

CAREER TRANSITION THEORY AND TRANSITIONS POST NURSE EXECUTIVE/MANAGER JOB LOSS: A WORK IN PROGRESS

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Although there is a global nursing shortage, the need to control escalating healthcare costs has resulted in increased job vulnerability for all levels of the healthcare management workforce. Recent popular (Bridges, 2003) as well as professional publications (Miller, 2003) are concerned with professional career development in changing times. Previous research that focused on nurse executives who have experienced involuntary turnover suggested a variety of strategies that might turn job loss into a successful career transition (Carroll, Show, DiVincenti, 1995). In a time of an epic nursing shortage, nursing can ill afford to allow nurses to leave the profession because of inability to cope with transitions inherent in job loss.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore the transition from job loss to re-employment among nurse executives/managers with a focus on placing job loss within the context of career transition theory. Career transition theory proposes that transitions are the “punctuations” and turning points that shape career outcomes. A process model of the career transition cycle has been proposed which includes preparation, encounter, adjustment, and stabilization. Careers are viewed as chains of transition cycles. The dynamics of transitions are explored in terms of affective content, modes of adjustment, continuity and change, and individual organization interaction (Nicholson & West, 1989).

Methods: This study is using a descriptive exploratory design. Long interviews with subjects are being tape recorded, transcribed, and verified. Interview data will be analyzed for content, themes and meanings (Kvale, 1996) within the context of career transition theory. Due to the sensitive nature of the subject, a snowball sampling technique is being used to identify nurse executives/managers who have experienced involuntary turnover, recovered and become re-employed in nursing post 2000. Interviews with 20 subjects are planned. Six subjects have been interviewed to date.

Findings: Preliminary analysis from 6 interviews suggests that nurses’ transition and re-employment is consistent with the process model of the career transition cycle (Nicholson, 1987). Further analysis in terms of the dynamics of transition is in progress.

Discussion: Placing nurse executive/manager job loss within the context of career transition theory opens opportunities for using methods to test findings from non-healthcare related disciplines to solve problems related to career transitions such as disengagement and turnover.