no room...for learning this position and then being in class.” Teddy, a financial assistant, echoed a similar need to devote time and attention solely to his job. He said, “I just sort of felt when I first got here that I needed to concentrate on the job and I just put work ahead of myself. I already had a degree and intended to work on a master’s but things just happen and after you’re here 8 or 10 hours a day you just don’t really sometimes have the motivation...” Lucky expressed succinctly how jam-packed her job was and how that made her feel that classes were an impossible addition: “My position has always been very packed, fast-paced...[I]t was just we were always busy, you know, there just was not time.” Much like participants who talked about their family’s needs and time with family coming first, these three participants described a sort of hierarchy which positioned job above educational pursuits. Thus, because they felt that their jobs required all of their time and energy, they were constrained from tackling free classes.

As indicated earlier, 11 participants noted more than one reason for not taking free classes through educational assistance. Of these 11, nine mentioned more than one kind of time constraint as making class participation impossible. One example of this combined time
constraint came from Margaret, who mentioned both time associated with family and time associated with her job as creating a challenge.

An administrative assistant to a dean, Margaret is also, as she described it, “the mom and dad at home right now.” Her husband was an active duty Marine and at the time of interview, and had just been stationed out of state for three years. She had a young son in a childcare center. Taking free classes either during the day or in the evening was very appealing but not possible for her because of her work schedule. As she put it, “…[I]f you take classes during the day, you have to make those up. But [my son] is in childcare during the day and come 5 or 6 o’clock he needs to be picked up.” Her work schedule, which requires her to make up at the end of the day any hours she missed due to class attendance, makes class participation impossible. Yet it is her family responsibilities that make her unable to adjust her work schedule in order to accommodate coursework. Margaret’s story is illustrative of the multidimensional nature of non-participation decisions.

Other priorities. Five participants noted time constraints related to other priorities as the reason they had not taken classes through educational assistance. They explained that they had other interests besides formal education on which they preferred to spend their free time. For example Ward, an administrator, “wanted to have a job to support what [he] wanted to do in life, which was whatever came next.” He delineated his hobbies, among them, care giving, theater, and Master Gardening. He has always been exceptionally busy with other priorities for his life and has never included taking classes as part of those priorities.

Similarly, Elizabeth had other passions that filled the time she might otherwise have utilized for coursework. “I’m now 60 years old,” she said. “I’m very close to being retirement age and if I received my degree it would merely be to have the piece of paper. It wouldn’t be to
have the degree to use in my life...and I instead have other priorities in my life for that time.”

She, like Ward, made a conscious decision not to spend free time on formal education but rather on those things that resonated with her. For decades prior to coming to the university to work, she had been a professional craftsperson. She supported herself by making and selling cornhusk dolls, an art indigenous to this area of the South. Seeing the craft beginning to fade, she took action and began to write a book about it:

I worked as a professional craftsperson for years and I’m now working on writing a book and I decided to put that time [outside of work] into trying to get enough of the book amassed that I could approach a publisher…So I made that my priority instead of education… If I get to the end of my life and look back on it I would get more self-satisfaction out of saying I wrote this book.

Elizabeth found greater personal value from working on her book than she perceived she might have from taking classes.

Violet had no interest in classes; she simply wanted to relax after years of having had a second job:

Just day-to-day it was like everyday living and routine and you got off work and my husband’s income increased and so I didn’t have to work extra. He was working some side jobs but not enough to interfere with us being able to do things. So we started being able to do things. We bought a boat and we did things that probably families do that we didn’t have the income early on to do…I didn’t feel interested in college classes by then…I was content…It was like the hustle and bustle had slowed down.

Like Ward and Elizabeth, Violet simply had priorities for her free time that she perceived as more important than taking classes through educational assistance.
Early Career Financial Concerns

Three participants mentioned financial concerns experienced early in their careers as a consideration in their decision not to take classes when they first came to work at the university. While financial concerns were no longer a primary consideration related to non-participation, they were a factor which might have influenced these participants’ attitudes toward taking classes. For one individual who was initially a lower-wage employee at the university, book fees made course participation impossible. Lauren explained:

[W]hen you’re young and you’re working at a low level job like I started out, it's just not feasible…a lot of times in our life even if I would have gotten school for free I don’t know that I could have paid for books…If I had been taking a bunch of classes and the total was high I couldn’t have done it.

Propal, when he first began working at the university, spent his extra time doing side jobs in heating and air conditioning to earn extra money. He could not spare time for formal education. He explained that he depended on the extra income: “I had no interest [in classes] to be honest with you for probably three or four years…I mean, I could make an extra thousand every other week.”

