Grief at Work

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Thanatology Capstone Paper

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**Abstract**

This paper examines topics related to grief at work and provides an overview of a proposed four hour seminar on grief at work. The theoretical framework for this paper includes theories related to personal growth, resilience, and adult learning. To facilitate an understanding of grief at work, this paper provides an overview of grief and related concepts, such as PTSD and depression, and delves into the cultural aspects of grief. Topics explored include how emotions are expressed at work, factors that influence the expression of emotions at work including a person's emotional makeup, corporate culture, what emotional labor is required and how death education is evolved from its conception in the 1950s. In addition to the literature review, this paper provides a review of a grief at work seminar designed for HR professionals and managers. This seminar is designed to education leaders about topics related to grief at work including the importance of supporting employees, how to support employees both formally and informally, and how to recognize when employees may need additional support.

## Introduction

Work is a place dedicated to stated goals and objectives, commerce, and duties, but workplaces are also human places and are not immune from death, grief, and mourning. In 2021, 1.66 million people between the ages of 15 and 74 died in the United States (Ahmad et al., 2022) and many of them left behind not only grieving loved ones, but also coworkers struggling to grieve at work. Grief at work comes in many ways from the deaths of colleagues, the deaths of loved ones, and the deaths of colleagues' loved ones. Some workplaces have strong cultures that provide formal support for grieving workers including grief counseling, supportive colleagues, and generous bereavement policies (Fowkes, 2022). However, many organizations offer only three to four days bereavement leave and rarely offer any other support (Hazen, 2008, p. 183). This lack of corporate support can leave employees feeling lost and unsupported.

Grief takes its toll in the workplace not only in the human costs of sadness and emotional pain, but also financially. A 2003 study by the Grief Recovery Institute estimated that grief cost $75.1 billion annually (Moeller, 2017), adjusted for inflation this is approximately $125 billion in 2023 dollars (Consumer Price Index, 2023). These corporate costs came from not only the costs of bereavement leave, but also from hidden costs related to errors in judgement which can lead to mistakes, injuries, and accidents (Hazen, 2008, p. 78). Employers can reduce these costs by offering improved bereavement benefits including increased time off and better training to *managers about how* to support grieving employees (Hazen, 2008, p. 84). Not only can taking steps to support grieving employees lead to lower costs, but it can also lead to improved employee retention and a more positive attitude about the company. Therefore, this capstone project seeks to educate corporate HR professionals about how to support grieving employees within their organization.

## Theoretical Framework

The two thanatological theories that will guide this capstone project are Hogan, Greenfield, and Schmidt's theory of personal growth and Bonanno's Resilience Theory. Grief includes loss and sadness, but it can also lead to personal growth. Hogan, Greenfield, and Schmidt detailed how bereavement accompanied by introspection can lead individuals to personal growth that includes being more loving, tolerant, forgiving, compassionate, and resilient (Hogan et al., 2001, p. 23). The origins of this theory were developed from a qualitative study where the researchers noted that personal growth was an outcome of grief (Hogan et al., 1996). A quantitative measure was subsequently developed to test the theory and the researchers found that personal growth as an outcome of grief could also be quantitively proven (Hogan et al., 2001). Other researchers including Braun and Berg (1994) and Milo (1997) have also written about the transformative powers of grief.

A key component of finding personal growth in grief is resilience and as such, this paper will also draw from Resilience Theory which was developed by Dr. George Bonanno in 2004. Bonanno's work has shown that resilience is not pathological, as many theorists once believed, but represents a healthy adjustment after a traumatic event (Bonanno, 2004, p. 23). Some of the characteristics of resilient people include hardiness, which includes the belief that one can learn and grow from both positive and negative events; a high self-image; and coping mechanisms that include laughter and a positive outlook on life (Bonanno, 2004, pp. 25–26). Bonanno has continued to study resilience and he posits that part of the reason that some individuals are resilient and others are not is the ability of some people to flexibly self-regulate, which means people facing trauma are able to decide which strategy to apply in which situation (Bonanno, 2004, p. 6).

As this project is a corporate training seminar, it is not only informed by thanatology theories, but also by andragogy, a leading theory of adult learning that was first conceived of in the 1800s by Andrew Knapp and popularized by Malcom Knowles in the 1960s. Andragogy purports that adults learn differently than children and that in order for adult learners to be engaged and learn they need to understand why they need to learn something, they need to take responsibility for their own learning, and they need to be ready and motivated to learn (Mews, 2020, pp. 65–66). Another important factor in adult learning is understanding that individuals learn differently with some being visual learners who learn through movies and pictures; others being auditory learners who learn through discussion and lectures; some learning through reading and writing; and others being kinesthetic learners who learn through hands on activities (Western Governors University, 2022). Understanding and applying these principles increases the chance that adults will meet the learning objectives.

## Literature Review

Death is the only true certainty in life as all lives follow the same trajectory: we are born, we live, and we die. Grief is death's companion and all of us who love and are connected to other human beings will experience grief. Unfortunately for many of us, US workplace bereavement policies often offer four days or fewer of bereavement leave (Fowkes, 2022, p. 9), which means we are forced back to the office before we have even had time to process our grief. Additionally, many workplaces are not conducive to the display of grief and other difficult emotions (Fowkes, 2022). While counseling and time can help individuals live with their grief, death education can help others help those who are grieving.

This literature review will explore grief including how grief is typically defined, relevant grief theories; expressions of grief; complicated grief and related afflictions; and cultural aspects of grief. It will also explore the expression of grief and other difficult emotions at work. Lastly, it will explore death education and how it can be used to help managers and Human Resource (HR) professionals help those who are grieving in the workplace.

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### Grief

Grief is sometimes defined as an emotional response to a loss (Corr et al., 2018, p. 19). However, while grief includes feelings of emptiness and sadness, it is not only an emotional response as it can manifest physically, behaviorally, cognitively (Thompson, 2009, pp. 11–12). spiritually, and socially (Corr et al., 2018, p. 221). There is no single pattern of grief as grief, according to Hazen (2008) is as unique as a person's DNA (p. 79). The terms grief, bereavement, and mourning are sometimes used interchangeably, but it is important to understand that they are three separate, but related, concepts. Bereavement occurs when someone experiences a loss (Rando, 1995). Although the loss is typically a death, the loss could

also be the loss of social standing, a marriage, or anything else a person values. Although there are multiple definitions of grief, for the purposes of this literature review, the definition of grief as a person's involuntary responses to grief (Rando, 1995)will be used as it is broad enough to encompass all types of responses to a loss. Lastly, mourning is the active processes and ways that people manage their grief (Rando, 1995). Mourning can be done individually or collectively as the methods by which people manage their express their grief are both personal and communal (Rando, 1995).

***Expressing and Experiencing Grief,***

Not everyone grieves the same way and there is no one right way of grieving. Doka and Martin (2010) identified two primary styles or patterns of grieving. The first is an intuitive pattern where individuals explore and express their grief through emotional expressions. The second is an instrumental method of grief where grief is experienced physically through cognition or taking action. For instance, someone who has an intuitive style of grief may choose to journal about their grief and someone who has an instrumental style may choose to build a memorial for their loved one. Although intuitive grief is often thought of as a feminine way of grieving and instrumental grief is thought of as more masculine, either gender can exhibit either form of grieving. Additionally, grieving styles exist along a spectrum with some individuals exhibiting characteristics of both intuitive and instrumental grieving (p. 4)

What is important to remember about intuitive and instrumental styles of grief is that there is no one right way to grieve. Throughout the years many theories have been posited about how people move through grief. Notable theories of grief include stage-based theories, such as Dr. Elisabeth-Kubler-Ross's five stages of grief; phase-based theories of grief such as Sanders' (1998) six phases of grief, and Worden's (2008) task-based theories of grief. One of the most

interesting evolutions in grief theory is the growing understanding that grief is part of life and that it is not something that you recover from, but something that you incorporate into your life. This is what Callie Hawkins did when she incorporated the grief over her stillborn child into her work as the Director of Programming at President Lincoln's Cottage in Washington D.C. After losing her son, Hawkins was able to channel her grief into mounting an exhibit on grief and child loss that juxtaposed the Lincoln's loss of two sons with the stories of modern-day parents who had lost children (Hawkins, 2021). Hawkins' story illustrates the made by Sanders that as grief theory has evolved so too has the understanding that people have choices in grief (Sanders, 1998). Understanding that people have choices in grief can help HR professionals and others understand that while they may not be counselors, they can cite examples of how others incorporated grief and loss into their lives and may help the provide resources for grievers.

One of the most notable grief researchers is Kubler-Ross (2011) who developed a model of five psychosocial stages that dying individuals go through: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. She also believed that individuals maintained hope throughout the dying process (Corr et al., 2018). Although Kubler-Ross developed her stage theory based on the emotions dying individuals went through, she and other authors eventually expanded the stages theory to apply to not only the dying, but also other individuals undergoing losses (Kubler-Ross, 2011, pp. 168–169).

