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BEING MADE REDUNDANT AND MOVING ON: A NARRATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

This study explores the personal meanings of redundancy for professionals and managers who experienced being made redundant during a period of economic prosperity and have since moved on with their lives and careers. Managers and professionals made redundant between two and seven years prior to the study were interviewed about their experiences of redundancy. The respondent group was made up of seven females and five males from a range of professions and industries. None of the respondents experienced long periods of unemployment or financial hardship as a consequence of their redundancy.

Thematic narrative analysis was used to analyse the data and develop an interpretive life history model of being made redundant and moving on with life. A conceptual framework drawing on ideas from research into rites of passage and identity theory was developed to explain respondents' psychological adaptation to their experience of redundancy.

Respondents' narratives show that experiencing redundancy was a significant life event that altered their world view and career path. Respondents' redundancy experiences were interpreted as a status passage transition and categorised as a coercive separation rite of passage. The life history model of redundancy developed from the respondents' narratives suggests that the psychological experiences of adapting to redundancy have several phases. Respondents adapted to redundancy by reframing the personal experience of being made redundant and by shifting towards a more transactional mental model of work. This study concludes that redundancy can be a significant life event in the absence of unemployment and can lead to long term changes to professional and managerial workers relationships with employers and to the significance of work within their lives.

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