Violet also struggled financially early in her employment at the university. When she first began a benefits-eligible position in the university’s housing department after working as a hair stylist, she did not earn enough to make ends meet. She recalled, “Pay was so small then you had to make ends meet somehow.” So when she completed her shift at 3:30 p.m. at the university, she dropped her daughter off at her mother’s, and did hair in the evenings. “I was forced to have to do it as a second job to make extra money.” At that time in her career, her life
was comprised of work and hair. As she explained, college was something she did not think
about early in her university career because she was so focused on earning money.

**Past Educational Experiences**

Two employees also noted past experiences with formal education as a reason they had
not attended free college classes. These individuals had memories that were so negative that
they powerfully influenced their decision not to enter a college classroom as an adult student.
Lauren relayed the lasting impact of her high school math experience:

I made really good grades except for Algebra and I was horrible at it. I had tutoring, you
know; I just never got it. It never clicked. I actually had planned on going to college and I
took Algebra II twice, failed it both times so I never passed…It never made any more
sense to me when I was a senior than when I was a freshman…A lot of [my decision to
not attend free classes] is fear that I really don’t want to take the math.

Lauren stated that she was concerned that, if she entered a degree program and pursued courses
through educational assistance, she would eventually need to enroll in a math course.

Similarly, Ward’s earlier experiences in the classroom were a contributing factor in his
decision not to enroll in classes through his employer’s educational assistance program. He
attended a different university in the 1980s and almost graduated with a degree in English.
Around that time, he experienced what he termed “emotional problems”, and did not graduate.
He explained that he has since come to realize that he is “not really geared for classroom
situations, particularly.” He described himself as an extremely introverted person who does
much better in one-on-one situations than in any kind of group setting. “I just have the urge to
run screaming from a room when I’m with a big group of people, especially if I’m put on the
spot or anything.”
Lack of Interest

Only one participant, Mary, reported lack of interest as her reason for not participating in classes through educational assistance. She explained, “I’ve never been interested. I never felt the need…Education is so important but I just didn’t want to do it. Just never have done it.” Despite gentle probes by the researcher, Mary did not identify any further reasons for not taking classes. Interestingly, of the entire group of participants, Mary seemed the least interested in educational assistance, yet was one of the most vocal proponents of education. Of her children she said, “From the time they were babies I sat on the front porch so they could see the school bus and I told them that one day they would get to ride the school bus. They always knew they were going to go to college.” Indeed, both of her sons are graduates of the university where Mary works.

Summary

Employees described their decisions not to take free college classes through educational assistance in various ways. From these descriptions, four themes emerged: time constraints, early career financial concerns, past educational experiences, and lack of interest. Time constraints were by far the most commonly mentioned barrier to participation. Various types of time constraints—those related to family, job, and other priorities—accounted for why most individuals did not choose to take free classes. Early career financial concerns and negative past educational experiences negatively impacted, collectively, five individuals’ attitudes toward returning to the classroom. Thus these themes were of some importance to these participants, but much less so than the theme of time constraints. Finally, lack of interest deterred one participant from taking classes. Importantly, this suggests that general interest may exist for most individuals, yet various factors exist which complicate their ability to enroll.
Research Question 2: What role, if any, does the supervisor play in employees’ decisions not to take college classes through educational assistance?

Related literature suggested that supervisors play an important role in employee development decisions (Burke & Baldwin, 1999; Burke & Hutchins, 2008; Fogerson, 2001; Foxon, 1997; Kozlowski & Farr, 1988; Martin, 2010; Noe, 1996; Tharenou, 2001; Tharenou, Latimer, & Conroy, 1994). A major finding of this study is that not a single participant mentioned their supervisor as playing a role in their decision not to take college classes. Indeed, none mentioned their supervisors until asked the following question by the researcher: “Can you tell me a bit about your supervisor’s role, if they had one, in your decision not to take free college classes through educational assistance?”

From their responses, three themes emerged: Perceived as Supportive, Enforcer of Policy and Procedure, and Perceived as Not Supportive. Twelve participants stated that they perceived their supervisor to be supportive of their participation in classes through educational assistance. Three individuals did not describe their supervisors as either supportive or non-supportive, but shared that their supervisors reminded them of policies and procedures related to missing work hours to attend class. One person described her supervisor as unsupportive. Table 3.0 summarizes participant responses.

