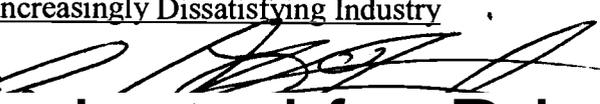


AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Jennifer McCarthy for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in  
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On October 6, 2004.

Title: The Light Shines in the Darkness: A Qualitative Exploration of Administrator Satisfaction in An Increasingly Dissatisfying Industry

Abstract Approved: 

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PURPOSE

Administrators of nursing homes are turning over at very high rates in the present industry. With the growth of older populations needing skilled nursing care, this presents a risk to the needs of the elderly. Satisfaction and turnover have been correlated in the literature. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore dimensions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction among nursing home administrators in order to ascertain constructs potentially contributing to dissatisfaction in the industry.

METHODS

Informational letters were mailed to all licensed administrators in the state (N=143) who were then randomized to receive follow-up invitational phone calls to join the study. Those interested in participating were asked a few short screening questions about their tenures in the industry and overall perceptions of satisfaction. Interested participants were then divided into 3 different strata based on their tenures. Purposive sampling informed the choices of participants and selected 10 from each of the shortest, longest, and most dynamic tenures. Interviews occurred on nursing home sites around Oregon. Grounded theory was used in a priori analysis by means of a

coding paradigm in order to allow emergent data to reveal substantive categories in a theoretically directed pattern of coding, contrasting, verifying, and eventually grounding new theory in data.

## FINDINGS

Allowing the data to emerge in analysis of satisfaction and dissatisfaction revealed two corresponding core categories, Constraints to the Job and Meaningful Work. Constraints to the Job included 4 categories: Bureaucratic Constraints, Budgetary Constraints, Personnel Constraints, and Ethical Constraints. Meaningful Work included Working Conditions and Meaningful Interiors. As dissatisfaction and satisfaction were further compared and verified, theory grounded in data emerged and revealed that constraints to the job obstruct an administrator's autonomy, which in turn impedes the ability to engage in meaningful work and contributes to dissatisfaction.

## CONCLUSIONS

While constructs of dissatisfaction emerged, administrators on the whole revealed high satisfaction with their positions. Future studies should concentrate on the bureaucratic constraints to the job as these constraints were perceived as extremely dissatisfying and hold political implications for state and corporate policies.

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The Light Shines in the Darkness: A Qualitative Exploration of Administrator  
Satisfaction in An Increasingly Dissatisfying Industry

by  
Jennifer McCarthy

A DISSERTATION

submitted to

Oregon State University

In partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the  
degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

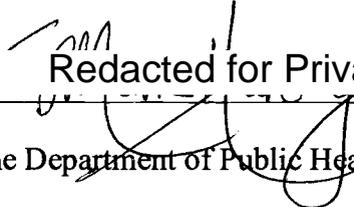
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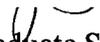
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 **Jennifer McCarthy, Author** 

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To the many administrators who opened my eyes to the soul of this business:  
You are in it for the right reasons. I am so grateful for your time.

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May God bless you all.

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## DEDICATION

For my father, the administrator, and my mother, the social scientist. May this serve the greater good as a reflection of your lives' work and love for humanity.

And

For Kevin Thomas, my joy.  
You gave so much life in the waiting. I owe this journey to you.

Soli Deo Gloria

# The Light Shines in the Darkness: A Qualitative Exploration of Administrator Satisfaction in An Increasingly Dissatisfying Industry

## INTRODUCTION

“And if you give yourself to the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light will rise in the darkness and your gloom will become like midday.”

(Isaiah 58:10, NAS)

It has been brought to attention in recent years that nursing home administrators in the United States are turning over and leaving facilities at exorbitant rates, with 40% of facilities changing administrators at least annually (Singh & Schwab, 2000). A number of factors may be contributing to this turnover. As turnover and job satisfaction have been correlated in numerous previous studies, the present study aims to discover dimensions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction among nursing home administrators in Oregon to ascertain the status of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction in the state, as well as their potential causes. The working environment for nursing home administrators has become increasingly regulated over time, and the tasks required today are very different from the tasks required less than twenty years ago. With notable increases in regulations have come notable increases in administrator turnover (Angelelli, 2001). Turnover and understaffing may have critical effects in the coming years of population growth and increased nursing care needs. Changing reimbursement rates, levels of competition, occupancy rates, salary rates, personnel retention, and levels of control on the job may be important factors in the inquiry into nursing home administrator satisfaction. An industry context will provide an introductory framework to understanding the problem of turnover and the backdrop for understanding the significance of the current climate in the study

findings. The following sections will introduce the current nursing home climate, trends specific to the industry in Oregon, and the profession itself.

### Nursing Home Industry Changes, Challenges, & Unforeseen Effects

The long-term care industry in America is changing, and with changes come challenges and unforeseen effects. From financial to regulatory burdens, nursing homes are facing ever-increasing demands to perform at higher levels within punitive structures. The evolving continuum of care now spans skilled nursing, high-acuity care to no medical care at all. The nursing home, providing skilled nursing care, is still the primary mode of care within the American long-term care industry and houses approximately 1.6 million residents in 18,000 facilities (Sultz & Young, 2004). Of persons over 85, 1 in 4 persons lives in a nursing home and projections suggest that by 2030, nursing home residents will total 5.3 million (Sultz & Young, 2004). Costs associated with care amount to \$53,300 on average per patient per year, and in 2000 nursing home expenditures totaled \$92.2 billion dollars, (Sultz & Young, 2004). Nursing homes have seen immense increases in acuity of patients due to discharging hospital patients "quicker and sicker," (Shi & Singh, 2001). These financial repercussions are felt by the government as 60% of nursing home expenditures are financed by federal and state funds (Sultz & Young, 2004). Trends over time suggest that nursing home occupancy is decreasing, another factor with financial repercussions. Occupancy rates declined from 92.3% to 88.8% between 1987 and 1996, and paired with reimbursement reductions and financial constraints, many nursing homes (9% in 2000) are operating under bankruptcy protection (Sultz & Young, 2004).

Nursing homes are characterized in different ways depending on the levels of care provided and payments accepted. Prior to 1989, nursing homes were divided according to two different classifications. Skilled nursing facilities were those facilities which accepted Medicare and Medicaid residents, and intermediate care facilities (ICF) accepted Medicaid only (Shi & Singh, 2001). With the passage of the 1987 Nursing Home Reform Act, legislation distinguished between skilled nursing facilities (which may admit Medicare patients) and nursing facilities (which may admit Medicaid patients) for certification purposes. A facility may be dual certified, and as such is defined as “a facility, or distinct part of one, primarily engaged in providing skilled nursing care and related services for people requiring medical or nursing care, or rehabilitative services,” (Sultz & Young, 2004). Private-pay patients are not affected by certification restrictions (Shi & Singh, 2001).

Nationally, the average age of a nursing home resident is 79, and 75% of the residents over 65 are women (Sultz & Young, 2004). Approximately 63% of residents in nursing homes are disoriented or memory-impaired, and older Americans in general have more than a 40% chance of being placed in a home (Sultz & Young, 2004). Nursing homes are staffed by administrators, medical directors, directors of nursing, registered nurses, licensed practicing nurses, certified nursing assistants, ancillary professional staff (dietitians, therapists, social workers), and support staff (kitchen, laundry, maintenance). The administrator role has changed significantly with increased regulations, and in addition to mandatory paperwork, the administrator is also responsible for enforcing regulatory mandates on staffing ratios and mixes of licensed and unlicensed personnel for the full 24 hours of care (Sultz & Young, 2004).

Increased regulatory burdens have their roots in efforts to improve quality of care and quality of life for residents. Major changes to the profession were on the horizon after quality improvement measures began in the mid-80s. In 1986, the Institute of Medicine discovered that residents were being mistreated and given inadequate care (Klauber & Wright, 2001). This audit served as a catalyst for major reforms in legislation regarding nursing homes. In 1987, the Institute's proposed measures became law through the Nursing Home Reform Act (NHRA), part of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA). This legislation made a number of significant changes, including: new guidelines and restrictions for the use of restraints, a resident bill of rights, increased quality assurance standards, a standard survey process, training and educational requirements, training standards for certified nursing aides, and comprehensive scheduled assessments of resident functional capacity (Sultz & Young, 2004). The aim of reforms was to ensure that residents achieve or maintain their "highest practicable" physical, mental, and psychosocial well-being (Klauber and Wright, 2001).

In order to monitor quality of care, the Nursing Home Reform Act established a survey process to audit all nursing homes at least once every fifteen months (Klauber and Wright, 2001). Enforcement of the survey is complex and has been both slow and controversial since its inception (Harrington, et al., 2004). The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) set the standards for the survey process, establish the monitoring procedures, and enforce the law; however, it is the states that carry out the actual survey inspections (Harrington, et al., 2004). Revisions to the original survey process occurred in 1995 (Klauber & Wright, 2001) and again in 1998 under HCFA

initiatives, and new survey legislation deemed that survey inspections would be unannounced and staggering, performed on weekends, holidays, and nights (Harrington, et al., 2004). The survey process is used to examine quality of life and quality of care in addition to safety and building issues. Additionally, surveyors can conduct target surveys and complaint surveys in response to complaints made against a facility. If a building is out of compliance, deficiencies will first be determined (the survey process uses letters A through L to label deficiency distinctions). If strong violations are found, possible sanctions can include civil monetary penalties (CMPs), denial of payment for new Medicare and Medicaid admissions, temporary management, or termination of the provider agreement (Klauber & Wright, 2001). States may not always use the regulatory process consistently, and the General Accounting Office (GAO) found that surveyors were often unable to detect serious quality issues (Harrington, et al., 2004). Prior to these changes, nursing home administrators performed their duties in a significantly less complex context (Angelelli et al., 2001). It has also been suggested that this change in regulations has shifted providers from a compliance model to a deterrence model, as penalties are now enforced to ensure quality standards (Harrington, et al., 2004).

#### The Nursing Home Industry in Oregon

The long-term care industry in Oregon is comprised of 524 nursing homes, assisted living facilities, senior housing facilities, residential care facilities, and in-home care agencies, meeting the needs of over 15,000 Oregonians on a daily basis (OHCA, 2004). Long-term care facilities provide for variant levels of needs, including sub-acute care, rehabilitative care, medical care, skilled nursing care, and

supportive social services. Nursing homes make up just under 30% of the long-term care provided in the state. Facility ownership among nursing homes may be for profit or nonprofit; private, government, or hospital-based; and free-standing or multifacility (owning more than one facility). Of Oregon's 140 facilities, 64.29% of facilities are controlled as multifacilities, 35.71% of facilities are controlled by independent ownership, and 3.57% are hospital-based (CMS, 2004). Over three-quarters (77.14%) of facilities in the state are for profit, while 18.57% of facilities are non-profit and 4.29% are government facilities (such as the Veterans Affairs facility). The majority of facilities in Oregon (83.57%) accept both Medicaid and Medicare funding, while 14.29% accept only Medicaid and 2.14% accept only Medicare (CMS, 2004). The average Medicare per diem for 2004 was listed as \$345.44 (AHCA, 2004).

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services disseminate annual state and national nursing home figures through the American Health Care Association's Health Services Research & Evaluation program in a process called Online Survey Certification & Reporting (OSCAR). According to the most recent reports (June, 2004), Oregon nursing homes currently serve 8,454 patients in 140 facilities throughout the state (CMS, 2004). For June, 2004, state occupancy stood at 66.48% with 12,717 certified beds and 8,454 residents, much lower than the national occupancy rate of 85.6%. The average facility caseload is 60.39 residents (median: 54 residents), substantially lower than the national average of 89.36 residents. Of the 8,454 residents served in state facilities, 11.95% are covered by Medicare, 61.84% are covered by Medicaid, and 26.21% are covered by other payers. This is comparable to national payment trends, with slightly fewer Medicaid residents (U.S.: 66.13%, OR:

61.84%) and slightly more residents falling into the Other Payer category (U.S.: 22.09%, OR: 26.21%).

The state survey is an annual regulatory process used to audit nursing facilities for safety, procedural, and building-related compliance. The Center for Consumer Health Choices, a subsidiary of the Consumers Union which uses market-based strategies to inform and alert consumers, began to publish nursing home reports based on CMS survey data in 1995. Reports rank states by greatest percentage of nursing facilities with “immediate jeopardy” citations, given for deficiencies which place residents at immediate risk for being seriously harmed. Oregon had the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest percentage of immediate jeopardy citations in the country (Lieberman, 2003). The report showed that out of 145 facilities evaluated, 22% of Oregon’s facilities (N=32) had at least one citation for immediate jeopardy. In a similar report, Oregon was ranked 4<sup>th</sup> by percentage of nursing facilities with citations for substandard care (Lieberman, 2003). Thirty percent of Oregon’s nursing homes (N=44) had at least one citation for substandard quality of care. Along with CMS, Oregon has authority to levy fines (Civil and Monetary Penalties: CMPs) against nursing homes. One Oregon facility was on the Consumer Union’s watch list of nursing homes for three years in a row, and the state fined this facility \$5,750.

#### The Nursing Home Administrator Profession

The profession of the nursing home administrator is characterized by professional associations, training and certification requirements, salary norms, and professional journals, such as *The Journal of Long-Term Care Administration* and *Nursing Home: Long Term Care Management*. Nationally, the American Health Care

Association is a non-profit association which aims to improve standards of service and administration of its member nursing homes, to secure recognition for work done in nursing homes, and to educate and promote legislation. Oregon has two nursing home trade associations, including the Oregon Health Care Association and the Oregon Alliance of Senior & Health Services, a state affiliate of the American Association of Homes & Services for the Aging. The Oregon Health Care Association is a private, not-for-profit association representing the 524 state long-term care facilities. OHCA's aim is to promote high quality care through professional development and policy-directed advocacy. OASHS is the state association of not-for-profit organizations dedicated to providing quality health, housing, and services to the elderly and disabled. The Oregon Department of Human Services, Seniors, & People with Disabilities is another state resource for nursing home data, support, and advocacy. Additionally, Oregon has its own quality improvement organization (OMPRO) dedicated to improving quality and effectiveness of healthcare through prevention of misuse of Medicare resources.

Licensure requirements for the nursing home profession are determined by the individual states. According to the Center for Health Workforce Studies, there is a significant variation in the licensure requirements across the states (Langelier & Wing, 2004). This creates difficulties for transient nursing home administrators and is potentially unwarranted as the tasks of the nursing home administrator do not substantially vary from state to state. The Center suggested that nursing homes are the most regulated of any health facilities and that tasks are often compliance-oriented. Thus, skills and educational requirements perhaps should be universal (Langelier &

Wing, 2004). In Oregon, licensure requirements are stringent compared to other states. Oregon requires a Bachelor's degree, 960 hours in an administrator-in-training (AIT) program, a state exam, a national exam, and 30 annual continuing education credits. This contrasts with states that make provisions for experience in lieu of education, fewer continuing education hours, and the absence of a state exam (Langelier & Wing, 2004). A failure to comply with licensure requirements may result in fines, exclusion from Medicare and Medicaid certification, and the withdrawal of licensure (Sultz & Young, 2004).

According to the ACHCA and ADVANCE Long-Term Care Administrator Salary Survey (N=263), the median national salary for administrators was \$73,358 in 2004 and the median salary for assistant administrators was \$54,060. Medians of administrators in skilled nursing were nearly \$10,000 higher than those of assisted living administrators (\$75,559 and \$65,731 respectively). Ranked by facility type, those classified in "other" (of which the most common type was for-profit stand-alone) had the highest median salary (\$81,262), followed by non-profits (\$76,113) and for-profit large chains (\$73,894). Government-owned facility administrator median salaries listed at \$69,588, while for-profit medium chains and for-profit small chains differed by over \$6,000 (\$72,819 and \$66,592). Administrators working in the Pacific region of the country made the highest median salaries (\$84,095) while those in the South Central region made the lowest (\$65,482). Broken down further by demographics, rural administrators made almost \$13,000 less than administrators in metropolitan areas. Additionally, while more women work in the field than men, female administrators made over \$4,000 less than men.

While an upward linear trend in salaries according to experience might be assumed, the Long-Term Care Survey revealed a median salary of \$79,854 after 5-10 years in the profession, but a dip down to \$71,674 after 10-15 years in the profession. Furthermore, non-credentialed administrators earned more (\$74,759) than credentialed administrators (\$69,443) in the profession (ADVANCE & ACHCA, 2004). In regards to benefits, 86% of respondents received medical insurance, 68% received retirement savings, 64% received reimbursement for professional association dues, and 51% reported tuition reimbursement as a benefit. Only 7% reported receiving stock options, while 9% reported profit sharing as a company benefit. Forty-five percent of respondents reported an average annual salary increase of 3 to 6%, while another 45% reported no increase to a 3% annual increase.

#### Purpose & Significance

The relationship between regulations and outcomes is not always positive, and in the case of nursing home administration it has had particularly dramatic effects on nursing home administrator turnover. Research shows that turnover among administrators was extremely high in the years following OBRA's inception, and is still today very high (Angelelli, et al., 2001). According to one study, annual turnover among nursing home administrators might be as high as 40% or higher (Singh & Schwab, 1998). This is of concern since quality of care and management continuity have been linked in the literature (Angelelli, et al., 2001). High turnover among nursing home administrators has been explained in part by the current regulatory environment (Angelelli, 2001) and will be explored further in the literature review. In addition to turnover, trends suggest that fewer persons are entering the nursing home

administration field and that licensure exam rates are continually decreasing in many states, including Oregon (Pratt, 2002). Provisional reasons suggested for the decline include the punitive regulatory environment, insufficient wages, more attractive opportunities elsewhere, growth of assisted living facilities, long hours, and staffing shortages (Pratt, 2002).

Turnover rates among nursing home administrators have been minimally acknowledged and addressed in recent years (Singh & Schwab, 2000, Angelelli et al., 2001). Job satisfaction and dissatisfaction have been explored in great detail in satisfaction studies, and turnover and satisfaction have been correlated (Lawler & Porter, 1967, Hulin, 1966, Herzberg et al., 1957). What is lacking in the literature, however, is a systematic attempt to better understand satisfaction and dissatisfaction among nursing home administrators in the current regulatory climate. The benefit of a new method's contribution to understanding a growing problem is in the ability to see a problem differently when assessed from different vantage points. It is in the possibility of seeing something new or not before seen in a certain contextual framing. With this goal in mind, the present study will focus its methods on developing a richer understanding of the core dimensions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction among practicing administrators in Oregon. Relationships between any cores discovered will also be assessed for significance, and a theory-building mechanism will be utilized to better inform the overall study purpose's "truth" found not in presuppositions, but rather in data emergent. In this way, the data will speak for itself and new knowledge contributing to or detracting from overall satisfaction may be on the horizon. This research may prove to be one of the first qualitative studies of job satisfaction among

nursing home administrators in Oregon and one of the first uses of grounded theory in job satisfaction research (Brief, 1998).

### Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study's efforts in potentially uncovering new dimensions in the world of nursing home administrator satisfaction:

- 1) What are the dimensions of job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction among practicing nursing home administrators?
- 2) Do differences in job satisfaction exist between nursing home administrators in the field for varying lengths of tenure?
- 3) Using grounded theoretical analysis, will a richer understanding of nursing home administrator job satisfaction and dissatisfaction emerge from the data?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Job satisfaction has been the central focus of thousands of published research projects over the last century. To undertake a study in job satisfaction without a grounded understanding of extant theories would be misguided. This chapter will present current literature on the issue of turnover among nursing home administrators and classic literature on some of the cornerstone theories of job satisfaction. The relationship between turnover and job satisfaction will be examined and theories on job satisfaction will form the theoretical framework for the current study.

### TURNOVER & NURSING HOME ADMINISTRATION

#### Health Care Personnel Turnover Rates

Turnover may be calculated in various ways. It has been defined in one turnover study as the total number of workers leaving an institution in one year divided by the total number of part-time and full-time workers employed as of the last date of the one year under study. For example, a turnover calculation would be the total number of workers leaving the organization between 1/01/04-1/01/05 divided by all workers employed as of 1/01/05 (Office of Nursing Workforce Research, Planning, & Development, 2003). Retention, by contrast, has been defined as “the continued employment of skilled and productive staff” (Wells et al., 2002). In 1999, the Human Resource Management Association (HRMA) suggested the overall healthcare personnel turnover rate for the year at 20.4% was the highest it had been in approximately ten years (Abrams, 2002).

#### Administrator Turnover & Retention

Concerns are only beginning to mount as new data is pointing towards a gloom-

and-doom future for the long-term care administrator supply. In a study conducted in New York State looking at nursing home administrator turnover rates from 1970 to 1997, average tenure was only four years. Approximately half of the job tenures across that time period lasted for two years or less (Angelelli, et al., 2001). The situation was remarkably worsened during the late 80s and early 90s with the advent of new OBRA legislation, as demonstrated by the fact that one half of administrators in the years closely following OBRA's 1987 inception stayed in their positions for less than one year (Angelelli, et al., 2001). The 1990s saw a decrease in the turnover rate, however from 1991 to 1997 nearly one-third (>27%) of facilities had four or more different administrators.

It has been suggested that rapid administrative turnover is a problem because of three main issues (Riter, 1995). The first suggests that assimilating into the culture of an organization is a lengthy process, and rapid turnover leads to a cycle of beginning the basic learning process all over again. This may spiral into a cycle of turning true organizational influence/power over to those not in administrative positions. The second issue presupposes that trust is not built overnight, and without trust an administrator's agenda will not be taken seriously but only temporarily "humored" until his/her tenure is up. On this same note, administrators have the power to set the tone of a facility, and respect imbedded in trust may only spawn from a more permanent tenure. The last potential issue suggests long-term care facilities do not operate in a vacuum, but rather integrate with the community to foster outside relationships resulting in outside activities for residents and participatory relationships with community members. A community presence is thus maintained by a proactive

administrator, and rapid turnover can impede the relationship potential between a facility and the community (Riter, 1995).

Recent literature acknowledges that the body of research encompassing issues related to long-term care administrative turnover is insufficient. With as many as 40% of facilities changing administrators each year, there is a renewed interest in focusing on competent individual hiring processes (screening out incompetencies before employing a new administrator) and on hiring individuals who are more likely to stay in their positions (Singh & Schwab, 2000). Over 80% of nursing home administrators leave their positions voluntarily, and the rate of turning over within the first three years of employment is as high as 37% (Singh & Schwab, 2000). One study in the literature focused on intrinsic characteristics that predict nursing home administrator turnover (Singh & Schwab, 2000). After many quantitative analyses, Singh and Schwab concluded that the single predictor of turning over as a nursing home administrator was an actual, measurable personality trait they labeled "tendency to turnover" (Singh & Schwab, 2000). This personality type is easy to identify through the analysis of past job history, and is characterized by past patterns of leaving jobs and taking new ones in short periods of time.

A 1999 Hay Group survey of over half a million employees determined there are ten reasons why employees stay: 1) career growth, learning, and development, 2) exciting tasks and challenges, 3) meaningful work, making a difference, 4) great colleagues, 5) being part of a team, 6) a good boss, 7) recognition of work well done, 8) autonomy, a sense of control over one's work, 9) flexible work hours and dress code, and 10) fair pay and benefits (Atchison, 2001). Other factors related to job

stability and satisfaction included favorable consideration of the current community as related to preferred lifestyle, positive performance results, and commitment and loyalty for an organization. Without opportunities to grow professionally and when job expectations are not met, administrators are more likely to turnover. An additional study published by Singh and Schwab suggested that having the ability to function independently, having direct involvement in decision making, being treated fairly, and being given reasonable goals to achieve all increase retention rates among nursing home administrators. They suggest matching administrator values to facility values in the hiring process (Singh & Schwab, 1998).

It should be remembered that turnover is not the only reason for understaffing in long-term care administration. A 2002 national survey of the National Association of Boards of Examiners of Long-Term Care Administrators disclosed a dramatic decrease in the number of skilled nursing facility administrators entering into the profession as noted by the decreasing number of exams being taken. The declines vary from state to state, but have ranged from 23-75% in recent years (Pratt, 2002).

#### Health Care Turnover and Satisfaction

Turnover and satisfaction have been correlated in classic studies since the 1950s and reconfirmed in more current literature (Dunham & Smith, 1979). Johns Hopkins University researchers have acknowledged that there do not seem to be simple solutions when looking at job satisfaction and turnover rates among PCPs (Buchbinder et al., 1999). Another study looking at front-line staff found that the conception of self-managed work teams, self-directed groups that share managerial responsibilities as well as service care duties, successfully increased employee

satisfaction and decreased worker turnover (McConnell, et al., 2000). Studies on turnover have shown that one factor correlated to satisfaction is a perception of personal integration or belonging in the workplace. When turnover is high, those who are “left behind” may experience decreases in their levels of personal satisfaction as their feelings of integration may decrease upon others’ leaving the workplace (Pillemer, 1996). In another study, hospitals were asked to disclose their practices for retaining individuals. The top response revealed that hospitals depend on employee surveys, which include satisfaction surveys (Abrams, 2002). The researcher stated that their results solidified the notion that employee retention is “inexorably linked to employee satisfaction,” (Abrams, 2002).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: JOB SATISFACTION

### The Nature of Job Satisfaction

Understanding the nature of job satisfaction as it has been previously described is pivotal to decision-making in a theory-building study. As grounded theoretical analysis relies on a coding scheme, the present study must be informed by previously verified constructs and determinations in describing dimensions of job satisfaction. Thousands of studies on job satisfaction exist in the literature (Spector, 1997), and this review selected among job satisfaction compilations to present classic studies germane to the current work. In order to study job satisfaction, the term itself must first be defined. Authors have noted wide incongruence in defining job satisfaction. An often-cited definition provided in 1976 by Locke suggests that job satisfaction is “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences,” (Brief, 1998). Arthur Brief evolved the definition to move away from

assumptions that the nature of job satisfaction is simply how one *feels* about a job, suggesting that job satisfaction “is an internal state that is expressed by affectively and/or cognitively evaluating an experienced job with some degree of favor or disfavor,” (Brief, 1998). This latter definition encompasses both job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, both affective and cognitive expressions, and will be assumed as the working definition for the present research.

