Chance Events and Executive Career Rebranding: Implications for Career Coaches and Nonprofit HRM

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

The purpose of the research was to examine the events and motivations that triggered career agency and stimulated career change. This research contributed to academic and practitioner knowledge of new career paths open to mid- and late-career executives and insights for nonprofit leadership, as many nonprofits can anticipate major shortages of qualified executives. Each stage in the career transition process provides opportunities for human resource professionals to contribute to successful nonprofit leadership change: first, by creating opportunities for “chance events” motivating transition, followed by career coaching opportunities before and throughout the transition.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

Francine Schlosser, Deborah M. McPhee, and Janice Forsyth conducted and analyzed interviews with 20 executives from the for-profit sector who had transitioned into second careers in the nonprofit sector. The qualitative study provides an in-depth analysis of the critical events that triggered career agency and stimulated the change process. The researchers used this data to identify a number of themes related to the change process experienced by executives as they made the transition to non-profits. Attention was also given to the rebranding opportunities that occur as the executive transitions from for-profit to nonprofit.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

The researchers found the following:

• The executives in the study never referred to these opportunities as “chance,” likely because they were used to portraying and seeing themselves as proactive and strategic in their decision making.

• Old paradigms were changed, and individuals became more open to opportunities and risk. However, this shock was not as great as originally thought, perhaps due to the second career nature and older demographics of the sample.

• Results support elements of chaos theory and social learning in how executives explained their choice to transition. The executives rationalized their choices, and some executives commented on how they were at a stage in their life where they could afford to take a lower-paying job or were ready for a transition into nonprofit because of their own personal affinity for helping others.

• The executives in the study experienced critical events requiring different priorities as they further developed their careers.
In summary, at each stage of transition, the executives revisited their personal brands, deciding how to best position their skills, knowledge, and values within the context of their new nonprofit organizations. Aligned with corporate rebranding, the executives redefined themselves as leaders in an organization with a social mission. In the second phase, the executives engaged in internal branding activities. A number of them mentioned that they were going to implement performance appraisals and reward systems. They also discussed how they engaged with their respective boards of directors. Consequently, throughout the third phase, a number of executives were working on the development and implementation of strategic plans, drawing on their past experiences to strengthen their new organization.

**HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?**

The research has practical implications for an increasing number of executives, career counselors, and Board of Directors (BODs) of nonprofit organizations (NPOs), and for human resources management, as follows. It is important for executives to assess how to rebrand themselves, specifically by considering how their skills might complement the mission of the NPO. It is recommended that career counselors use a narrative and constructivist approach to coaching executives and other employees through the transition. It is recommended that BODs of NPOs focus on mutual interests to develop stronger relationships with forprofit organizations. It is recommended that human resources ensure the introduction of innovative incentive strategies tied to performance management systems to reduce turnover.

**CITATION**


**KEYWORDS**

Careers, Chance Events, Leadership, Nonprofit, Personal Branding

**WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW**

The purpose of the study was to examine the events ad motivations that triggered career agency and stimulated career change. The study dissected the change process experienced by executives as they made the transition to nonprofit. Developmental transitions involve termination of a life structure and initiation of a new one.