**Supervisor Perceived as Supportive**

Of the 15 participants interviewed, 12 stated unequivocally that their supervisors were (or would be) very supportive if they decided to pursue college classes through educational assistance. Hassel, the event coordinator, shared that he believed his supervisor to be very supportive of educational assistance participation. He explained that others in his department who were on a more traditional 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. schedule often attended college classes with the
Table 3.0: Perceptions of Supervisor Role in Non-Participation Decision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Perceived as Supportive</th>
<th>Enforcer of Policy and Procedure</th>
<th>Perceived as Not Supportive</th>
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<td>Becky*</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
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<td>Ward</td>
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*Becky perceived both support and lack of support from persons of authority in her department.

support of the department supervisor, even though he himself was unable to attend due to his schedule. Mary, who provides administrative support for a fine arts discipline, has worked in various areas on campus during her 23 years at the university. She stated that she has worked in several offices where people took classes and that her co-workers were always given time to complete coursework. Though she has thus far chosen not to take free college classes, if she had, she explained, her supervisor “would be the first one to say…go for it, girl!” Teddy explained that he has earned two supervisory certifications through the university’s training department, though to date he has not taken any free college classes. He stated that his supervisors have been very supportive of his development and that he was sure this would extend to his participation in college classes should he decide in the future to do that. Margaret, whose husband was on active duty in the military, was still relatively new to the university and had just marked six months of employment. She explained that when she sat down with her supervisor to discuss her six-month
performance review, he strongly encouraged her to take advantage of the university’s educational assistance program. According to her, “[H]e was very supportive and thought it was something I should do.” Eight others made statements indicating that they perceived that their supervisors would be very supportive if they decided to enroll in college classes through the university’s educational assistance program.

It is interesting to note that two participants who perceived their supervisors to be supportive went into some depth about why they felt their supervisors were so supportive. They both felt that their supervisors’ own experiences would translate into support for any of their employees who chose a similar path. Becky stated, “I have a very flexible boss. He’s very understanding. He did his Ed. D. while being employed fulltime with the Air Force.” She went on to explain that, because her boss had personally experienced going to college while working, she believed he would be supportive if she chose to do the same.

Lauren, a long-term employee in a parking and transit department on campus, also mentioned her supervisor’s own experiences with higher education:

She didn’t go to college herself but she always got onto us for not going to school ourselves…She wanted us to be successful in our lives, not just here. She would have loved for us all to go get a college degree here because none of us girls that work up here…have a college degree or have even went to college.

Lauren expressed that her supervisor always regretted not having attended college and thus would certainly be supportive of—and in fact, nagged them often about—taking college classes.

Two participants, when speaking about their supportive supervisors, explained that their departments at large were also supportive. Ward, who worked for a literacy studies unit, stated that the mission of his department was to promote education across the lifespan, and that that
pertained to employees of the organization as well. It was his supervisor who, some years ago, let him take time off of work to attend a Master Gardener program. “In this place,” he said, “we’re all about education!” Because of their departmental mission and overall support for continuing education, he was certain his supervisors would support him if he decided to take college classes through educational assistance. Becky, who worked in an academic department, described a department which was also very supportive of employees taking classes. Her department gave staff a book allowance to help facilitate their college class attendance. She felt that this helped to make every person feel supported to attend classes if they wished to enroll.

**Enforcer of Policy and Procedure**

When asked about the role of supervisors, three participants stated that their supervisors reminded them of policies and procedures which applied if they chose to take classes during the business day. Though none of these participants stated that they perceived this as either supportive or non-supportive, all mentioned that the policies and procedures of which they were reminded by supervisors tended to make class attendance seem less feasible. For example, university policy requires that work time used for class attendance be made up. Lucky said that her supervisor had mentioned this policy to her. She recalled, “…my director would approve it [taking classes during the day] but it would be like if you take two hours off here you have to stay two hours late…So it does make it difficult.” In other words, though the supervisor would approve her attendance in the course, he would also enforce the university policy which would, in turn, make attendance difficult for her.

Two participants mentioned that their supervisors referenced financial procedures, albeit in a vague manner, in response to inquiries about taking classes through educational assistance. Propal conveyed that he felt supervisors kept employees from pursuing some training and
educational opportunities, perhaps because of the cost to the department. “I’ve heard money’s an issue,” he said. Though he admitted to not knowing exactly what the financial concerns were related to employees attending college classes through educational assistance, he was sure his supervisor had mentioned them in response to employee interest in classes. He thus assumed that taking classes would be an uphill battle within his department because of how the classes were paid for by departments.

Similarly, Claire related this experience, when she was working for a self-funded academic unit:

…I did ask my supervisors at that time about getting back to take a few classes. A lot of us were talking about it at the time and were a little concerned about our options because we were contract-based. We worked on different budget codes for different projects and we were sort of led to believe by our supervisors that all that [classes] would have to be paid for in the proposals that we write when we bid for projects…So a lot of us were hesitant to actually take classes.