### Measurement of Job Satisfaction

Most often, job satisfaction is measured in research with questionnaires (Spector, 1997). A number of questionnaires have established validity and reliability through numerous studies, and the available scales cover the dominant facets of currently understood job satisfaction (Spector, 1997). They are also inexpensive to use. The limitation to conducting research with an existing scale is the constriction to a certain set of satisfaction-related facets. It is not possible to gather new information when relying on pre-existing categories and this might be limiting if a population of interest shares unique characteristics, such as satisfaction with specific decisions, events, individuals, or policies (Spector, 1997).

Two of the most popular job satisfaction scales are Smith, Kendall, and Hulin’s 1969 Job Descriptive Index (JDI) and Weiss, Dawis, England, & Lofquist’s 1967 Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ). These two scales measure facets of job satisfaction and have both been used in numerous studies. The JDI has been the most used among researchers and possibly the most carefully developed and validated (Spector, 1997). It gauges only five facets of job satisfaction through 72 scale items: work, pay, promotion, supervision, and coworkers. This contrasts with the MSQ’s

more specific 20 facets of job satisfaction, also shown to be acceptable in internal consistency. Intrinsic and extrinsic factors are captured in a 100-item form or 20-item short form (Spector, 1997). General job satisfaction scales, such as the Job in General Scale (1989) and the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (1979), assess overall job satisfaction rather than facets (Spector, 1997).

Qualitative work may not be as prevalent as the JDI or MSQ in researching job satisfaction, but qualitative methods have received some attention by prominent satisfaction researchers. The use of the interview as substantive to job satisfaction research was noted in the literature. Edwin Locke suggested that interviews had a number of advantages including the potential to ascertain a respondent's true meaning behind a response, the potential to correct and explain contradictions, and the potential to probe in an in-depth fashion in a way that is suitable to each individual's knowledge, degree of education, and perspective (Brief, 1998). Brief more recently suggested grounded theory might benefit the field tremendously as a potential method for understanding the dimensions of job satisfaction and their relative importance (Brief, 1998). He offered that developing a grounded theory might "signal how little we may know and how much we might learn from observing and listening to workers," (Brief, 1998). While grounded theory potentially results in new terminology based on emergent findings, Brief posited that the interpretation of familiar terms might not be commonplace, contributing in merit to the understanding of job satisfaction.

#### Job Satisfaction: Major Schools of Thought

Job satisfaction has not always been a substantive goal for businesses in America. Original studies on job conditions neglected to consider attitudinal variables

and instead focused on enlarging tasks themselves to negate low productivity. Industrial psychology began to focus on job satisfaction with the advent of the Hawthorne Studies in the 1920s, focusing on job satisfaction as a potential correlate of job productivity (Gruenberg, 1976). In 1952, job enlargement (increased demand with more operations to perform) was suggested as a means of increasing satisfaction (Walker & Guest, 1952), and this was later countered and evolved through the assertion that job enrichment (“vertical enlargement”), or psychological growth, would increase motivation (Herzberg, 1968). Numerous dependent variables have been studied in relationship with job satisfaction. The attitude of a supervisor (Foa, 1957), compensation (Schwab & Wallace, 1974), the organizational structure in which a person works (Porter & Lawler, 1964), age (Herzberg, 1957), sex (Hulin & Smith, 1964), social reference groups (Klein & Maher, 1966), and marital status (Wild & Dawson, 1972) are just a few among many that have been shown to affect job satisfaction. Still today there is divergence in methods used to ascertain an overall satisfaction with occupation, and the dominant theories of job satisfaction as well as the very understanding of the nature of job satisfaction are still widely debated.

Antecedents of job satisfaction are those correlates that determine why individuals might differ in their appraisals of satisfaction. Early job satisfaction research (Murray, 1938, and Schaffer, 1953) found that the ability to satisfy needs in a work environment was perceived as satisfying (Brief, 1998). Later researchers (Katzell, 1964, Harrison, 1978, Holland, 1985, Kristof, 1996) discovered that fits between individual personalities, values, and job characteristics affected job satisfaction (Spector, 1998). Need theories, evolving from Maslow’s need hierarchy

theory (1943, 1968) became popular in organizational theory, suggesting that discrepancy between need and what a job offers results in dissatisfaction (Kuhlen, 1963). Kuhlen measured this relationship with a satisfaction questionnaire and a needs rating scale and found the theory held true as long as persons viewed occupation and career as a primary source of need gratification (Kuhlen, 1963).

Expectancy theorists similarly stress that the expectations held about what a job should offer play into overall job satisfaction. Expectations may differ with educational levels (Klein & Maher, 1966) and social backgrounds (Blood & Hulin, 1967), and most people seem to have higher-order needs for psychological growth and development (Walker & Guest, 1952). Locke countered the importance of expectation alone with the significance of value fulfillment, asserting that values and expectations often coincide. One might be satisfied with an unexpected raise, for example (Locke, 1969). Expectancy theory believes that overall satisfaction is a function of various facets of the job (Gruenberg, 1976).

Satisfaction and dissatisfaction are often assumed to be mirror images of each other. Quite divergent from this assumption is the controversial but widely-known theory of Frederick Herzberg. His famous two-factor theory (or "motivation-hygiene theory") suggests that satisfaction and dissatisfaction have separate and distinct causal factors. Motivation factors are primary causes of satisfaction and hygiene factors are primary causes of dissatisfaction (Herzberg, 1968). Factors of motivation are intrinsic and include facets of achievement, recognition for achievement, the work itself, responsibility, growth, and advancement, while extrinsic hygiene factors include company policy & administration, supervision, interpersonal relationships, working

conditions, salary, status, and security. His work showed that motivators have a longer-term effect than do hygiene factors (Herzberg, 1968). While well-known, these assumptions have been criticized in the literature (King, 1970; Ewen et al., 1966) for lack of a specified theory and an ill-informed view of the distinct nature of satisfiers and dissatisfiers. Still, current satisfaction researchers are not entirely willing to debunk the theory, as satisfiers and dissatisfiers are likely not mirror images (Brief, 1998).

### Consequences of Job Satisfaction

The rationale for studying job satisfaction is not a gesture of humanity but is well-informed of potential consequences of dissatisfaction in occupation. In 1967, Lawler and Porter looked at the relationship between job satisfaction and productivity and found that individuals perform successfully “to the extent that effective performance leads to the attainment of what they desire.” A correlation existed between rewards and productivity. More recent studies have suggested that organization citizenship behavior (OCB), a helping behavior going beyond formal requirements of the job, would be increased with increased satisfaction (Spector, 1997). Lawler and Porter also suggested that high satisfaction would lead to low turnover and absenteeism, as individuals are motivated to work when satisfied (1967). Hulin similarly found that the dissatisfied worker is more likely to leave a position than a satisfied worker (1966). Herzberg confirmed that a dissatisfied worker is more likely to leave a position for avoidable reasons, suggesting that the difference between former and current pay, the nature of the social work group, and decision-making opportunities all factor into rationale for turnover (1957). Beyond performance and

withdrawal issues, health, psychological well-being, and overall life satisfaction can be negatively affected by low job satisfaction (Spector, 1997). While this material diverges from the present study's focus, the literature is ripe with job satisfaction consequences and confirms beyond doubt that job satisfaction is still extremely important to current industrial knowledge.

## METHODS

My approach to studying dimensions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction employs a qualitative inquiry process, combining a purposive sampling technique with a grounded theoretical process of analysis. This qualitative approach is exploratory and semi-structured in nature, designed to capture potentially new or unforeseen dimensions, and may be the first of its type with this population. Quantitative surveys are more appropriate for examining previously identified categories. Social actors construe their worldviews and their roles within such worlds in a way that is often best explored through qualitative research (Lawler, 2002). It is precisely within the realm of worldviews that this research seeks entrance.

In the game of exploratory research, pre-conceived (*a priori*) categories do not lend themselves to the openness required in seeking potential newness in phenomena of interest (Silverman, 1997). The (*in situ*) approach contributes a means of capturing elements not captured in previous studies, and allows the researcher to remain relatively free from certain presumptions or historical perspectives. It keeps the door open for rich explanations and patterns in thought without the constraints of reproducibility, as found in the natural sciences. That being said, methods for (*in situ*) studies are abundant and are not without concerns for validity of the data. Empirical methods span the gamut of qualitative research styles and contribute both the openness to novel constructs and dimensions, as well as a theoretical grounding in the data itself.

The current study presupposes a problematic climate in which practicing nursing home administrators leave their facilities at very high rates. While changing regulations, burdensome hours, and poor communication may indeed prove to be

dimensions of dissatisfaction, for example, this study will utilize semi-structured interviewing methods so as to avoid leading participants in certain directions of thought. Additionally, it cannot be assumed that dimensions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction are mirror images of each other. Terminations provide one example: "not firing" might not be satisfying even though firing is dissatisfying.

### Recruitment Procedures

In order to uncover constructs of satisfaction and dissatisfaction among practicing nursing home administrators in Oregon, a list of all current nursing home facilities and their administrators throughout the state was obtained from The Oregon Health Care Association (OHCA). The "Seniors and People with Disabilities Licensed Nursing Facilities" list was printed in February, 2004 and included facility names and addresses, administrator names and phone numbers, owner names and operators, capacity (# of nursing beds), original dates of facility licenses, and whether or not Medicaid and/or Medicare would be accepted at the facilities.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Oregon State University approved the confidentiality procedures for this study. Participants were given pseudonyms and randomly generated numeric identifiers, and facility names and sizes were never disclosed. Informational letters describing the study and the confidentiality procedures were mailed to all 143 licensed nursing home administrators in Oregon. Letters invited administrators to participate if selected and preceded invitational phone calls. Letters were sent out on OSU Department of Public Health letterhead on April 8, 2004. The informational letter described the purpose and procedures of the study, including the use of a tape recording device, the necessary interview time expected

(less than one hour), the confidentiality procedures, and advance notice of the screening questions to be asked upon my calling. Of the 143 letters mailed out to administrators, only one was returned not delivered. This administrator still received an invitational phone call and it was confirmed that he was the current administrator. When the telephone screening later revealed many outdated names on the list of administrators, it became apparent that though reaching their intended destinations, 39 letters (27%) had been addressed to previous administrators. These letters may or may not have been read by the new or interim administrators.

Before placing any recruitment phone calls to administrators, I received a self-selected phone call on April 9, 2004 from an interested potential participant. Over the next days and weeks I received eight phone calls from self-selectors who had received the informational letter and were interested in participating. Of these early self-selectors, three people met the selection criteria to be included in the final sample based on length of stay at facilities and tenure in the field. Though there was no one detectable common theme in the rationale for self-selection among this diverse group of administrators, shared issues brought to the surface included the desire to have privacy protected and an appreciation that someone was interested and listening. All self-selectors were gregarious and seemingly helpful.

Soon after letters were mailed to the universe of Oregon administrators, a web-based random number generator (<http://www.random.org>) was used to assign random numbers to each of the 143 nursing facilities. This was to be the order in which facility administrators were called. At this stage, phone calls were commenced and continued with multiple try-backs until each administrator in the population of current

Oregon administrators had received an invitational phone call or message about the study. If an administrator expressed interest in the study, she or he would then be asked a set of screening questions inquiring about industry employment and satisfaction. The screening questions were extremely important to this study, as it was imperative to first survey the landscape of practicing administrators to demographically ascertain their population's work patterns and characteristics within Oregon. Additionally, the screening questions gave an opportunity for satisfaction-related pilot data to be collected on over half of all administrators currently working in the nursing home industry in the state. Content of semi-structured screening questions was developed to assess tenure and comparability for purposes of triangulation with qualitative findings on satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Responses were hand-written during phone conversations and later entered into Excel. The following screening questions were used in the preliminary telephone interviews:

How long have you been in your current position?

And is this your first position as a nursing home administrator?

What was your last job before taking this position?

And how long were you in that position?

(If last position was as a long-term care administrator): And what did you do before that?

What would you say is the most satisfying aspect of your job? And the least satisfying?

At the end of the phone-based recruitment stage, 81 people (56% response rate) had offered participation and all tenure-related screening information was

collected from 80. Full screening information (including most and least satisfying elements of work) was collected from 72 administrators. Only two people I spoke with directly were not interested in participating, with reasons being: 1) concerns about confidentiality, and 2) a personal, non-work related situation that did not permit the extra time. Screening data was collected from interested administrators, and this laid the foundation for categorization of administrators based on length of stay in the field. Specific parameters for entering the study would then be relative to data acquired through the screening process.

In order to assess whom of the interested administrators would comprise the final sample, a stratified, purposive sampling method was employed based on theoretical assumptions contributed by past nursing home administrator turnover research. As cited earlier, the “tendency to turnover” personality type (Singh & Schwab, 2000) can be detected through analysis of work history and is characterized by past patterns of leaving jobs and taking new ones in short periods of time. As satisfaction and turnover have been strongly linked, the goal of understanding global dimensions of satisfaction among administrators was heightened by the interest in potentially assessing distinctions in satisfaction among administrators at various levels of tenure in their positions. It was determined that 3 strata would be of particular interest to this study: 1) administrators with the longest tenures in nursing home administration; 2) administrators with the shortest tenures in nursing home administration; and 3) administrators who had “hopped” around in the field, a mutually exclusive category designed to capture administrators who had been in the

field for varying lengths of time but whose employment record showed their stays at facilities were usually short in nature.

While this sampling method diverges from traditional grounded theoretical sampling (in effect, snowball sampling), this purposive sampling technique contributed to the study's aim by allowing for comparisons between specific groups of interest. In using a non-random technique, an adequate range of dimensions represented in the population were captured to mitigate bias (Weiss, 1994). The present method both ensured fuller representation within each stratum than would otherwise be obtained through traditional grounded theoretical sampling and a sufficient sample size to complete an in-depth exploratory study aiming to attain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of specific types within a population (Neuman, 1997).

When all administrators had been contacted, the screening data was entered into a spreadsheet and ranked with regard for the aforementioned categories. Ten administrators in each of the three categories (longest tenure, shortest tenure, and "hoppers") were then called back and appointments were scheduled for face-to-face interviews (N=30) at settings of their choices. Administrators were then met in their corresponding cities around Oregon at appointed times over a period of two months. Taped interviews (not including time spent touring facilities) lasted for under forty minutes on average (Standard Deviation: 12.4, Median & Average: 34.0), an expected result when considering the employment demands and characteristics of the population.

### Administrators As Elites

During phone calls and attempts at scheduling, it became at once critical to understand that administrators of facilities are extremely busy and powerful people in their practices and that they comprise a research subculture known as “elites.” This knowledge of elite status introduced the issue of managing to properly interview a group of individuals with not much time to spare. More often than not, this busy population also had gatekeepers doing at least preliminary value assessments of my telephone calls (for which my student status often came in handy). The topic of elite interviewing in qualitative studies has been addressed in the literature, with elites defined sociologically as “people who occupy, by heritage, merit or circumstances, a key place in power networks” (Undheim, 2003). Though qualitative studies are more often conducted with marginal or powerless groups, qualitative studies are indeed proper means to get at issues affecting elites (Neuman, 1997). Elites may be interested in a researcher’s pedigree or credentials, as well as with whom a researcher has already spoken (Neuman, 1997). Appropriate language and demeanor would be expected. Additionally, as well-educated individuals, elites may be familiar with research techniques and may either dominate the conversation or knowingly increase cooperation. Besides being busy or powerful individuals, Undheim points out that when it is difficult to access elites, ethical issues are always involved. This presents another difficulty in assessing truth-telling in interviews with elites who may be quick to give vague or politically appropriate responses. Thus, extreme respect for the protection of confidentiality and the use of narratives in the interviews were powerful tools in the research process.

## The Interview

Ethnography has relied heavily on narratives in anthropological studies throughout its methodological tenure, and the use of narratives is increasingly relevant to non-positivistic social inquiries today. Narratives in social research have been described by Steph Lawler as “interpretive devices, through which people represent themselves, both to themselves and others” (May, 2002). Lawler also concludes that even fragmentary narratives have a great potential to give us insight into a social actor’s world and his or her social role (May, 2002). Narratives and stories are ways of conceptualizing the world and one’s place in the world, but there is no ‘unbiased’ account of the past. According to Lawler, one continuously reworks his or her past to provide a “coherent sense” of one’s identity (May, 2002). From this perspective, asking about a recent event that comes to mind is less likely to have been sociologically reframed in an individual’s memory than is a twenty-year-old story that has been reframed as a life turning point and thus colored differently in perception. Neither version would be discounted; however, the interplay that occurs in the mind between experiences over time and perception resulting in discourse of self-identity might affect the unfolding of the dimensions of interest. It is for this reason that interviewed participants in this study were not simply asked about most satisfying or dissatisfying moments in a career, but were encouraged to name recent satisfying and dissatisfying events.

In addition to recent events, literature would suggest that asking about concrete incidents provides more reliable information than do questions about general states or opinions (Weiss, 1994). The rationale proposes that stories vibrantly remembered and

relayed in rich detail are more likely to be trustworthy. Asking for details in an unstructured-question form also increases validity as answers to open questions more likely mirror a respondent's true feelings or perceptions (Dey, 1993). Both sympathetic listening on the part of the researcher and interviewing within the context of a partnership between the researcher and participant additionally help to increase validity in participants' statements (Weiss, 1994).

Variations of the following semi-structured questions were used in the interview process:

- Q1. After learning about the study, what led you to be willing to participate?
- Q2. How would you rate your satisfaction with this job? Very high, high, neutral, low, or very low?
- Q3. Tell me about your most satisfying experience (or day) on the job. (A prompt for a recent example would follow)
- Q4. Tell me about your least satisfying experience (or day) on the job. (A prompt for a recent example would follow)
- Q4B. Follow-Up Example: What made that so dissatisfying for you?
- Q5. How is this job different than you'd expected it to be?
- Q6. What advice would you give to someone thinking of entering the field?

Though underreporting of past events due to "memory decay" may occur and could compromise validity, interviews show their strength in the element of shared negotiations between two players involved in dialogue (Brenner, Brown, & Canter, 1985). Both interviewer and interviewee have the potential to truly understand each other in question and response in a way that is impossible using survey techniques

alone. The semi-structured qualitative interview process in this study was a resource for emergent data and ideas with many core strengths, including the ability to probe, ask for clarity, and ask follow-up questions throughout the conversations. This study's process of interviewing began with a general, conversational question about willingness to participate. This would generally flow naturally out of introductory conversations during the process of obtaining informed consent and was included for the purpose of building an early rapport and ascertaining any potentially unique reasons for willingness to engage in the research. Follow-ups were used at any time and followed the ideal of repeating key phrases in non-leading styles, a way of probing for more information or additional material. Both the direct and indirect questions were used to capture dimensions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and this non-linear style would often involve revisiting respondents' initial statements about various topics for comparison and contrast.

To increase the study's reliability and validity (Silverman, 1997) and to ease my process of interviewing, tape recorders were used in all interview situations to record the direct conversations. Recorders were placed closer to the interviewee than to myself to increase clarity of the responses. I later transcribed all thirty tapes verbatim. Any dialogue difficult to comprehend during transcriptions was replayed at different speeds and volumes using a transcription machine. After multiple attempts an enumerated best guess based on sounds and syllables or an acknowledgment of incomprehensible diction was placed in parentheses within the text of the dialogue (such as "And then the boss wanted (2 words) for the labor report"). Things spoken "off the record" either prior to or after use of the tape recorder were later added to tape

recorded memos and/or jotted down into a notebook. Facility tours were not audio-taped. The notebook was a helpful tool, useful for penciling verbal and facial cues, semiotics of carriage and corresponding artifacts. It was also useful as a prompting tool and as a reminder of specific words and phrases to follow-up with or compare with other dimensions at a later time in the conversation.

### Analysis: Grounded Theory

The methodological framework for this study's analysis is the grounded theory approach to deriving meaning and building theory out of qualitative material.

Developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, grounded theory in and of itself is not one specific technique or method (Strauss, 1987) but is instead a style of conducting analysis based on some key assumptions and rules of thumb used to attain a higher understanding of social phenomena. Strauss suggests that their proposed methods are in no way "hard and fixed rules" by which to derive theory; however, legitimizing their techniques should lend to increased complexity in analysis through the development of many concepts and linkages in seeking the core phenomena.

Assumptions of grounded theory suggest that a) there is a need for effective theory based on the analysis of qualitative data, and that b) without grounding that theory in data, the theory will be merely speculative (Strauss, 1987).

The process of grounding theory allows categories to evolve from data and is not a linear process. Induction and deduction are both aspects of the inquiry in a back-and-forth process of converting provisional conditions and categories into hypotheses and then seeking implications of the early hypotheses for the sake of verification (Strauss, 1987). Coding of the data follows a specific scheme called the coding

paradigm. The paradigm for coding within traditional grounded theory is comprised of conditions, interactions among the actors, strategies and tactics, and consequences. As the purpose of a coding paradigm is to ensure active, purpose-driven reading and analysis, the list of substantive issues sought must appropriately fit the researcher's main goals. Ian Dey suggests that no one checklist is of particular virtue; rather, the checklist will or will not prove productive for the researcher's purposes (Dey, 1993). As the traditional coding scheme was designed for the analysis of social processes, it was decided that a revised checklist grounded in the present substantive concerns would better fit the dimensions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire's 20 dimensions of satisfaction were used as the coding paradigm for open coding, and emergent categories and subcategories were adapted to best fit the data as appropriate.

In conducting the analysis, the data was first coded in an open fashion to find constructs that fit and described the data. This produced descriptive data which was categorized into a large hierarchical display. From this point of separating out provisional themes, the data was continuously reworked and refined until categories and their subcategories shed light on core categories. Axial coding, a type of open coding aptly named as it implies analysis around the "axis" of a category, was used for intensely analyzing each provisional category and its subcategories as related to the coding paradigm. Throughout the process, more and more data was added to categories until a point of perceived theoretical saturation was reached within any one category. An additional key feature in the theory-building process was the active search for and taking account of negative examples of provisional categories and

conditions. After core categories arose out of the analysis, selective coding was finally used to code systematically for the core categories and no longer for material irrelevant to the cores. In this way, the cores began to take shape as actual theory (Strauss, 1987).

As sociologically constructed codes are quite acceptable with this method, background subject knowledge combined with current substantive concerns was appropriate for naming and constructing emergent categories (Strauss, 1987). Ideas for categories and their names were stored in theoretical memos, central tools in the circular work of coding and theorizing. Memos are notes written during the data analysis to connect theoretical ideas and link different categories together (Strauss, 1987). They are useful for clarification, for storing ideas not yet tied together but seemingly important, and for providing context to help with developing thorough descriptions (Dey, 1993). This study used memos throughout the entire process of analysis with the help of a qualitative software program, N6.

In order to house and code the hundreds of units of text produced from the study transcripts and to create theoretical memos, qualitative software was purchased and employed throughout the process of analysis. N6, which is a QSR product from Australia standing for Non-numerical Unstructured Data \* Indexing Searching and Theorizing (NUD\*IST Version 6), was used in this study to create categorical hierarchies, to store both loose and organized thoughts, and to refine categories as core categories and main themes emerged from the data. The process of coding with N6 is non-linear in nature, and easily combines the process of coding, memoing, and refining. Any category can be memoed, and data can be directly searched for

keywords or patterns within various “nodes”, a term for coded categories. This aids in the final process of theory building as tools for patterning and coding structures allow for tightening major ideas in a back-and-forth process with great flexibility.

## RESULTS: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

### Pilot Data: Turnover in Oregon

The comprehensive list of all current nursing home administrators provided to me by the Oregon Health Care Association in February of 2004 was already significantly outdated by April, 2004. Thirty-nine of the 143 listed administrators (27%) were no longer at the listed facilities. This is suggestive of a system delay in the compilation of the "Seniors and People with Disabilities Licensed Nursing Facilities" state list and/or significant evidence of high turnover in Oregon among nursing home administrators. Occasional descriptions for this discrepancy provided by facility staff members over the phone suggested: the current use of an interim administrator, the absence of a current administrator, and the facility as "in transition." One facility would not give me the name of the current administrator and another facility had been through two administrators since the listed administrator.

TABLE 1. SCREENING DATA: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS ON NURSING HOME ADMINISTRATOR TURNOVER IN OREGON (N=80)

Percentage of NH Administrators	Length of Stay at Current Facility
35% (N=28)	At current facility <1 year
26% (N=21)	At current facility >1-2 years
7.5% (N=6)	At current facility >2-3 years
12.5% (N=10)	At current facility >3-4 years
7.5% (N=6)	At current facility >4-5 years
2.5% (N=2)	At current facility >5-6 years
3.8% (N=3)	At current facility >6-7 years
5% (N=4)	At current facility >7 years

Some of the turnover was corroborated by responses to pilot phone questions inquiring about length of stay in current facilities (Table 1.), as 28.8% (N=23) of 80 respondents had only been in their positions for <6 months. Telephone screening revealed that among the 80 administrators for whom this data was collected, 35% (N=28) had been at their current facilities for less than one year; 26% (N=21) had been at their facilities for over 1 to 2 years; 7.5% (N=6) had been at their facilities for over 2 to 3 years; 12.5% (N=10) had been at their facilities for over three to four years; 7.5% (N=6) had been at their facilities for over four to five years; 2.5% (N=2) had been at their facilities for over five to six years; 3.8% (N=3) had been at their facilities for over six to seven years; and 5% (N=4) had been at their facilities for over 7 years. Thus, 61% of the 80 nursing home administrators in Oregon screened by telephone had been at their facilities less than 2 years.

