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Drifting, professionalism, and saving the world: Career narratives of the leaders of patient and public health care associations viewed from the perspective of chaos theory

This study examines the leadership of social and health care associations by means of career research. The research data consist of 19 career narratives of the executive directors of national patient and public health associations. The data were collected through interviews. The Chaos Theory of Careers (CTC) has been used as the theoretical framework. The research sought to determine how association leaders narrate their careers and what kind of career transitions and attractors can be found in their career narratives. As a result of the analysis, three career types were formed: leaders, career changers, and association workers. The careers of association leaders are multi-phased and meandering, and they contain a lot of career transitions. The careers follow the work career of the foreign attractor, and coincidences and drift play a big role. Individuality, a basis in values, haphazardness, and complexity, identified as special features of association leadership, appear in career narratives and guide career direction. The career narratives show openness to changes and readiness to react to them. The same capabilities would also be useful in other types of careers in the future.

Keywords: third-sector leadership, career narrative, chaos theory of careers