This participant, too, only had vague impressions about supervisors having financial concerns about employees taking classes. Neither of these two participants was ever explicitly forbidden to take classes by their supervisors, but supervisors gave the impression that a departmental policy or procedure might make college classes a difficult prospect.

**Perceived as Not Supportive**

One individual, Becky, perceived certain authority figures in her department to be unsupportive. “My supervisor is department head and he is very supportive if I would like to go back to school. He would find somehow to work it into my schedule. The other people that I support would not be so supportive of that decision.” She explained that she answered to 23
faculty members and that the faculty, who had some authority over her position, would not understand if she were in class and not available to assist them. “I don’t think they realize that we have other roles…They think we’re just here.”

Summary

Before being prompted by the researcher, as a group, not one of the participants mentioned anything about their supervisors. Thus it might be surmised that supervisors do not figure prominently in these decisions not to take classes. However, the majority of participants perceived that they would be very supportive of their participation in classes. This is further support for suggesting that supervisors did not seem to play a large role in these employees’ decision not to take classes.

For a small number of employees, supervisors were perceived to have played a deterrent role by referring to policies and procedures as they related to the educational assistance program. In this role, they are not described as explicitly trying to dissuade employees from taking classes, but rather reminding them of some bureaucratic details which might make class participation more difficult. Lastly, one participant mentioned that other (non-supervisory) authority figures in her department might play a non-supportive role. While this does not specifically pertain to the question of supervisor role, it does suggest that others in the department may contribute to employees’ perceptions of supervisor support.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Educational assistance programs have existed in the United States since as early as 1952. These programs, in which employers pay for employees to complete post-secondary coursework, are popular among employers as recruitment and retention tools (Babcock, 2009; Buddin & Kapur, 2002; Cappelli, 2004; Manchester, 2008; Meisler, 2004; SHRM, 2009). They are viewed by employees as a means to accomplish personal goals (Jacobs, Skillings, & Yu, 2001). Yet, at last count, only 8 to 9% of eligible employees participated in classes through educational assistance (General Accounting Office, 1996).

Though very little is known about why employees choose not to participate in educational assistance programs, adult education literature suggests that personal factors such as cost, lack of confidence, time constraints, low personal priority, and lack of course relevance deter adults from participation in educational activities (Cross, 1981; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1985; Drake, 1987; Fogerson, 2001; Johnson, Harrison, Burnett, & Emerson, 2003; Korab, 2003; Martindale & Drake, 1989; Ratcliff & Killingbeck, 1989; Scanlan & Darkenwald, 1984). Contextual factors like gender and class identities and social and economic structures have also found to contribute to adult non-participation in education (Archer, et al., 2001; Gallacher et al., 2000; Paladaniu, 2007).

Research from the human resource development field furthers our understanding of employee learning and development. This literature suggests that supervisors play an important role in employee development decisions (Burke & Baldwin, 1999; Burke & Hutchins, 2008; Foxon, 1997; Kozlowski & Farr, 1988; Martin, 2010; Noe, 1996; Tharenou, 2001; Tharenou, Latimer, & Conroy, 1994). Yet only one researcher (Fogerson, 2001) has studied the impact of
Fogerson (2001) found that lack of supervisor support contributed in some way to employees’ decision not to take classes through educational assistance. Yet this finding did not contribute significantly to our understanding of why employees do not participate in educational assistance. First, the finding had a low mean value (less than 2.00 on a Likert scale measuring from 1.00 to 5.00), making it difficult to assess how significant a role supervisors in the study played. Second, it did not tell us anything about the role of the supervisor in employees’ non-participation decisions. How do employees perceive that role and how does it figure (or not figure) into their decision not to take free college classes?

The purpose of the study was to explore employees’ decisions not to participate in an educational assistance program, and to examine the impact of supervisor support on those non-participation decisions. The research questions which framed the study were:

1. How do employees describe their decision not to participate in an educational assistance program?

2. What role, if any, does the supervisor play in employees’ decisions not to take college classes through educational assistance?

In order to gain an in-depth understanding, from participants’ perspectives, of the decision not to participate in an educational assistance program, interviews were utilized as the primary source of data in this study. Fifteen employees who had not taken free college classes through a university’s educational assistance program were interviewed. Each interview lasted between 15 and 40 minutes and was recorded and transcribed. The researcher analyzed and coded transcripts on an individual basis and then comparatively to identify emergent themes and
categories. These categories and examples of supporting data were used in the presentation of findings.

This chapter provides a summary of the study’s findings, a discussion of the findings, and implications of the findings in relation to the literature. Lastly, implications for practice, as well as recommendations for future research, are presented.