### Participation

Throughout this process there were individuals I expected to meet and those I did meet, both so seemingly real. Often guarded or hurried phone personalities became key informants, disclosing sometimes scandalous details of corporate life. Others fell easily into roles of teacher, colleague, or old friend. The settings for our meetings were administrators' offices, conference rooms that often doubled as storage, or meeting tables at facilities all across the state. The sole exception to this pattern was a restaurant in a bustling urban area, appropriate for an early morning breakfast interview with a busy administrator. Administrators are very much used to meeting for a variety of reasons in their offices so the comfort level in office settings was immediate and assumed. Some preferred doors open, and very often the abundant

background noise would lead participants to shut the door for the sake of my future transcriptions. Often administrators told me in advance how to locate their offices once inside the buildings, though some would have assistants guide me or have me wait in lounges or hallways. Some offered me facility tours, and all tours were accompanied by helpful descriptions of the building structure and functions.

Interviews were on the whole extremely pleasant. The tape recorder was not an obvious discomfort for any of the participants. The final sample of study participants was comprised of 17 women (57%) and 13 men (43%). This was similar to the true Oregon population of nursing home administrators' 54% women and 46% men. Administrators represented the range of nursing facilities in Oregon: free-standing, large chain, small corporation, for profit, not for profit, faith-based, mental health, and government. Administrators ranged in age of appearance from 20s to 60s, and all were convivial upon arrival. To interview participants, I traveled to the following 20 cities (enumerated with the number of times visited for separate interviews): The Dalles, Seaside, Grants Pass (2), Corvallis (3), Florence, Salem, Portland (6), Albany, Gresham (2), Gladstone, Scappoose, Independence, Junction City, Coos Bay, Hermiston, Eugene, Tigard, Lebanon, Lincoln City, and Klamath Falls. One administrator met me in my town and another met me at a restaurant outside of her facility's city.

Securing participants for the study was a surprisingly undemanding task, and a natural curiosity crossed with an innate tendency toward altruism likely deserves the credit. It is fair to say that people enter this business with a "helping" frame of mind, and this optimistic mindset was reflected often in responses to my first question.

When asked, as an interview warm-up of sorts, to give an explanation for willingness to participate in this research, the following categorical motives were conveyed: a) the study sounded interesting/helpful, b) as an act of kindness toward a student/pro-education, c) as a contribution to the field, d) the administrator was burning out, e) the administrator was concerned about the climate of turnover, f) the administrator loves this work/is passionate about the job, and g) as an opportunity to refute the nursing home stigma. On the whole, willingness to participate was tied to virtuous behavior or belief: charity toward a student, hope for the industry, love for the position, and sacrifice for the sake of the field. A common theme within the helping dynamic was the hope that through participating in such a study, more people might come to join the field. Assigning selves to the role of catalyst, administrators expressed a knowing concern for the perceived common results of dissatisfaction among colleagues:

“Um, most administrators at one time or another say that they’re just really frustrated and they hate this job and they wish they could do something else. And that’s not a good thing, so I thought well, if I can help in some way, make it better, I’d be happy to do it!” (57L, Elizabeth)

\*L, S, & H next to identifiers name the 3 strata classifications

The administrators I spoke with seemed to be straight-shooters and mostly approached our conversations with “tell it like it is” forthrightness. Willingness-to-participate was sometimes grounded in philosophical causes that would come out later in interviews in more extensive detail. Some administrators played the role of advocate, using responses not directly to refute their own, personal dissatisfaction within the profession but to indirectly suggest some amount of personal dissatisfaction with the societal perceptions of the industry. Specifically among administrators who

enjoy the field, an obligatory sense of righting a pervasive wrong was at times expressed.

“...I feel like nursing homes are either, they’re either categorized as places that are horrible places where people don’t care, or they’re categorized as um, they’re categorized as bad. I guess as uh, places where people go to die. And I don’t think either one of those are true. I feel real strongly about it.” (17S, Lucille)

As displayed by the sheer response to the invitational phone calls, administrators were not at all piqued by the topic but rather eagerly shared bits and pieces of stories or facts when time permitted. Many were intrigued with the process of discovery, asking me to please send results even if not selected and citing rumors they had wondered about. One administrator relayed a curiosity about the rumored shorter life span of administrators, unsure if it had been a joke. Others speculated about rumored rates of turnover in the industry. Even in the absence of a true interest in the work, the invitation to participate was rarely perceived as adverse or intrusive. Upon being asked for a reason for participation, one administrator replied:

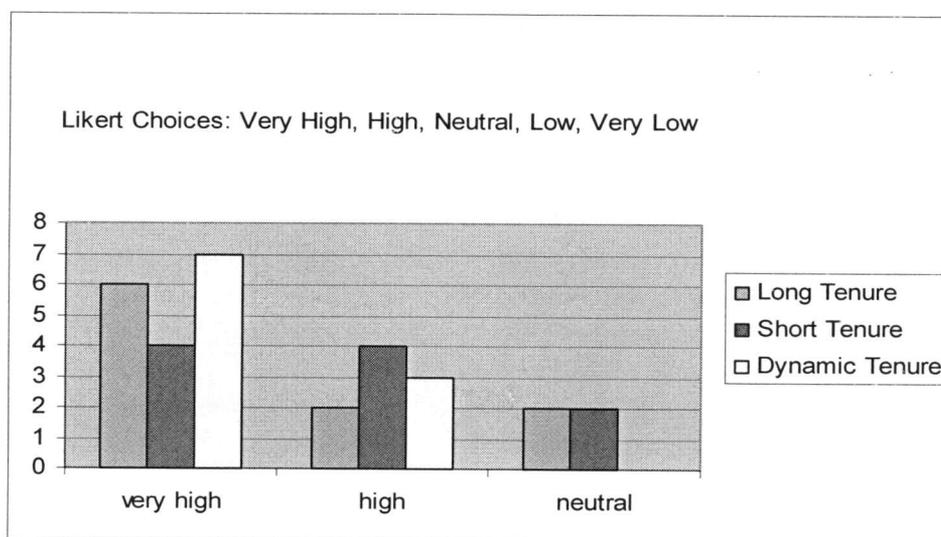
“Just uh, nothing really. You asked, and I figured, sure why not. Nothing exciting.” (45S, Scott)

### The Illusion of Dissatisfaction

An especially key finding in this study which must serve as a basic tenet to understanding the study’s results was uncovered in the closed-ended, Likert scale interview question asking participants to rate their overall job satisfaction on a scale from very high to high to neutral to low to very low. Contrary to what certain turnover data or interview narratives might suggest in exploring dimensions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, the administrators of Oregon represented in this study

were a highly satisfied group of workers. Implications of this finding are critical, as presently assessed dissatisfying themes and events are not in actuality contributing to an overall job dissatisfaction. Past experiences often informed dimensions of job dissatisfaction. Of the thirty administrators interviewed, 57% (N=17) rated their overall job satisfaction as very high and 30% (N=9) rated their satisfaction as high. The remaining four individuals (13%) rated their job satisfaction as neutral (N=2) or waffled between neutral and high (N=1) and neutral and low (N=1).

CHART 1. CATEGORICAL DIVISION OF OVERALL JOB SATISFACTION



An early prediction might have hypothesized that the tendency-to-turnover group, or “hoppers,” would have expressed more dissatisfaction than the long-tenured administrators and perhaps even more than the short-tenured administrators. Interestingly, however, this group was more likely to choose “very high” (N=7) than either of the other two populations (Chart 1.), and the remaining three individuals in this population selected “high.” Of the short-tenured individuals, satisfaction was still high, with four individuals selecting “very high” and four selecting “high”. Of the

long-tenured individuals, over half (N=6) selected “very high” and two selected “high.” The category “neutral” was occupied by one long-tenured administrator and one short-tenured administrator. The “neutral to low” response was selected by a short-tenured individual and the “neutral to high” response was selected by a long-tenured participant.

With such high satisfaction among all three segments of the study population of administrators, it cannot be assumed that small differences in ratings imply that any dimensions of dissatisfaction are significantly worse for some administrators than for others. One question still remained. If the hoppers were not falling into a regularly dissatisfied, tendency-to-turnover personality category, who were they?

#### Hoppers: Identities Revealed

“Hoppers,” as it turned out, was not a very accurate term for the participants captured as such in this study, at least in the sense that something about a “hopper’s” personality would have been implied. Indeed, its core members had worked at many facilities relative to the number of years they had been licensed in the field. One basic element not captured in the screening questions, however, was the element of direct corporate intervention. Administrators discussed the process of moving around within the same company, “cleaning up” buildings and then transferring into new buildings. This is a normal process in the life of many administrators. Of the participants originally classified as hoppers in this study, a number of anecdotal circumstances relating to changes in buildings were captured.

The following circumstances represent conveyed pieces of the quick-to-turnover puzzle from administrators’ perspectives: a) a lack of corporate support in

previous positions; b) a company's desire to move an administrator into challenging buildings for short periods of time as an interim; c) too challenging/stressful of a building; d) questionable corporate ethics/absence of shared cultural values; e) a higher salary elsewhere; f) a building gets sold/ownership changes, g) a lack of autonomy, and h) potentially unfounded company decisions to terminate. The absence of shared values spanned both fiscal decisions and issues of quality of care. In the following case, the lack of shared values about quality care combined with a lack of empowerment led one administrator to leave a company:

“And, to be in a position where I felt so strongly that I needed to advocate for my residents and my staff but yet be somewhat powerless to make any changes, that drove me insane. And that, obvious I didn't stay at that job or with that company.” (76H, Miles)

Interestingly, for a number of participants originally classified as hoppers, there were instances of relaying a sense that one had “arrived” in his or her current position. Comments linked to commitment and loyalty for a current owner or company were common. Lessons were learned about turnover in this study indirectly, often because an administrator engaged in comparing and contrasting past industry employment with current employment. All comparisons within this group, in fact, pointed to aspects of a marred past and a golden present. The tendency-to-turnover personality simply was not confirmed by this study. Rather, it seems the climate for administrators in corporations is one of dynamic change in which an administrator flexibly adapts to challenging situations or seeks employment elsewhere.

#### The Landscape of Satisfaction & Dissatisfaction

To determine where the present data shed light on new territory and where the

data fit into categories of previously established work, coding and enumeration of categories according to a theoretically established job satisfaction coding paradigm allowed for a more precise understanding of exploratory findings. Job satisfaction research has been conducted for nearly a century, and researchers from past decades have developed quantitative satisfaction measures proved both valid and reliable. To ascertain dimensions of satisfaction from the data in a theoretically informed manner, the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) was used as a theoretical paradigm for assessing dimensions of satisfaction among practicing nursing home administrators in Oregon. Findings in groupings of similarity from each facet of this paradigm as well as emergent categories will be discussed. The following two tables (Table 2. and Table 3.) provide definitions of and an overview of the fit between the study findings and the MSQ's 20 dimensions of satisfaction (Weiss, Dawis, England, & Lofquist, 1967). Definitions corresponding to dissatisfaction were adapted from definitions of satisfaction. The present section introduces the dimensions of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction among nursing home administrators to the reader. Denser descriptions of categories and themes discovered in grounded theoretical analysis will be discussed in the next sections.

TABLE 2: MSQ-ADAPTED CODING PARADIGM

	Satisfaction	Dissatisfaction
Ability Utilization	Chance to use abilities	Does not have chance to use abilities
Achievement	Feelings of accomplishment	Does not have feelings of accomplishment
Activity	Able to stay busy on the job	Not able to stay busy on the job
Advancement	Opportunity to advance	Does not have opportunity to advance
Authority	Chance to direct others	Does not have chance to direct others
Company Policies & Procedures	Satisfied with company policies & procedures	Dissatisfied with company policies & procedures
Compensation	Satisfied with compensation	Dissatisfied with compensation
Coworkers	Relationship is satisfying	Relationship is dissatisfying
Creativity	Chance to try own work methods	Does not have chance to try own work methods
Independence	Opportunity to work alone	Does not have opportunity to work alone
Moral Values	Does not have to violate conscience at work	Must violate conscience at work
Recognition	Praise received from work done	Praise not received from work done
Responsibility	Freedom to use own judgment	Does not have freedom to use own judgment
Security	Steady employment of the job	Does not have steady employment of the job
Social Service	Chance to do things for others	Does not have chance to do things for others
Social Status	Be "somebody"	Is not "somebody"
Supervision (HR)	Way boss handles employees is satisfying	Way boss handles employees not satisfying
Supervision (Tech.)	Supervisor is competent	Supervisor is not competent
Variety	Chance to do different things occasionally	Does not have chance to do different things occasionally
Working Conditions	Facets of work environment are satisfying	Facets of work environment are dissatisfying

TABLE 3: FREQUENCIES OF MSQ AND EMERGENT DIMENSIONS OF SATISFACTION & DISSATISFACTION AMONG NH ADMINISTRATORS

Dimension	Satisfaction	Dissatisfaction
MSQ: Ability Utilization	N=11 (37%)	N=1 (3%)
Emergent: Creativity	N=7 (23%)	N=0 (0%)
MSQ: Achievement	N=28 (93%)	N=9 (30%)
MSQ: Social Service	N=13 (43%)	N=3 (10%)
Emergent: Task Significance	N=20 (67%)	N=6 (20%)
Emergent: Others' Satisfaction	N=17 (57%)	N=7 (23%)
MSQ: Activity	N=6 (20%)	N=2 (7%)
MSQ: Variety	N=14 (47%)	N=1 (3%)
Emergent: Challenge	N=14 (47%)	N=10 (33%)
Emergent: Growth	N=12 (40%)	N=3 (10%)
MSQ: Advancement	N=0 (0%)	N=0 (0%)
MSQ: Compensation	N=6 (20%)	N=0 (0%)
MSQ: Security	N=2 (7%)	N=6 (20%)
MSQ: Company Policies/Proc.	N=4 (13%)	N=10 (33%)
Emergent: Ownership	N=11 (37%)	N=4 (13%)
Emergent: Corporate Support	N=13 (43%)	N=11 (37%)
MSQ: Supervisor (HR)	N=17 (57%)	N=7 (23%)
MSQ: Supervisor (Tech)	N=2 (7%)	N=5 (17%)
MSQ: Moral Values	N=14 (47%)	N=18 (60%)
MSQ: Authority	N=2 (7%)	N=0 (0%)
MSQ: Independence	N=3 (10%)	N=5 (17%)
MSQ: Responsibility	N=14 (47%)	N=24 (80%)
MSQ: Coworkers	N=28 (93%)	N=20 (67%)
Emergent: Residents	N=23 (77%)	N=2 (7%)
Emergent: Families	N=11(37%)	N=6 (20%)
MSQ: Recognition	N=10 (33%)	N=4 (13%)
MSQ: Social Status	N=9 (30%)	N=11 (37%)
Emergent: Regulations	N=2 (7%)	N=20 (67%)
Emergent: Budget	N=2 (7%)	N=16 (53%)
Emergent: Staffing	N=8 (27%)	N=14 (47%)
Emergent: Census	N=4 (13%)	N=8 (27%)
Emergent: Facility Issues	N=17 (57%)	N=10 (33%)
Emergent: System Issues	N=5 (17%)	N=3 (10%)
Emergent: The Work Itself	N=10 (33%)	N=17 (57%)

#### Ability Utilization & Creativity

The chance to use one's abilities on the job was not a dominant contributor to themes of significance in the present study but emerged as a construct of satisfaction for 11 respondents (59 text units) and as a construct of dissatisfaction for 1 short-

tenured respondent (4 text units). Of the 11 respondents for whom using abilities was named as satisfying, 5 respondents were long-tenured administrators, 4 respondents were short-tenured administrators, and 2 were hoppers. The dimension of ability utilization gave minimal insight into administrators' desires to use their skills and ranged in content. As one administrator explained, "I'm sure all administrators would like to have whatever their hobby or skills or avocation is...they'd like to have that be a part of this job," (49L, Shawna).

Similar to ability utilization was the construct of creativity, the chance to try one's own work methods. One long-tenured administrator explained the effect of increased job complexity in terms of creativity: "The running of these operations has gotten more and more uh, you've had to be more and more creative...but that's part of the excitement!" (62L, Manny). Seven administrators (23%) named facets of creativity among contributions to satisfaction (27 text units, 7 documents) and no administrators named creativity among dimensions of dissatisfaction.

#### Achievement, Social Service, Task Significance, & Others' Satisfaction

Making a difference in the lives of people is critical to the satisfaction of nursing home administrators, as demonstrated in the categories of achievement, social service, and task significance. The dimension of achievement dominated the findings as the most concentrated dimension of satisfaction in the study. With 484 text units in 28 documents, nearly all administrators (93%) tied their job satisfaction to feelings of accomplishment on the job. All but 1 hopper and 1 long-tenured administrator named achievement as a reason for job satisfaction. Sixteen of the 28 administrators specified resident-based achievement as satisfying. One short-tenured administrator

described his biggest satisfaction as “the people that come in that, you know, their prognosis is, they’re not going to recover from this...and in a matter of weeks or, or a month or so, they’re walking with therapy or talking again,” (19S, Brian). Nine administrators (30%) associated feelings of not having accomplished on the job to job dissatisfaction (71 text units). This included 4 short-tenured administrators, 2 hoppers, and 3 long-tenured administrators. As one short-tenured administrator explained in light of the budgetary environment, “I’m really the kind of person who likes to succeed and do well at my job and, and I feel sometimes with all of these sort of pressures around that I’m not,” (120S, Bridgette).

Similarities among task significance, achievements, and social service all reflect the altruistic nature of administrators and the importance of intrinsic dimensions. Social service, the concept of doing things for others, was a notable satisfier for administrators. “I love being able to help them out,” (120S, Bridgette) characterizes the helping nature of the dimension. Thirteen administrators (43%: 5 short, 2 hoppers, and 1 long) named having the chance to do for others as satisfying in 89 text units, and 3 short-tenured administrators (10% of administrators) named not having the chance to do for others as dissatisfying in 9 text units. As Michael, a short-tenured administrator explained, “The good part is when I can do something to help the staff... The problem is the job doesn’t really accommodate that,” (65S, Michael).

Achievements and social service may have been satisfying in light of their significance. The Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire did not capture purpose as a contribution to job satisfaction, and yet this was an extremely significant piece of the satisfaction puzzle for nursing home administrators. The antecedent “task

significance” has been named in job satisfaction literature (Spector, 1997) and was therefore used as the category heading to describe the purpose behind occupational tasks that contribute to job satisfaction. Task significance was named as a contributor to job satisfaction for 20 administrators (67%) in the study: 3 short-tenured administrators, 7 long-tenured administrators, and 10 hoppers. As one administrator explained, “So you know that you’ve done a lot to impact someone’s life and especially at a not so good time,” (123H, Deidra). Task insignificance (not perceiving purpose in occupational tasks) was named as dissatisfying for 20% of administrators (3 short, 2 long, and 1 hopper; in 29 text units). A demonstrative quote explains the category: “I wasn’t getting any satisfaction from pushing a lot of paper. There has to be, you know, a balance...we can’t forget that there are residents in the building,” (60H, Susan).

The results of an achievement or act of helping might have manifested through others’ satisfaction, as explained by one administrator: “And it gives me a lot of job satisfaction to see them satisfied, as well,” (108H, Jean). Others’ satisfaction emerged as its own category when tied to 4 hoppers’, 7 short-tenured, and 6 long-tenured administrators’ descriptions (N=17, 57%) of satisfaction in 73 text units. Others’ dissatisfaction was represented by a response from Leigh, an administrator who struggled with negative personnel attitudes: “You know, ‘cause you want everyone to be happy and enjoy their job, and some people just don’t,” (41S, Leigh). Others’ dissatisfaction represented comments from 3 short-tenured administrators, 3 long-tenured administrators, and 1 hopper (N=7, 23%).

### Activity, Variety, Challenge, & Growth

Staying busy, having variety, and being challenged on the job were important to the satisfaction of many study participants. Activity, the category representing the ability to stay busy on the job, housed comments from 6 administrators (20%) across the range of tenures. Three long-tenured, 1 short-tenured, and 2 hoppers associated their satisfaction with being able to stay busy in 29 text units. The dimension was satisfying for one long-tenured administrator who enjoyed the “rapid fire decision making and things happening all the time,” (119L, James). Not being able to stay busy, the mirror image of being able to stay busy, was named as dissatisfying in 4 text units for only 2 participants, 1 short-tenured and 1 long-tenured. Miles, a long-tenured administrator, explained the dissatisfying nature of seasonal downtime: “And so the pace in the building slows down. And, and I like things to move quickly, so, so that gets a little bit boring,” (76H, Miles). In contrast to the dissatisfying construct of “not being able to stay busy,” 2 additional comments (4 text units) were made referring to dissatisfaction with being busy. As one administrator explained, “Everything can kind of hit you all at once,” (29S, Rudy).

Variety, the chance to do different things occasionally, was corroborated as a dimension of satisfaction by 14 administrators (47%) in 62 text units. As Stan explained, “I don’t have to get stuck in doing just one thing,” (132H, Stan). Four short-tenured administrators, 4 long-tenured administrators, and 6 hoppers named variety as a satisfier while a single short-tenured administrator named the lack of variety (attributed to boredom) as a dissatisfier. Variety and challenges were sometimes interrelated, and “challenges” arose as a strong dimension of satisfaction

not represented by the MSQ. Satisfying challenges emerged within 14 participants' responses (47%) in 129 text units, and were spread across the tenures with comments from 4 short-tenured administrators, 6 long-tenured administrators, and 4 hoppers. Laura, a hopper, explained that one of her "most favorite things, and it's kind of a sickness I think, is when people come in really mad," and she has the chance to try and work with them (70H, Laura). Ten participants (33%) were dissatisfied with challenges, represented in 82 text units by 5 short-tenured administrators, three long-tenured administrators, and 2 hoppers. As one participant explained after a negative event, "It really threw the facility into a complete state of disarray. And, and it's just, right now it's a real challenge," (120S, Bridgette). Administrators also enjoyed the chance to grow and learn on the job. Satisfaction detected in an emergent category of "growth" spanned 12 interviews (66 text units; 3 short, 5 long, and 4 hoppers) and dissatisfaction from not having a chance to grow or learn (such as acknowledging that an experience was not nurturing) spanned 3 interviews (23 text units; 1 short and 2 hoppers).

#### Advancement, Compensation, & Security

The MSQ category of advancement was a non-issue for this population, none of whom described wishes to move up within a company. One long-tenured administrator made mention of feeling age-related peer pressure to be a regional administrator (a higher position in a corporation), but this was not his intention and the stigma associated with his age was the notable dissatisfier. Compensation, while mentioned among participants, was also not a strong category in this population and was never mentioned as a dissatisfier. Salary was neither dissatisfying nor satisfying

for 5 administrators (42 text units), 4 hoppers and 1 short-tenured administrator. As explained by Ruth, “The salary isn’t what dictates your job satisfaction,”(36H, Ruth). This compares to perceptions of satisfaction correlated specifically with compensation among 6 administrators in 22 text units, 3 long-tenured administrators, 2 short-tenured administrators, and 1 hopper. Michael, a short-tenured administrator, explained: “And now I’m making lots of money. I’ve never made lots of money,” (65S, Michael).

Security, the MSQ’s category for steady employment on the job, was also not a strong category in this population. Only two administrators (1 hopper, 1 short-tenured; 11 text units) specifically mentioned job security as satisfiers. As explained by one administrator, “You know, when your um, job security is good, then your job satisfaction tends to be better, too,” (137S, Gabe). Those dissatisfied with the lack of job security (N=6: 3 short, 2 long, and 1 hopper) were all dissatisfied about the possibility of termination due to the punitive nature of the current regulatory environment. As one hopper explained, “When the chain goes off the track, the engineer gets canned, you know!” (60H, Susan). This category spanned 95 text units due to the accompanying explanations related to the punitive environment.

#### Company Policies & Procedures, Ownership, & Support

Facets of company life were both satisfying and dissatisfying to administrators, and the MSQ’s “company policies and procedures” captured only part of the picture. Three long-tenured administrators and 1 hopper (N=4, 13%) named company policies and procedures as satisfying in 20 text units. Policies and procedures were named as dissatisfying for 10 administrators (3 long, 3 short, and 4 hoppers). As Laura explained of dissatisfying company procedures, “Even if I could figure out a way

financially to hit the same bottom line, I still was held accountable to these smaller pieces,” (70H, Laura). Ownership was also perceived as both satisfying and dissatisfying and emerged as a company subcategory. Satisfaction with ownership spanned responses from 5 long-tenured administrators, 1 short-tenured administrator, and 4 hoppers (N=11, 34 text units). James described satisfaction with ownership not being “this distant ownership,” (119L, James). Dissatisfaction with ownership spanned 24 text units in 4 interviews, 1 with a short-tenured administrator and 3 with hoppers. Dissatisfaction with ownership was described by one administrator in the following way: “Just ‘cause you could play golf doesn’t mean it’s not a prison,” (60H, Susan).

