

An Exploration of Career Stages from the Causes of Turnover: Nurses as Examples

Mei-Ling Wang*

Department of Health-Business Administration
HungKuang University, Taichung County, Taiwan, R.O.C

Wan-Yu Chen

Department of Business Administration,
TransWorld University, Yunlin County, Taiwan, R.O.C

*Corresponding Author: mlw317@ms22.hinet.net

ABSTRACT

Resigning from a job is usually influenced by career-related factors. Demographic variables contribute to the causes of someone's decision to leave a job. The purpose of this study is to explore the career stages of nurses from the causes of turnover. First, secondary data regarding 750 nurses working in four hospitals was collected. This data was used to analyze the reasons these nurses left jobs, and then to develop a scale of the turnover causes. Next, a questionnaire was dispatched to 320 nurses working in five hospitals who had at some point left their jobs. This study found that "marital status" and "job seniority" can form a basis with which to recognize career stages. Job seniority of less than two years, between two and five years, between six and ten years, and of more than ten years can be used to recognize career stages. It is hoped that the results of this study will provide useful information for executives and for researchers conducting future studies.

Key words: career, career stages, turnover, causes of turnover, marital status, job seniority

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INTRODUCTION

Nursing personnel generally comprise approximately 41% of a hospital's human resources. Findings have shown that the turnover rate for nurses in the US is over 40%, which is the highest ratio when compared to the turnover rates of all other professional and technical personnel (Gorrell, 1994). In Taiwan, the nursing turnover rate is similar, between 15% and 40%. How can healthcare organizations lower the nursing turnover rate? The high turnover rate for nurses negatively influences the quality of care-giving activities and operational costs, and may lower the morale of other on-the-job workers (Dalton, Todor, & Krackhardt, 1982).

Many scholars have investigated the possible causes of nurses leaving their jobs from a variety of perspectives (Fang, 2001). Most of the literature on staff turnover suggests that hospitals have plans for the career development of their nurses. For a nurse, the decision to resign from a job is a crucial career choice. A nurse will collect the relevant information and examine the outcome of all the alternatives before making this important decision. Krau (1981) noted that most workers leave their jobs because of career-related factors, and adopted a career-related perspective to analyze and predict the turnover rate of employees. Gibson (1994) found that "a lack of career development on the job" is the dominant factor influencing the turnover rate of nurses.

Previous research has used age, organizational tenure and seniority to define the distinct career stages of nurses (Bedeian, Pizzolatto, Long, & Griffeth, 1991). However, Cooke (1994) postulated that this is a limited viewpoint and that the results may not be generalized to all types of career. This study takes into account that nursing has its own specific features, and that these features are different from those of other professions. For instance, most nurses are female and female nurses may leave or change their hours from full-time to part-time because of pregnancy. Therefore, this study suggests that it is insufficient to analyze the career stages using only the concept of time series.

Tsai and Lu (1997) found that the career development of nurses and their retention intentions are positively correlated. Plans for the career development of nurses have reduced the turnover rate by 8% and the vacancy rate by 5% in the last decade (Walsh and Weeks, 1995). Yoder (1995) indicated that when a nurse is interested in their career, they will notice the critical role of career development in the profession. In addition, the nurse's retention intention will also increase. That means that individual needs differ in accordance with changes in an individual's career; employees have distinct goals and tasks for career development at different career stages (Schein, 1980; Yeh, 2004). At the same time, career development provides managers with opportunities to reframe nurses' work experience and to increase their interest in challenging jobs (Kleinknecht & Hefferin, 1986).

In order to explore the career stages of nurses, this study proposes that leaving a job is a critical career decision, and that the causes of turnover are mostly related to career-based factors. Firstly, an analysis was undertaken on the secondary data regarding the turnover of nursing personnel who had, at some point, left their jobs, including information about the possible causes of their resignation. These data were used to develop a relevant questionnaire. Secondly, nurses were asked to recall the reasons why they left their last job and to write down their personal data (demographic variables). This

allowed this study to analyze the causes for leaving and demographic variables, and to formulate the correspondence model. In accordance with the results, the foundations for recognizing the career stages in nursing were delineated.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Career Stage

Although the opinions about using age as a criterion to distinguish career stages have been inconsistent, there is some common ground: (1) the development of career stages is a continuous procedure; (2) each stage has its own distinctive career needs and tasks for development; (3) the previous stage is the preparation for the following stage; the latter stage can be used to review and examine the results of the development in the previous stage; and (4) the stages of a career constitute a developing and continuous process that grows with age and when the psychological and physical status of an individual become more mature (Chen, Chang & Yeh, 2003; Yeh, 2004).