**Summary of Findings**

First, the employees in this study described their decision not to participate in educational assistance in several ways. From these descriptions, four themes emerged: time constraints, early career financial concerns, past educational experiences, and lack of interest. With 14 out of 15 participants mentioning at least one type of time constraint as impacting their non-participation decision, time constraints was the predominant reason employees did not take classes.

Second, a majority of participants (11) mentioned more than one deterrent to participation. This finding suggests that the decision not to take classes is a multifaceted one. Nine of these instances related to experiencing more than one type of time constraint, underscoring the primacy of time constraints in non-participation decisions.

Third, regarding the supervisor’s role in employee non-participation decisions, supervisors did not appear to play a part. When asked their reasons for not having taken part in classes through educational assistance, not a single participant mentioned their supervisor.

When asked by the researcher about the supervisor’s role in their decision not to take free college classes, a majority of participants in this study (12) perceived that their supervisors would be very supportive if they decided to take free college classes. A smaller number (3) felt that their supervisor’s role as enforcer of university practice regarding making up time missed for
classes made participation seem like a difficult prospect. A single participant noted that she feared lack of support from other authority figures in her department. These findings suggest that, if an employee wanted to take classes through educational assistance, at least one university practice (requiring non-exempt employees to make up time) might act as a deterrent.

**Discussion**

This study was limited in that it did not explore particular categories (for example, race, gender, geographical area). That said, several important findings emerged, and there are both consistencies and inconsistencies between the study’s findings and the literature. The study’s findings were consistent with the literature in two areas. First, participants identified cost, time constraints, and low personal priority as factors in their decisions not to participate in educational assistance. These three factors correspond to the findings from previous studies of adult education non-participation. Second, also as in previous studies, participants in the current study described not one but, rather, several reasons for not participating in free college course. There were also two significant inconsistencies between the present study and extent literature related to participation in adult education. First, previous work had identified lack of course relevance as a fairly common deterrent factor. This finding was not replicated in the current study. Second, contrary to the literature, supervisor support was not found to be a significant factor in employees’ decision not to take free college classes through educational assistance.

Four of the six non-participation factors identified in the original Deterrents to Participation Scale-General study (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1985) were found to be somewhat constant across studies of adults who chose not to participate in educational activities: cost, time constraints, lack of course relevance, and low personal priority (Drake, 1987; Fogerson, 2001; Johnson, Harrison, Burnett, & Emerson, 2003; Korab, 2003; Martindale & Drake, 1989; Ratcliff
In the current study, three of these constants, cost, time constraints, and low personal priority, were confirmed by participants as contributing to their decision not to enroll in courses. The remaining factor, lack of course relevance, was not mentioned by a single participant. This raises some question about the constancy of the four factors as suggested by earlier studies. It also raises the possibility that perceived barriers like cost and time constraint might deter individuals from even considering the fourth factor, course relevance.

What Darkenwald and Valentine (1985) termed “synergistic effects of multiple deterrents” in the original DPS-G study also resonated in the current study’s findings. Darkenwald and Valentine concluded that the low mean value of non-participation factors identified in their study indicated that multiple issues contributed to the decision not to participate in educational settings. Similarly, the current study found that many participants had more than one reason for not participating in free college classes. An example of this was Margaret, the administrative assistant who chose not to enroll in classes because of simultaneous work schedule and childcare constraints. The present study affirmed that adult education non-participation decisions are more often than not multifaceted and difficult to isolate.

While some findings in the present study were in keeping with extant literature on non-participation in adult education, they were not congruent with suggestive literature related to supervisor impact on employee development. Previous studies have suggested that supervisors influence such areas as participation in training and professional development, career development behaviors, updating behaviors, and training transfer (Brinkerhoff & Montesino, 1995; Burke & Baldwin, 1999; Burke & Hutchins, 2008; Foxon, 1997; Green, 1991; Kozlowski & Farr, 1988; Martin, 2010; Maurer & Tarulli, 1994, Noe & Wilk, 1993; Tharenou, 2001; Tharenou, Latimer & Conroy, 1994). Similarly, a study by Fogerson (2001) found that lack of
supervisor support was a deterrent factor (albeit with a low mean value) among a group of university employees who had decided not to participate in an educational assistance program. The most unexpected finding in the current study was that participants’ supervisors played either no role in their non-participation decisions, or at most, they played a relatively minor role. In fact, a majority of participants described what they perceived would be strong support from their supervisors should they decide to take free college classes through educational assistance.