Company support was another emergent category in data analysis. Satisfaction with corporate support (94 text units, N=13) spanned responses from 2 short-term administrators, 5 long-term administrators, and 6 hoppers. Dissatisfaction with a lack of corporate support (67 text units, N=11) spanned responses from 4 short-term administrators, 3 long-term administrators, and 4 hoppers. Jean had known both good and bad and described the significance of corporate support “If I need something, in order to make this facility do what it’s supposed to do, then by all means, you get that, (108H, Jean).

#### Supervision (HR & Tech)

The manner in which administrators are supervised contributes strongly to satisfaction and partially to dissatisfaction. Shawna described the dissatisfaction of having “a boss that gets mean with you about stuff!” (49L, Shawna). Dissatisfaction with HR supervision was reported in 23% of interviews (N=7: 1 short, 3 long, and 3

hoppers; 78 text units). Satisfaction with HR supervision was reported in 17 interviews (57%; 3 short, 7 long, and 7 hoppers). The competence of a supervisor was much less significant as a category of job satisfaction in this study. Satisfaction with the competence of a supervisor was mentioned only twice, by two hoppers (23 text units). Dissatisfaction with a supervisor's incompetence was named in 5 interviews (2 short, 1 long, 2 hoppers) spanning 28 units of text. Margo described a situation in which her supervisor neglected to keep another facility administrator from interfering in her decisions. She described frustration with "upper administration allowing that to happen." (47S, Margo).

### Moral Values

Moral values, not having to violate one's conscience at work, was an identifiable satisfier for 7 administrators, 3 long-tenured administrators and 4 hoppers (N=14, 41 text units). Values were often correlated with the corporate environment. As one administrator explained, "I decided I'm not going to go work for a company unless they have this value, the same values as me," (101L, Chuck). Having to violate one's conscience or dealing with questionable morals of others on the job was dissatisfying for 18 administrators (60%) and represented in 213 text units. General dissatisfaction with a lack of values was represented by 3 short-tenured administrators, 4 long-tenured administrators, and 4 hoppers (N=11). This was further broken down into dissatisfaction with corporate game-playing (N=7, 98 text units) and survey-related game-playing (N=2, 15 text units). This in vivo term was addressed by Lucille, a short-tenured administrator: "There's game playing that goes on with that, which I object to," (17S, Lucille).

### Authority, Independence, & Responsibility

Authority, the MSQ's category for having the chance to direct others, was not a strong category in this study's findings. Only two participants mentioned directing others as satisfying (1 long-tenured, 1 hopper; 3 text units) and no one expressed not directing others as dissatisfying. Two participants (1 short-tenured & 1 hopper; 13 text units) were dissatisfied with having to "micromanage" others. Independence was also not a genuine category in this study as responses (N=3) were redundantly captured in "responsibility," suggestive of a separation only in semantics. Occasions of independence mentioned as dissatisfying were often countered with satisfying dimensions (N=5). One administrator explained that being an owner, no one would be there to help achieve satisfaction (43L, Jack); he later suggested he preferred being an owner.

Responsibility, the MSQ's category for having the freedom to make one's own decisions, was an extremely relevant category. In vivo descriptions would better characterize this category as "autonomy," and the category captured both satisfaction with autonomy and dissatisfaction with a lack of autonomy. Fourteen administrators cited autonomy as a satisfier in 96 text units (2 short-tenured, 6 long-tenured, and 6 hoppers). Dissatisfaction with lacking control, power, and autonomy arose in 24 interviews (80%) and in 278 text units. Seventeen administrators were dissatisfied with a lack of autonomy (4 short-tenured, 6 long-tenured, and 7 hoppers; 166 text units) and 16 mentioned a specific dissatisfaction with issues related to a perceived lack of control (6 short, 5 long, and 5 hoppers; 102 text units). A more minor emergent subcategory, power, was mentioned as dissatisfying by 4 administrators (2

long, 2 hoppers; 17 text units). This perception of powerlessness was described by one administrator as “a position where I felt so strongly that I needed to advocate for my residents and my staff but yet be somewhat powerless to make any changes, on quality of care,” (76H, Miles).

### Co-Workers, Residents, & Families

The human element informed many facets of satisfaction and dissatisfaction for nursing home administrators. While the category of achievement dominated the study's satisfaction findings, “coworkers” was a very close second with representation in 294 text units and 28 (93.3%) documents. Emergent subcategories included teamwork (51 text units, N=12), attitude (34 text units, N=10), performance (70 text units, N=18), and communication (25 text units, N=8). All but 1 hopper and 1 long-tenured administrator described satisfaction related to at least one facet of the dimension of co-workers. Facets of dissatisfaction were found in 20 interviews (303 text units; 7 short, 6 long, and 7 hoppers) and spanned the same subcategories: teamwork (47 text units, N=6), attitude (96 text units, N=13), performance (57 text units, N=10), and communication (31 text units, N=3). The categories “residents” and “families” emerged due to the nature of nursing home work. Resident interaction was specified as a dimension of satisfaction in 77% (N=23) of interviews (194 text units; 7 short, 7 long, and 8 hoppers) and was mentioned as a dissatisfier within only two short-tenured documents. Satisfaction within the dimension of families of nursing home residents spanned 38 text units and 11 documents (5 short, 3 long, and 3 hoppers). Dissatisfaction with families spanned 52 text units in 6 documents (3 short

and 3 long). As James explained, "If most of the relationships weren't good, I mean, that would be a good indicator to be out of this business," (119L, James).

### Recognition & Social Status

Recognition, the MSQ's category for praise received from work done, was expressed as satisfying in one-third of interviews (55 text units, N=10) among 2 short-tenured administrators, 3 long-tenured administrators, and 5 hoppers. Dissatisfaction from not receiving praise spanned only 4 documents (2 short- and 2 long-tenured administrators) and 10 text units. Frustration was exemplified by one long-tenured administrator who remarked, "That's probably the hardest thing because I'm trying really hard to do the best job for them, and they think I'm not. (57L, Elizabeth).

Social status was also important to administrators and mirrored both satisfaction and dissatisfaction quite evenly. Satisfaction due to social status spanned 37 text units in 9 interviews (3 short, 3 long, 3 hoppers) and dissatisfaction was named in 11 interviews (4 short, 5 long, and 2 hoppers). For a facility once struggling, new competitive care options were improving the general outlook for one short-tenured administrator: "We're starting to get, we're starting to get that reputation, which is good," (45S, Scott).

### Working Conditions & The Work Itself

Other emergent facets of the work environment noticeably contributing to satisfaction and dissatisfaction for nursing home administrators included the regulatory and budgetary environments, staffing issues, census issues, facility-specific issues, and overall system issues. With regards to the punitive/regulatory environment, 2 participants (1 long, 1 hopper) had satisfying comments about the regulatory

environment (8 text units). Twenty participants (67%) had dissatisfying comments about the punitive/regulatory environment in 184 text units (6 short, 7 long, and 7 hoppers). State survey emerged as its own category and was quite a significant satisfier and dissatisfier among nursing home administrators. While 13 administrators were able to name positive aspects of survey (114 text units; 5 short, 4 long, and 4 hoppers), 53% of administrators (N=16; 5 short, 5 long, and 6 hoppers) found survey dissatisfying as expressed in 179 text units. The budget environment was also significant, not contributory as far as satisfaction (2 long-tenured administrators had positive budget-related comments) but significant as far as dissatisfaction. Sixteen interviews (6 short, 5 long, and 5 hoppers) expressed dissatisfaction with budget-related issues in 213 text units. Issues related to staffing (such as having sufficient staffing) were named as satisfying for 8 participants (31 text units; 3 short, 4 long, and 1 hopper). Dissatisfaction with staffing issues was named in 14 interviews (47%), spanning 111 text units (5 short, 6 long, and 3 hoppers).

Closely interrelated with both staffing and the budget environment was census, an emergent category representing positive and negative census experiences and perceptions. Four interview participants named census issues as satisfying (8 text units; 1 short, 1 long, and 2 hoppers) and 8 named census issues as dissatisfying (41 text units; 4 short, 3 long, and 1 hopper). Conditions specific to the facility (such as size and structure) were also perceived as satisfying and dissatisfying. Positive facility conditions contributed to assessments of satisfaction among 57% (N=17) of administrators (119 text units; 3 short, 6 long, and 8 hoppers) and negative facility conditions contributed to assessments of dissatisfaction among 33% (N=10) of

administrators (79 text units; 4 short, 2 long, and 4 hoppers). System issues, such as “all the components fitting” or “being surrounded by many problems, not just one” contributed to satisfaction for 5 administrators (26 text units; 2 short and 3 hoppers) and to dissatisfaction for 3 administrators (13 text units; 2 short and 1 hopper).

Additionally emergent in the findings were two categories related to the nature of the work itself, items enjoyed and items not enjoyed. Satisfaction with specific items (such as working “on the floor”) spanned 10 interviews (2 short, 4 long, and 4 hoppers) in 50 text units. Dissatisfaction with the nature of work tasks (often with paperwork or terminations) spanned 17 documents (6 short, 6 long, and 5 hoppers) in 117 text units. A general comment made by a short-tenured administrator summed the sentiments of this category of dissatisfaction: “I’m having to turn my back on the part I like to do the part I don’t like,” (65S, Michael).

#### Dimensions of Satisfaction: Mirror Images

Eight dimensions of job satisfaction in this research appear to lie on a continuum from satisfaction to dissatisfaction. Social service was closer to a reflective dimension than other altruistic dimensions, as 13 administrators found the chance to help others satisfying and 9 found not having the chance to help others dissatisfying. The category of activity might also fall on a mirror image continuum. Low responses in categories make conclusions uncertain, but it would appear that being able to stay busy on the job (N=6) and not being able to stay busy on the job (N=4) mirror each other; thus, administrators may be satisfied when busy and dissatisfied when not busy. Much more confidence can be placed in the continuum of corporate support. Corporate support and the lack of support (N=13: satisfying, N=11: dissatisfying)

were very reflective of one another, as support was satisfying and the lack of support was dissatisfying. Autonomy was also extremely reflective, with 14 administrators satisfied with autonomy on the job and 17 administrators dissatisfied with the lack of autonomy on the job. The dimension of coworkers was on a continuum, with administrators satisfied with positive coworker-related constructs (N=28) and dissatisfied with negative co-worker related constructs (N=20). Along with coworkers, positive social status was significant to job satisfaction and negative social status was significant to dissatisfaction for 9 and 11 administrators respectively. Thirteen administrators named aspects related to state survey as satisfying and 16 administrators named them as dissatisfying. While these figures would appear to be on a continuum, the severity of negative comments toward survey might suggest otherwise as dissatisfiers were very personally dissatisfying and satisfiers were often tied to observing improvement in the system. Lastly, system issues were not extensive but system satisfaction and dissatisfaction might mirror each other slightly (N=3: dissatisfying, N=5: satisfying).

#### Dimensions of Satisfaction: Not Mirror Images

The chance to use one's abilities emerged as satisfying for 37% of administrators (N=11) and not having the chance to use one's abilities emerged as dissatisfying for only 1 respondent. No evidence suggested this dimension was on an obvious continuum, and the construct of ability utilization would fall under Herzberg's motivators, supporting the two-factor theory. There was also no evidence that creativity-based satisfaction and dissatisfaction were mirror images, as 7 administrators named creativity as satisfying and no administrators named the lack of

creativity (trying one's own work methods) was dissatisfying. Achievement, one of Herzberg's factors affecting job attitudes, was the crown dimension of satisfaction in this study according to data frequencies. Twenty-eight people derived satisfaction from achievement, and 9 administrators linked dissatisfaction to not having feelings of accomplishment. From this finding, it is not possible to conclude that feelings of accomplishment and not having feelings of accomplishment are perfect mirror images of each other. On the other hand, a continuum exists and it is apparent that dissatisfaction is caused by a lack of accomplishment, though not to the same degree as satisfaction is related to accomplishment. Similarly, task significance (N=20) and insignificance (N=6) were not shown to mirror each other on the satisfaction continuum. As satisfaction within the emergent category of others' satisfaction (N=17) did not mirror dissatisfaction with others' dissatisfaction (N=7), it can be concluded that intrinsic factors related to achievement and altruism are not on a strong continuum and are motivators of satisfaction.

Variety is likely a separate and distinct satisfier (N=14), as only one person named the lack of variety as dissatisfying (N=1). Company policies and procedures did not appear to be on a strongly correlated continuum (N=4: satisfaction, N=10: dissatisfaction). Similarly, cognitive assessments of satisfaction and dissatisfaction associated with ownership did not seem to mirror each other (N=11: satisfaction, N=4: dissatisfaction). In terms of supervision, the way a boss handles employees was a large contributor to satisfaction (N=17) and only minimally explanatory as a dissatisfier (N=7). The competence of a supervisor was hardly noticeable in terms of

satisfaction (N=2) and the incompetence of a supervisor was noted only in 5 interviews as dissatisfying.

Satisfaction with not violating one's conscience at work and dissatisfaction with violating one's conscience at work were not mirror images of each other. Violating one's conscience at work was significantly more dissatisfying than not violating one's conscience was satisfying (N=7: satisfying, N=18, dissatisfying). On an even greater scale, nursing home residents contributed to the majority of administrators' assessments of satisfaction (N=23) and only 2 persons felt that resident interaction was dissatisfying.

While families contributed largely to administrator satisfaction, families of residents offered minimal satisfaction and the relationship on the continuum is less clear. Eleven administrators derived satisfaction from residents' families and 6 derived dissatisfaction from issues related to families. A very similar pattern was observed in the category of recognition (N=10: satisfying, N=4: dissatisfying) which contributed to both satisfaction and dissatisfaction but did not clearly emerge as a continuum.

The regulatory environment (N=2: satisfying, N=20: dissatisfying) and the budgetary environment (N=2: satisfying, N=20: dissatisfying) showed very similar patterns. Both the regulatory environment and the budgetary environment contributed largely to dissatisfaction among nursing home administrators in Oregon and contributed almost nothing to satisfaction. Staffing (N=8: satisfying, N=14, dissatisfying) and census (N=4: satisfying, N=8: dissatisfying), also similar, showed similar patterns but to varying degrees of magnitude. Neither were obviously on

reflective continuums. Many participants (N=17) derived satisfaction from their facilities in issues of size and structure, and for 10 administrators this was presently or had been a contributing dissatisfier. The opposite pattern was observed in the category of work itself (items enjoyed: N=10 and not enjoyed: N=17). Lastly, satisfaction with growth (N=12) was a strong satisfier compared to dissatisfaction with a lack of growth (N=3), and the two opposites did not mirror each other.

This chapter has introduced the reader to the landscape of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction among nursing home administrators in Oregon. The next chapter will describe dominant themes in further detail and will move into emergent findings, grounding theoretical conclusions in the framework of patterns and associations between dominant themes of job dissatisfaction and satisfaction. This will elucidate potentially new findings and will work to answer research question #3.

## **RESULTS: NURSING HOME ADMINISTRATOR DISSATISFACTION**

While the study population relayed a range of dissatisfying dimensions, the patterns that emerged suggested a theoretical model encompassing factors that contribute to limited autonomy in the position of administrator. Successful and commanding in demeanor, it was no surprise that administrators relished control and authority and disavowed autonomy's opposing constraints in the workplace.

Constraints of the Job emerged as an overarching theme atop many other seemingly disparate categories of dissatisfaction. Drawing categories and subcategories in to generate a dominant explanatory factor for nursing home administrator dissatisfaction, Constraints of the Job took on a theoretical identity, comprising the four major constructs of perceived dissatisfaction among study participants: Bureaucratic Constraints, Ethical Constraints, Budget Constraints, and Personnel Constraints. The quest for theoretical saturation further revealed multiple subcategories and relationships within the four dominant constructs. Thus, Constraints of the Job emerged as a workable and consistent core category of nursing home administrator dissatisfaction.

### **CORE CATEGORY: CONSTRAINTS OF THE JOB**

The whole is made up of many parts. To understand the core construct of Constraints of the Job would not be feasible without a working knowledge of its pieces and their relationships. The four major categories of dissatisfaction are not isolated constructs but rather interrelated and insightful when taken as a dependent set of a whole. A mindful, holistic approach to viewing the world through the following

seemingly independent constructs should be remembered in affording the core its due meaning.

## BUREAUCRATIC CONSTRAINTS

The American Heritage College Dictionary defines a bureaucracy as “an administrative system in which the need or inclination to follow complex procedures impedes effective action” (def. 3, 1993). Administrators in this study spent long increments of interview time describing state, county, and corporate regulations and red tape that impeded them from perceived autonomy, power, and appropriate support. Key players and their roles were discussed in light of the regulatory structures, and processes were detailed through narrative-style exemplars. Relevant dimensions were joined together after open coding to construct the basis for this present category.

### Bureaucratic Nature of the System

The labor of love has morphed into a labor of labor. General bureaucracy in the current nursing home industry is not simply a matter of paperwork. Humanity has been tossed overboard in lieu of a dynamic of complexity in which bigger federal, state, and corporate government replace everyday care. Administrators are forced to forego meaningful goals in efforts to catch up with an unending stream of reports and documentation. The survivors may fight the system sufficiently through half-done paperwork to afford their residents some personal attention and care. It is questionable to consider this a “poor” job, and yet the demands of a regulated system only mask themselves as catalysts of quality care:

“I mean, we’re dealing with real people. And sometimes the bureaucracy is pretty much black and white and they forget that everybody here has a heart and a soul and bleed blood and have pain and their other

issues.” (42L, Brenda)

Bureaucracy is a term used to sum up a commonly held view of government roles and interventions in a system. The nursing home industry, thanks in part to the litigious nature of society, has battled a certain image for decades. In a society that does not care for their own elderly nor has the money to afford exceptional staffing, the power of families and government to ensure proper care has rested on bureaucratic principles and solutions. This transfer of power from a facility administrator to the government has serious limitations as would any process which removes power from a direct to an indirect source. One administrator joked upon the state entering her building to make placement decisions, “...as if only they could make this decision. Um, I’m glad mental abuse of bureaucrats is not a violation (laughs)” (37L, Alice). Certain regulatory processes for nursing homes are more stringent than those of hospitals, which by comparison at minimum have warnings prior to annual audits. General perceptions of bureaucracy and regulations among this study’s administrators were interestingly often encased in a well-known, insider comparison to nuclear power plants:

“We’re more regulated and managed than nuclear power plants- that’s (true).” (42L, Brenda)

“We’re the highest regulated industry in the country. We used to be second to nuclear plants, but now we’re the highest regulated, or most regulated.” (60H, Susan)

“Uh, it is the second most regulated industry, nursing homes are, in the world. Why would anybody want to get into this profession?” (62L, Manny)

“I mean, the way it’s been said before that kind of puts it in perspective is that we’re the industry that is regulated the most second only to nuclear power.” (76H, Miles)

Positions on general bureaucracy shared other commonalities, such as the perceived effect of regulations on patient care. The general government structure is perceived as a “creator” of paperwork, and this process of creation is believed to have replaced time allotted for direct patient care. That is to say, meaningful work had been replaced by empty work. As one administrator explained regarding reports (a combination of state and corporate, no doubt), “I think 90% are bullshit...I have reports that are taking me days ‘cause I’m trying to figure out how to do them,” (65S, Michael). Regulations overtly burden administrators and nursing staff who would prefer to be performing management or direct care duties. Administrators report a preference to “be on the floor” rather than in the office, but the regulatory environment of paperwork is cumbersome and demanding, sucking time from patient care and preferred management tasks. Besides replacing meaningful work, it was expressed that regulations do not *create* meaningful work, as “regulations don’t always equal quality of care,” (123H, Deidra). The regulatory demands are shared among personnel, and this in turn impacts both budget and frontline care availability:

“I have a full-time nurse for this small building and that’s all she does! Is regulatory paperwork. And it’s like, god, I’d rather have another, pay another nurse to work on the floor to give care that actually counts. So that’s, that’s frustrating.” (123H, Deidra)

Administrators were dissatisfied with regulations on the whole. However, this population was not without consideration for the history of the problem and subsequent necessity. In describing the level of regulations and bureaucratic intervention in the industry as burdensome, administrators also engaged in legitimization of the regulatory process based on historical need. Respondents

mentioned past abuses and the known weaknesses of past failed systems. Citing the 1987 Omnibus Reconciliation Act as a turning point, it was agreed even among these historical references to necessity of intervention that the current climate of regulations was worsening still. In question were efforts of the present legislature to further increase the survey system and auditing processes. HIPAA was also called into question in terms of logic and value based on the manpower required, described as “a boondoggle” and “absolutely abominable,” (13H, Marie). Prioritization of funds was another concern, as the regulatory process may potentially draw from better uses of government funds in a fiscally struggling environment:

“...it’s already very intense. And I think it, it’s already where it needs to be. And so if they’re looking at putting more money into that system versus putting more money into long-term care reimbursement, that’s very frustrating.” (27H, Kayla)

#### State Survey: Guilty Until Proven Innocent

Direct hits to personal satisfaction among administrators become exceedingly apparent in light of the state survey process’s punitive nature. In discussing the survey process with administrators, a spectrum of negative emotional responses and facets of the perceived problem emerged. Administrators painted colorful images of a system widely in need of reform, from heartless encounters to power-hungry surveyors akin to the fundamentalist mindset of Eric Hoffer’s The True Believer (1951):

“The punitive nature of the state survey is just unbelievable to me. You know, I mean last year the surveyors came in and basically told us with smiles on their faces that they were trying to shut us down. You know. So, when that’s the first thing out of their mouths, you’re kind of like, really? Okay, this is going to be a fun experience. ...and you’re very suspicious of everything they’re doing, ‘cause you know they’re

trying to trick you into doing something that they can cite you for. So um, so that process is obviously the least satisfying.” (137S, Gabe)

“...they’d have a smile on their face when they found somethin’. That’s not the way to do it.” (60H, Susan)

While the meaning behind survey itself is not in question, administrators muse the methods used to keep accountable the group of individuals so obviously in the field to help people and do right by society. An age long past still serves as a reminder of hurting conditions, with abuses and restraints and neglect in the media and minds of the people. Still, almost two decades have passed since the inception of the OBRA environment, and administrators are teachable and willing to put in the effort required to maintain strong buildings. If they are not, they have probably not survived.

The concept of justice in the nursing home industry is an unforgiving and legalistic version of justice, according to many study participants. The process involves looking for fault, and upon finding fault moving to punish.

“...you know, our justice system was supposed to be presumed innocent until well proven guilty. The survey process, and if there’s a complaint against the building and whatever it may be, you’re guilty until you’re proven innocent. ...and when we’re in on, in the survey process, it’s very traumatic.” (62L, Manny)

Comparative analysis reveals a similar, long-tenured perspective holding that surveys’ end results do not work for the good of the staff, the facility, or the quality of care:

“...I’m talkin’ 30 years experience! The only thing that a bad survey has ever done, or a stop placement has ever done, has caused a staff to be demoralized. It has nothing to do with improving the quality of care in a nursing home. If the nursing home is so bad that you have to put it in stop placement, close it! Close it.