The problem with the five stages theory and other stage-based grief theories is that not everyone grieves identically, and emotions are not linear. Even Kubler-Ross and coauthor David Kessler acknowledged this in the introduction to their 2005 book, *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss* (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005, p. 7). There is a concern that if the five stages of grief, or other grief theories are applied too

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literally that grieving people will be rushed through the grief process and judged if they show signs of distress longer than what is perceived as appropriate. Even worse, grieving people may harshly judge themselves for not recovering quickly enough from a traumatic event like the death of a loved one (Wortman & Silver, 1989, p. 350). Unfortunately, even psychologists and counselors sometimes subscribe to stage based theories of loss and they continue to be taught at medical schools (Stroebe et al., 2017), which means that even professionals may be judging people who do not progress through pre-defined stages of grief in what is deemed to be an appropriate manner.

Phase based theories of grief are similar to stage-based theories in that they suggest that all grievers move through a similar progression of grief (Corr et al., 2018, p. 233) One phase-based theory of grief was developed by Sanders (1998) after the death of her teenage child. Her research indicates that individuals go through four key phases of grief. The first of these phases is shock which is when the individual begins to feel the impacts of the death physically and psychologically. The next phase is awareness of loss which occurs after the social aspects of grieving, such as the funeral, are over and the individual begins to feel their loss. Key aspects of this phase include crying, anger, and sleep disturbances. After awareness comes conservation withdrawal, which can be likened to a sense of hibernation. Conservation awareness brings choices to the griever as they can choose to consciously or unconsciously seek their own death, they can choose to live in a diminished state, or they can choose to move forward with their life and heal (Sanders, 1998).

While Sanders' phase-based theory is similar to Kubler-Ross' stage theory as it suggests individual move through rigid phases or stages of grief, it represents a progression from Kubler-Ross' stage theory as it is research based and it illustrates how mitigating factors such as the

bereaved' s emotional makeup, the social support available and the circumstances of death influence the grief process (Corr et al., 2018, p. 232). Sanders'(1998) theory also suggests that mourners have choices in how to process a loss as they can choose to remain stuck or choose to move on.

Another key set of grief models are process based grief models such as William J. Worden's (2008) task-based theory of grief. These types of theories are similar to Sander's theory in that they posit that grief is something that people actively work through versus passively endure (Corr et al., 2018, p. 235). Worden outlined Four Tasks of Mourning that he believes all people work through during the grieving process. Although these tasks are laid out in order, similar to the stage or phase theories of grief, they differ from some other models as they call for grievers to actively work through their grief. The four tasks of mourning as defined by Worden are: (1) to accept the reality of the loss; (2) to process the pain of the grief; (3) to adjust to a world without the deceased; and (4) to find a way to remember the deceased while embarking on a new life without them (Corr et al., 2018, p. 235). Unlike descriptions of other models of grief, Worden's (2008) tasks actively call upon the griever to do something.

Worden's (Neimeyer, 2000) third task of adjusting to a world without the deceased relates closely to Bonanno's (2004) theory of resilience as a healthy adjustment after a traumatic event, as adjusting to life after the loss of a loved one requires resilience. Worden's last task of finding a way to remember the deceased while embarking on a new life without them can take many forms. This can be related toto grief as a path to personal growth as remembering the deceased can lead individuals to reflect upon their life and choose to become more loving and forgiving as a way to honor their loved one. Another related theory of grief is Neimeyer's Meaning Making Theory (2000)This theory proposes that humans seek to make meaning out of

grief by doing something to honor their loved ones. An example of this is a man who sought to honor his lost son and grandson by pressing the National Park Service to warn boaters of the danger of boating and to offer free life vests(Neimeyer et al., 2014). Foundations started as a way to honor the loss of loved ones include the Susan G. Komen foundation which was founded by Susan's sister Nancy Brinker as a way to honor her sister and raise money for breast cancer (Susan G. Komen, n.d.). Similarly, the National Association of the Parents of Murdered Children was founded by Robert and Charlotte Hullinger in 1978 after the murder of their daughter (National Association of Parents of Murdered Children, n.d.).

***Complicated Grief and Related Afflictions***

The majority of people who experience the death of a loved one are able to move through their grief and come to terms with their loss. Although they may have sad days and days where the grief is closer to the surface than others (Ufema, 2002), they are mostly able to resume normal activities. However, for almost 7% grief becomes more complicated (Shear et al., 2013, p. 406). Complicated grief is not simply an extended version of normal grief, but can manifest as absent grief, chronic or prolonged grief, or as distorted grief, which can present as either extremely angry or guilty behavior (Rando, 2013, p. 46).

One form of complicated grief is Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD) which is formally recognized in the DSM 5 (Appelbaum & Lamyaa, 2022). Key symptoms of PGD include identify disruption, defined as feeling as if part of the self has died; a sense of disbelief about the death of a loved one; avoidance of reminders that the person is dead; intense anger, sorrow, bitterness or other emotional pain related to the death; emotional numbness; loneliness that manifests as feelings lone or detached from others; feelings that life is meaningless; and difficulty with reintegration with life, which can manifest as a lack of planning for the future or

pursuing interests. To be diagnosed with PGD, a person must experience at least three of these symptoms for at least a month prior to diagnosis. As many of these symptoms, such as numbness and intense emotional grief, can also be present during the normal grieving process, the American Psychiatric Association has stipulated that at least one year has passed since the related death, that the duration and severity of the bereavement exceeds cultural, societal, and religious norms; the symptoms are not better attributable to another condition; and that the symptoms severely impact the person's life (Appelbaum & Lamyaa, 2022).

Prolonged Grief Disorder is not the only form of complicated grief and its definition is restrictive from a clinical perspective (Rando, 2013, p. 42). Other ways that complicated grief manifest include absent grief, which occurs when someone shows little or no signs of normal grief; distorted grief, which can be manifested by extreme anger or feelings of grief; delayed grief, which occurs when someone deliberately avoids dealing with their grief; unanticipated grief, which occurs when someone is facing an unexpected loss; and inhibited grief where an individual may not display outward signs of grief, but is internalizing the grief One of the concerns with equating all complicated grief with prolonged grief disorder is that other forms of complicated grief may be missed and a person may not receive the treatment that they need (Rando, 2013, p. 42), which could result in people suffering needlessly when with therapy they could move through their grief.

In addition to grief and all forms of complicated grief, there are other afflictions that can occur after the death of a loved one that may present similarly:

- ***Major Depressive Disorder (MDD)*** is listed in the DSM 5 and includes symptoms such as feeling empty and sad; loss of interest in activities one once enjoyed; changes in sleeping patterns; showing of physical activity, thinking, and /or speech; agitation;

increased restlessness; irritability; decreased energy or feeling down; feelings of worthlessness and/or feelings of guilt; trouble concentrating; thoughts of death or suicide and/or suicide attempts. Anyone who exhibits two or more of these symptoms for at least two weeks may be diagnosed with depression (Tores, 2020).

- ***Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)*** is also listed in the DSM-5 and occurs in people who have experienced or witnessed a trauma such as being a victim of a violent crime or witnessing someone they love dying. Symptoms of PTSD fall into four primary categories: Intrusive thoughts such as involuntary memories, distressing dreams, or flashbacks; avoiding reminders of the traumatic event; alterations in thoughts or moods such as being unable to remember important aspects of the event or distorted thoughts about themselves and others; and alterations in arousals and reactivity such as being more irritable than usual or behaving in destructive ways (Taylor-Desir, 2022).
- ***Complex PTSD (CPTSD)*** is not recognized as a disorder in the DSM-5, but is formally listed as a disorder by the World Health Organization. While PTSD can occur after a single instance of trauma, CPTSD develops after chronic long-term trauma and its symptoms include anxiety, avoiding situations and things related to the traumatic event; flashbacks and/or nightmares; and heightened emotional responses (Cleveland Clinic, 2023).

Although there is overlap between grief, complicated grief, and related disorders and the treatment for many of them includes therapy and medication, it is important to consult a professional so that a proper course of treatment can be established. As this project is about grief at work, understanding complicated grief and related afflictions can help HR professionals and

others understand if what someone is going through is more than grief. By understanding the interplay of these afflictions, an HR professional may be able to advise that what someone is going through may be more than grief and gently guide them into getting help.

***Cultural aspects of Grief and Mourning***

All Americans die and all Americans grieve, but we do not all grieve identically. How we grieve is influenced by various aspects of culture. Culture includes the traditions, values, and beliefs recognized by a group of people (McGrath, 2013) These beliefs, values, and traditions hold groups together and make them more understanding and supportive of each other (McGrath, 2013). Culture is what helps us make sense of the world and influences our beliefs, thoughts, communications, and actions (Williams, 2006, p. 210). Different cultures can have widely divergent beliefs on grief and understanding cultural views can help you understand how a person may grieve. For instance, some grieving people want to talk about their loved one (Speaking Grief, n.d.), but in some cultures talking about a deceased loved one is forbidden by tradition. Navajo, or Dine families, believe that talking about the deceased can keep their spirit from moving on and physically impact their loved ones (Clements et al., 2003, p. 23). There are many aspects of culture including socioeconomic status; gender and sexual orientation; and racial, ethnic and religious aspects. Although each of these can influence how we grieve, due to space considerations, this literature review will primarily consider racial/ethnic and religious aspects of culture.