The stages of one's career entail an individual's continuous work and career styles, as well as the corresponding psychological status (Super, 1957). Generally speaking, an individual usually needs to go through the stages of exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement. Cooke (1994) added that the first career stage should be exploration and establishment, the second stage should be reinforcement of the established career, and the third stage is maintenance, which forms the stage before retirement. Some research has suggested that managerial and professional careers can be separated into three stages: establishment, movement, and maintenance (Morrow & McElory, 1987).

With regard to the distinctive features of each stage, Super (1957) used personal conditions and perceptions in order to measure the status of a career, instead of using age. Lynn, Cao and Horn (1995) used four categories to measure a career: age and the seniority in the organization, position, profession, and job. In terms of studies investigating nurses, Bedeian et al. (1991) used age and organizational seniority to differentiate between the career stages of nurses, and Reilly and Orsak (1991) differentiated between the career stages of nurses in terms of age and professional seniority.

Benner (1984) proposed the idea of development "from novice to expert" for the career development of nurses, and divided the stages into novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert. Judith (1995) adopted age and job seniority in order to recognize the differences between the stages of a nurse's career, including the early career stage, the mid-career stage, and the later career stage. On the other hand, Reilly and Orsak (1991) separated the career stages of nurses into four stages in terms of age and organizational seniority.

Due to the unique nature of the nursing profession, as well as the fact that the measurement of career status should be dependent on an individual's condition and perceptions (Super, 1976), this study suggests that the measurement of the career stages of nurses should be distinct from other types of professionals, the career stages of whom are frequently measured in accordance with the time series data. As leaving a job is the most crucial vocational decision within an individual's career, and factors affecting

turnover are mostly related to career (Gibson, 1994), it is possible to explore career stages from the causes of turnover.

Factors Influencing Turnover

Turnover entails an individual leaving the organization that they work for, whether for voluntary or involuntary reasons (Williams & Hazer, 1986). This study has categorized the factors which influence turnover into seven phases.

Individual Factors

The literature has stated that females have a higher turnover rate than males due to the responsibilities of childcare (Hom & Griffeth, 1995). Older workers, however, are more reluctant to leave their jobs due to increased family responsibility (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986). Also, workers with higher levels of educational achievement usually have higher expectations and competence levels, which lead to better job opportunities, and thus they have a higher turnover rate (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1982). Newly recruited nurses usually have a higher turnover intention; out of all nursing professionals; however, they are the ones who are most likely to leave their jobs (Chen, Chen, & Su, 2006).

Family Factors

Family responsibility and turnover are negatively correlated, especially in the case of nurses who are single parents or the primary income earner in the family (Hom & Griffeth, 1995). However, Duffield, O'Brien-Pallas and Aitken (2004) added that it is only when a nurse's job and his or her family life is balanced that the nurse can be retained. Of the respondents, 85% expressed the view that they have to take care of both their job and family at the same time (Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005). It is predicted that most nurses, who are mostly female, will interrupt their careers in order to get married, become pregnant, and care for their children. For this reason, family responsibilities are the most frequent cause of a nurse resigning.

Organizational Factors

Price and Mueller (1981) studied 1091 nurses and discovered that their level of attendance, organizational communication, and the justice of their salary and promotion opportunities either directly or indirectly affected turnover intentions. Judge (1993) analyzed 234 nurses, and his study indicated that there is a negative relationship between job satisfaction and voluntary turnover. Job satisfaction is the result of salary and opportunities for promotion. If a hospital has good opportunities for promotion, the retention intention rate of nurses will be higher (Kunaviktikul, Nuntasupawat, Srisuphan, & Booth, 2000).