The finding that supervisors played either no role or a minor role in non-participation decisions may be due, in part, to the largely personal nature of those decisions. As stated earlier, employees gave four main reasons for choosing not to take free classes through educational assistance: time constraints, early career financial concerns, past educational experiences, and lack of interest. These factors are largely personal and do not relate to the supervisor, the employees’ relationship to the supervisor, or the supervisor’s perceived attitude toward education. These findings are consistent with Cross’s (1981) contention that adult education barriers could be organized into three areas: situational, dispositional, and institutional, and that those barriers stemming from personal circumstance were the most pervasive. “In all survey research,” she wrote, “situational barriers lead the list, ranging from roughly 10 percent citing situational factors such as lack of child care or transportation to about 50 percent mentioning cost or lack of time” (p. 100). Given, then, that the issues deterring employees in the current study from enrolling in free classes seemed to be of a personal nature, supervisors’ minimal role in those non-participation decisions is a more understandable finding.

Cross’s (1981) Chain of Response (COR) Model proved helpful in identifying processes and relationships underlying participants’ non-participation decisions. It holds that participation decisions related to adult education are not single acts but rather based on “a chain of responses,
each based on an evaluation of the position of the individual in his or her environment” (Cross, 1981, p. 125). According to the model, participation decisions are impacted by such things as attitudes about education, goal expectation, opportunities and barriers, and access to information life transitions. Participants in the current study voiced a process of evaluation, of reflecting the possibility of taking classes against their current circumstance. For example, Monique claimed to have interest in taking classes but decided that, due to her complex work schedule and young children at home, college classes were not for her. In Violet’s case, her ever-changing life circumstance (struggling financially, then becoming financially stable, then caring for an ailing parent, then gaining custody of her grandchildren) kept continuing education at arm’s length. Her evaluation process lasted decades. Each participant seemed to have, as the COR Model suggests, systematically evaluated their current situation and their current environment in the process of deciding against educational assistance.

The COR Model also provided a means through which to consider the interplay between individual motivation and environmental factors in participation decisions. The model suggested that external forces could deter even the most determined and motivated adult. This seemed to be true for the study participants. Several participants voiced strong interest in taking classes through educational assistance, yet external forces such as work schedules acted as a barrier to their participation. The COR Model also, conversely, suggested that motivation might help adult learners to overcome external barriers. This study did not support this aspect of the model, though the researcher deliberately interviewed only those who had not participated in classes. In other words, the participants in this study were interviewed specifically because they had not overcome barriers in order to participate. Thus this study cannot properly assess the extent to which high motivation enables adults to overcome participation barriers.
The study found many elements of the COR Model interacting with one another throughout participants’ stories: self-evaluation, attitudes about education, life transitions, and barriers. Yet one important aspect of the model, goals and expectation of goal achievement, did not emerge from any participant experience. It could be that, in the case of more technical, job-related training classes, expectation of goal achievement might emerge as factor in employees’ decision not to participate. But in the case of college class participation, the extent to which employees considered goal achievement did not appear to be a significant factor for consideration. Thus this aspect of the COR Model was of limited utility in the present study.

Conclusions

Consonant with the literature, the findings of the study affirm the conclusion that employees do not participate in educational assistance due to a number of reasons which are multi-faceted, synergistic, and largely personal in nature. In spite of what has been suggested in the literature, the findings of the study support the conclusion that supervisors play little to no deterrent role in the decision not to take free classes, at least for the participants in this study.

Implications for Practice

The results of the study provide program administrators with important information about educational assistance programs. First, educational assistance is not desirable to everyone at all times. For example, if an employee does not wish to trade time with small children in favor of course attendance or simply has no interest in taking free college classes, it would be inappropriate for organizations to impose pressure to participate. While organizations often feel responsible for trying to remove barriers to participation in educational assistance, with respect to personal barriers, it may well be an area in which they may not be able or willing to play a significant role.
Organizations may, however, have a role to play in easing perceived barriers so that those who wish to participate in educational assistance might do so. First, time constraints were mentioned by a majority of participants as factoring into their non-participation decisions. Of these participants, several perceived that their work schedules made class attendance difficult to impossible. To assist employees with such concerns, organizations could establish a program for non-traditional learners whose role, in part, would be to assist adult working students with class scheduling. Staff of this program might help working adults identify courses and/or fields of study which would allow them to participate outside of their work hours. A similar model for this work is an Americans with Disabilities Act coordinator, whose job it is to evaluate a person’s need and work within existing structures to help the individual accomplish goals.

Concerns about book fees and negative prior educational experiences are also participation barriers that such a program could address. First, such a program could establish a need-based fund to assist low-wage employees with the purchase of books. It also might assist with making arrangements for employees to observe a college class before committing to enroll. Such observations would re-introduce the adult learner to the classroom in a welcoming manner, and help him/her decide whether or not to pursue coursework.