The United States is a rapidly diversifying country with more of us encountering people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds than ever before. As late as 1980, almost 80% of the nation's population identified as White, non-Hispanic. However, by 2000 that percentage had shrunk to just under 70% (CensusScope, 2000). And the latest census numbers from 2020 show

that the percentage of the US Population that identified as White, non Hispanic, has shrunk to 60% (US Census Bureau, 2022). Even more rural states within the United States have seen their populations becoming increasingly more diversified. For instance, in 1980 a little over 97% of Iowans identified as White (Iowa Data Center, 2000), but by 2020 that percentage had shrunk to just under 62% (US Census Bureau, n.d.). Although there are a multiplicity of races, ethnicities, and religions in the United States, this review will only look at grief as related to African Americans, Hindu Americans, Jewish Americans, and Hispanic Americans. These cultural groups were chosen to include in this review because people from these groups may be encountered in a work setting and because they illustrate the diversity of how people grieve.

***African American Bereavement, Grief, and Mourning***

Within the borders of the United States there are approximately 45 million people, or 13.6% of the population who identify as African American (US Census Bureau, 2022). Grief and mourning practices for these individuals are informed by African funerary practices (Mbiti, 2015, pp. 60–69) and, for those who are descendants of enslaved people, by the centuries of enslavement, poverty, and the continued oppression, from both systematic racism and discrimination, that they must endure. The remnants of slavery, especially poverty and systematic racism, means that African American people experience bereavement at a higher rate than Whites as they are more likely to experience the early loss of a close family member (e.g. spouse, sibling, parent, or child) (Rosenblatt & Wallace, 2005).

African Americans are also more likely than Whites to experience the death of a loved one by homicide (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). Despite representing only 13.6 percent of the population, 54.1 % of the homicide victims in this country are African American (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). This means, according to Centers

for Disease Control and Prevention data, the homicide rate for African Americans is 29 deaths by homicide per 100,000 people versus only 8.5 per 100,000 for White people (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). African Americans are also more likely than White people to experience complicated grief(Goldsmith et al., 2008, p. 360). Complicated grief can include severe psychological pain or psychache (Frumkin et al., 2021, p. 255) and psychache is a significant risk factor for suicide (Schneidman, 1998) which could lead a grieving person to die by suicide and continue the cycle of grief.

Despite experiencing more losses than their White peers and being less likely overall to seek mental health care (Diala et al., 2000), African Americans are resilient in their losses as they turn toward their family, extended family, and community members that are considered kin for support (Sudarkasa, 2007) Other factors that help African Americans in their grieving include the intergenerational support they receive from their families and communities (Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008, p. 186) and their religious beliefs (Frazier et al., 2005, p. 587).

African Americans are also comforted by their belief that death does not sever the bond between the living and the dead but is a transitional step (Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008, p. 186). Many African Americans make regular cemetery visits to strengthen the bond with their loved ones (Laurie & Neimeyer, 2008, p. 185) and many believe that the dead can come to them through dreams and that the dead continue to communicate with the living (Manigault-Bryant, 2014). These beliefs, along with the belief that the deceased is either going home to Africa (Roediger, 1981, p. 177)or home to heaven (Fletcher, 2023)inform African American mourning practices.

African American funerals, known as Homegoings, are similar to those of their White peers, but while many White funerals are sad affairs where the focus is on loss and mourning,

African American funeral services, (Bonanno, 2004) known as Homegoing services, reflect not only grief for the life loss, but also a celebration as their loved one is going home (Fletcher, 2021) The celebratory aspects of a Homegoing are present in celebratory singing, stories told about the loved ones, and a shared meal, known as a repast, where friends and loved ones continue to share stories about the deceased and bond with one another in their shared love of the deceased (Bonanno, 2004) The celebratory aspects of. Homegoing celebrations are reflected in the New Orleans tradition of a second line, which is a lively parade where community members dance and parade though the streets to accompany family members on their return from the cemetery(Secundy, 1989)

***Jewish Bereavement, Grief, and Mourning***

Unlike the racial designators of White or African American, being Jewish is a complicated mix of culture, ancestry, religion, and ethnicity (Mitchell, 2021) , which means that even some Jews who may not be practicing may be influenced by Jewish grief and mourning traditions (Clements et al., 2003). According to a Pew Research Center Report, approximately 10 million (4.7 %) of US adults identify as having some connection to Judaism. This includes 5.8 million (2.4%) who identify as Jewish by religion;1.5 million (.6%) who identify as Jewish of no religion; which means they had a Jewish parent or identify as Jewish in some way; 2.8 million (1.1%) who have a Jewish background; and another 1.4 (0.6%) million adults who have Jewish affinity, which is defined as not having a Jewish upbringing or identifying as Jewish by religion, but identify as Jewish in some other way. Additionally, there are 2.4 million or 3.2% US children who were raised by at least one Jewish parent (Mitchell, 2021).

Jewish grief is complicated by the intergenerational trauma that Jews have endured throughout the centuries, most recently during the Holocaust. During the Holocaust, Jewish

people suffered trauma in a variety of ways including being interred in Nazi concentration camps, being forced to leave their homelands, experiencing or witnessing torture, and losing loved ones due to Nazi violence and hate. After the war, many of these people left Europe for other countries, including the United States, and although they were able to rebuild their lives, the horror they endured had a major impact on them, their families, and the wider society. The intergenerational trauma places them at greater risk of key vulnerabilities including having a negative world view and difficulties in emotional expression. These vulnerabilities can be triggered under stressful conditions including the death of relatives who are Holocaust survivors (Krauskopf et al., 2023). Unresolved intergenerational trauma and grief can mean that grief responses to current deaths may be disproportionate or may morph into complicated grief (Gajdos, 2002).

Although Jewish mourning practices between the major groups of Judaism –Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, Reconstructionist, and Hasidic—are similar, each group interprets Jewish law differently which means there may be significant differences in funeral practices. Additionally, as with all cultural and religious groups, each family may have personal practices in addition to cultural/religious practices (Clements et al., 2003). There are two primary types of mourning practices within Judaism: those intended to care for the deceased body and those intended to soothe the souls of those left behind. It is also important to understand that at transitional moments in people's lives, they may choose to become more or less observant. For instance, someone who is a nonobservant Jew may decide to have a more traditional Jewish funeral. Or someone who is more observant, may choose to go against Jewish custom and see the body before burial (Clements et al., 2003).

A key belief that informs Jewish mourning customs is the belief that the soul returns to God immediately after death, which means that according to Jewish law and tradition, the body should be returned to the earth as soon as possible, preferably before sundown on the day of death (Jewish Virtual Library, n.d.). As the body is believed to be the repository for the soul, it is accorded the highest respect in Jewish tradition. After death the care of the body is given over to the holy society, known as chevrah Kadisha. The society performs a traditional washing of the body, then it is dressed in linen shrouds and placed into a simple all wooden casket. The wooden casket has no metal parts such as screws or handles and signifies that in death all people are equal. Caskets should also have holes drilled in them so that the body can come in contact with the earth (Jewish Virtual Library, n.d.). In an act of care and respect for the body, a member of the cherah kadishi or a friend of the family will sit with the body until it is buried (Clements et al., 2003). Although autopsies are performed in the event of a suspicious death, Jewish tradition frowns on desecrating the body and requests that autopsies be as minimally invasive as possible (Jewish Virtual Library, n.d.)

Jewish traditions also honor and support the deceased family during this time. Prior to the funeral, each family member with tear an article of clothing they will wear to the funeral or affix a black ribbon to their clothing as a symbol of their grief (Clements et al., 2003). Jewish mourners also have a tradition of shoveling dirt on the casket as a final act of respect for the deceased. After the rabbi has recited a prayer over the casket, each family member takes a turn shoveling a small amount of dirt on the casket. After they are done they either place the shovel back in the earth for the next person or hand it to the next person. Once each family member has taken their turn, others come forward to take a turn. Although some more liberal Jews struggle with this ritual, rabbis encourage people to participate as hearing the sound of dirt on the casket

symbolizes the finality of death (Diamant, n.d.). Another keyway that Jewish and Christian funerals differ is that in Jewish culture flowers are inappropriate to send to loved ones as there is a belief that the withering and dying of the flowers may be a reminder to the family of their loss. Instead, Jewish families prefer donations to a charity of the family's choosing (Jewish Virtual Library, n.d.).

After the funeral, Jewish tradition prescribes three specific mourning periods, the longest which is the traditional year of mourning during which the kaddish (a life affirming mourning prayer) is recited daily. The first seven days after the funeral the family sits shivvah. During this time, members of the community prepare meals and attend to the daily needs of the family while the family contemplates their loss. Mirrors are covered during this time to prevent vanity and mourners do the bare minimum of grooming and bathing. As a physical reminder of their loss during this period, family members sit on low benches or stools and spend time quietly mourning their loss (Clements et al., 2003). The second period of mourning, known as shloshim, begins after shivah and lasts for thirty days. During shloshim, mourners may return to work, but may not visit the grave of the deceased or attend any celebrations. It is only after the end of the traditional year of mourning that a headstone is placed on the grave (Clements et al., 2003).