Because all you do with a bad survey is demoralize the staff. Kay. Demoralize it!"  
(101L, Chuck)

With this observation remains the fact that surveyors are not only *not* in buildings to give credit and accolades for jobs well-done, but they are not in buildings to teach administrators about the rules. Perhaps contrary to logical assumption, this lack of proactive, long-term thinking was named in more than one instance of administrators hoping for a chance at professional growth. Jean, for instance, said that she still finds them to be "not, not a nurturing experience," (108H, Jean). She suggested that administrators are actively caring for people, and so state surveyors should "come in and teach... You know, because people want to do a good job." This was corroborated by another administrator, Laura:

"Um, I think people who survey us should become more of a source of information and a team member and an advocate and a helper versus punitive. How much better if the surveyors who go door to-, I mean, go to every facility and gather lots of information and certainly see best practices, if they would share that?" (70H, Laura)

In analyzing text surrounding the actual survey processes, the *in vivo* heading best suited to represent the overall feeling of administrators might just be the description of survey as a "week-long root canal," (137S, Gabe). Generally, surveyors stay in a building during regular business hours for three days to a week, and they may stay during an evening to watch mealtimes or med-passes. Unlike hospital systems' 3-4 weeks of notice, a perceived inequity in the system means that administrators will not know the time of surveyors' arrivals until they walk in the door (43L, Jack). Administrators described survey-related emotional states as anxiety-ridden, on "pins and needles" (Gabe, 137). Realistic administrators note this precarious dance as

simply part of life in a facility, and administrators must negotiate new perceptions of survey to endure the experience. It is difficult for administrators to see beyond the fear of survey in many cases as the outcomes will last for twelve months, even if corrections are made immediately. Preparatory work and psychological strategies and techniques are used to prepare staff, the building, and oneself for the process. Strategies include practice surveys with contract services, in-house audits, and philosophical reframing of the situation:

“...for me, I looked at survey process as a learning tool. Um, it’s always nice to have a different set of eyes, uh, look at your facility. Look at the ways you manage the building and the residents and staff. ...that has helped me considerably to deal with those periods of time.”  
(43L, Jack)

With the exception of occasional bonds between a survey-friendly nursing home administrator and a survey team, interactions among the players during survey may be filled with mistrust and anxiety. Game-playing and suspicion characterize some of the interactions, with games being purposeful efforts on the parts of surveyors to trick personnel into saying or doing wrong things or activities. This frustration is compounded for administrators who believe surveyors are not qualified for their positions or are not empathetic, not having walked a mile in their shoes, (123H, Deidra). Additionally, the joy surveyors seem to take in finding errors produces fear, and administrators perceive surveyors in some instances as true adversaries:

“I think that government, their (involvement), it fosters that. You know. We’re going to get you type of thing. It’s very dissatisfying because when they come in if they’re, if they have that kind of mindset where they’re out to get you, they’ll just, you know, make your life miserable!” (60H, Susan)

State survey is also dissatisfying in many instances because administrators are by nature of duty perfectionists. Socialized to smooth over bumps, produce positive outcomes, and adhere to hundreds of pages of rules in a brutally stigmatized industry, imperfection is minimally accepted in the rarest of circumstances. A survey team will arrive on the scene of a facility unannounced and work for up to a week's time in a grand audit of the entire building. They are not paid to disseminate positive feedback, and an unnoticed cobweb on the ceiling could result in a deficiency. An administrator's true desire for perfection may be squelched by a minimal citation or a lack of praise in what might otherwise be deemed a successful survey:

“...and there's so many things! The book is so fat! Of all the different things that you have to do right. That it's, um, hard to get them all right. And you want to be perfect, if you have that sense in yourself. That you don't want them to find anything, which is what I have. Then anything that they find is, is big. And so even if someone says, oh, this is a really good survey! It's just still, um, yeah, but you found this, this, and this. So, um, it's never quite good enough.” (57L, Elizabeth)

Consequences of survey go beyond the shame or pride correlated with public disclosure of annual results. Explanations of fears suggest that a true “black mark” on a facility (119L, James), that being a bad survey or complaint, could lead to the dismissal of an administrator. As an industry report card of sorts, survey results can also internally influence staff morale and externally affect factors related to facility status and success. The following quote is an example of such consequences and demonstrates a reinforcing loop of consequences following a bad survey:

“And one (facility) that has had chronic, ongoing problems, um. It impacts the patients you get. What impacts your bottom line. And, and that impacts your staffing. It impacts who is willing to come to work for you. Um, and that, and

then that impacts the patient care that you give, which then impacts your survey.” (37L, Alice)

Some administrators felt the survey process has progressed and improved well over the last few years. Negative examples of the punitive construct centered around improvement of the process over time, healthy relationships with survey teams, and utility of the survey. For some administrators, the survey teams are now perceived as less tenacious and zealous in fault-finding and more relaxed in demeanor. The specific survey team and the status of previously built relationships with the team may contribute strongly to survey-related satisfaction or minimization of dissatisfaction.

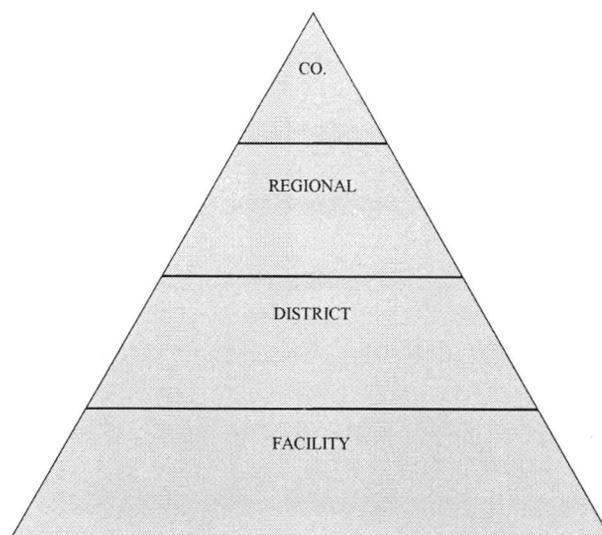
#### Role and Context in Corporate Life: Who’s Running the Show Here?

Beyond the context of the annual state survey lies a world of day-to-day dynamic interaction. For the nursing home administrator, the role played within the company framework may serve as the biggest key to overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The dominant corporate structure of nursing homes has remained virtually unchanged over time and hierarchical in nature. Peter Senge’s Fifth Discipline (1990) could be useful to the upper echelons of many corporate structures in this industry. Company ownership and size dictate the identities of players with the ultimate decision-making power, and administrators may or may not share in perceived appropriate levels of power within this structure. The following sections detail patterns of dissatisfying constructs within the corporate framework.

To understand problems within corporate contexts, basics of the nursing home company structure must first be understood. Free-standing, small companies may have a single or few owner/s and administrators interface with owners in varied intervals, not always daily. There is large variation here dependent largely on the

personality of ownership. Free-standing administrators in this study tended to have very positive relationships with their owners, so dissatisfying constructs sometimes emerged based on memories of past experiences. Facilities that were part of larger hospital systems seemed to share typical hierarchical structures and sometimes had separate accounting departments shared with the hospital. Larger for-profit corporations are the usual targets for stereotypical images of multilayered business systems making decisions from different cities or states and were the targets of elements of company-related dissatisfaction presented in this study. In understanding the "layers," one administrator would interface with a regional director who would report to a CEO-level figure for usual business. In dealing with financial processes, however, she believed there were nine different figures in her corporate structure one would have to go through. A typical corporation might have a facility level, a district level, a regional level, and a corporate level. According to Chuck, a long-tenured administrator, an inverted triangle similar to what he termed an "inverted iceberg" would best be used to represent these levels. This facetious concept was named to represent the distance and instability perceived to be typical in such a structure. The traditional hierarchical structure is displayed below (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. CORPORATE HIERARCHICAL STRUCTURE



As suggested by one administrator, the corporate structure is really more like an inverted iceberg. The levels would remain the same, but an inverted triangle would represent the overshadowing imbalance of power.

Frustration levels are sometimes high among facility-level administrators since all company/corporate profit is made at the facility level in room and board. Revenue is not generated elsewhere and all corporate levels will draw funding from the facility. This is a source of contention for some who view structures that “suck money from the facility” as particularly unnecessary. One long-tenured administrator who had worked in a number of corporations in various states perceived the role of someone like a “regional nurse” as superfluous. A director of nursing and an administrator are all you need, he reasoned, citing smaller companies as examples (101L, Chuck). More critical to his dissatisfaction with a corporate system was the distance between a decision-maker and an actual facility. He reasoned, “I think that’s a bad combination when people making the decisions don’t have to really account for it on a daily basis.”

This commonly held philosophy formed the crux of dissatisfaction within the corporate structure for many frustrated administrators. It was perceived that above the

facility level, individuals would go from “their office to the boardroom to their office,” and that the higher up one is, the easier it is to simply bark orders, (101L, Chuck).

Another perceived dissatisfaction with the corporate structure was a feeling of mistrust between a corporation’s levels. This is suggestive of struggling for power among individuals who should be playing for the same team, yet the perception of genuine support was most typically lacking in corporate relationship-based narratives. As one administrator explained, “big companies often times (they) force you to fail because of their corporate structure and requirements and reports,” (40L, Tom). According to the same administrator, meetings to discuss labor reports were sometimes held with “morons” who did not even understand their own forms. Pointing out an error to a superior could result in a perceived need to feign a certain attitude in order to get back into the superior’s social graces. This element of negotiating relationship dynamics in unauthentic modes was perceived as dissatisfying and was corroborated by other stories of political game-playing. More than simple game-playing, it was a belief among some that care is affected when bottom-line thinking rules basic interactions. The consequences of financially-guided prioritization upon the satisfaction of caregivers and administrators was described by the fore-mentioned administrator in the following example:

“...they create such a hostile work environment that you can’t keep staff. And you can’t keep residents, hardly. You can’t keep a good reputation, and those companies make life miserable enough that they’ll look for work elsewhere, or, or you get pretty cranky yourself.”  
(40L, Tom)

Employee-boss relationships play an extremely large role in determining administrator satisfaction. Styles of communication may impact an administrator’s

perception of employee-based self-worth, and quick-to-anger superiors may leave administrators confused, hurt, or angry. A faith-based facility administrator who determined that this relationship with a boss most significantly impacted her satisfaction suggested that “they don’t have to be quite Christian in how they handle stuff” and “if you’re enthusiastic about something, the worst thing a boss can do is put you down,” (49L, Shawna). She had experienced this and considered such behavior to be mean-spirited and hurtful. An administrator cities away recalled how she had “put up with a lot” due to a good wage from a company that treated her poorly in unfounded, blame-based communication: “...(the company) had really horrible HR practices. And uh, would scream! Literally scream. I mean, to the point you’d hold the phone away,” (36H, Ruth). Even positive relationships between employees and employers can be burdensome to administrators if social support is even temporarily lacking. For one administrator experiencing an enormous amount of stress in the post stages of a traumatic facility event and in the middle of budgetary constraints, a wonderful boss was no comfort when largely unavailable to give desired support. The hierarchical structure of nursing home corporations negatively impacts administrator satisfaction and might bring into question its structural worth.

#### It’s Out of My Hands: On Relinquished Control in Company Bureaucracy

Administrators want control in their organizations, and this desire, a perceived right of sorts, is only compounded by the magnitude of bureaucratic entities pulling authority further and further from the administrator’s grip. Not only do corporate figures take the reigns on what might more efficiently be dealt with at the facility level, but protective services, unions, and agencies all bring authority of a direct manager

into question. To one administrator, the worst part of the job is the general concern that an outside source can arrive on the scene and second-guess an operation, upsetting “when you don’t feel you have total control,” (119L, James). A similar instance was relayed by an administrator who, after dealing with senior services, began to question his authority to do his job the right way and to do the best thing. This affront to his own authority became a lens of concern through which he characterized the effects of the senior services “roadblock” upon his satisfaction. Still, the day-to-day battles occur on the battleground, and corporate “tying of hands” and “tightening of belts” have a more frequent impact on satisfaction than events of greater magnitude. One administrator, upon fearing for her license, quit at a facility whose management would not fix a fire panel in a home of 65 smokers. Another had to take matters into her own hands when an employer would okay expenditures that money did not exist to cover. With the power to disclose the situation to a proactive individual, her control was maintained and the situation righted itself. Administrators indeed enjoy problem-solving, but the challenges are only enjoyable when the control remains in their arenas.

The consequences of too much corporate authority may manifest as conflict or even turnover. An administrator with lots of company experience decided to open her own facilities after concluding that she “felt like a robot,” not even able to write her own checks, (123H, Deidra). The “outside” (corporate) pressures also impact the level of “inside” pressures, as the corporate decision-makers may define the consequences when census drops, which in turn affects the attitudes of frontline staff.

Micromanaging may produce better fiscal outcomes, but the disparate value systems of corporate officials (bottom line) and administrators (residents) may not justify the

stripping of authority from the administrators, who take pride in their decision-making abilities. One administrator relayed another problem with corporate micromanagement, in that they “teach to the lowest level.” She described her perception of corporate control in a rather heated explanation:

“I feel like people are trying to micromanage me. And I want to run my own show. Just leave me alone! Um, and so I feel thwarted in many ways. And so they end up in conflict a lot. I think they don’t understand me, they think I’m rebellious...” (57L, Elizabeth)

### Coming to the Defense of the Corporation

Not all administrators were down on corporations, and the benefits of a corporation were mostly correlated with aspects of function. Busy administrators may appreciate having the ability to tell vendors that purchases are corporate decisions. They may appreciate having “expertise to fall back on, (to) help you make decisions,” (43L, Jack). This same administrator considered his experiences as both an owner and a non-owner, concluding that a corporate parent company provides expert professionals in almost any category of the whole process of running a facility and that this creates a beneficial security. “It’s not like you’re out there on an island by yourself,” but rather as part of a 30-facility wide system, there is a cushion of sorts “to fall back on.” In terms of satisfaction, being an owner means an administrator must create his or her own, and no one will be in place to help with that goal. A corporation, while necessitating sometimes legalistic accountability with half a dozen indirect and direct bosses, may be satisfying in function for administrators who relish professional help from time to time. Other functions said to be benefited by the corporation include negotiating contracts and assembling manuals. Managed care contracts are

negotiated by companies, taking a large burden off of busy administrators. They additionally provide ready-to-use manuals, policies, and procedures. Even with this plus, however, it was noted that cookie cutter forms may not fit all buildings, and that “you can’t come up with your own forms or anything,” (57L, Elizabeth).

## BUDGET CONSTRAINTS

Administrators feel the forces of a rapidly changing budgetary climate in their positions. Some have facilities stacked nearly on top of each other in booming and competitive urban locations. For these administrators, competition with other nursing homes, as well as with assisted living facilities, may invoke a need to engage in more competitive marketing strategies. Rural facilities must struggle to find qualified personnel. Smaller companies cannot offer benefits like the bigger companies, and bigger companies may have to go through layers of bureaucracy only to account for every spending decision to the last penny. Everyone is concerned about low reimbursement rates in a time of high-cost, high-acuity residents and maintaining a balanced case-mix. As one administrator explained, the issues are multifaceted and interlinked in a “whole atmosphere of nursing homes and low reimbursement and just not being able to make and meet the way you want,” (120S, Bridgette). For her, this was a “least satisfying” aspect of work. Constraints to an administrator’s perceived desire for control or authority are thus often budgetary in nature, and sufficiently ground from this data the theme of Budget Constraints.

### Now Hiring...Maybe: On Reimbursements, Census, & Reductions in Force

In a personnel shortage and time of high agency, the term for temporary and expensive frontline staff based in an outside company, administrators are feeling the

pressures of losing employees to competition, attempting to attract and maintain employees, and simultaneously struggling to afford the employees they have.

Reimbursement rates are low and staffing ratios are in some cases dangerously low.

Consequences of low reimbursement affect staffing ratios directly and thus potentially patient care. As informed in one narrative, patient care was perceived as excellent at a particular facility but “hard hits” still could not be altogether prevented due to necessary staffing ratios. A “hard hit” at this facility was explained as “very disturbing” to the administrator and detailed through the example of a situation in which a resident would strip off her clothes and bed sheets in her dementia repeatedly in a day. In a staffing environment of 10 to 1, this administrator explained that, “Unfortunately, Medicaid, Title 19 and Title 18 don’t reimburse us (in a) place where we can put a person sittin’ by the bedside to watch a person all the time,” (62L, Manny). A better staffing ratio, such as might be found in a church affiliation or non-profit group, was perceived as a coveted “luxury” while the present ratio was perceived as the “limit” for their for-profit business.

Satisfaction among this group of administrators was affected by budgetary constraints and the necessity to cut staff workers’ hours was particularly dissatisfying to participants. When census is low, administrators are often required to cut staff members’ hours. This impacts relationships with staff who may perceive such decisions as inappropriate or unnecessary. Workers may feel offended, replying with defenses such as, “I have a family, too,” (45S, Scott). Tied to the human element and the atmosphere of a “second family,” the disappointment involved in “hurting” an employee could create a temporary but burdensome dissatisfaction. When hours must

be cut, strategies used to make peace with agitated workers sometimes involve compromising on the number of hours to be cut. A flexible, creative administrator may both positively impact the satisfaction level of angry staff and may impact his or her own satisfaction through the employment of problem-solving techniques. Still, an administrator will know that family lives are being negatively impacted. One administrator described a day that “really sucked” after discovering he would have to “slash every single nurse’s hours,” (65S, Michael). This frustration was described as dissatisfying because he perceived the situation as his fault rather than a systems-wide problem. He relayed the burdensome encounter with one nurse upon her discovery of the cost of lost wages:

“A nurse looked at me and said, ‘I went home and did the math. You know, this is going to cost me \$300.’ And I said, ‘No, it’s going to cost you \$345. I worked it out and I’m sorry.’ You know. And that’s a huge chunk.” (65S, Michael)

When it is necessary to improve a facility budget, nursing home administrators must often cut personnel altogether. This aggravation impedes a logical, working system of giving consistent care and maintaining stability within a team. It takes a toll on an administrator’s morale when the system-wide burden is both illogical and stagnant in terms of finding a solution. An extremely trying situation was described by one administrator who felt a logical solution, investing in marketing to increase census, was overshadowed by an inability to change a system that preferred to keep cutting costs and staff positions. She described the frustration of “cutting into muscle, not fat” and seemed particularly downcast about her authoritative barriers to creating positive change, (120S, Bridgette). Interestingly, an inability to “figure out all the

pieces” inferred both the specific “pieces” (low reimbursement and cutting already low-wage personnel) contributing to largest frustration as well as the perceived constraint upon her authority and control. An analysis of her interactions with other players revealed an additional constraint upon her autonomy to make her own budgeting decisions in a strained relationship with a system-wide accounting department. Accounting, she relayed, would express only that “the numbers are what the numbers are!” She in turn processed this as an affront to collaboration and as a personal rejection, explaining, “they don’t want to work with us.”

Another threat to consistency is free-will turnover among personnel. An administrator in a highly competitive urban area described the “only frustrating thing” as difficulties in establishing a strong team when “in 3 months, you’ve got 30% different people,” (137S, Gabe). Drawing staff away from smaller companies, bigger companies are able to offer better, more competitive benefit packages. A rural administrator confirmed this frustration and attributed the problem to a wider societal climate of changed demographics and stressors, specifically, the changing instability among women 18-25 who formerly comprised the primary group of caregivers. From her standpoint, a changing society results in a constant search for workers in a relatively “isolated” situation.

Competition is not only felt among personnel, but among the case-mix and population of residents walking in the door. Tied to low reimbursement rates, census is the driving force behind the consequences of slashed hours and lower wages. Older facilities may not have an edge when newer buildings come into town, a comparison detailed by one urban administrator in saying: “They can offer cable in the rooms, they

can offer phone service in their rooms,” (45S, Scott). It is a constraint in its own right, and the competition has all but forced some facilities to close. In order to stay open, one administrator illustrated the extreme measures required of her:

“And our census dropped because of an assisted living company, and we went from having an average of 35 residents to 20-25. And it wasn’t feasible to pay...a director of nursing and an administrator. And so what I’ve done basically is I’ve done both jobs for the last 3 years,” (17S, Lucille)

Census drives everything, according to one administrator, and a certain vulnerability is present because of its power. As an administrator noted in referencing the precarious nature of impressing and hopefully securing new residents, “You can turn people off as they come up this hill!” (101L, Chuck). In terms of satisfaction, it is the stress on the building and the labor consequences of low census that are most important. As one administrator explained, “If your census is low you’re not makin’ the money, you’re not going to be able to retain the staff,” (27H, Kayla). Additionally, facilities tied to larger hospital systems sometimes experience a “dumping” of costly patients. A hospital-based facility will save the hospital money by accepting the patients into less expensive care, but in turn the facility may suffer greatly for its unbalanced case-mix. Being part of a larger system is a financial burden in cases like these, and satisfaction decreases among administrators trying to survive the pressures caused by an outside force. It is the burden of perceived unreciprocated respect between a facility and a hospital or a feeling that the benefits of a tie with a nursing facility are not appropriately valued that may most agitate an administrator’s overall satisfaction in light of “patient dumping.” It may also be perceived that the system is already inequitable, as hospitals are well-staffed and can afford their personnel.

Finally, patient dumping infringes on an administrator's value set in terms of moral obligations. To desire the rejection of costly, indigent patients because of a permissive hospital system may create a guilt-ridden defense of a facility just "trying to do the right thing".

#### Robbing Peter to Pay Paul: On Corporate Budget Practices

"A good money line." That was the response of one participant when probed for specific items that "please the boss," a factor that contributes widely to her overall sense of satisfaction. The same administrator described very costly clients changing the scene of the nursing home with expensive machinery and specially oversized beds. A \$6,000 wheelchair was described by another administrator, who finished the tale of system-wide waste with the perfect punchline: "The family sold it at a garage sale," (101L, Chuck). With such increases in costs and models of wastefulness, perhaps it is only natural that corporations choose to nickel 'n dime their administrators. Still, this big brother mentality draws life from facility managers who want nothing more than to run their own buildings. They would also like to receive necessary facility items on time, and the budget process in corporations may involve a number of timely steps. In one company, anything above \$500 requires "hoops" at the corporate level. This includes obtaining three bids, then sending a request to home office for a regional director's signature, an owner's signature, a finance manager's signature, and a building controller's signature. This might be a 2-3 week waiting period before receiving a response, and this is all done prior to ordering so that the arrival of a desired product might not show up for two months' time. This affects not only an

administrator's satisfaction but also staff satisfaction, perceptions of which may in turn affect an administrator's satisfaction again:

“The staff think that if they immediately need something, if there's something wrong with their lift, they immediately want a new lift...they think if, since you're a business, you can just go out and buy everything,” (45S, Scott).

Corporate practices in relation to budgetary expectations may be perceived as illogical and potential hindrances to quality of care. The illogical logic related to corporate expectations is described as “robbing Peter to pay Paul,” a direct reference to activities such as transferring funds from a food budget to a laundry budget to make up for a perceived loss (40L, Tom). The dynamics of corporate fiscal accountability seem legalistic to already conscientious facility managers. Dissatisfaction has been correlated with a restraint on administrators' abilities to come up with their own solutions and an almost insulting, bureaucratic stupidity of “tying hands” and dictating where money should be transferred without regard for consequences. The following example describes the frustration that follows from organized stupidity:

“...it's kind of stupid. Supply budget, sometimes you'll end up having a heavy month where you'll order for a couple months. You're over that month, you're late the next month. It's kind of like look, for the year I'm under. For the year, type of thing. Get off my back.”

## PERSONNEL CONSTRAINTS

Personnel Constraints, the fourth construct of Constraints of the Job, was given its name to represent the realm of non-budgetary, non-corporate constraints that occur in trying to run a nursing home operation and subsequently affect the satisfaction of administrators. Company structure, building conditions, census, and case-mix are all

important to the success of a nursing home but only one is completely indispensable with the influence to make or break a facility in a moment's time: human capital. A dynamic element of operations not yet directly addressed is that of human capital, or personnel issues. A nursing home operation cannot by nature succeed without dependable human resources, and the dynamics of humans habits and characteristics often leave this resource wanting. In turn, this lack of dependable resources can affect an administrator's sense of control.

#### Human Capital: Conditions in the Workplace

The current industry, with no additional resources to pay highly competitive wages, pays its direct caregivers to do a difficult job for McDonald's wages (62L, Manny). The work conditions are very demanding and the type of work (toileting and feeding, for instance) is not glamorous. The administrator has direct influence only when physically present, and a physical presence is only possible for limited hours during the day. As one administrator explained: "Today I came in at 7 to get caught up and I was hit with uh, with people clocking in and smoking in the smoke (area) and uh, and CNAs not cleaning the bed liners," (65S, Michael). Thus, when a strong work ethic is not innate, frontline staff workers find ways to negotiate their roles differently in and out of the direct presence of the administrator. Other staff may be hesitant to confront the issue of a "lazy" worker or to "rat 'em out" because of fear that he or she will be responsible for picking up that worker's unfinished job. This same administrator noted that he hates being mad or irritated at staff, but "the biggest issue is that we have a pool of CNAs who just don't do their job." This frustration in turn directly impacts the satisfaction of administrators whose perceived control of the

situation is limited to babysitting or disciplinary action. This concept of babysitting was named by a number of administrators, most of whom strongly dislike a perceived need to micromanage individuals on a work team. The following point details the perception of "babysitting" as a necessary administrator-related task:

"You know, like this person gets too many phone calls, or you know, this person takes a break on the couch upstairs, or just little things. But they add up and they take a long time and they definitely affect the morale and the resident care, so." (41S, Leigh)

A lacking work ethic is sometimes compounded by a problematic and troublesome personality. Individuals who "think they know it all" but fall behind in actual performance, or that feel an administrator is against them, may affect an administrator's confidence about hiring decisions (127L, Minsun). One administrator in the study relayed a situation from which she left altogether after going through one personality problem after another. The dynamics of drama (routine acting out in anger or tears) were more than her personal threshold could allow. Other administrators expressed a notion similar to the "one bad apple" concept, using phrases such as "cancer breeds cancer," and "80% of your problems come from 20%." Personalities were particularly dissatisfying to administrators when accompanied by certain unappreciative attitudes or adversarial motives, such as attempting to have a new administrator fired, (60H, Susan). With such high turnover among administrators, staff may embrace philosophies of "seen 'em come, seen 'em go." This may decrease respect held for the position of administrator, fostering chaos, mistrust, or devious behavior upon a new administrator's commencement. One study participant observed, "you will always have people that, you know, want to see you fail," (137S, Gabe).

Other problems may be rooted in personnel's perceptions that personal value has not been properly acknowledged. The stereotype expressed in the following illustration is an interesting commentary on the effects of repetitious problem areas and their direct effects on administrators' perceptions:

“Oh, I think a lot of it is the types of personalities in the industry. They're just, often negative and feel like they're owed something, I think. I mean, we try to do things for them all the time but it seems like it's never enough, or it's not fair (imitates whining).” (41S, Leigh)

Besides work ethic and problem personalities, there are a number of other factors contributing to workers' inability to accomplish required tasks in an expected timeframe. Personal lives of workers may take priority, and while sympathetic, this may impact the stress level of administrators. In a nursing home environment, reaching a certain hour of the day does not guarantee that a patient's care has been sufficient. The separation perceived between “home life” and “work life” is never salient for administrators who must constantly consider their facilities and residents first. As one administrator who routinely stayed long hours (often “taking up slack”) described the choice of prioritization, “I'm really thankful that I'm not in a situation where I have to make those difficult decisions between, what does the law require, what does the patient need, and what does my family need?” (37L, Alice).