Job Factors

Other causes for turnover include work overload, and being unable to work night shifts (Andrew & Dziegielewski, 2005). Duffield et al. (2004) indicated that being overloaded with work and working in an unsafe environment are major causes of nursing turnover. Factors affecting the turnover of nurses include the characteristics of the job, such as an unstable work timetable, fatigue due to night shifts, work overload, being too busy at work, low social status, being underappreciated, and so on. Most nursing jobs have low autonomy.

Supervisor Factors

Judge (1993) found that nurses' supervisors were one of the causes affecting their turnover. 85% of nurses had experienced conflicts with other colleagues or supervisors of which 62% then experienced turnover intention (Landstorm, Biordi, & Gillies, 1989). The level of support received from supervisors can predict nurses' levels of satisfaction and their turnover intention (Youngjoon, Jongwook, & Price, 2004). Ribelin (2003) noted that support from immediate supervisors has a greater impact on the retention period than hospital policies or work procedures.

Colleague Factors

The colleague support of nurses demonstrated correlation with the rate of retention intention. Relationships with colleagues constitute a critical factor which influences the retention intention of nurses (Yin & Yang, 2002). Relationships between nurses and their colleagues and job satisfaction are significantly correlated, and further influence, directly or indirectly, the retention intentions of nurses (Price & Mueller, 1981). Negative relationships negatively influence turnover rate (Blau & Boal, 1987).

External Environmental Factors

When an individual feels that they can find a better job, the idea of resigning from their current job will be transformed into an action (Michaels & Spector, 1982). The quantity of external job opportunities has a significant correlation with the rate of turnover intention (Hom & Griffeth, 1995). Tauton, Krampitz, and Woods (1989) noted that alternative opportunities to change occupation are also one of the causes affecting nurses' rate of turnover.

Through an analysis of the factors affecting the turnover of nurses, and demographic variables immediately after turnover, this study aims to outline the distinct career stages.

METHODS

The Development of a Questionnaire Investigating the Causes of Turnover

In order to survey the reasons why nurses leave their jobs, an analysis was undertaken of secondary data (the causes of turnover and demographic variables) concerning 750 nurses who had left their jobs in four hospitals in Taiwan. Two human resource management practitioners from two of the hospitals in question were then invited to collaborate on the secondary data. 833 valid responses from 633 nurses remained for further analysis. The data regarding involuntary turnover were abandoned, and the remaining data were used to categorize the 27 causes of turnover into seven factors: individual, family, job, hospital, supervisor, colleagues, and external environmental factors.

Two nursing supervisors, who had each worked in hospitals for more than twenty years, were invited to examine the questionnaire design. Based on the discussions which ensued with these two supervisors, certain items regarding the causes of turnover were increased and updated so that the adjusted scale of turnover causes for nurses (STCN) contained thirty-eight items. The STCN was designed in the form of a multiple-choice questionnaire so that respondents could simply, and directly, check the item box. In addition to the causes of turnover, the STCN also asked respondents to provide information regarding demographic variables immediately after turnover, including gender, age, job seniority, educational level, and whether or not they were a supervisor.

Data Collection of the Causes of Turnover

Next, this study involved dispatching the STCN questionnaire to nurses in five hospitals in Taiwan who had experience of leaving their jobs. A total of 320 questionnaires were dispatched, and 290 responses were collected. Three questionnaires were abandoned, meaning that a total of 287 valid responses were collected. In addition to the causes of turnover, which were answered via multiple-choice questions, demographic variables regarding gender, marital status, educational level and leadership experiences were requested in the form of single choice questions.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The Analysis between the Causes of Turnover and Demographic Variables

At first, a crosstab analysis was adopted to explore the relationships between the causes of turnover and demographic variables immediately after the turnover. The results can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Results of Crosstab Analysis of Causes of Turnover and Demographic Variables

Demographic variables	Chi-square	Degree of freedom	<i>p</i>
Gender	3.32	6	.76
Age	108.69	18	.00
Educational level	12.89	12	.37
Marital status	18.39	6	.00
Job seniority	160.12	18	.00
Leadership experience	24.86	6	.00