***Hindu Bereavement, Grief, and Mourning***

Although 15% of the world's population is Hindu (Pew Research Center, 2012), Hindus represent only 0.7% of the US population (Pew Research center et al., 2014). However, as the largest population of Hindus resides in India (Pew Research Center, 2012) and immigration from India has been increasing over the last few years(Hoffman & Batalova, 2022), there is a significant possibility that the Hindu population in the US will also increase. One thing that makes Hinduism unique among the worlds' religions is that unlike the Abrahamic religions –

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—Hinduism does not have a single founder or set of scriptures (Clements et al., 2003) Instead, it is considered an indigenous religion and has been practiced in India for thousands of years and contains diverse philosophies and traditions (Hindu American Foundation, n.d.). Despite the diversity of practices, there is significant uniformity in Hindus approach to death (Clements et al., 2003).

Hindus believe in Karma and reincarnation which means that each time a soul is born into a new body, the soul is considered linked to actions taken in previous lives. Hindu people believe that the soul can liberated by an accumulation of good actions or by being released into the Ganges (Fujita, 2002) In order for the soul to transition from this world to the next, it is important for the body to be cremated before the next sunrise. Burying the body is unacceptable as it will leave the soul earthbound and confused (Clements et al., 2003).

When a Hindu person dies, the body is bathed, massaged in oils, and dressed in new clothes (Clements et al., 2003). In India, the body would be taken to an outdoor crematorium, preferably in Varanasi on the banks of the Ganges. The eldest son would place flowers around the body and light the funeral pyre (Fujita, 2002). However, in the United States, this practice has been adapted to modern day crematoriums with some crematoriums even allowing family members to start the cremation furnace and light a fire within the casket (Cremation Institute, 2017) . For the first 10 days after the cremation, which are considered a time of prayer and contemplation, it is believed that the soul of the departed remains close to the family. To facilitate the soul's transition to the next world, an oil lamp is kept burning in the house and the family eats only once a day and only food that has been prepared at home (Clements et al., 2003). On the 10$^{th}$ day, the immediate family members of the deceased go to the river for a ritual bath and shaving of their heads. The oil lamp that has been burning in the home is floated on the

water on either a leaf or a flower. It is believed that on the 12th day the soul releases it's attachment to its for deceased (Clements et al., 2003).

***Hispanic Bereavement, Grief, and Mourning***

The terms Latino and Hispanic are often used interchangeably, but while there is overlap in who the terms refer to, they both have precise meanings. Latino and its variations, Latina and Latinx, is a geographic designator that refers to people with origins in Latin America (Central America, Mexico, and South America) and the Caribbean. In contrast, Hispanic is related to language and denotes that a person has ancestry from a country whose primary language is Spanish. By these definitions, a person from Brazil where the primary language is Portuguese would be considered Latino, but not Hispanic. Similarly, someone from Spain would be Hispanic, but not Latino (Alexander, 2022). For the purposes of this literature review, the term Hispanic will be used with the disclaimer that we are primarily discussing people who speak Spanish, but have migrated to the United States from Mexico, South and Central America.

Hispanics are the second largest racial or ethnic group after Whites in the United States. They account for 18.9 percent of the total U.S. population with 62.1 million Hispanics living in the United States. Within this demographic, Mexicans represent 61.6 percent of all Hispanics living in the United States with Puerto Ricans coming in a distant second at 9.6 percent. The largest concentrations of Hispanics are located in California, Texas, Florida, and New York (Office of Minority Health, 2023). Although Hispanics in the United States have traditionally been Catholic, the percentage of Hispanic adults who identify as Catholic has fallen from 67% to 43% in 2022. Conversely, the number of Hispanics who identify as unaffiliated has grown from 10% in 2010 to 30% in 2022 (Krogstad et al., 2023).

While there is no one "Hispanic culture," because of the high percentage of Hispanics who do or have identify as Catholic, there are some similarities. Additionally, it is important to note that first generation Hispanic immigrants are likely to be more traditional than second or third generation Hispanics (Clements et al., 2003). From a cultural perspective, Hispanic people, especially women, express their grief openly by crying and even wailing loudly and calling out the name of the deceased. However, Hispanic men are more likely to exhibit machismo and not grieve openly. There is also an expectation that those close to the family will provide support to the family, including through hugs and other tactile displays (Clements et al., 2003). Friends and family members of the deceased pay their respects through group prayers to the deceased in the evenings prior to funeral. This allows family and friends to pay their respects to the deceased and condolences to the family members. The deceased is usually laid out in an open casket for the funeral service and a rosary is typically said. After the funeral mass at the family's church, the body is taken to the cemetery where a graveside service is held and the grave is blessed with holy water (Clements et al., 2003). The family is typically supported by their family, friends, and church during their period of mourning and extended family members often travel great distances to attend the funeral and support the family (Irish et al., 1993). Church, family, and friends also contribute to the burial and funeral expenses (Shaefer, 1999). After the burial there is a mourning period where family members typically wear dark or black clothing and refrain from listening the radio, attending social events, or watching TV. This mourning period can last from months to years (Clements et al., 2003).

Many Hispanic people believe that there continues to be a relationship between the living and the dead after death and they work to continue this relationship through prayer and visits to the cemetery (Clements et al., 2003). Mexican Americans often celebrate Dias de Los Muertos

or Days of the Dead, which is an amalgamation of Catholic and indigenous traditions (Carmichael & Sayer, 1991). Dias de Loss Muertos is a time to welcome and celebrate the sounds of the dead as Mexicans believe that during these festivities, typically held at the end of October and beginning of November, , the spirits of the dead return to the world of the living to enjoy the pleasures they enjoyed while they were alive. Key elements of Dias de Los Muertos are ofrendas or temporary altars set up to welcome the dead; a proliferation of Mexican marigolds, which Mexicans believe create a path from the world of the dead to the world of the living; a proliferation of skulls and bones; and pano muerte or bread of the dead (Carmichael & Sayer, 1991). While these festivals originated in Mexico, they have spread through the United States to places as diverse as Chicago and Cleveland (Shakti, 2022).

***Importance of Cultural Humility***

Beliefs about death and grieving and mourning customs within a cultural group are not homogenous (Clements et al., 2003, p. 19). Recognizing individual variations is important to avoid stereotyping because human beings are complex and reflect various aspects of all of their cultures to various degrees and even children raised in the same environment can reflect the backgrounds of their various cultures differently (Williamson & Harrison, 2010, p. 765). Another consideration that is commonly overlooked is that culture does not remain static and that as individuals grow and mature, their views change over time. Despite the potential pitfalls of studying culture, understanding basics of how different cultural groups grieve and how they mourn their dead can provide insight that can help people help grievers (Clements et al., 2003, p. 19).

In relating to people of different cultures, cultural humility is a key concept. The term is borrowed from the medical field and is defined as the attitude of working with people with an

attitude of humility (National Association of Social Workers, 2016)and requires a lifelong commitment to self critique and learning, to evaluating power imbalances, and to setting aside biases when dealing with other people (Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998, p. 123) . Cultural humility, unlike the related concept of cultural confidence does not require memorizing lists of beliefs about other cultures, but instead encourages people to develop a respectful and curious attitude about differences (National Institute of Health, 2007). By approaching people of different cultures with an attitude of curiosity and willingness to learn rather than a dogmatic attitude, managers and others can be in a position to help people instead of harming them.

## Grief and Bereavement in the Workplace

The news that someone at work is getting married or having a baby is met with joy and celebration. At some employers, coworkers will band together to host a wedding or baby shower and even if there is no formal event, the happy bride/groom or parent to be is often lavished with attention and support(Kenion, 2022). There are even web pages with titles like "Office Bridal Shower" (Mackey, 2021) and "Work Baby Shower: What's Normal and How to Throw One" (Berlinsky-Schine, n.d.)that provide guidance on hosting workplace celebrations. However, if someone is taking care of a dying parent or faces the death of a child, in many workplaces the employee's loss or impending loss is barely acknowledged and if it is acknowledged, it is done so awkwardly(Fowkes, 2022, p. 8).

### *Grief at Work*

Emotions in general are a complicated mix of the personal and the organizational as emotional expression in general is impacted by a person's innate emotional makeup, which is influenced by nature and nurture (Despret, 2021); the organizational culture of the workplace (Smollan & Sayers, 2009) and whether or not the person is expected to perform emotional labor

and only display appropriate emotions (Hochschild, 2012). One of the most complicated emotional experiences at work is grief because it is not a single emotion, but can manifest as anger, sadness, or a host of other emotions (Corr et al., 2018, p. 13). The other factor that makes the grief after the loss of a loved one complicated is that the loss is permanent and both the person facing the loss and their coworkers know it.

The behavior of someone is mourning is not congruent with ideal behaviors of an employee (Hazen, 2008), but workplaces have evolved and as more women have filled what were once hallowed halls of masculinity it has become more acceptable to display emotions at work (Schnall et al., 2018). One of the key reasons that emotional expression at work has become more acceptable is that leaders are recognizing the importance of their workers and there has been an increased emphasis on the need for workplace well being (Schnall et al., 2018). Although much of this emphasis has been on the wellbeing of parents (Heymann et al., 2017), there is an increasing awareness that helping employees manage their grief is also important (Tehan & Thompson, 2013).