Administrators in very rural areas noted the sociological correlates of rural living as particularly influential on staff and subsequent work. Workers in lower-income housing situations may struggle with the additional demands of an at-risk lifestyle. As relayed by one participant, “They're going to call in because they got a black eye and they don't wanna have to come to work,” (42L, Shawna). This impacts attrition and

eventually good nurses may be terminated because of the inability to handle life stressors and work at once. For the same administrator, this particularly burdensome situation impacted her satisfaction negatively as she perceived her attempts at intervention as failures; however she realized that she was not able to empower the nurse to change her life conditions, that she would have to do that on her own:

“Um, I think it was really distressing to me this last week, uh, when we finally had to let a nurse go. And she’s a very good nurse, very good nurse! And a very nice person. But, um, she had so many personal problems at home and hadn’t really worked through them, and we’d given her chances and chances and tried to support her and we’d given all of the staff had donated money...and we just did everything. And it still, it just didn’t work. ...And it was really hurtful for me.”  
(49L, Shawna)

#### Sinners in the Trenches: On System-Wide Vulnerability

Occasionally the human element will fail a building in a devastating way and all members of a team will take a very hard hit. As one administrator explained in remembering an act of violence upon a dementia patient, “I’ll never forget the patient, never forget the aide,” (37L, Alice). An intentional act of violence or sexual aggression against a resident, for example, may procure the wrath of the media and a surrounding community, and certainly no less by protective services. While safeguards are in place to protect residents, administrators acknowledge a perceived vulnerability in the face of the human element. It is a situation no one wants to know personally. One otherwise exemplary paradigm of a “work ethic” problem was in fact a much more serious window into the world of false protections and a lurking system-wide vulnerability. The following illustrates the deconstructive questioning and concern for

regular patient care of an administrator upon disclosing that he had found a staff member charting on a dead person:

“She just wasn’t aware that the person had died two days before...the issues that raised for me was, if you don’t know this person’s not even in the facility number one, and dead number two, that means you’re just charting and you’re not even looking. So how many other people are you doing that with?” (137S, Gabe)

Administrators also fear the more day-to-day concern that a single error on the part of a staff member could result in a loss of license for the facility. Phrases such as “one nurse going brain dead” spoke to the perceived trivial nature of such an incident paired with the unpredictable and infallible nature of the human element as well as the punitive nature of a regulatory system in need of reform. Similarly, families are empowered to call the state with the faintest hint of a suspicion of wrong-doing, and a full survey may result from the investigation. As one administrator explained, “We’ll even have thought we addressed that very well...And they’ll still go ahead and complain to the state,” (119L, James). Litigation is another ever-growing cultural norm that may spawn from suspicion of a wrong-doing, and was confirmed as a direct hit to administrator satisfaction. In explaining that Oregon is racing to the top as far as lawsuits are concerned, the following explanation was provided by an administrator who has dealt with lawsuits at each of her facilities:

“People sue when there’s absolutely nothing, no validity here, and they do it on purpose! ‘Cause they know the companies that are bigger, like this one, will settle for something smaller, because of the labor hours it takes to take us all into court.” (13H, Marie)

### Terminations: Duck and Cover

Administrators strongly embrace a family-oriented team dynamic in the work place. To then have that source of pride threatened by a problem personality after much hard work may result in a permanent decision to terminate an employee. On the whole, terminations were perceived as very dissatisfying for administrators; however, they were not perceived as comparable in dissatisfaction to ethical constraints and some administrators perceived their success with terminations as not dissatisfying. When a termination has been decided as best for a resident and a facility, an individual will first be put on suspension for the sake of an investigation. This suspension is viewed more as a company formality, as most employees will have already received numerous chances to improve in a typical situation. Administrators then call a member in to meet with a final check prepared, and the conversation tends to be “short and sweet,” (57L, Elizabeth). Occasionally terminations go awry with strong, negative, emotional responses (versus “good” terminations, such as in the case of an administrator who received a thank-you letter from a former employee) or with intentions to sue. Due to the possibility of lawsuits, some companies ensure that their administrators do not provide reasons for terminations, as anything quoted could be used in a case. A short-tenured administrator described a case in point, concluding that a complacency has set in for him concerning issues of unemployment:

“She knew why she was fired. I mean, she’s been told. Over and over again. Uh, I’m not allowed to tell people why I’m firing them. I just say goodbye. ...she got a letter quoting me, as quoting me all through it and I was like, oh crap, we’re going to court on this.” (65S, Michael).

### Strategic Thinking: Four Gallons of Ice Cream

Human capital is a most valuable asset to a nursing home, and strategies for patching conflicts, strengthening teams, and moving forward are critical to a home's success. Personally surviving in the industry is also key, and so administrators have strategies and techniques on hand for their own survival. Some will say to avoid pressure you must "hire well," while others will cite making change as quickly as possible as most important. Another administrator suggests coaxing rather than forcing change. Another still does not allow staff to approach his office with problems until after 9 am, and the same administrator will strategize to improve the morale of a team with "four gallons of ice cream and syrup and whipped cream" in the break room on a day that is strangely not going well. This type of optimism and care for staff quickly reminds the research that altruistic personalities, when successful in the helping role, may find deeper satisfaction than they ever could without the presence of challenges. Solving problems is an extremely highly rated item of success. Perhaps this flip-side to the fore-mentioned personnel challenges explains why dynamics of satisfaction are far more influential to the overall perception of employment satisfaction in the ever-changing role of administrator.

### ETHICAL CONSTRAINTS

#### Corporate Games: Shades of Gray

Sometimes truth is stranger than fiction. In the world of Enrons, Tenets and HCAs, illicit activity is neither new nor terribly surprising, even in healthcare. While much of corporate activity is black and white, spelled out in the books and laws, ethically tricky arenas consist of a grayer, blurrier set of guidelines. Judgment

decisions are made in bad taste. Someone is berated in a phone conversation and mistreated. Another is fired for personal reasons of convenience. Another yet watches profit seep out into other facilities within the same company while attempting to keep creditors at bay. Mission statements may be written in good faith, but nursing home ownership is not exempt from poor judgment nor bad behavior. This behavior in turn produces discontentment and perceived unempowerment among nursing home administrators, leading to a wider construct of dissatisfaction. Ethical Constraints was thus assembled out of dimensions represented in moral values, produced by very different narratives relayed closely in confidence by Oregon administrators (and to further protect the confidentiality of participants in this study, identifiers of all types will be removed from the following sections). Over half of the study sample relayed perceptions and experiences of breeches in practice-based ethical standards. One administrator expressed the level of dissatisfaction caused by an unethical situation as a 10 on a dissatisfaction scale of 1-10, five points higher than her rating of terminations. The following text illustrates this administrator's perception of an ethically tricky situation:

“Doing something that I’ve been directed by my boss that I find not only distasteful but unethical, unnecessary, and yet I have to do it. ...And I don’t feel they’re right, but there’s no place for me to go. I mean, there’s nobody to appeal to to change that decision, it’s gonna be the same. I’m going to be dictated to do something. So that’s the least satisfying.”

The following table describes the spectrum of ethical constraints disclosed in interviews with administrators in Oregon (Table 4.). Most accounts referred to past positions.

TABLE 4. GAME-PLAYING IN THE NURSING HOME INDUSTRY

TYPES OF CORPORATE GAMES	EXAMPLES
Fiscal Mishandling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Families overpay; money not returned</li> <li>*Ownership "floats the bills", "adjusts" files</li> <li>*Ownership streamlines funds from profitable building to other buildings, unbeknownst to administrator</li> <li>*Company pays off administrator</li> </ul>
Unfounded Terminations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Company replaces successful administrator with romantic interest</li> <li>*Company has facility personnel fired for political reasons against administrator's wishes</li> <li>*Administrator is scapegoat; fired to get an easier survey, to appease political figures in company, or after ownership makes financially poor decisions</li> </ul>
Deceptive Management Techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*owner investigates facility for problems through coercive questioning of staff; staff feels forced to provide unfounded negative information</li> <li>*companies budget facility's census lower than it is; staff at unsafe, inadequate levels</li> </ul>
Improper Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*corporate berates administrator over phone when facility not at fault</li> <li>*company lies to administrator</li> </ul>
Politics, Power, & Pride	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*consultant and corporate figure play "good cop, bad cop" to manage personnel</li> <li>*administrator must appease consultants to avoid termination</li> <li>*administrator must "brown-nose" after pointing out corporate error</li> </ul>
Survival Techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Corporate requires capital requests to make purchases; will play game of repeatedly denying requests; administrator sneaks under wire to purchase facility items</li> </ul>
Questionable Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Bonus structure designed to pay out 2-3 times regular salary</li> <li>*Company A loses present building lease to different bidder; purposefully disrupts operation of and reputation of building before switching with Company B</li> </ul>

### Off With Their Heads!

A common dissatisfier combining moral values and items not enjoyed was that of unfounded terminations. Named hypothetically or in true form in five of thirty interviews, terminations without right cause were perceived to occur because of corporate interests imbedded elsewhere, in either self or company. Unfounded terminations affected administrator satisfaction in both of the following cases: 1) administrators themselves were terminated, or 2) facility personnel were terminated at the corporate level without an administrator's approval. Perceived by administrators as acting with selfishly vested interests, company figures may terminate on unfounded grounds with motives rooted in personal lives, political relationships within companies, or financial performances. Interactions among players in politically heated "good ol' boy networks" (though an unfitting name in an industry of more than half women) may dictate decisions to terminate based on petty or childish personal preferences. In one narrative, quality of work had been compromised for a number of direct line staff due to a particular nursing director. Rather than terminating the nursing director, friend to a powerful individual in the corporate structure, the administrator attempting to terminate the nursing director was fired. In an industry jokingly referred to as "in-bred," playing the corporate games is a vital part of survival. In some circumstances, administrators are left totally powerless to secure their own positions. Administrators may be used as "scapegoats," as corporate "lobs of their heads" to convince the state that proactive change has been made in a building. Personal lives of ownership may also inform their decisions to terminate when personally linked to others in the industry:

“...he had sent me flowers telling me what a great job I had done. And uh, the flowers were still on my desk and very much alive when he came to me and said his girlfriend was back in town and needed a job as an administrator. And I lost my job.”

### Cooking, Floating, & Bribing

Not all corporate games that emerged from the data were perceived as very dissatisfying. Questionable practices, such as one company's attempt to undermine the success of another company, were sometimes viewed simply as challenges (and to most administrators, challenges contribute to “high” and “very high” satisfaction ratings). Other games may have been perceived as annoyances or corporate stupidity, tinkering not at all on the line between remaining in a position and leaving. The personal threshold of administrators was indeed more defined in the face of fiscally unethical dealings. In one narrative, an administrator discovered that resident bills had been overpaid and the money was not returned to families. Upon bringing attention to the finding, a rationalization was presented by “the office” explaining that unless requested from the families, it was not the company's job to inform families of overpayment. An instance of discovering mishandled accounts also led to cooking the books or “adjusting the files” to produce a new account, while an administrator was told simply to do nothing, that the company would “even it out.” A reference to “floating the bills” was disclosed in another narrative:

“The worst thing that a company does that I have experienced is, uh, they float their bills. Most all companies float their bills about 90 days because the reimbursements for Medicare, Medicaid isn't a lot. Then, the worst I've had, is a company that I worked for...And they would never pay their bills. They would just move from, like, you know, they'd run up a big bill in food

and then they'd change food companies. ...it was like, you would spend 3 or 4 hours every day just fielding creditors."

Corporate decisions about how to spend money was also a source of frustration for some administrators. In "cookie cutter" corporate models, it may be assumed that each facility should run in a nearly identical fashion. Profits may be shared across companies. For a profitable facility to begin receiving calls from creditors, however, the issue of streamlining funds out of a successful building and into other facilities becomes ethically questionable. For one administrator doing very well on accounts receivable, this scenario "just didn't feel right." Another corporate spending decision was shown to impact satisfaction negatively, though it in fact resulted in higher administrator wage. A world exists, according to one administrator, in which noticing and raising a questionable issue would strangely result in a \$5,000 raise. Being mysteriously fired from the same company was later perceived as "the biggest blessing."

#### Consequences: A Loss of Control

Ethical violations compromise confidence, trust, comfort, autonomy, and satisfaction. Terminations based on preferential treatment may have "devastating" consequences for administrators, increasing personal insecurity within the industry as a whole. This personal threshold of administrators in turn contributes to an understanding of some cases of turnover. Such breeches in morality relieve administrators of perceived decision-making power and create a sense of obligation to follow through with a corporate superior's wishes, further increasing the weaknesses of a hierarchical system. In asking an administrator to "not say anything," an

administrator may feel his or her power to act or to find an appropriate solution compromised. In “not having anyplace to go,” a sense of isolation may keep an administrator in an emotionally unstable position. Administrators may also feel the weight of the legal system bearing down on a system largely out of their control:

“And so, you know, that was a very uncomfortable situation because you know, at the time there were all kinds of things going around about administrators going to jail for this and that and so (laughs). So that’s, ho gee!”

#### Strategies: Few and Far Between

Administrators are motivated to create change and make a difference and yet seemed surprisingly unempowered throughout the narratives when handling one of the least satisfying part of their work. Strategies to manage perceived immoral activity in the first phase included bringing the issue to the attention of the company in a proactive and helpful manner, an interior solution. After receiving pressure to stay out of the situation by corporate use of rationalization, bribery, or verbal nonchalance, the second phase usually went one of two directions: 1) do what was asked by the superior, or 2) leave the company. Social support may have been absent in some cases due to the illicit (and thus, socialized perception of “secret”) nature of the unethical behavior, though one administrator acknowledged receiving help. Ironically, the only strategic empowerment administrators may have experienced during ethically trying times was the realization of their abilities to simply walk out the door:

“I’ve just never stayed if I didn’t respect the person. If they lie to me then I don’t...I try to measure every hill that I climb on, but I’ll pick a very, what other people might think is a very small hill to actually die on.”

## **RESULTS: NURSING HOME ADMINISTRATOR SATISFACTION**

### **CORE CATEGORY: MEANINGFUL WORK**

As the realm of dissatisfaction intellectually enlightened an entire discourse on constraints to autonomy, the realm of satisfaction opened a different sort of world, less investigative and more humanistic. Warm tea would have seemed appropriate as I was often invited into the warmest parts of individuals' working lives, places where purpose and meaning were assigned to seemingly menial day-to-day tasks. Laughing and sometimes near tears, favorite memories of residents long since gone produced a tacit understanding of the real work for a nursing home administrator. The bureaucratic otherness strangely became the "outside" and had no place in meaningful narratives. In the same way that bills do not describe a home life, exterior constraints to the job in no way inform the core of the nursing home familial experience.

In assessing relationships beyond identification of satisfying dimensions, administrator satisfaction seemed to follow two different patterns throughout analysis and eventually constructed the foundations for the two dominant categories of satisfaction that emerged from the data: Working Conditions and Meaningful Interiors. After further analysis, it was realized that both categories, deeply intertwined, laid the foundation for satisfaction's core category: Meaningful Work. The working conditions of administrators which contributed to satisfaction included the following subcategories: Residents, Staff, Company, and Challenge. Meaningful Interiors captured the richer, descriptive elements of satisfaction in the nursing home environment and included the following two subcategories: Task Significance and Achievement. While Working Conditions reflects a number of seemingly base, if

incongruent, pieces of daily life, the various categories of working conditions truly reflect the elements of satisfaction *on the job*. Additionally, an important component of understanding Working Conditions is its direct relationship to administrator empowerment. While some employment conditions would be measured as stagnant, flat dimensions that simply “are” (in the sense that we often do not create our own working conditions), administrators are not simply affected by conditions but they rather impact their own working conditions through their very creation or determination. These categories ran all throughout the transcripts in an almost predictable fashion. Working Condition’s richest narratives arose in the subcategory of Residents. What makes this particularly valuable as a contribution to the research and to corroboration of the core is its interrelated distinction, as the nursing home resident-administrator relationship is both a work condition and a meaningful interior. Meaningful Interiors additionally presented dynamics unique to workers in this field. The hope of this work is that the reader will feel the weight of the satisfaction as compared to the dissatisfaction so very elemental to this position. Attempts have been made to present both satisfaction and dissatisfaction in their richest cores; however, the fact remains that most administrators are highly satisfied in their positions. This next section is an attempt to find out why.

#### WORKING CONDITIONS: RESIDENTS

##### Two Sugars and a Cream: Social Meaning in Negotiated Resident Intimacy

In some companies, blowing off steam requires a cigarette and a balcony. In the nursing home industry, escapism may be achieved by walking down the hall. The same administrators who asked me, “Why would anyone want to do this job?”

following horrific tales of a punitive landscape are the same administrators who know full well why *they* do this job. Rudy, new to his latest facility, strategically begins to learn that the gentleman down the way likes to smoke every other hour with a coffee in between. If the day is unfolding in a less than optimal way, Rudy will employ his tried and true technique, meeting the resident on one of his predictable smokes. This works to “put you in a little bit better of a mood,” (28S, Rudy). Kayla, another young administrator, also takes a deeper interest in her residents. Her favorite part of the day arrives in the early evening when all other day staff have left the building. She knows her residents’ drink orders, who likes cocoa and who wants two sugars and a cream. This is her time to refresh and relax, and she dances for the residents in a silly, happy fashion. For administrators like Kayla, working among surrogate grandparents brings all the joys they would deeply miss anywhere else. Kayla, like Rudy, benefits from resident interaction on less than optimal days. The following illustrates her ability to reframe a stressful, state survey experience through an opposing emphasis on comfort and encouragement received from one of her many “grandmas”:

“...and it was kind of a stressful day ‘cause our state survey had (been) in, that day, and I was standing there and she had her arms out like she was going to hug me. She was like, you know, standing like that (laughs) and so I walked over and I said, I needed one of those. So she hugged onto me for, you know, a good couple minutes and kissed me on the cheek. And she was like, I love you. ...it was just a neat thing.” (27H, Kayla)

Whereas I had no visual verification of corporate neglect or bureaucratic demands save a few three-inch thick binders of policies and regulations, administrators who offered tours before and after interviews allowed me the privilege of a bit of human triangulation. Upon walking the halls with Michael, for instance, we

stopped in to visit a sweet lady who did not immediately recognize him. "It's Michael, the administrator!" he screamed. She caught on slowly and was precisely as warm as I can imagine he knows her to be, with or without immediate recognition. This same administrator, not unlike Rudy and Kayla, described intimate interaction with his residents as a strategy for coping with more difficult aspects of managing a facility:

"Well, you know, it's like after the meeting where I yelled at everyone, which wasn't really yelling for me, it was just being really stern. I came and threw my stuff on the desk and went out and hugged residents. ...Um, you know, I go and I sit and I talk and listen to what they have to say." (65S, Michael)

Intimate touches and words were described in numerous accounts with Oregon administrators, including most often smiles, hugs, kisses, hand holding, and verbal love/appreciation. For one administrator, a special interaction approached when a resident, for whom grooming was "extremely difficult," allowed her to cut his nails. This was particularly satisfying to her because as she explained, "it's knowing that I have that special...that he's going to let me do it, type of thing," (36H, Ruth). For a number of administrators, residents themselves are the most satisfying part of the job and most significantly impact their day-to-day work. Interesting in sociolinguistic fashion is the fact that administrators were more likely to associate time with resident-based satisfaction. Phrases such as, "the long-lasting satisfaction," "always from the residents," or "satisfaction we get every day," illustrated a more meaningful, more permanent satisfaction and also contrasted well with temporally-founded constructs of dissatisfaction.

Satisfaction was also relayed, most notably among long-tenured administrators, in intimate knowledge of the rich histories that accompanied each individual. The

satisfaction derived from these narratives spoke to an interplay between the two constructs of Meaningful Work, Meaningful Interiors and Working Conditions.

Without these conditions, I dare say administrators might be hard to find, but in fact these are the common conditions of a meaningful, rich life work. One long-tenured administrator admitted to having his “favorites” in each nursing home, folks with whom he enjoyed learning about in terms of their personal histories: “...all you have to do is sit down with them and they’ll tell you where they’re coming from,” (101L, Chuck). Alice, another long-time administrator, went further with her hobby of genealogy on more than one occasion. During a county-enforced placement reassignment for one resident, she successfully reconnected him to his first cousins after family lost track of him in the system fifteen years earlier. Alice was also providentially prepared to face Becka, a long-time resident who “loved men,” when she one day knocked on Alice’s office door with the sounded cry of a lost foundation: “Nobody knows me! I don’t know why I’m here! Nobody even knows me!” Laughing as she told this story and clearly back in that place, Alice described opening a drawer, removing Becka’s file, and telling her about her mother and father, a few other collected thoughts about her family history. Becka slowly responded, “Well, I guess ya do know me!”

Rich life histories enhance the satisfaction of administrators who embrace the familial and familiar aspects of a home-like work environment. The concept of turning a negative to a positive for residents was a dominant aspect of achievement. Success stories in a challenging work environment create a satisfaction administrators can relish and appreciate, even when not clinically involved in the residents’ successes.

A good death, for instance, might be a source of pride for an administrator who can do no hands-on care but who can photograph the family and comfort the weary. This again exemplifies a relationship between the two constructs of satisfaction's core, a "meaningful working condition" of sorts. Administrators know they work among excellent caregivers, and they know their buildings are successfully arranged to handle varieties of challenges. They are empowered in many ways to create their own working conditions (choice of staff, choice to form relationships with residents, choice to build intimate connections and to put residents first). Knowing that residents are happy to be in a facility, that families feel residents are safe and sound, that residents are individual characters with rich, life histories, and that positive outcomes are achievable speaks not to issues of case-mix or census but to the empowerment experienced through hard work, long hours, and efforts of love. The human dynamic as a working condition could have it no less complex way.

#### WORKING CONDITIONS: STAFF

##### Cows Are Easier, But This Here Takes People

Human elements of working conditions are no small factors in the culture of nursing homes, and administrators described worlds of both tumultuous personalities and familial bonds in our interviews. Administrators were not slow to name dissatisfying constructs related to personnel; however, the constructs usually did not end as simply stagnant and negative situations. Indeed preposterous in an industry that survives on people, administrators embraced the empowerment to select their own employees, to create their ideal working situations and conditions through often hand-picked staff. The effort involved in managing people was in no way trivialized, and

yet administrators will be the first population to relish satisfaction in creating positive change in staff-related working conditions. The conditions are not always easy, but managers can always make them better (even if through terminations). As one self-proclaimed “old cowboy” explained, “I can tell ya, managing cattle is a lot easier than managing people! ...But that’s part of the challenge...I do love managing,” (62L, Manny). One condition, while not a dominantly mentioned part of satisfaction (rather, perhaps not a glamorous part of satisfaction) was in simply having sufficient staff. Some dimensions of satisfaction related to staff represented philosophical goals of administrators. Administrators delighted in the growth of their staff, for example. On the other hand, a need-based acceptance was quite critical to the satisfaction of other administrators. For one administrator relatively new to her facility, the best part of her satisfaction thus far was the level of perceived acceptance she experienced from her staff members. The attitudes of personnel directly impacted administrators overall and this was in part related to their perceptions of playing significant roles in maintaining or improving that condition within the staff. One administrator relayed the effects of successful training of CNAs in the following example:

“I mean, right now we’re just finishing up the CNA class and, you know, so I’ve got like 8 new people that are just totally jazzed about what they’re doing. And they’re making 8 bucks an hour. And they love it, you know. So, I mean it’s, yeah, it’s satisfying.” (123H, Deidra)

Positive staff-related working conditions were satisfying to administrators in that the consequences were salient and productive. One administrator explained that having “happy” staff members resulted in “just a big cycle” of positive consequences:

“...as an overall, if the staff are happy and they’re well taken care of, and, and we treat them well, they’re going to pass it directly on to the residents much easier. Um, and it’s, it’s just a cycle. You know, like we get staff are happy, the residents are more likely to be happy. And I don’t have as many families complaining to me, or residents or staff. It’s just a big cycle. ...which makes things easier on me if they’re happy.” (19S, Brian)

Staff-related satisfaction stems often from a security/trust in a staff’s independence and positive work ethic. For very busy administrators, it is satisfying to have dependable department heads who do not necessitate micromanaging (a mirror image of overall dissatisfaction from necessitated micromanaging). As one administrator explained, “Uh, I’m really lucky. My dietary manager’s wonderful and has managed that department without my interference and done beautifully,” (17S, Lucille). This freedom from personal “interference” is liberating for overworked administrators, and may generate a higher-level interaction between key players based on this trust, providing “loneliness at the top” a short respite. The one relationship described time and again as critical to success was the position of director of nursing. Administrators rely heavily on good DONs and appreciate their abilities to “answer their own questions,” (19S, Brian). Feeling that the staff is comprised of “the best there is” is another contributing factor to satisfaction, and conversations with administrators remarkably and consistently left the impression that they were highly satisfied with current staff selections. For Shawna, a faith-based facility administrator, having “the best there is” allows her to “rest assured that if I ask one of them to take care of something, they will do it. And that is job satisfaction,” (49L, Shawna).

Good communication is another key for administrators rating satisfaction correlated to staff in the workplace as high. When lines of communication are open,

administrators feel more positive and secure about what is going on in the building. One strategy used to negotiate this openness was mentioned multiple times in interviews: the open door policy. While occasionally negative in that workloads sometimes increase due to disruptions and that too much time in an administrator's office may mean insufficient time doing a job, administrators use open-door policies to keep informed, to foster a comfort level with staff in suggesting direct communication is an option, and to measure current conditions in the workplace. According to Brian, a relatively young administrator, "...figure if they're not coming in that often then they must be pretty happy, for the most part," (19S, Brian). Other strategies used to positively impact staff, which in turn impacts administrators, is through a reward system involving routine or special occasion events or acts of appreciation. Maintenance of appreciation and the ability to use proper management styles with different personality types informed the administrators' views of their own personal success, contributing in large part to overall satisfaction.