In addition to establishing a program to assist non-traditional learners, organizations should review policies and practices related to educational assistance to make sure they do not deter participation. For example, in the current study, three participants noted that the need to make up work hours missed for class attendance made class participation seem more difficult. Removing this requirement might encourage participation, and the number of hours missed per week capped to keep it from becoming an undue burden on hiring departments.
The finding that supervisors were perceived as supportive of educational assistance has implications for supervisors as well as for other employee benefit programs. If organizations want to encourage participation in educational assistance, they should institute a reward program for those supervisors for whom it can be demonstrated they actively encouraged employees (through verbal encouragement, creative scheduling, recognition of milestones, and/or departmental purchase of course books, for example) to participate. Further, organizations should utilize supervisors for the encouragement of other employee benefit or academic programs.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the findings in this study, the following are suggestions for future research on non-participation in educational assistance programs:

1. Replicate this study at other, large research institutions to see if similar findings emerge.
2. Replicate this study among a different employee population (for example, exempt employees) to determine whether employment status is a critical factor in non-participation.
3. Design a comparative study analyzing non-participation in educational assistance across different types of organizations.
4. Undertake a study similar to the present study and ask interviewees to complete a motivational measurement tool to explore the extent to which level of motivation impacts non-participation decisions.
5. Carry out a mixed methods, longitudinal study examining employee records over time. Who participates in employee assistance programs? Who does not? How do years of
service, employment status (exempt/non-exempt), professional field and the like appear to factor in non-participation decisions?
LIST OF REFERENCES


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APPENDIX
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Why have you chosen, thus far in your career at [institution] not to take a free college class through the educational assistance program?

Possible probes:

- Many individuals mention various factors as contributing to their decision not to take a free college class. These include: a) lack of confidence; b) lack of course relevance; c) time constraints; d) low personal priority; and e) cost and f) personal problems. Can you talk to me about factors that may have kept you from taking a class?

- Thus far you have not mentioned your supervisor as having any bearing on your decision not to take classes. Can you tell me a bit about your supervisor’s role, if they had one, in your decision not to take free college classes through educational assistance?
APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Employee:

I am conducting a research study as partial requirement for a doctoral degree at the University of Tennessee. My research interest is participation in educational assistance programs. Specifically, I am interested in understanding why some employees choose to enroll in free college classes through educational assistance programs and some do not.

You have received this letter because you are a UT Knoxville non-exempt employee who is eligible for free classes through educational assistance. I would like to ask you to participate in this research study. If you have opted not to use educational assistance programs and you are willing to be interviewed, you will be asked to participate in a 30 to 45 minute interview that can take place at a location of your choice, as well as a short follow-up call following the interview. Your information will be confidential: no identifying information about you will be reported or included in any written documents. Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time during the study.

If you are willing to be interviewed, please fill out the information at the bottom of this letter, including your contact information, and return it to mlucal@utk.edu or send in campus mail to Mary Lucal, 230 Conference Center Building. Please feel free to e-mail me at mlucal@utk.edu or call me at 865-951-9010 if you have any questions.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Mary Lucal

1. Have you ever taken a free college class through the educational assistance program at UT Knoxville?
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No

2. Would you be willing to be interviewed by the researcher about your decision not to take classes through educational assistance?
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No
3. If you answered “Yes” to item #2, please supply your contact information below.

   Name:____________________________________

   Contact phone and e-mail:_____________________________

   Best time to be reached:______________________
APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT
[Non-participation in Educational Assistance Programs]

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Mary Lucal, a student in the Higher Education Administration doctoral program. You were selected as a possible participant because you are eligible to participate in your employer’s educational assistance program yet thus far have chosen to not take part in it. You also stated, in an earlier document, that you were willing to be interviewed about your reasons for not participating in your employer’s educational assistance program.

Please read the information below carefully, and feel free to ask any questions you may have. If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this form. You will also be given a copy of this form. The purpose of this study is to explore the decisions of those employees who choose not to participate in educational assistance programs. Specifically, it seeks to understand the role that workplace experiences play in such non-participation decisions. Findings from this study will help guide campus leaders and administrators in how to make educational assistance a more effective recruiting and retention tool.

YOUR ROLE IN THE STUDY

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you would be asked to do the following:

1. Complete one interview about your decision not to participate in your employer’s educational assistance program. Interviews will be scheduled at a time and place convenient to you, and will last approximately 30 minutes. They will also be audio recorded. If you choose not to be recorded, you may still participate in this study. Interviews will be audio recorded with digital technology. Recordings will be uploaded to the researcher’s computer. Recordings will be transcribed by the researcher.

2. Have one follow-up conversation with the researcher. The purpose of this conversation is to confirm the accuracy of themes which arose from your interview. This follow-up conversation can take place in person or via phone and is expected to last approximately 20 minutes.