Part of this effort to improve workplace wellbeing for grieving employees is the realization that there are individual and organizational costs to grief and that not addressing these can affect the bottom line (Tehan & Thompson, 2013). Grief has both open and hidden impacts on the workplace. The open impacts are those that are plain for people to see such as crying or becoming emotional at the mention of the departed loved one. The hidden aspects are those that are more difficult to see such as reduced concentration, poor quality of work due to a higher level of errors, reduced quality of work, and poor communication with co-workers. Unfortunately, the connection between these effects of grief and the grief a person is suffering are often difficult for managers to understand (Tehan & Thompson, 2013). Although poor quality of work and

reduced concentration can have an impact in any workplace, in manufacturing and other workplaces where heavy equipment is used, such lapses in judgement can be dangerous (Kowalski-Trakofler et al., 2003).

Leadership support of the grieving cannot fix the issue as there is no way to undo the tremendous loss that a person has endured; however, leadership attention can help the employee as they transition back to work and reduce risk to the organization. The risk to the organization is not only loss of productivity and potential accidents, employers who are not supportive of the grieving also risk losing employees who may feel as if they are being kicked when they are down if workplaces are not supportive of them during this painful period in their live (Tehan & Thompson, 2013).

Grief is difficult to manage in the workplace because grief can manifest as two of the most difficult emotions of all: sadness and anger (Corr et al., 2018, p. 220). Perpetual sadness, as experienced by people who are grieving, is one of the most unwelcome emotions at work as sad people work fewer hours as they often show up late and leave early, choose to avoid the office by working remotely, and become apathetic. One person's sadness not only impacts them, but it affects the entire office as it drains productivity, drains enthusiasm from the office, and dulls morale (Pearson, 2017). Another difficult emotion at work is anger (Pearson, 2017)and grieving people are often angry, angry at God, angry at their loved one who left, and angry at themselves (Fowkes, 2022) While dealing with sad people can be draining, working with angry employees can be not only exhausting (Pearson, 2017), it can also be dangerous (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, 2002). Angry people put their coworkers on edge, undermine their drive, and increases stress. Additionally, having to respond to angry people can cause people to have difficulty thinking clearly or communicating well and subpar responses to

angry people can make them feel justified in their anger and reinforce their bad behavior(Pearson, 2017).

***Work and Loss***

Managers may feel uncomfortable with loss (Barclay & Kang, 2019), but research suggests that one in ten employees may be grieving at any one time (McGuiness, 2009, p. 19) and that these numbers are likely to increase (National Council for Palliative Care, 2014). Historically, grief has been neglected in the workplace in part because of the uncomfortable emotions associated with it (Thompson, 2012). This discomfort can lead managers and others to step back in order to give people space, even though human connection may be what they really need (Tehan & Thompson, 2013). As work is a place of commerce and not a counseling center, managers may believe that providing emotional support is not their responsibility or may be so overwhelmed with other tasks that they do not have time to support the grieving person (Barski-Carrow, 2000). However, as full time employees spend 40 or more hours a week at work, having a supportive workplace not only benefits them, but can also benefit the organization as it can reduce the ill effects of presenteeism and can build a more loyal employee base (Hazen, 2008).

***Types of Losses***

Before delving into how organizations can help their grieving employees, it's important to understand the types of losses that people may face in the workplace. The first is the death of a coworker, either through a workplace incident or offsite through an accident or illness. The death of a coworker is unique as it impacts the entire workplace and leaves all who know the individual grieving (Thompson, 2009). For organizations at risk of workplace injuries or death, such as manufacturing or utility companies, policies should be put in place to detail how to

handle the deaths of employees. These policies should include processes for supporting coworkers who witnessed the incident, notifying the organization, handling press inquiries, and most importantly notifying family members (Thompson, 2009). An example of how not to handle a workplace death comes from Amazon. A worker died of cardiac arrest at the end of his shift and the body was left with a makeshift barrier surrounding it until emergency workers could arrive. To add to the trauma, arriving workers were not told what had happened and found out through informal means. There was also no guidance provided as how to seek counseling (Sainato, 2023).

The loss of a loved one, such as a spouse, parent, or child, also impacts the workplace as humans cannot be reasonably expected to leave their feelings at home and their grief and related emotions will carry over into the workplace (Tehan & Thompson, 2013). Employees are not only impacted by the loss of their own loved one, they are also impacted by the loss of coworker's loved ones as they will feel the need to support their coworker and may end up picking up additional work while the coworker grieves (Fowkes, 2022, p. 146). Employees may also be impacted by the deaths of clients or vendors with whom they worked closely (Tehan & Thompson, 2013).

There are also a few special categories of loss that require special attention. The first is a miscarriage as there may be a tendency to downplay the loss since the child was not yet born. However, a miscarriage can be especially devastating as it represents the loss of hope and possibility (Corr et al., 2018, p. 406). The death of a pet is another loss that is often not given the attention it deserves as it is "just a dog" or "just a cat." However, people develop deep connections to their pets and may be more devastated over the loss of their animal companion than of a distant human relative (Scott, 2016, p. 187). The last category of death that requires

special attention is that of suicide. Although attitudes toward suicide are changing, there is still a tendency by some to treat suicide as shameful and as something to be hidden (Harris & Winokuer, 2019, p. 168). All three of these types of losses, along with others that may be considered shameful or best kept hidden, can lead to disenfranchised loss. Disenfranchised loss occurs when a loss is not openly acknowledged, publicly accepted, or publicly mourned. Grievers may feel that they have to hide their grief, which could lead to longer term mental health issues (Corr et al., 2018, pp. 261–263).

***Bereavement Support***

Bereavement support offered to employees falls into two primary categories: formal support, such as bereavement leave, and informal support, which can include death education for managers to ensure they understand the complexities of helping grieving employees. The primary way that employees formally support employees through the death of a loved one is with bereavement leave. Bereavement leave is defined as time taken by an employee to attend the funeral of a family member or loved one and to attend to post-death matters, (Employment Law Handbook, 2023), such as settling wills or other financial matters (Corr et al., 2018).

As of 2023, approximately 90 % of US workers have access to at least some bereavement leave, although it may be unpaid leave (Rumage, 2023), unfortunately this bereavement leave is often only five days or less (Society for Human Resources Management, 2017) Bereavement leave in the United States is primarily a matter between employers and employees as federal law does not require employers to offer bereavement leave (Department of Labor, n.d.)and only five states—California, Illinois, Maryland, Oregon, and Washington—require employers to offer bereavement leave (ADP, n.d.). The required time off varies by state with Illinois and Oregon being the most generous by requiring employers with a set number of employees, 50 in Illinois

and 25 in Oregon, to provide employees two weeks of unpaid time off. None of the states require paid time off, except for Maryland which says if employers provide paid time off, they are required to allow employees to take paid time off when a family member dies (ADP, n.d.).

With no federal requirement to offer bereavement leave and only five states requiring bereavement leave, employers are left to develop their own policies with guidance from professional organizations such as Society for Human Resource Management. Bereavement leave policies can differ drastically between employers with some offering a paltry three to four days, although some offer more for closer family members (Mayhew, 2019)and others offering significantly more. After the death of COO Sheryl Sandberg's husband, Facebook announced that it would offer up to 20 days of bereavement leave for immediate family members and 10 days for extended family members (Miller, 2017). The federal government allows federal employees to take up to three days of funeral leave to arrange for and attend the funeral of an immediate family member who died as a result of combat and 104 hours of sick leave to make arrangements for and attend the funeral of a family member. (US Office of Personnel Management, n.d.).

In developing formal bereavement leave policies, employers should consider a number of factors including:

- **How much time off to provide:** While the standard is three to five days (Society for Human Resources Management, 2017) there are employers who offer significantly more (Miller, 2017). However, the truth of the matter is that even a generous 20 days off will not be enough for a person to fully grieve their loved one (Barclay & Kang, 2019).

- **Whether or not the leave is a separate category of leave:** is another key consideration. While some employees offer a separate category of leave, others require employees to take vacation time or even unpaid time off (ADP, n.d.).
- **Relationships covered:**Many employers specify that only immediate family members—typically defined to include grandparents, parents, spouse, siblings, and children—are covered by bereavement leave (Employment Law Handbook, 2023). If bereavement leave is offered for other relatives, such as aunts and uncles, the time off is general less than for an immediate family member (Employment Law Handbook, 2023).
- **Flexibility in taking time off:** Although the funeral may happen immediately after the death, there are other tasks that someone who has lost a loved one needs to handle, such as dealing with financial paperwork, that may require time off weeks later (Barclay & Kang, 2019).
- **Whether to require proof of death**: This is a tricky question as requiring proof of death, such as a death certificate, ensures that employees are not fraudulently taking time off (Employment Law Handbook, 2023), but may feel to grieving employees as if they are not trusted (Barclay & Kang, 2019).
- **Cultural and Religious beliefs:** Some religions have rules around when the burial should take place (Barclay & Kang, 2019) and how much time should be spent mourning. For instance, as noted above, Jewish tradition requires immediate family members to sit shiva for 7 days (Clements et al., 2003).

