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WHERE DO I STAND?
 BEING HERE AND
 ELSEWHERE AT WORK:
 NAVIGATING CAREER
 TRANSITIONS TO
 SUSTAIN AND DEVELOP
 SELF-NARRATIVE

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This ethnographic inquiry explores how mid- to late-career senior professionals experience transition as both an opportunity to become someone else and a source of apprehension about losing who they are, through shifts in narrative identity. Job transitions are not merely temporal disruptions in careers; they can also be understood as a liminal condition—an indeterminate state “charged with promises, potential, and uncertainty” (Turner, 1969)—in which existing interpretive frameworks are suspended, triggering identity work aimed at reconfiguring, maintaining, or protecting narrative thread. Individuals must claim continuity between past, present and future selves, while exploring alternative identities, and positioning themselves within, or at the margins of organizational scripts. Becoming someone else, or doing things differently while asserting one’s individuality, thus emerge as central motifs structuring transition narratives. This study examines how individuals navigate transitions by balancing continuity and exploration, and by aligning with or distancing themselves from organizational scripts, understood as determined programs which prescribe patterns of legitimate thought and actions.

Drawing on an 18-month ethnography within an internal consulting unit designed to support employee redeployment within the company, we document and examine the possible pathways for identity development and consolidation, and the critical thresholds that threaten its integrity. We also consider how this unit functions as a transitional object within the organization.

Our findings suggest that transition blurs boundaries—between past, present and future, else/elsewhere, self/other—producing a blended period in which identities are both altered and consolidated. This in-between condition elicits emotional responses to ambiguity and uncertainty, and prompts individuals to actively construct their own agenda to sustain continuity and agency. We find that transition is structured by several phases characterized by distinct attitudes, emotions, and concerns (e.g., distancing, agitation, exploration, return to the self, and projection) and describe four types of narratives—expansion, preservation, drift, and resilience—that capture how individuals move from doubt toward clarity in identity work. We argue that narrative continuity emerges as a fragile, provisional, and resource-intensive accomplishment, involving emotional labor, boundary work and organizational socialization, as individuals strive to remain themselves within specific organizational, social, and biographical conditions.

We contribute to research on identity fluidity and career transitions by showing that ambiguity and uncertainty are not merely puzzles to be resolved; rather they are productive spaces for identity development and transformation.