Your name will not be used in any publication based on this study. Instead, a pseudonym will be used. The name of the university will also be a pseudonym to further address privacy concerns.

______Participant’s initials
PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may The purpose of the study is to explore employees’ decisions not to participate in an educational assistance program, and to examine the impact of supervisor support on those non-participation decisions. To participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be destroyed.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information in this study will remain confidential. Digital recordings and transcripts will be stored securely on the researcher’s password-protected computer system and will be available only to the researcher. All recordings will be destroyed after five years. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link a participant to the study. Participants and the employing institution will be given pseudonyms. All data related to the study will be destroyed one year after the completion of the study.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Mary Lucal, at 230 Conference Center Building, 600 Henley Street, Knoxville, TN 37996, and 865-974-1909. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466.

____________________________________________________________________________

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature ______________________________ Date __________

Investigator's signature ______________________________ Date _________
APPENDIX D


| Code Mapping for Educational Assistance Non-Participation (Research Question 1) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Third Iteration: Non-Participation Themes** |
| 1: Time Constraints | 2: Early Career Financial Concerns | 3: Past Educational Experiences | 4: Lack of Interest |
| 1 | Time Constraints-Family | 2 |Couldn’t afford books | 3 | Fear about prior classes |
| 1b | Time Constraints-Job | 2b | Side jobs in evenings for money | 3b | Discomfort in prior classrooms |
| 1c | Time Constraints-Other Priorities | 4a | Lack of Interest |

| **Second Iteration: Non-Participation Variables** |
| 1a | Time Constraints-Family | 2a |Couldn’t afford books early on | 3a | I was horrible at Algebra in high school |
| 1b | Time Constraints-Job | 2b | Did side jobs in evenings to earn extra money | 3a | Fear. I don’t want to take the math. |
| 1c | Time Constraints-Other Priorities | 4a | Never been interested. |

<p>| <strong>First Iteration: Initial Codes</strong> |
| 1a | Family first | 2a |Couldn’t afford books | 3a | I was horrible at Algebra in high school |
| 1a | It would take away from time with family | 2b | Did side jobs in evenings to earn extra money | 3a | Fear. I don’t want to take the math. |
| 1a | Didn’t feel like trading that time off | 3b |Not geared toward classroom situations, particularly |
| 1a | Keeping kids and job on track leaves no extra time | 3b | Atmosphere of classroom not to my liking; had trouble in classes in 80s |
| 1a | Free time filled up with small children and sick parents | 3b | Urge to run screaming when in a big group of people |
| 1a | Family took a lot of my time |
| 1b | Job demands all of my time |
| 1b | Would have to alter my schedule |
| 1b | My position has always been packed and fast-paced |
| 1b | We were always busy at work...there just was |
| not time | 1b | I needed to use time to concentrate on the job |
| 1b | If you take courses during the day, you have to make up time |
| 1c | Evening activities |
| 1c | Other things more important for my time |
| 1c | Other priorities for my life and free time |
| 1c | My husband made more money so we could do things in the evenings |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Iteration: Initial Codes</th>
<th>Second Iteration: Supervisor Role Variables</th>
<th>Third Iteration: Supervisor Role Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1a They want me to take more classes.</td>
<td>2a My director reminded me I would have to make up the time. So it does make it difficult.</td>
<td>1: Very Supportive 2: Enforcer of Policies and Procedures 3: Not Supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1a First supervisor was very supportive.</td>
<td>2a I’ve got to make sure I get all my classes in so I can come into work at 3:00.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1a Boss now always encouraging us to take classes, take training, fit it in, go here.</td>
<td>2a I’ve heard supervisors say you can take classes but you have to be here for your shift.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1a My supervisor is department head and is very supportive if I want to go back to school.</td>
<td>2b Supervisors said we had to work the cost of classes into the contract.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1a I would completely be able to do a daytime class now.</td>
<td>2b Money’s an issue.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b My boss didn’t go to college but always got onto us for not going to school ourselves.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b She wanted us to be successful in our lives.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b She would have loved for us all to get a college degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b He did his Ed.D. while being employed fulltime with the Air Force.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1c This place is all about education!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1c Very supportive atmosphere here.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>1c They [supervisors] would be ok because everybody in our department can go to classes.</td>
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<td>1c Everyone here is very supportive of education.</td>
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VITA

Mary Lucal was born in Sandusky, Ohio. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in English and Women’s Studies from the College of Wooster, her Bachelor of Science in Education from the Ohio State University, and her Master of Science in Human Resource Management from Lesley University. She currently works as a Senior Trainer and Employee Relations Counselor at the University of Tennessee.