#### WORKING CONDITIONS: COMPANY

##### Gone Are the Days: On Puppet Liberation

Company success stories ran rampant throughout this study, a very interesting insight after pouring through texts on corporate-based dissatisfaction. From wonderful owners to personal ownership, the overall impression with which I was left suggested that almost every participant had found a place to call home in their current facilities. Particularly interesting was the fact that most everyone had prior, negative experience on which to base their current satisfying claims. Of course, I appreciated this fact for methodological reasons. Most everyone had multiple experiences with past

companies (which largely informed my education on dissatisfaction) before arriving, and “arrived” they certainly had. For Brenda, an urban administrator, having control in her current position through personal ownership was in satisfying opposition to her days as a “puppet administrator,” (42L, Brenda). I asked her at one point in our conversation why she stayed in her position. “Probably because, there again the control,” she replied. She further explained that she could control the tasks leading to progress independently versus creating the success for someone else. James, a non-owner, was administrator of a free-standing facility, in which his satisfaction, too, was tied to the ability to make decisions and implement actions quickly. Autonomy to make choices and to interact among key players without constraint results in the desired consequences of high job satisfaction. The following illustrates one such example from his facility:

“Well, one of our RCMs on her particular wing wants a medication aid for that particular wing. That’d be a new position. So she wrote a letter to us requesting that. And uh, so you know, we were able to meet ownership, DNS, myself, uh, yesterday, and talk, and personnel, and talk about that issue. And we have a game plan, we’ll be meeting with those people tomorrow. You know, meeting with her tomorrow. But I mean, that’s the kind of thing, I mean I don’t know how that would flow with another organization. You know, some other organization might say, well, you know, that FTE’s not in the budget. Or, we gotta, you know, make a formal request to somebody up, way up the line. It’s just, I mean, really, I think that’s the thing I’ve enjoyed most here. Is you know, just the decision-making ability. I mean, uh, we can make decisions within 30 minutes that other people might take 3 weeks to make that same decision.” (119L, James)

### Value-Based Authority

Ever-present in this study were expressions of the satisfaction found in high perceived levels of autonomy. In the popularity contest for autonomy, personal ownership dominated among those who had experienced personal ownership. Intimate structures (free-standing and smaller companies) were also well-loved. One might have imagined that the substantive finding in ownership-based satisfaction would have resided in issues of actual interaction, such as number of calls per day and communication styles. These things were not off the map entirely. In getting past the intuitive, non-owners like Ruth provided information critical to understanding that satisfaction is also a byproduct of shared core values. The autonomy to manage a facility should be matched with a moral sharing of deeper purpose or significance, which should (ideally) in turn support the notion that management should have the desired autonomy. In a simple example, Ruth illustrates the relationship between positive structure and shared core values:

“Out of the different companies that I’ve worked for, the different ownerships that I’ve worked for, the different facilities that I’ve worked in, that this one’s the best fit for my personality. Um, it’s very family-type oriented. It’s a very small, intimate building that um, you know, allows actual hands working with the residents. Um, I have incredible ownership. Incredible ownership, the best I’ve ever had. It’s about making, you know, every business needs to be profitable, but it’s not always all about the dollar. It’s really about quality and want to make darn sure that we’re doing a good job.” (36H, Ruth)

Many interviews pointed to this value-based core condition as central to the appreciation for and satisfaction with certain ownership. Miles, the administrator of a large chain facility, called this shared core a “company culture,” (76H, Miles). For

Miles, long-term experience in the industry directed his decision to “never work for anyone else” upon joining this particular ownership. He has worked with bad and good in the industry and praises intensely the corporate values present in his current working climate. He has high accolades for a company that realizes in caring for staff, residents are cared for; and that in caring for residents, quality care is prioritized. This core value then “enables and empowers those of us in leadership positions to put our focus in the right place,” and he emphasizes the provisions made to actually act on the core values versus simply what he termed “spouting the wonderments.” Chuck, a long-term administrator, shares this same conviction to only work within specific value-driven cultures (101L, Chuck). He compares a smaller company, the type that most suits his value-based preferences, with a bigger company that would wonder why he had not climbed the corporate ladder. Susan, the administrator of a small corporation, shares this conviction about working within certain value-driven boundaries (60H, Susan). She claims to have found the “company of her dreams” in finding a company that actually believes in its mission statement. Similarly, another administrator perceived the support of current ownership to be ethically comfortable, a notion encompassing a value-driven support system. She reveled in the idea that with this company, she needed not pontificate potential involvement in the seedier side of company business. Structure, in the end, is empty without value.

## CHALLENGE

### The Unboxed Life

The final construct of Working Conditions is probably the most germane to the actual category. When working conditions arise in the mind, most any employee

likely considers pace, variety, and level of difficulty among first thoughts. When asked about job satisfaction in this study context, a seemingly less direct reference to such basic categories, the job as a “challenge” arose over and over in predictable fashion. Reinforcing the concept of the position as a challenge were the subcategories of pace and variety, not separated in their own rights only because administrators tied them together so often under the slightly more dominant rubric. Where variety arose, an excitement about its difficult implications would follow. When pace arose, it was in reference to keeping up with challenges. Administrators enjoy the type of work that a challenge implies, with its unpredictability, competitive nature, and positive end results. As one new administrator explained about a very chaotic recent day in response to a question about unexpected parts of the job, “it just felt like I was in a snowstorm. Driving through a snowstorm with all the snow coming at me. ...I thought it would be a little more...sort of in boxes or whatever,” (52S, Tara). Upon further inquiry, I learned that even for this new administrator the perceived stresses of the job in fact contributed to her job satisfaction. Rudy, another youngish administrator, attributed his job satisfaction to “a different challenge every single day,” summing up the sentiment of many and corroborating the intermeshed relationship between challenge and variety (28S, Rudy).

#### It's Kind of a Sickness

For a number of administrators, the satisfaction derived from chaos and complexity could be most likely attributed to a combined personality type and predictable gratification brand of optimism. For individuals who used phrases such as “competition,” “fun,” and “adrenaline rush” to describe the condition of challenging

work, the personality likely fit the job. For Laura, the optimism of expected outcomes shapes the vantage point of her working world. Boasting a 99% success rate on changing negatives to positives, Laura describes one of the most satisfying aspects of her work:

“One of my most favorite things, and it’s kind of a sickness I think, is when people come in really mad. And, if I can diffuse them and calm them down, that is one...I, I love being able to do that! So, where some people might say, Oh, I hate angry families! I like the challenge of it! I don’t potentially make them angry so I can have that challenge, but I don’t mind that.” (70H, Laura)

In the case of Deidra, I probed for a reason when she described her attitude toward work as “passionate,” (123H, Deidra). Her answer entailed an intellectual stimulation unrelated to pace and more closely related to solving a mystery. She described the dynamics as parts of a “puzzle” in which the end goal was to provide good care and the pieces were poor reimbursement and a highly regulated environment. Making the pieces fit was one part of the satisfaction; though she later confessed it was the further consequence of her success, that of fun competition (“in a sick sort of way”) between colleagues regarding profit, that was additionally enjoyable. For James, it was the “rapid fire decision making” and “just trying to stay one step ahead of all the challenges” that was “kind of an, a little bit of an adrenaline rush,” (119L, James). Kayla concurred that administrators “put out a lot of fires,” a fact of which she loves and finds highly satisfying. As she explained, she “thrives on, um, I don’t know if you’d call it chaos...but just stressful situations,” which “fits” her personality (27H, Kayla). She enjoys being in the middle of things. With such relished chaos in entertaining style, administrator satisfaction is clearly tied to the

enjoyable side of a good, rollercoaster-esque, thrill-seeking daily experience. It is perhaps no wonder that people do not survive forever in such a high-paced, rapid-fire environment.

#### Making A Silk Purse Out of A Sow's Ear

Of course for anyone to survive in this environment, the thrill-loving conditions of fast-paced work must be tapered by the ability to actually solve problems thoroughly and well. This requires discipline and cautious prudence in terms of fiscal dynamics and multiple other factors on the job. The consequence of having a challenging environment shapes the meaning of administrators' own roles, and administrators gain confidence over time in successfully navigating in often troubled water. This type of "negative to positive" problem-solving usually speaks to the financial aspects of work, though no more significant to overall satisfaction than the "negative to positive" dynamic discussed in the construct of Residents. It is here in the world of problem-solving that administrators have the long-loved chances to shine. Susan likened the condition of improving a building to making a "silk purse out of a sow's ear," a phrase I had never before heard (60H, Susan). I needed clarification. She described turning a challenging building around and suggested that she liked "to be in a ditch. And then comin' out of the ditch and everybody sayin' oh, look at this!" It seemed so easy to her, and kindly she revealed her strategy learned long ago. When the emergency call comes at 2 o'clock in the morning, she simply asks the caller for her options. According to Susan, they always know what to do. Unlike administrators, they simply do not want the decision-making power.

## MEANINGFUL INTERIORS

As could only be assumed in a person-based inquiry, categories of interior meaning (that is to say, provoking a deeper sense of one's richness within an organization) run mightily throughout all categories of satisfaction. It is not the purpose of this next section to "separate them out" as if their own islands, as that would be thoughtless and without regard for truth in data. However, due to sheer enormity, it is the intention of this section to magnify the interiors as they were magnified to me in interview after interview. Without a deeper sense of significance, so few, I am convinced, would do this job. This assessment of significance is tied directly to feelings of achievement. Isolated meanings they are not, for the layered parts create an interior whole.

### When Work Works: The Loveliest Orchestra

"Um, I just love when it works. When my employees are happy. You know, when, when, when things are going right. When things are orchestrated correctly. Uh, I love it when we have difficult family that turns out to be just, just a family that adores us. Um, we've taken a problem and we've managed it and we've made what is historically a hideous experience into a positive experience for a family. These things I love!" (65S, Michael)

A tremendous dynamic occurs in most homes, a picture not commonly painted in the media, in which staff, department heads, and an administrator successfully orchestrate an entire world of caregiving dimensions. The pride of a "system" would be a gross misnomer in a culture truly so proud of its "family" and of its "home." Successes are many, though perhaps not as frequent as administrators would hope for in light of constraints to the job. When work works, per se, administrators feel deep

pride for not only their personal contributions (they are not a selfish breed) but for the successes represented by staff and families. Administrators have a right to feel this pride as they are well aware of the mountains of obstacles faced to get to such a point. This is indeed deeply satisfying. Tom expressed that one of his biggest satisfactions was in “just probably running a good, solid facility that’s got good satisfaction with the residents, happy staff. ...And, there’s a lot done good, I guess,” (40L, Tom). For James, system pride stems from both the familial aspect of the job and from the wider acknowledgement of that achievement by state surveyors. They notice the resilience in their low turnover of key personnel and James knows, like a proud father, that successes are tied to the human relationships he has impacted. He describes the chemistry of which he is so proud, saying he knows the phrase is “overused sometimes but we really do kind of create this little family, type thing,” (119L, James). Similarly, Marie enjoys the part of the job that allows her to have an impact on staff and their lives. She describes the pride of low turnover (only five in roughly five months’ time, she says) and of “helping them to grow as people individually as well as growing professionally as well as seeing, um, their skills improve which ultimately turns around and provides for better care,” (13H, Marie).

#### Paradise Lost: Reputation Found

Within the construct of pride lies a deep desire for respect. A perception of respect will contribute to esteem and will have as a consequence the great reward of pride. All administrators would like to feel respected, and in a time when nursing homes are quite often disrespected, along with their managing bodies, it is a challenge to secure. I am back now, sitting with the Old Cowboy, as he shares with me the

changes in societal perception he has known all too well. For the man who claims if he did not love this so much he “could be fishing,” a once highly reputed position is now largely disrespected. He admits that he enjoys having respect and tries not to “betray” it. At the same time that the global respect for the position has changed, Manny counters its disappointing effects: We have a great reputation among ourselves, ‘cause we know the good we do, (62L, Manny).” This interior meaning must sustain him, and does, as he considers himself still extremely passionate about his work over all the long years.

Another administrator light-heartedly thinks back to her first two years on the job. She is still relatively new at this, but has gotten a handle on things, especially in the last year. When she arrived on the scene 6 years and some months earlier, the facility was in total disarray. I asked her how the community reputation ended up affecting her and she suggested that she had cried for two years out of fear that she had ruined her reputation (17S, Lucille). She laughs as she inevitably recalls the battle, so proud now of a completely different scenario: “But it’s, we’ve got so many improving and I’m proud. Um, I’m proud of the relationship that we have. It’s been a long, hard haul.” Alice is also proud, both of her success with state survey and of her personal reputation’s influence on resident choice. She illustrates the importance of a good survey on a facility and on herself through comparative diction:

“Um, we have people coming to us because they have enjoyed working with us in the past. We have patients that have come to us because of our personal reputations. Not the facility’s reputation! Okay. And that was nice, okay. But I got part of that reputation because of the deficiencies (through survey). Okay. So it’s, it is that, you know, if you’re a world scholar, type of thing, or if you’re Miss America or maybe The Bachelor or

whatever it is, um, those are things that can impact um, your facility and you as an individual for a long time to come.” (37L, Alice)

Administrator pride produces a sense of satisfaction, and the exteriors that play into various levels of satisfaction are numerous. For some, a high census and low turnover are great successes. For others, these factors may be taken for granted while larger-scale success stories, if deeper stories, create the meaning that results in their feelings of accomplishment. All facilities share pride in excellence of care, perhaps more so through the “report card method” after strict state socialization has been implemented. Long-term administrators sometimes take great pride in passing contributions to the next generations of management. Deep senses of “jobs well done” accompany problems of all sorts solved, and will be further portrayed in the next section.

## ACHIEVEMENT

### It's all just smoke and mirrors

The hours put into a labor of love are not without consequence to family life and personal independence. Administrators are always on call, every day of the year. They may be called during vacations and may fight the system only by giving in, forgoing vacations altogether. As one administrator explained, his wife has been “totally a widow” for the last 20 years (62L, Manny). Interestingly, a sense of absolution is imbedded in descriptions of these sacrifices. Without a satisfaction tied to actual performance, the sacrifice required of the job would be an inane affront to independence. Analysis of the data exposed a strong performance-satisfaction relationship as administrators in the profession procured much satisfaction indeed

from on the job labor. For some, tasks were satisfying because they were done well; for others, it was the nature of the job that was satisfying. James explained that after leading successful brainstorming sessions, he “feels really good” and comes away “feeling really fulfilled,” (119L, James). Stories of greatness were often described from long since past experiences, though still ever-salient to proud administrators. Manny further described a moving scenario of turning a “nasty place” lacking caring owners into a strong facility with strong financials and a waiting list. To him, this was a “super achievement” and his “true success story,” (62L, Manny). Susan relayed a success story (“That was satisfying!”) in which after only four months of taking on a very challenging building, the facility made money for the first time in history. She also described the satisfaction resulting from learning “the best way to handle something” on the job. Probed for additional detail, she explained the following in her typical tongue-in-cheek fashion:

“Cause it works sometimes! And when it works, it’s wonderful! You know. Then (you’re saying) wow! How did I do that? You know, because you, it builds your self-confidence so that you think, the minute they find out that this is all done with smoke and mirrors and you don’t have the faintest idea what you’re doing, then they’re going to fire you. Ya know. So every time, you know, you’re pulling over the wool over their eyes one more time because something actually worked! You know, you say, ah! I’m getting better and better at this!” (60H, Susan)

Getting “better and better” at a job was a repeated notion in the satisfaction related to job performance. Personal growth, or learning to manage and improve specific tasks, had an element of interior reward. For Alice, work at her new facility was turning out to be “exhilarating.” She appreciated immensely the knowledge that

someone of her age “could learn so many new things so fast!” (37L, Alice). Also a long-tenured administrator, Brenda similarly enjoyed the educational benefits of working which contributed to growth, rating her satisfaction as “very high” and “on a 1 to 10, I guess probably a 10” thanks in large part to continual education (42L, Brenda). Yet another long-time administrator, Miles further verified this correlation between continual growth and satisfaction. He jokingly suggested that some people might find his perception to be “backwards,” but that the longer he’s in the job the more satisfaction he experiences: “And the more I gain, and the more I learn, and it happens every single day, the more satisfied I am,” (76H, Miles). He further explained it is the “equipping” he is able to realize in order to handle “whatever comes up” that makes the growth satisfying. For Bridgette, a newer administrator, the tasks with which she still struggled, such as the financial pieces, were in fact the tasks with which she felt the most success. She light-heartedly described this as “weird” and gave the example of a success she experienced in marketing, one of her favorite jobs:

“We used to only have about average twenty (fict.) skilled people per day, and now we’re, like, up above thirty-one (fict., increment same). So that, I think, I think that says a lot. And I just, I feel like I’ve done really well. But I feel like there’s still more that we could do.” (120S, Bridgette)

Jobs well-done informed feelings of achievement, personal value, esteem, and improvement, allowing administrators to see themselves sometimes in newer, brighter lights. Marie explained that her leadership skills had always been present, but were improved since entering administration. She suggested that now “I’m able to detach more, to use more objective, uh, rationale, in making decisions,” (13H, Marie). Perhaps in qualities always “there,” successful job performances allowed

administrators to experience the fullness of unique, intrinsic giftedness; to see themselves in the lights in which they'd always hoped to be seen.

## SIGNIFICANCE

The best part of face-to-face interviewing may just be in the laughing. To connect on a level of fast friends imparts such grace to a researcher, and this detectable construct of interviewer-satisfaction may be the catalyst for respondents' sharing their lives and their richest meanings. It is in a dimension such as significance that the narrow scope of a work becomes somehow disappointing. Were this an appropriate outlet for collecting life histories, distinct narrative after narrative would paint the loveliest of stories on meaningful engagements, interactions, and loves. A small portion are relevant to overall patterns found in satisfaction, and it is with both pleasure and hesitation that I now introduce the reader to a culture of significance, deeply ingrained in every aspect of satisfaction. This is only an entrance into a much deeper realm, and in choosing a select few examples I am omitting so very many possibilities.

### I Could Be Fishing!: On Serving A Higher Purpose

Numerous administrators relayed phrases encapsulating the bigger purpose behind their work. Terms such as "mission," "impact," "more to this than," and "difference" were used to direct the explanations of satisfying and meaningful job factors. Comparative analysis revealed that administrators with faith-based natures or environments might be more likely to embrace the global purpose of running a nursing home as a "mission," and that this perception of a higher purpose might itself work as a strategy for coping in difficult times. There was no noted difference of any

significance, however, between any administrators in terms of the perceptions of residents as the focus of the higher purpose. Serving a purpose and focusing philosophically on a higher purpose are only slightly distinct, and all administrators shared in the understanding of having a significant reason behind actions and beliefs. Satisfaction was also universally understood from the elements of significance described in this study. Kayla discussed the higher purpose of “making somebody happy,” a rewarding end goal making worthwhile “the battles that you’re doing with profit law statements and budgets and the state and federal government,” (27H, Kayla). This contrasts only slightly with the perspective of Shawna, who suggests that in her faith-based company, “we remind each other, right up through the ladder, that there are greater things. There is a mission,” (49L, Shawna). This support system based on shared values is satisfying for Shawna because it is in stark contrast to “the everyday, run-of-the-mill, backstabbing, make-the-dollar facility.” Manny, the long-time cowboy administrator, joked about the fact that if he didn’t love this work, he could be busily fishing. He also used the term “mission” to describe the work and suggested that this was likely the reason God allowed him to keep living. If the job is not viewed as a mission, he philosophized, obstacles will be that much greater. In obeying this conviction to live selflessly, he defines his life purpose:

“I’ve laughed all my life at people who go in search of themselves, and they climb the Himalayas and ... Well, until I looked at the inner me... well, you know, to me, uh, I guess as a guitar player and an entertainer, it’s what I saw in other people’s faces, in other people’s life, that made me. And searching the inner me is a waste of time. Because it’s what I can do out there that really demonstrates what I know. ... like I said, for me to see the satisfaction in somebody else’s face by something

I'm able to do for 'em, there's my reward. There, there is me!" (62L, Manny)

### A Good Death

Administrators are sober about the fact that in their facilities, people will die. A medical model would suggest that death is a failure to be fought. A nursing home, while often now rehabilitative, adheres to a largely non-medical model in end-of-life care, and meaning will sometimes lie within the capability to ensure that an inevitable death is as comforting and meaningful an experience as possible. An administrator sometimes finds her or himself in a surrogate role in end-of-life situations. Meaning may instantly be imparted if a resident asks something of an administrator in these times, or simply in the final interactions. One administrator fondly remembered walking in on a resident eating molasses, and she just "knew" she was not going to die that day. Michael, a nurturing personality, found meaning and satisfaction in the attention he was able to give to a woman and her family in the woman's last hours.

"But while they were here, you know, me and the staff focused on the husband who was really suffering. And this woman was so elegant and, and, and in that week of passing away, she knew she was going to die. Uh, her sisters were here and I worked with them. We have, I have a book that I've started giving away to families. Some families don't need it . . . And the day before this woman died, she was up, we have this sort of a chair, rocking chair in there, and she's sitting there. You know, tucked away in her husband's arms and the kids came in: Do you have a camera? And we have a digital camera and went to get it. And then I said, oh, wait, wait, wait, wait! She had these comforters on and the soft side was the colorful . . . Let's turn it around! And got 'em looking really pretty. Got a lovely photograph of the two of them together and she died that night. And it, it was wonder-, you know. And that made me feel good." (65S, Michael)

### The Number One Thing

The residents of long-term care give meaning to the lives of administrators in many ways. From opening windows into souls, some for the last time, to allowing an administrator to use his or her gifting in purpose-driven manners, the needs of residents are key components of administrators' abilities to engage in meaningful work that informs their overall satisfaction. For Brenda, serving a higher purpose is achieved by successfully "keeping the doors open" in a constrictive financial environment. For Tom, it is fighting for the underdog that brings so much satisfaction. He relayed a chance to engage in meaningful work in the following story, after a homeless would-be resident with co-morbidities was dropped from OHP after failing to pay \$18 in premiums:

"And here's a, you know, a brittle diabetic, very blind, in his 40s, homeless, a lot of problems. Been in the hospital every 2 weeks for about 3 months. And I guess I'm a person, if I think there's a person that needs coverage then I don't take no for an answer. Uh, so after getting nowhere with the local government people that said we're sorry, that's just how it is, I called the governor's office, got one of his assistants, by the end of the day had permanent coverage for him. That kind of stuff, I guess I, I like to fight for the underdog. That's good." (40L, Tom)

To bring meaning to another life is the central theme in the construct of Task Significance. For some, that is achieved through helping staff to grow and through aiming to achieve a core, strong team. For others, it is in an occasional fight for the underdog, a good death, making a facility safer, or comforting a family. As Alice explained, it is in treating a person with decency and respect, in allowing a family to "let go" with security, and in making the choice to love another not out of obligation,

but out of free will. As Miles explains in summation and representation of administrators' perspectives on working with purpose:

“It’s having a, a very real, or having the power or ability to have a very real positive impact on such a large group of people. And if you do your job well and you, you know, do the best you can with what you’ve got, I mean, that’s a silly way to say it, I know. But, but you can really see very real and positive differences in people’s lives, on several different levels. So, that by far is the number one thing.” (76H, Miles)

### On Autonomy and Meaningful Work

Emergent from the data, a theory on administrator satisfaction will now be discussed. This work was very fruitful in progressing toward a richer understanding of dimensions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in the nursing home administrator role in Oregon. Results discussed the wholes as their individual parts, and in deriving theoretical meaning from the findings, the parts must now make sense of the whole. Autonomy, as emerged time and again across the spectrum of dimensions, is the dominant life force behind both satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The presence of autonomy creates conditions for attaining higher meaning in work, and meaningful work is the impetus for satisfaction on the job via achievement and significance. Likewise, the absence of autonomy obstructs an administrator’s path to achieving meaning in work, and thus detracts from overall satisfaction. Concisely stated, constraints to the job impede satisfaction through the obstruction of freedom to do meaningful work. Four dominant constraints (Budget, Bureaucracy, Ethics, and Personnel) obstruct meaningful work for nursing home administrators through their impediment to direct autonomous power.

In seeking negative examples to this theory, one might question the authenticity of the theory based on the job constraints' true magnitudes. If nearly the entire study sample was satisfied overall, what evidence is there for dissatisfying constructs' actual impacts on globally perceived satisfaction? Verification of the theory is largely helped by information gathered about study participants' job histories and present ownership contexts. For nearly all administrators (regardless of categorical strata; no significant differences were found among the three original subpopulations, though the purposefully sampled variety was appreciated throughout the exploration), current ownership was very satisfying. Shared values and empathetic support characterized the population's perceptions of current ownership. Additionally, nearly all administrators had past experience with negatively-perceived ownership, at which time dissatisfaction was based on constraints to the job and often contributed to the search for a new environment. As described in the Results, this population relayed an overarching sense that they had "arrived," and a corporate culture of value-driven designation of appropriate autonomy (resulting in authority to engage in meaningful work) was to thank for present perceptions of high satisfaction.

#### On Triangulated Verification: Screening Survey Data

A basis for concluding anything at all is helped by alternate or supportive findings using variant methods. In the present study, phone screening included two questions about most and least satisfying aspects of the job. These questions were generally answered very quickly and were open-ended in design. While short in nature, they still managed to simultaneously capture a wide range of categories and representation of the most dominant satisfactions and dissatisfactions in the industry.