While bereavement leave is the primary formal benefit offered to grieving employees, some employers also offer help through employee assistance programs (EAPs). Employee

assistance programs can provide tactical support such as helping with finding tax attorneys or even helping with funeral arrangements and may be able to offer counseling or guidance to mourning employees. EAPs could also provide training for managers and coworkers to help them understand bereavement (Bergeron, 2023, p. 5). What employers do not want to do is to suggest to employees that their grieving is not important and that the only emotional support that can be provided is through the stranger on the EAP phone line (Bergeron, 2023, p. 4).

Another way that employers can help grieving employees is to support a formal business resource group or BRG for grieving employees. BRGs are employee-led groups that provide resources for employees and help build a supportive culture (Elder, 2023). Kohler, for instance, has BRGs dedicated to women, parents, mental health advocacy, and veterans (Kohler, n.d.). Delta Airlines employees founded Wrenched Hearts, a support group for parents who have lost children, after two employees realized the healing power of sharing their grief with each other(Fowkes, 2022) .

Grief often makes people uncomfortable, and many leaders do not understand the implications of grief on the workplace or how they can individually support their grieving employees. Three keyways that leaders can help employees who are grieving are understanding, compassion, and communication. Leaders should take the time to understand that grief is individual and that even though employees have returned to work, that does not mean that they are over their loss. Employees often return to work sooner than they would like for financial reasons (Fowkes, 2022, p. 21) and even if they are physically at work, they may not be fully engaged in meetings and other events. Leaders should also educate themselves on what to say and what not to say to grieving employees. Unfortunately, many grieving people are hurt by well-meaning people who say things like “He’s in a better place” or “God must have wanted an

angel" (Fowkes, 2022, p. 66). Leaders should also have a minimal understanding of the signs of complicated grief and related afflictions like depression as noted above. Although there is not an expectation that they be counselors, by understanding the signs, they may be able to guide their employee to getting help.

Compassion is key to an employee's reentry into work, but all too often a grieving employee's return to work is met with silence, demands to catch up, or worse (Hazen, 2008). An Amazon employee was placed anon a performance improvement plan (PIP) immediately upon her return to work after delivering a stillborn child. Although there had been no performance issues, the PIP was a way to signal to the employee that despite her loss her performance would be monitored and if she was found to be lacking, she would be disciplined. Not surprisingly, the employee quit after this treatment (Kantor & Streitfeld, 2015).

Many individuals, including leaders, do not fully understand that grief not only impacts individuals, it also presents major challenges to organizations as not helping people through their grief can impact efficiency, effectiveness, and the reputation of the company. Helping leaders to understand how to help grieving employees can help a company help not only individual employees, but also help the organization. Leaders need to understand that when a grieving person comes back to work, they may be physically present, may attend the necessary meetings, and do their work, but their mind and heart will be elsewhere (Hazen, 2008). Leaders also need to understand that how people grieve is individual and unique and that grief can ebb and flow with time as anniversaries and other significant milestones may trigger intense grief reactions (Fowkes, 2022, p. 63). Additionally, just because a person is back at work, doesn't mean that they want to be there, financial considerations often mean people have no choice and must come back to work before they are truly ready (Fowkes, 2022, p. 21).

A key way to be compassionate to employees is determining in advance how much flexibility is available in their re-entry. Potential areas for flexibility include modified assignments, this is critical if employees work with equipment or in dangerous positions; the ability for employees to work from home all or part of the time; and reduced hours (Wolfelt, 2005, p. 25). Additional ways that leaders can be compassionate are by ensuring a private place for employees to grieve, if necessary, and by being mindful that key dates—death anniversaries, the birthday of the deceased, and holidays—may be extra hard for the person grieving (Fowkes, 2022, p. 66).

Communication, both with the bereaved employee and their coworkers is critical to helping employees feel supported. One of the first steps that managers can make is to make sure employees know what resources are available to them including bereavement leave and any available counseling, Managers should also take time to understand the situation including who has died, the relationship, and any other facts (Fowkes, 2022). During this initial call, the manager should ask what to share with others about the circumstances surrounding the death, funeral plans, and whether or not to reach out. By asking these questions and respecting the person's answers, leaders will be able to help coworkers understand what is going on (Fowkes, 2022). Prior to the employee's return to work, managers should reach out and discuss the employee's return to work. Some topics to include in this conversation are whether accommodations, as noted above, are needed, whether or not they want to talk about their loved one, and when they plan to return to work. Grieving employees may feel more comfortable coming in briefly before their first day back to see everyone and have what may be awkward conversations with their coworkers. They may also be more comfortable having their first day

back be a Thursday or Friday versus a Monday so that the first week back at work is shorter (Fowkes, 2022).

Conversations with the rest of the team are also important. When the loss first happens, the team should be informed so that they understand that someone is out of the office because they are grieving and not for vacation. This will help avoid any awkward questions about vacation when the person returns (Fowkes, 2022). Leaders should only share information that the employee asked to be shared. An important piece of information to be shared is whether or not the grieving employee wants to talk about their lost loved one. Some people want to talk about their loved one, but others for cultural or personal reasons may not and bringing up their loved one may upset them (Fowkes, 2022, p. 34). Coworkers should be reminded to not offer platitudes about the person being in another place or that it was the person's time as those may be unintentionally hurtful (Fowkes, 2022, p. 66). Coworkers should also be reminded that grief has no real timeline and that it cannot be rushed. One woman who was grieving the loss of her daughter was told by three coworkers just after the one year anniversary of her death that she should take her daughter's picture down because she had grieved long enough (Wolfelt, 2005, p. 19). As in all situations, leaders should lead by example. In this instance, they should set an example as to how grieving employees should be treated by continuing to treat them like a valuable member of the team, making sure they know their work is still valued, and by making accommodations when possible (Fowkes, 2022). Leaders should also be sensitive to potential issues with coworkers and should coach the person's peers as appropriate if they are making inappropriate comments or being resentful over extra work they are picking up (Wolfelt, 2005).

## Death Education

For most of human history, people died at home surrounded by their family members. People, generally women, took care of the dying and the dead (Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Care at the End of Life, 1997). Bodies were laid out in parlors surrounded by loved ones and community members stopped by to pay their respects. Family members prepared the bodies for dying and the dead were laid to rest in local graveyards where family members could visit them regularly (Greenfield, 2011). As many Americans lived a rural life where they cared for livestock, their death education would have come from their everyday lives as they were intimately connected to the cycle of life and death (Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Care at the End of Life, 1997).

Death began moving out of the home and into hospitals in the early 1900s and by 1955 only 31.4% of deaths occurred at home and by 1967 that number had dropped to 24.2% (Lerner, 1970, p. 23). It was against this backdrop that the death education movement began. The beginning of the death education movement is often traced to a 1956 seminar given by Herman Feifel at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (Doka, 2015, p. 15). Between Feifel's 1956 seminar and the 1969 publication of Kubler-Ross' On *Death and Dying*, a number of colleges and universities began courses in death education (Crase, 1989). Academic programs in death and dying have expanded beyond the university level and there are now courses offered in high schools and even grade schools (Doka, 2015, p. 546).

According to Doka (2015), there are four primary factors for the emergence of death education, first in academia and then more generally. The first factor is that the population of the United States is aging, which first brought an increased interest in the study of the aging and then an increased interest in death and dying. The second is that the increased awareness of threats to

our human existence including terrorism; new diseases such as AIDS and Ebola; and environmental issues. The Death Awareness movement is another factor that has increased interest in death education. This social movement reminded people of the naturalness of death and reminded people of the rights of the dying. The last factor was cultural as society became more secular and death education served to help people find meaning in death (pp. 546-547)

Death education, which includes education for the grieving, started in an academic setting, but it has moved out of the classroom as there are a number of organizations including The Grief Recovery Method (*The Grief Recovery Method - Home*, n.d.) and The Dougy Center (the Dougy Center, n.d.), which offer seminars to help people heal from grief. In addition to formal courses and seminars on death education, there are also books, websites, and online support groups that provide death education. There are three primary audiences for death education: the general academic audience; professionals; and the general public. Perhaps the best summary of death education comes from Kastenbaum (2004) who said that thanatology is "the study of life—with death left in" (p. 19).

***General Academic Death Education***

General academic death education courses take place in an academic setting, as opposed to a seminar or more informal setting, and are geared toward people who are not in death related professions such as grief counseling, the medical profession, or the funeral industry. The audience for academic death education includes college, secondary, and elementary students. The objectives for these academic courses are similar to those of the general public: to reduce the fear of death and dying and to help people find meaning in death (Doka, 2015, p. 547).

Collegiate courses about death and dying are offered in a variety of departments including philosophy, religious studies, and education (Crase, 1989). Western Michigan

University's Comparative Religious Department offers a course entitled "Death, Dying, and Beyond" that focuses on the beliefs and practices of various religious traditions around the world. This course satisfies general education requirements and covers material about the handling of bodies, funeral rituals, and grieving (Western Michigan University, 2023). The University of Pittsburgh's course "Death and Dying" is situated within the Department of Health and Human Development at its School of Education. This course focuses on theories and concepts of death education, strategies for working with children, adolescents, and the terminally ill, and end of life planning (University of PIttsburgh School of Education, 2023).