In addition, a correspondence analysis was used to transform numerical data into graphical data. A correspondence analysis uses low-dimensional graphs to describe the level of relationship between two or more categorical variables. Two-dimensional diagrams are frequently used (Greenacre & Blasius, 1994). The graph representing the results of the correspondence analysis can then be viewed as the ideal scaled-down version of the categorical data (Tseng, 2003). The scores for the causes of turnover were calculated in accordance with the reasons listed on the STCN. The reasons listed on the STCN could either receive a score of 1 or 0. A total of 800 valid responses were available for analysis. The results of the correspondence analysis showed that the model between the variables of causes of turnover and “marital status” ($p = .04$), and “job seniority” ($p = .04$) have a significant effect.

Correspondence Analysis of the Causes of Turnover and Marital Status

The results of the correspondence analysis between the causes of turnover and marital status are demonstrated in Table 2. The correspondence model of the cause of turnover and marital status is significant ($p = .04$). Table 2 shows that the inertia of dimension 1 is 0.023 and dimension 2 is 0.004, in which the levels of explanation are 84.9% and 15.1%, respectively. This indicates that these two dimensions are qualified to

explain the relationship between these two variables, and that marital status is a meaningful variable in distinguishing the stages of nurses' careers.

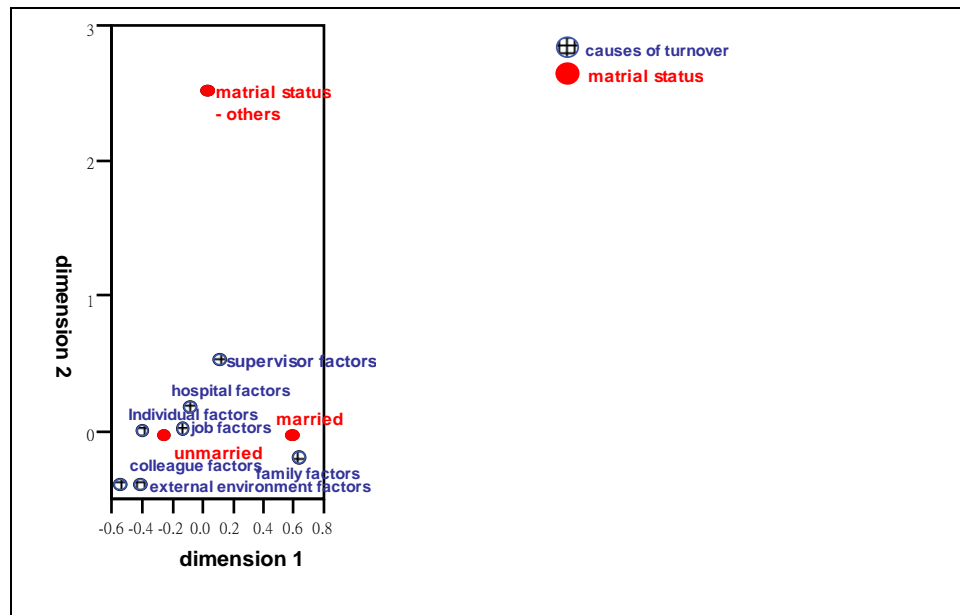
Table 2: Summary Table of Causes of Turnover and Marital Status

Dimension	Singular Value	Inertia	Chi-square	Significance	Proportion of Inertia	
					Accounted for	Cumulative
1	.15	.02			.84	.84
2	.06	.00			.15	1.00
Total		.02	21.82	.04	1.00	1.00

From Figure 1, which shows the association plot between the causes of turnover and marital status, it can be seen that:

- (1) For unmarried nurses, their turnover tends to be due to the individual, the job, and hospital-related factors;
- (2) For married nurses, their turnover tends to be caused by family-related factors.

Figure 1: Association Plot between the Causes of Turnover and Marital Status



Correspondence Analysis of the Causes of Turnover and Job Seniority

The results of the correspondence analysis regarding job seniority and the causes of turnover are summarized in Table 3. The model of correspondence between the causes of turnover and the job seniority of nurses is significant ($p = .04$). The inertia of dimension 1 is 0.02, and 0.007 for dimension 2, meaning that these two dimensions explain 74% and 26% of the information, respectively. Thus, these two dimensions can be said to be sufficient in explaining the relationship between these two variables, and job seniority is a meaningful variable in distinguishing the different stages of nurses' careers.