TABLE 5. PHONE SCREENING DATA: MOST & LEAST SATISFYING COMPONENTS OF THE NURSING HOME ADMINISTRATOR POSITION (N=72)

MOST SATISFYING COMPONENTS	LEAST SATISFYING COMPONENTS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Residents (N=22)</li> <li>2. Making a difference (N=15)</li> <li>3. Work relationships (N=9)</li> <li>4. Helping others (N=6)</li> <li>5. Authority to ensure proper care (N=5)</li> <li>6. Positive impact on staff (N=4)</li> <li>7. Variety (N=3)</li> <li>8. Seeing negatives turn to positives (N=2)</li> <li>9. Good company (N=2)</li> <li>10. Management (N=2)</li> <li>11. Feeling appreciated (N=1)</li> <li>12. Ability to create financial success (N=1)</li> <li>13. Authority to make decisions (N=1)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Budget constraints (N=18)</li> <li>2. Regulations (N=12)</li> <li>3. The labor shortage/turnover (N=8)</li> <li>4. Politics/bureaucracy (N=5)</li> <li>5. Difficulties with staff (N=5)</li> <li>6. Always on call (N=5)</li> <li>7. Variety (N=3)</li> <li>8. Corporate micromanagement (N=3)</li> <li>9. Paperwork (N=3)</li> <li>10. Terminations (N=2)</li> <li>11. State survey (N=2)</li> <li>12. Time constraints (N=2)</li> <li>13. Upset boss/state/families (N=2)</li> <li>14. Working two jobs (N=1)</li> <li>15. Death (N=1)</li> <li>16. Reputation (N=1)</li> <li>17. Retiring (N=1)</li> <li>18. Fear of losing license (N=1)</li> </ol>

Oregon administrators included in this screening data (N=72) enjoyed the following aspects of their work (and this represents the entire range of responses; additionally, combined answers were not used as such; rather, the first response was included in analysis; see Table 5.): positively impacting staff (N=4), seeing negatives turn to positives (N=2), feeling appreciated (N=1), having decision-making authority/enjoying management (N=2), helping people (N=6), having relationships with/working with different people (N=9), making a difference (N=15), ensuring proper care (N=5), having a good company (N=2), variety (N=3), residents (N=22), and being able to successfully pull the financial pieces all together (N=1). The relational side of the job took a sweep over many other aspects of work enjoyed, with general relationships comprising 22% of the responses and resident-related

satisfactions accounting for 31% of the data. Making a difference accounted for 21% of the data.

Least satisfying responses included the following categories, again capturing the full range of dissatisfactions (N=72): working two jobs (N=1), firing (N=2), regulations (N=12), survey (N=2), budget (N=18), politics/bureaucracy (N=5), paperwork (N=3), difficulties with staff, such as bringing personnel up to standards (N=5), death (N=1), reputation (N=1), always on call (N=5), a feeling of no time (N=2), people upset, such as boss/state/families (N=2), the labor shortage/turnover (N=8), retiring/will miss (N=1), fear of losing license based on potential for one staff member to make an error (N=1), and micromanagement from corporate office (N=3). When combined (politics/bureaucracy, survey, regulations, and paperwork), general bureaucracy accounted for 31% of the data. Dissatisfaction with the budget followed at 25%, and the labor shortage trickled behind further at 11%.

Particularly interesting to this study is the fact that two of the constructs of core categories are presented here as the most and least satisfying aspects of the job. In a qualitative study, it is tangible to assess the depth and interrelationships behind constructs and to saturate theoretical constructs and dimensions. Quantifying data is a misleading art in many ways, as discussed in earlier sections. This method of triangulation supports the study finding's theoretical premise in that resident-based satisfaction (and thus, Meaningful Work) accounted for the highest amount of satisfaction among half of all practicing Oregonian nursing home administrators, and general bureaucracy (and thus, Constraints to the Job) accounted for the highest

amount of dissatisfaction. As this sample was randomly collected, it can be assumed that this method of verification can be trusted to support the present project's results.

## TENURE

### So Why Do Administrators Stay?

In learning about dimensions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction through narratives and discourse, a number of references to tenure in the industry emerged from the data. The deconstructive process is unpredictable in nature and grounded theory methods allow for exploring emergent ideas. This small diversion contributes not to the theoretical constructs of this work but to the overall interest of the particular research base in wondering if we now see anything that we did not see before. Again, administrators were only questioned formally about satisfaction and satisfaction's correlates. References to tenure were made in general conversation or in biased understandings about the foundation of my own research interests. Participants took stabs at their rationales for staying in the industry when others have left, or for staying with one particular company after finding appropriate fits. Four main categories fit the data: Mindset, Strategies, Structure, and Conditions. No verification is possible, as scant and inconsistent probing on the topic does not lend to formal conclusions. Still, the topic is salient and the exploratory findings worth mentioning. Further study might assess these staying points in their fuller meanings. The following table (Table 6.) characterizes references made in the study to self-assessed reasons for staying on the job.

TABLE 6. EMERGENT FINDINGS ON SELF-PERCEIVED RATIONALE  
FOR TENURE IN THE INDUSTRY

STRATEGIES	Designate Responsibilities Roll with Punches Sense of Humor Confidantes Diversions
ATTITUDES	Death Happens Passion for This It's My Life Selfless Not Easily Upset Faith Sense of Obligation In the Right Field
STRUCTURE	Strong Team Good Company Social Support
CONDITIONS	Got Easier Balance Authority/Control Good Relationships

## DISCUSSION

### Dimensions of Job Satisfaction & Dissatisfaction

The dimensions of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction were largely informed by the theoretical framework. Using the MSQ as a paradigm for open coding provided a valid and reliable alternative to using the more general coding paradigm associated with grounded theory (interactions among players, strategies, consequences, and conditions). I assessed job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction according to the MSQ-based paradigm to better evaluate the dimensions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction within an occupational satisfaction framework and to evaluate the degree to which satisfaction and dissatisfaction were mirror images of each other. This was done in light of Herzberg's Two-Factor theory (1968). Herzberg suggested that satisfaction and dissatisfaction have different causes, and that motivators lead to satisfaction whereas hygiene factors lead to dissatisfaction. What resulted from the exploratory findings suggested that satisfaction and dissatisfaction are occasionally but not usually mirror images of each other, largely supporting Herzberg's original claims.

Frederick Herzberg's Two-Factor theory explained that we usually think of satisfaction and dissatisfaction as each other's opposites. He found that they were not mirror images, and this research corroborates that theory. The opposite of dissatisfaction with the budgetary environment is not satisfaction with the budgetary environment but *no* dissatisfaction. Herzberg also found that achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility, advancement, and growth were all motivators, the primary causes for satisfaction. Enumeration of this study's findings suggested that the most often cited satisfiers in this study were achievement (N=28), coworkers

(N=28), residents (N=23), and task significance (N=20). Others' satisfaction, HR supervision, and facility satisfiers tied with 17 administrators' responses each. This does not mesh perfectly with his theory, although the nursing home environment is in many ways unique and "the work itself" is truly a human element encompassing relationships, which he would otherwise consider hygiene factors. Corroborating earlier findings from value fulfillment theories and Herzberg's hygiene-motivation theory, this study confirmed that fulfillment of values through meaningful work is very satisfying to nursing home administrators.

The most often cited dissatisfiers comprised the regulatory/punitive environment (N=20), issues with with co-workers (N=20), violations of conscience (N=18), lack of autonomy (N=17), and specific dissatisfying tasks within work itself (N=17). State survey and the budgetary environment followed closely (both at N=16). Herzberg's hygiene factors (dissatisfiers) included company policy & administration, supervision, relationship with a supervisor, work conditions, salary, relationship with peers, personal life, relationship with subordinates, status, and security. Thus, the hygiene-motivator theory does not perfectly explain this study's findings, though still useful for grounding the notion that satisfiers and dissatisfiers are not each other's opposites. It was interesting to note that salary was not particularly satisfying or dissatisfying with this population. Associations among these dimensions gave much insight into satisfaction and dissatisfaction among nursing home administrators in Oregon.

Enumeration is merely suggestive of possible trends and is primarily useful for confirming the presence of dimensions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in the

research. The current study was quite a good fit with the MSQ paradigm, though categories of advancement, authority, and independence were not best fits with this data. Additionally, the MSQ was too limited to ascertain task significance, a significant antecedent contributing to 20 persons' satisfaction. Intrinsic factors were noteworthy satisfiers and extrinsic factors were noteworthy dissatisfiers, with the exception of moral values. Self-actualization through the fulfillment of higher needs and through growth were clearly demonstrated as expectations, values, and desires in this population so an intrinsic-extrinsic model does fit the present findings.

#### Short, Long, and Hopper: Differences Among Tenures

There were no significant differences between overall job satisfaction ratings stratified by tenures. Hoppers were not truly "hoppers" in the sense that they did not fall into the personality-based characterization of persons who do not stay in one place. This was further verified by the satisfaction and desire to stay in current facilities expressed by administrators in the "hopper" category. Further research might confirm that this construct is problematic. In terms of the predominant study findings relating to the study's core construct, Meaningful Work, there were no overtly meaningful differences observed between tenures. It is interesting to note that short-tenured administrators (N=3) were the least likely (Hoppers: N=10, Long-Tenured: N=7) to name task significance among dimensions of job satisfaction. This population possibly lacked the time required to develop a sense of purpose on the job or the time required to derive satisfaction from doing meaningful work. It is also possible that hoppers placed more importance on satisfaction derived from task significance and that a lack of task significance played a part in avoidable turnover. Short-tenured

administrators also experienced more dissatisfaction with challenges on the job (Short: 5, Long: 3, Hopper: 2) and described less satisfaction with HR supervision than the other two groups (Short: 3, Hopper: 7, and Long: 7). Short-tenured administrators were also less likely to cite the importance of moral values in terms of satisfaction and were the least dissatisfied with lacking autonomy on the job. While this study is limited in scope, further studies might assess the weight of task significance and initial challenges in correlation with short-tenured turnover.

#### Qualitative Exploratory Analysis: What New Territory Can We See Now?

In the method of qualitative theory-building, interpretation is based on practical wisdom (“phronesis”) involving judgments, decisions, values, and interests. This is desirable for the basic reason that social science is strongest where natural science is weakest (Flyvbjerg, 2001). The power of prediction is limited in complex, non-linear human situations. The primary intellectual goal of this work is not to concentrate on solving a problem, but to cast light on possible causes of the problem and causes’ core meanings. It would be impossible to derive a predictive theory from the research. As Bent Flyvbjerg elucidates in a defense for the social sciences, predictive theory must be context-free, discrete, and among other conditions, universal. The universal condition alone eliminates the human element, and certainly where satisfaction would be concerned. Rather, he suggests, “the very *raison d’être* of phronetic social science is to help society see and reflect, and transparency is a key prerequisite for this and for democratic accountability,” (Flyvbjerg, 2001). It is with the value of transparency in mind that this work is completed.

Bertrand Russell said that “The fundamental concept in social science is Power, in the same sense in which Energy is the fundamental concept in physics,” (Flyvbjerg, 2001). In fact, no position could be more germane to the dominant finding in this study. Satisfaction and dissatisfaction were not each other’s opposites, and yet identification of core themes drew the dimensions of both constructs together. In fact, each informed the other when selective coding around the cores revealed a dominant impetus to influence both states, satisfaction and dissatisfaction. That thread that wove numerous categories together was autonomy (MSQ’s “responsibility”).

#### The Mission is the Mission: On Structure

In assessing the significance of the qualitative exploratory data, I had insights into systems thinking issues of structure, process, and function. The following sections help to answer, “What can we see now that we could not see before?”

Dissatisfaction stems from constraints to autonomy. Heated antagonism, the colorful byproduct of surviving a dissatisfying work life, peppered many a story of formerly known corporate worlds. Company-related satisfaction contributed strongly to dimensions of satisfaction. It is a necessary question in a strong satisfaction-related finding, then, to consider the relationship between two such different yet satisfying pieces of the administrator-satisfaction puzzle. If ownership-related categories produce immense satisfaction, and if resident interaction produces immense satisfaction, which is the key element of high satisfaction?

The answer, I would speculate, rests in the following question: If taken away, which would be most dissatisfying? There is evidence for one and not for both (as participants have quit because of dissatisfying companies, never to my knowledge

because of dissatisfying residents), so this cannot be theoretically verified.

Nevertheless, I would liken the perceived answer to launching a spaceship from the Kennedy Space Center versus an acre in a Kentucky cornfield. Only one launching area makes sense, though either location could be used for the same purpose. The difference, of course, is in the infrastructure so beautifully and masterfully in place in the Kennedy Space Center. It has learned from painful mistakes, put time and experience into its structure, and made only decisions thought to be best for the overall mission. A haphazard attempt to create movement of greatness in a thought out (perhaps) but unteachable structure (that is, unwilling to learn from mistakes suggestive of alternate best structures) will serve no greater purpose, though perhaps an acceptable purpose. The Kennedy Space Center is where you want to launch your spaceship because the core values represented by its entire structure suggest that in no small way the mission is the mission. And so it is here, that the mission is the mission. The greatness is the people. The infrastructure creates the opportunity for greatness. They are separate but mutually dependent aspects of highest satisfaction, yet one is still the prize.

#### Function: On Buffing My Nails

Brenda, a long-tenured administrator, accused one of her assistants of assuming the work of an administrator was to sit in an office and buff nails all day. In light of this study's core findings, this brings up an interesting point. Meaningful Work informs satisfaction and Constraints of the Job inform dissatisfaction; however, a question is begged: Who in actuality is *supposed* to do the Meaningful Work? More to the point, what is the actual function of the administrator? Though the answer is

implicit in socialized knowledge of the nursing home “world,” it should not be taken for granted without consideration that administrators function best as Meaning Workers. Is the problem necessarily the structure, or is the problem in the framing of the function? Perhaps in the hiring, the framing of the position could be changed, if ever so slightly, to measure effects of our own socialization: “Bureaucratic Warrior” for hire, or “Champion of the Common Good” to start immediately. In simple reframing, we might better understand the socialized acceptance of a certain construction to which we adhere. Administrators administer, surely, but what *should* that entail?

According to The American Heritage College Dictionary, “administration” has two relevant definitions to the general core of this analysis: 1) “management, esp. of business affairs,” and 2) “the activity of a sovereign state in the exercise of its power or duties,” (1993). This provides an interesting inference to power and duty, and yet conceivably not sufficiently specific to the function of a nursing home (and thus, person-centered) administrator. I turned to the 600+ page nursing home bible for comparison and/or contrast. The third edition of James Allen’s Nursing Home Administration described the importance of a nursing home administrator acting on certain core values which would in turn instill those same practices in personnel: “If the administrator constantly moves around the facility assuring that each resident is getting quality of care and enjoying a high quality of life, the employees will probably follow suit,” (Allen, 1997). Besides this top-level function, the following other charges of nursing home administrators were listed:

- \*advocate for residents/patients/staff/facility
- \*monitor and control all subsystems

- \*develop and manage the budget
- \*manage the interface between the facility and its constituencies in the world outside
- \*monitor and manage personnel functions
- \*lead by providing stimulus on a daily basis to activities that implement the facility's goals and mission
- \*forecast and lead the facility to a successful future
- \*assist all staff and residents to understand the nature and value of change
- \*interface with owners, inspectors, ombudspersons, third-party insurers, hospitals, fire departments and the myriad of other persons, groups, and functions necessary to the facility's survival
- \*communicate with staff, residents/patients, others
- \*empower department heads and staff to accomplish their work
- \*facilitate the functioning of the facility by walking around and similar management approaches
- \*set the tone for the facility in matters of dress, taste, compassion, and concern by word and behavior, and
- \*settle territorial and jurisdictional disputes among staff, residents, and owners

This rather exhaustive list of duties (straight from the expert) corroborate the functions specified in administrators' descriptions of meaningful work and interaction, while simultaneously clarifying the role of the administrator in handling all major business affairs. More so, this elucidates the fact that in becoming dissatisfied due to the loss of power, an administrator is simply dissatisfied that he/she cannot do her/his prescribed job functions with power. This builds the case against corporate game playing, as anything that would impede the working conditions or comfort levels (ethically speaking) of administrators would inevitably harm the actual work required/desired of administrators, not simply work they would *prefer* to do. Thus, the entire profit structure might be compromised (affecting all levels in the hierarchy) because of the players' structure-informed behavior compromising administrators' abilities to perform their functions. Plainly said, the function in Meaningful Work is justified.

### Process: The Problem is the Problem

Spatial Blindness occurs, according to Barry Oshry, when we see ourselves as part of the system but not part of the whole. Using descriptions of interactions between players and structures, he describes a world of “Burdened Tops,” “Oppressed Middles,” “Righteously Dominant,” and the “Righteously Dominated,” (Oshry, 1995). Aside from describing structure and inferring conditions of interaction, these terms speak to conditions and dynamics among players that in turn direct the processes used. Of interest to the current research is the question of interaction between Meaningful Work and Constraints of the Job in terms of their effects on each other’s processes. Does Meaningful Work have an effect on Job Constraints? The data are not suggestive of this. However, Constraints of the Job were lucidly described as interruptions to the process of engaging in Meaningful Work. Even in ethically compromised situations, the process of administering was disrupted by the unwelcome process of forced renegotiation of personal roles and of strategic decision-making. The only resolution in the face of such interruptions, in fact, was occasionally the stopping of the process altogether (in the form of resignation). Meaningful Work does not occur without time, a vital condition to its success. The processes embedded within Bureaucracy, Budgeting, managing Personnel, and forming decisions in Ethical situations remove the element and freedom of time so critical to engaging in Meaningful Work. Creating one’s working conditions, again, is in many ways a unique feature of management in that Working Conditions comprise a process, not a condition. Interior Meaning, likewise, is not a stagnant condition but rather a byproduct of very specific workplace processes.

Why do we do what we do? Oshry suggests that “the ability to see the systems that we are a part of may be the next level of human evolution,” (Oshry, 1995). This conjures a relatively entertaining image of corporate worlds and survey games stuck somewhere along an evolutionary path of sticks and rocks and triangle wheels. The punitive and corporate game-playing occur for *some* reason, and yet this reason cannot ethically be written into the rulebook of fair play. This would imply that the process has been empowered by the power-holder for reasons that would satisfy the power-holder personally, or that tradition has kept process in a holding lock of “that’s the way we’ve always done it.” The problem is the problem, but what is the problem? The process has become the problem. The possibility for transformation, according to Oshry, involves first seeing the problem, and in so doing transforming a culture that embraces The Dance of Blind Reflex (dominated and dominant). The dominants will “resist powerfully” and will not understand “what the fuss is all about,” as for them there is no problem and no awareness of culture to even fix. The way out of a problem is in seeing the problem in Time Out of Time, which requires a willingness to tell the truth, to listen to others, and to give up “your” story for “its” story (Oshry, 1995).

#### The Light Shines in the Darkness: A Final Note on Structure

This project has detailed the emergent dimensions of dissatisfaction’s and satisfaction’s core constructs, relating the findings back into this work’s theoretical framework through job satisfaction discourse. Throughout the exploratory analysis, it would seem that the very nature of the nursing home industry’s hierarchical structure would directly inform the elements of dissatisfaction. Additionally, it is well known (Senge, 1990, Haines, 1995, Oshry, 1995, Gharajedaghi, 1999) through years of

systems thinking discourses that top-down hierarchies generally do not foster the model of a learning organization optimal for the realization of shared values. This, too, was my bias. As Senge explained, "We must look into the underlying structures which shape individual actions and create the conditions where types of events become likely," (Senge, 1990). This is in no small way correct, and actually informs the present (quite unexpected) realization.

A qualitative inquiry must turn its back on stereotypes and even tacit knowledge to engage in the process of looking for newness, qualities, ideas, or properties of dimensions not before seen. The parts are inspected carefully for their true contribution to the identity of the whole. When the state of job satisfaction was taken as a whole, it was in fact not the case at all that hierarchies could be blamed for mirror-image manipulation of overall job satisfaction. Theorist Ken Wilber put his finger on the exact substantive issue, explaining the presumption of hierarchies implicit to certain thought in post-hierarchical experience-based assumptions: "...the sensitive self begins a concerted attack on, and condemnation of, virtually all types of hierarchies, simply because they have indeed often been involved in horrible social oppression," (2000). He describes what we have seen here as structures both to blame for "the mess" and for presently high levels of satisfaction . . . within hierarchies! Good ownership does not, in this industry, always move away from the hierarchy. I neglected to see this in seeing only that hierarchies were often to blame for process/structure problems, and that corroboration existed for this point in examples of satisfied administrators now removed from hierarchical structures. It is quite fascinating to see now, then, that satisfied administrators were often still very much

enmeshed in hierarchical systems. Wilber further contributes to this understanding in a description of “a softer, nested fashion of hierarchies...often called growth hierarchies,” (Wilber, 2000). The appropriate delegation of power may in fact be the most salient structural point contributing to administrator satisfaction, and not the structure itself.

## CONCLUSION

### Significance

The current study has provided insight into dimensions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction affecting nursing home administrators in Oregon; preliminary information about turnover in Oregon; preliminary information about retention among Oregon administrators; descriptive information introducing the reader to the current world of nursing home administrators; and a theory grounded in data regarding the core construct of Meaningful Work. Administrators are attempting to do a very significant job in an increasingly regulated industry. The aging population will increase the demand for high-acuity care in the coming years, and environments that foster growth, opportunities for achievement, opportunities for resident interaction, healthy corporate relationships, and general autonomy spanning ethical decisions and fiscal decisions may see lower rates of administrator turnover.

Preliminary information on nursing home administrator turnover in Oregon gathered in this study suggests that a) turnover is occurring at high rates in Oregon; b) administrators do not stay at facilities for salary alone; c) administrators will leave positions if they are put in ethically uncomfortable situations; and d) satisfaction is correlated with turnover among nursing home administrators in Oregon. The punitive environment of today's administration may cost administrators their satisfaction, and may eventually cost Oregon her administrators. Adversarial survey techniques might best be reconsidered by the state, and nursing home corporations might benefit from additional attention to ethical matters. With all of this in mind, the study's primary finding suggests that administrators in Oregon are indeed satisfied in their jobs.

### Study Limitations

The present study was conducted to explore the dimensions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction relayed among nursing home administrators throughout the state of Oregon. Thirty administrators were interviewed using face-to-face interview methods, and the interviews were conducted with three strata of different workers based on earlier work of nursing home administrator turnover. This research was limited by time and money, barriers to further travel through Oregon for purposes of face-to-face verification and revision of theoretical findings. In the interest of time and place, the research was also limited to the scope of traveling to conduct interviews within a relatively short time frame of approximately two months. The modified version of grounded theory employed in this study did not have the benefit of seeing data emerge through immediate transcripts and coding to formally inform future research questions and instead used *an a priori* approach to analysis. Lastly, interviewing in an "elite" framework sometimes resulted in shorter-than-typical interviews, varying according to both unpredictable and predictable work schedules.

### Future Research

In carrying on where this project left off, future analyses might benefit from a deeper understanding of these findings through slight variations to the present methods (for example, grounded theoretical sampling with a smaller N and longer research appointments) to take what has been learned and explore the relationship between these core dimensions of satisfaction & dissatisfaction and industry turnover. A direct focus on autonomy using grounded theory would provide a framework for testing the theory presented in this work and for furthering the development of issues central to

the heart of the high turnover/low entrance present situation. Additionally, a theoretical sampling for future work should include state and corporate figure heads (district and regional managers, too) to learn from the "other side" of this one-sided story. Systems thinking might inform these decisions in choosing a focus of utility, as there are no adversaries in any of these core structures, only opportunities from which to learn and progress. We should be so lucky to have such "problems," as administrators in Oregon are highly satisfied workers even amidst the bureaucratic, regulatory climate. Policy would be well served by unbiased, judgment-free research on additional elements of state survey processes, and the state might be well-served to take an interest in our work. It is for the greater good that we put forth the effort.

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## APPENDIX

«Name»  
«Address»

April 6, 2004

Dear «Name»:

My name is Jennifer McCarthy and I am a doctoral student at Oregon State University in public health. I am doing dissertation research on job satisfaction among nursing home administrators in Oregon, and I am writing today to invite you to consider participating in my research.

With extremely high turnover rates and fewer administrators entering the field, learning about job satisfaction among currently licensed nursing home administrators is of great interest to me and may benefit the field as a whole. My research will involve face-to-face interviews predicted to take less than one hour at a time, day, and place that is convenient for you and professionally appropriate. I will use a tape-recorder to record the conversations and will then transcribe the tapes myself.

I will phone you soon to discuss the study further, to answer any questions you may have, and to inquire about your potential interest in participating. If you are interested in participating, I will then ask you 3-4 short screening questions concerning your length of stay in your current position and your time in the field of nursing home administration. The purpose of the screening questions is to be sure that the study is representing a variety of nursing home administrators from around the state.

If you choose to participate and are selected, your confidentiality will be protected at all times throughout the study and your name or facility name will never be released. I will change both your name and your facility name in the transcription of the interview. Additionally, you may stop participating at any time and do not have to answer any question/s you do not want to answer. No risks or benefits to you would be predicted, and there will be no compensation for your participation. Additionally, the audio tape from our conversation will be destroyed at the end of the study to further protect your confidentiality.

I truly appreciate your time and consideration on this matter and look forward to speaking with you soon. Please do not hesitate to contact me at any time with questions.

Best Regards,

Jennifer McCarthy, MPH