The primary textbooks for overview courses in thanatology are DeSpelder and Strickland's (2014) *The Last Dance: Encountering Death and Dying* and Corr, Corr, and Doka's (2018) *Death & Dying, Life & Living.* Both of these books cover similar topics such as cultural attitudes toward death, bereavement and loss, legal and financial matters surrounding death, and how different age groups view death (Corr et al., 2018; DeSpelder & Strickland, 2015). However, each book also has unique features. For instance, both books have chapters dedicated to suicide, but *The Last Dance* spends more time delving into theories of suicide(DeSpelder & Strickland, 2015) than *Death and Dying, Life and Living*. In contrast, Doka, et. al, spend less time discussing theory and more time discussing the moral attitudes toward suicide in various cultures (Corr et al., 2018). Some college professors go beyond the textbook and include experiential learning in their death education courses. Gould (1994) makes his students responsible for their learning by incorporating a multi week exercise that has students reflecting upon and writing about their own grief experiences, working in a small group to construct a grief model, and lastly evaluating the constructed models with the entire class. In addition to

providing students with a model that ties grief theory directly to their personal experiences, the exercise has led to bonding among classmates.

Students in high school, middle school, and elementary school are also being taught about death, although there is evidence that that has waned since interest in death education peaked in the 1970s and 1980s (Smilie, 2022). Early death education classes for high schoolers primarily focused directly on death, dying, and bereavement (Stevenson, 2004), but more recent courses have focused on suicide and suicide prevention, coping with loss, and violence and violence prevention (Corr et al., 2018, p. 7). Violence and violence prevention is an important topic in schools today because sadly much of the exposure students have had to death in the last 20 years has been seeing news reports of their peers being gunned down at schools around the country. Since the shootings at Columbine in 1999, there have been 389 school shootings with 357,000 students experiencing gun violence during that time frame (Cox et al., 2023). This means that much of the death education students have received has been trauma informed education designed to help students not in dealing with death per se, but in dealing with the effect of violence (Alexander, 2021).

For elementary and middle school students, the introduction to death education, when not in a crisis setting, is often through books and movies such as Bambi, where the titular character's mother is killed by hunters (Salten, 1926); *the Lion King*, where we see Simba trying to wake his dead father (Allers & Minkoff, 1994); and *Charlotte's Web*, where the spider Charlotte dies (White, 1952). More formal death education programs for elementary school students have existed since at least the 1980s when the Suicide Prevention Center of Dayton, OH produced a program called "Life and Death: Elementary School Puppet Show" designed to educate elementary school children about death using puppets. The program included a variety of scripts

for puppet shows that teachers could use to educate children about death, grief, and sadness (Bernhardt & Praeger, 1985). A more recent death education for elementary school students uses slides from the Disney movie *Lion King* and an outline to encourage discussion about unhelpful ways that children often react to death: pretending it never happened, running away from it and not discussing feelings about the death (Corr et al., 2018, p. 6). It should be noted that while there are still pockets of death education within elementary schools, they are dispersed as cuts in school funding and other changes in the educational system have made them less popular (Smilie, 2022).

***Death Education for Professionals***

Professional death education is designed to provide education to help professionals, including paramedics, doctors, therapists, and those who work in the funeral industry help both the dying and the grieving. These programs are designed to educate professionals about death, provide guidance on caring for the dying, and helping the grieving (Corr et al., 2018, p. 13), Death education for professionals includes classes in academic programs, seminars, and certifications and degree programs.

For medical professionals, death has often been viewed as the enemy as medical students were taught how to save lives and not how to help people have a good death. Doctors were encouraged to encourage their patients to do whatever was necessary to live, even if it meant a low quality of life (Gawande, 2014). As recently as 2016, the majority of medical residents reported receiving no classroom end of life training in either medical school or during residency (Schmit et al., 2016). There is evidence that that is changing as medical schools are recognizing the importance of end of life concerns; however, they also realize that experiential learning is often the best way to teach about end of life issues. To that end, a number of medical schools are

creating rotations with hospices and nursing homes to help students learn about death (Patural, 2019).

Psychiatrists, counselors, and therapists also interact with both the dying and the grieving and for these individuals, there are courses embedded within degree programs, certificate programs, master's programs, and seminars through professional organizations. Examples of courses embedded within degree programs include a course in "Loss, Grief, and Bereavement" from USC'S Suzanne Dwork Peck's school of Social Work. This course examines theories in grief and is designed to enable social workers to help grieving clients (USC Suzanne Dworek Peck School of Social Work, 2023). Another offering comes from Cleveland State University which offers social workers a course in "Grief, Death, Loss, and Life.? This course introduces social work students to the experience of grief and loss not only in the lives of their clients, but also in their personal lives. It focuses on different types of loss and how social workers can help people in coping with these losses (Cleveland State University, n.d.)

Several schools also offer certificate programs in thanatology that are designed to help professionals better understand death related topics. One program is the University of Maryland's Death, Dying, and Mourning: Aging and Applied Thanatology. This twelve credit graduate certificate is designed for professionals and covers topics such as the influence of history, culture, and religion on death and aging; relevant theory and research in the field of thanatology; and is designed to help students enhance their skills in supporting people who are facing their own death or the death of a loved one (University of Maryland Baltimore, n.d.). Another certificate program is from Hood College that is designed for psychologists. counselors, and social workers as well as those working in hospice or the funeral industry. Course work includes and overview of thanatology as well as education about the multicultural aspects of

death bereavement, and mourning (Hood College, n.d.). Purdue University's Psychology program offers a death education certificate that covers grief and mourning as well as advanced directives. The program also aims to help students better understand their own mortality so they can live higher quality lives (Purdue University Fort Wayne, 2023).

In addition to certificate programs, there are also degree programs in thanatology. Both Marian University and Edgewood College offer 30 semester hour programs in thanatology. Marian's program is designed for people interested in becoming thanatologists or applying their knowledge of thanatology to their existing careers in psychology, medicine, emergency services, and others (Marian University, n.d.-b) and includes core course work in principles of thanatology, cultural humility, applied healthcare ethics, and grief theory and practice. Electives include suicide, women and death, and palliative and hospice care (Marian University, n.d.-a). Edgewood College's program is similarly geared toward professionals and includes similar course offerings. One key difference is that Edgewood offers students an opportunity for an internship (Edgewood College, n.d.). Both programs are aligned with the Association for Death Education's Essential Body of Knowledge (Edgewood College, n.d.; Marian University, n.d.-b).

In addition to academic death education programs for professionals, there are also seminars offered through professional organizations. The Association of Grief Counselors provides grief counseling certificates to professionals including doctors, nurses, and funeral professionals. It also offers specialty certificates in pastoral care and pet grief counseling (American Academy of Grief Counseling, n.d.). The Association for Death Education (ADEC) also offers certification, and it offers monthly webinars on death related topics. Available webinar topics include childhood grief, couples grief therapy, and providing support to people who have lost loved ones to Covid (Association of Death Education, 2023). ADEC has also

published the Handbook of Thanatology, which is billed as the essential body of knowledge for death, dying, and bereavement (Association of Death Education, 2017). Topics include death ethics; memorialization rituals; grief theory, and grief education (Servalty-Seib & Chapple, 2021).

***Death Education for the General Public***

Death education for the general public aims to reduce the fear of death and dying and to help people find meaning in death (Doka, 2015, p. 547). Three primary reasons that individuals seek out death education are because they are interested ins specific death related topics such as suicide prevention; they want to prepare for future experiences that will arrive, such as the death of a loved one; or they are actively dealing with a death related experience such as their own terminal diagnosis or their own grief or the grief of a loved one (Corr et al., 2018, p. 5). The original death education for the general public was books such as Kubler-Ross's (2011) *On Death and Dying*, and books continue to be one of the primary ways that people learn about death. However, there are also seminars, both online and offline, about death and dying and the Internet has provided ways for people interested in death and dying to connect and share information.