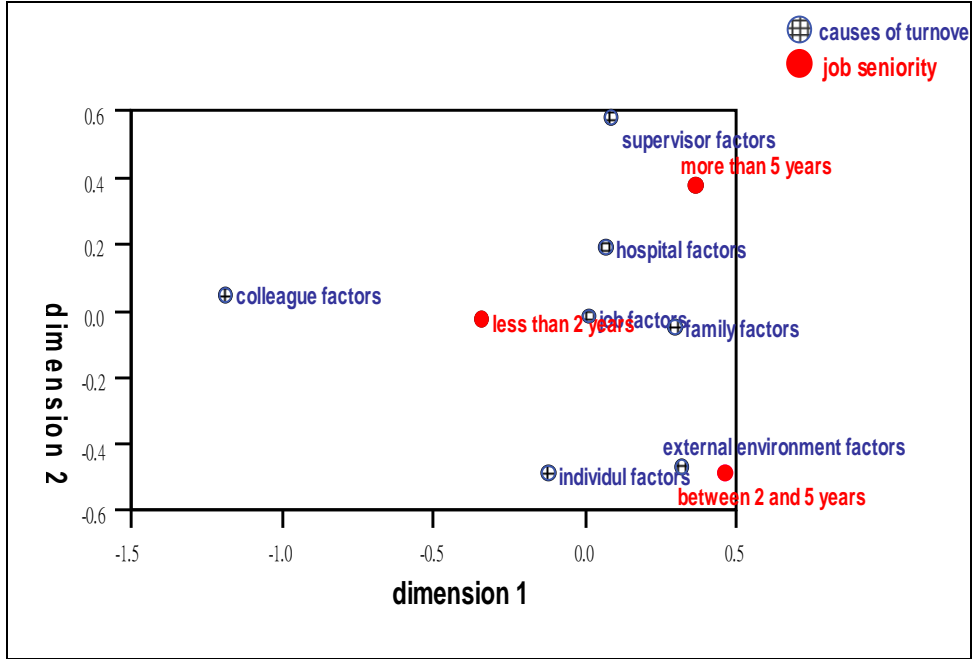
Table 3: Summary Table of the Causes of Turnover and the Job Seniority of Nurses

Dimension	Singular Value	Inertia	Chi-square	Significance	Proportion of Inertia	
					Accounted for	Cumulative
1	.140	.020			.74	.74
2	.083	.007			.26	1.00
Total		.027	21.34	.046	1.00	1.00

From Figure 2, which presents the association plot between the causes of turnover and job seniority, the following can be concluded:

- (1) For nurses who have less than two years of job seniority, their turnover tends to be due to job-related factors;
- (2) For nurses who have two to five years of job seniority, their turnover tends to be caused by market/external environmental factors;
- (3) For nurses who have more than five years of job seniority, their turnover tends to be caused by leadership and hospital-related factors;

Figure 2: Association Plot between the Causes of Turnover and the Job Seniority



CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Exploring Career Stages from the Causes of Turnover

Turnover is a critical career decision (Krau, 1981), and is mostly related to career-based factors (Gibson, 1994). Through a correspondence analysis of the causes of turnover and the personal data, this study distinguished the career stages of nurses. This study not only empirically verified two points, but also added meaning to the existing studies of career development. For future studies, further verification of the career-based needs and the development of each career stage of nurses will be possible.

It was found that it is meaningful to use “marital status” and “job seniority” as a basis with which to distinguish the career stages. The method adopted for distinguishing the career stages of nurses in this study is different from other research, which has either allowed respondents to indicate their own career stages, or only used the time-series method to distinguish career stages. The advantages of the research are that the job-related and demographic variables can be more thoroughly covered.