There are books available for all ages on a variety of death related topics. For children, there are offerings such as Kircher's (2018) *The Endless Story: Explaining Life and Death to Children* and Mosback's (2022) *In Grandpaw's Pawprints : A Story of Loss, Life, and Love*. Both of these books use a story format to help children understand death. For adolescents there are books such as Feder's (2022) *Dancing at the Pity Party: A Dead Mom Graphic Memoir* that recounts the story of a teen's journey through her mother's cancer, death, and funeral. Offerings for adults include Kubler-Ross and Kessler's (2005) *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the*

*Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss* and Kessler's (2019) *Finding Meaning*: *The Sixth Stage of Grief* which was written after his son died and he worked to find meaning in his death. Kessler's (2007) earlier work *Needs of the Dying: A Guide for Bringing Hope, Comfort, and Love to Life's Final Chapter* was written based on his experience working in hospice and provides guidance on helping those who are dying. In addition to more general books about death and grief, there are also specialty offerings such as Fowkes (2022) *Leading Through Loss* and Wolfelt's (2005) *Healing Grief at Work* which were written to help employees and managers help coworkers who are grieving. There are also books about death from various religious and spiritual perspectives such as Leif's (2001) *Making Friends with Death: A Buddhist Guide to Encountering Mortality* and Starhawk and Nightmare's (1997) *The Pagan Book of Living and Dying: Practical Rituals, Prayers, Blessings, and Meditations on Crossing Over*

Death education for the general public also includes online and offline seminars on a variety of death related subjects. Green Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn offers death education seminars on cremation, death rituals around the world, and a variety of other topics (Green Wood Cemetery, 2023). There are also a variety of death related seminars and programs online. David M. Kessler offers seminars, along with podcasts and blogposts on his Grief.com site (Kessler, n.d.). The Grief Recovery Method also offers a variety of programs including ones for children and to help people with pet loss (*The Grief Recovery Method - Home*, n.d.). It should be noted that while the Grief Recovery Method purports to help people recover from grief, experts typically do not believe that people recover from grief, instead they lear to live with it (Corr et al., 2018, p. 244)

In addition to books and structured death education programs, the internet has also made more unstructured resources available either by providing a forum for offline resources to be

found by the people that need them or providing online resources such as podcasts and blogs. Although Death Cafes are both online and offline, the Internet has helped grow the Death Café movement by providing a way for people to locate local or virtual Death Café meetings. Death Cafes are designed to be safe and informal spaces for people to talk about death with likeminded people. The Death Café movement was founded in Switzerland in 2004 and spread to the United States in 2012 (Corr et al., 2018, p. 3). Death Cafes originated as in-person events, but online events were created in the wake of Covid which both increased the need for conversations about death and made it impossible to gather in person (Death Cafe, n.d.). Unlike Death Cafes which are open to all, the Dinner Party limits its audience to 21 to 45 year olds who have experienced loss, but they are similar in that they provide a space for people to talk about and share information about death (The Dinner Party, n.d.).

The Internet has also provided a safe space for people to find information about death via podcasts or blogs. In addition to Kessler's podcast Healing (Kessler, n.d.), there are hundreds of other death and dying and grief related podcasts online. These include Grief Out Loud, a podcast by the Dougy center which supports families and children through grief, that offers stories and tips about managing grief and Good Mourning which aims to normalize grief (Boudin & Patel, 2022). For those who prefer to read than to listen, there are also a number of death related blogs including Grief Healing, which provides regular blog posts on a variety of death related topics including making decisions after loss and using writing to help with grief

While many of the death related blogs and podcasts are related to grief, there are also online resources that cover a wider variety of death related topics. Talk Death is a site devoted to positive and constructive conversations around death. Topics of articles on the site include culture and politics, death care, and the environment (Talk Death, n.d.). The Order of the Good

Death is another site aimed at educating people about death. Founded by Caitlin Doughty, whose Ask a Mortician videos explore a variety of death related subjects, The Order of the Good Death aims to education the public about death related topics including funerals, green burials, decomposition (The Order of the Good Death, n.d.).

***Gap in literature***

There are limited scholarly articles about death education at work and those that do exist are related to death education for medical professionals (Shakti, 2023). Additionally, a review of the indexes for the two primary overview textbooks on thanatology, *The Last Dance* and *Death and Dying, Life and Living*, do not contain any entries related to workplace deaths (Corr et al., 2018; DeSpelder & Strickland, 2015). The one scholarly book on death in the workplace, *Loss, Grief, and Trauma in the Workplace* does provide information on supporting people who are grieving in the workplace and about workplace policies and procedures related to grieving, but does not include information about how people from different cultures mourn (Thompson, 2009).

There are existing workshops/seminars on grief in the workplace, but the ones reviewed are missing critical pieces of information or it is unclear if key topics are covered. The following is a review of some workshops/seminars available online and gaps in their offerings.

- ***Companions on a Journey*** offers workplace grief support workshops and bereavement classes, but based on the available information it does not appear that they offer any training on cultural or policy issues related to grief in the workplace (Companions on a Journey, n.d.)
- ***Comfort for the Day*** does not provide details on the site as to what their seminars and workshops provide(Comfort for the Day, n.d.).. However, based on the information

provided it does not appear they cover key areas such as cultural considerations around death and complicated grief and related afflictions.

- ***Grieving at Work*** offers weekly online workshops about a variety of grief at work related topics. Past topics have included grief, loss, and bereavement; the true cost of grief at work; and common myths about grief (Grieving at Work, 2023). The topics offered do provide valuable information, but the ad hoc manner would not provide comprehensive information about grief at work related topics.
- ***Community Grief Support's*** Grief in the workplace is a 60 minute lunch and learn designed for grieving employees and to help people understand how to help coworkers through grief (Community Grief Support, n.d.). While providing support to employees, this seminar does not provide guidance for leaders on workplace policies, culture humility, or other key topics.
- ***Next Step Consulting*** has a variety of offerings to assist companies through the bereavement processes including providing grief support groups and a workshop for employees (Next Step Consulting CHicago, n.d.). However, these workshops are reactive as they are designed to assist employees who have already suffered a workplace loss and are not proactive in the sense that they would help workplaces implement policies and practices to assist grieving employees.

Although a search of the Web revealed no comprehensive grief at work workshops, the Pacific Southwest Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network has developed a free comprehensive starter kit to help schools and mental health organizations become grief ready. This kit covers key elements of workplace grief including cultural aspects of grief, the importance of policies, and procedures, and other key areas required to help organizations

become grief ready (Pacific Southwest MHTTC, 2022). Two other resources that address grief readiness and grief education in the workplace are Fowkes (Fowkes, 2022) Leading through Loss: How to Navigate Grief at Work and Wolfelt's (2005)*Healing Grief at Work: 100 Practical Ideas After Your Workplace Is Touched by Loss* which both provide practical ways that managers and organizations can help grieving employees. While all three of these resources are excellent and can provide a foundational for grief education at work, they do not have the interactive aspect of training of a live workshop.

## Project Completion

My project, a four-hour seminar on Grief at Work, aims to close the gap in existing offerings by providing leaders with information on a variety of topics including the financial and personal costs of grief in the workshop, cultural humility and its importance, and the importance of people centric policies and procedures on grief.

### Collaborating Organization

This project is being developed with my current employer, PPL, Inc. in mind as multiple deaths, including two at work, have occurred over the past year. However, the thoughts and design of this project are my own. Once this project is complete, the VP of HR at my organization will be asked if it would be possible to present this to our human resources department.

### Project Description & Intended Use

This project is four-hour seminar for human resources professionals and managers on grief at work. Key topics to be covered in include:

- Introduction
    - Definitions of grief, bereavement, and mourning
    - Key grief theories

    - Why having strong grief and bereavement policies is good for the bottom line(Tottsley, n.d.)
- Losses at Work
    - Death of coworkers
    - Deaths of coworkers on the job
    - Death of relatives/loved ones
- Grief in a multicultural workplace
    - Introduction to cultural humility
    - Cultural aspects of grief
- Emotions at work
    - Expressions of emotions at work
    - Expressions of grief at work
- Supporting grieving employees
    - Formal methods (bereavement policies, counseling etc.)
    - Informal methods (grief support groups)
    - Recognizing when employees may need additional support

My capstone project will fill the gap in the available training because it will not just provide a simplistic list of how to help grieving employees, but will help HR professionals and managers develop a better understanding of grief, how it manifests, and how workplaces can support grieving employees through formal and informal methods.

**Limitations**

The focus of this project is on death related losses including the death of coworkers and loved ones. It does not address non-death related losses felt by employees such as layoffs and restructurings and personal losses such as divorce. Although our world is increasingly violent and workplace shootings are becoming more frequent, this workshop will not the impacts of traumatic workplace events on employees. As this workshop is designed for the corporate workplace, it will not cover grief in settings where deaths occur more frequently such as nursing homes and hospitals. Lastly, although this workshop will be comprehensive in the number of topics covered, a four hour workshop is not sufficient to cover topics at a deep level. However, as part of this workshop, a list of additional resources will be provided.

## Conclusion

All of us grieve and grief at work has both personal and financial implications. The personal implications are that people who are grieving may be prone to distraction, may cry at work, and may not be as productive as they were before suffering a loss. The loss of productivity can lead to financial implications and people who are grieving may make mistakes which can have financial and/or safety implications (Moeller, 2017). How people grieve at work is influenced by several factors including whether they are an instrumental griever, who expresses grief physically, or an intuitive griever, who expresses their grief emotionally; the corporate culture; and whether there are in role requirements to act appropriately in front of customers (Wharton, 2009)

Organizations can best support grievers by being proactive and evaluating bereavement policies that support employees and by training managers on how to best support employees through their grief. Key factors to be included in training include education on how people grieve and on complicated grief and related afflictions; on the cultural aspects of grief; on the importance of cultural humility; and how different types of losses impact employees. Although a short seminar cannot fully cover all the nuances of grief at work, it can demonstrate to leaders the importance of helping employees through grief and can provide information that can help them better help their employees.

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