Implications for Recognizing Career Stages by Marital Status and Job Security

The literature on career stages has frequently adopted age and seniority in order to distinguish the career stages of nurses (Judith, 1995; Reilly & Orsak, 1991), but there is still no consistent and universal way of measuring career stages. This study analyzed the causes of turnover and found that the corresponding correlations with demographic variables are the best variables for the purpose of distinguishing career stages. Cooke (1994) considered the fact that it is not easy to use age or seniority as the criteria for recognizing the career stages, as there are limitations when generalizing between different vocations or industries. Super (1957) advocated using information regarding the subject's immediate personal situation and perceptions, instead of their age, in order to define career status. This study adopted marital status and job seniority to differentiate between career stages, in accordance with the perspectives of Krau (1981) and Gibson (1994), and the result was a different method for distinguishing between stages other than the traditional time series method. Because of the foci of career, job development, individual challenges, and the psychological needs of nurses, the different stages can be better expressed.

Marital status has rarely been used as the criterion for recognizing distinctive career stages. Individuals located at any point of their career could have atypical career styles (Super, 1957). It was found that a change in the marital status of nurses (from being single to married) is the most critical change in someone's career. This is because once the married nurses progress to certain career stages, they may be confronted by the conflicting desires to excel at work and to take care of their family. Hence, by using marital status as the criterion for recognizing distinctive career stages this study was able to observe the demands placed on nurses at different career stages.

Married nurses, being confronted with the challenge of balancing their roles within the family and at work, will have different needs in terms of their career than unmarried nurses. These two types of roles are also significantly influential dimensions for adults. After being married, conflicting demands from work and the family generate work-family conflict. Married nurses are expected to experience more family-work conflict than unmarried nurses (Herman & Gyllstrom, 1977). When nurses are wives and have long working hours, the husbands have to devote more time and energy to running the family. This fact causes conflict within the family and work for the husband (Greenhaus & Kopelman, 1981). Therefore, marital status influences the career of nurses.

This study had previously indicated that there is a significant relationship between the causes of turnover and job seniority. It was inferred that this could be as a result of the fact that the subjects are nurses, who are mostly females and sometimes have to temporarily leave their jobs to take care of children or elderly relatives, or to be housekeepers for the sake of their husbands' careers. Therefore, using job seniority in order to recognize the distinctive career stages of a nurse allows a better reflection on the tasks, adjustments, and challenges that may confront nurses than using organizational seniority.

In addition to verifying whether job seniority is a good indicator for recognizing distinctive career stages, in accordance with the results of the correspondence analysis, it is further suggested that career stages can be separated based on four stages of seniority: less than two years, between two to five years, six to ten years, and more than ten years.

These results resemble Benner's (1984) concept of the career development of clinical nurses, from novice to expert. Compared to previous research, which used professional seniority in order to recognize the career stages of nurses, this study's use of job seniority and the duration of seniority at each stage is different. In the past, the career stages of nurses were defined based on "ages and working duration" (Judith, 1995), and "ages and organizational seniority" (Reilly & Orsak, 1991). By observing the age distribution of nurses in Taiwan, it was found that the largest proportion of nurses was those who were less than 30 years old. If the duration of job seniority is over-extended to define the different stages (even as long as the life of an adult), as has been done in some studies, the results could lead to inconsistency and inaccuracy between the results of the research and real-life situations.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Marital status and job seniority, which were proposed in this study as foundations from which to recognize the career stages of nurses, are also two separate and independent dimensions. Owing to the difficulties involved in collecting the relevant data, it is difficult to re-verify the career stages using a cross analysis of these two variables. Therefore, it is suggested that future studies could develop ways to verify the issues mentioned above.

This research aimed to ask nurses who were currently working in a hospital, but who had experienced turnover, to review the causes of their last experience of turnover and their own personal situation. Due to the fact that each respondent had left their job at a different point in time, their life experiences after leaving their previous job may or may not have affected their responses to the questionnaire. In addition, the subjects with job seniority of less than two years tended to be few; it is inferred that the insufficient sample for this population may have partially influenced the empirical results.

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Mei-Ling Wang is an Assistant Professor in Hungkuang University, Taiwan. She received her PhD degree in management from National Yulin University of Science and Technology in Taiwan. She has a thirteen-year experience as the health service administrator in hospitals. Her research interests include human resource management, organizational behavior, and healthcare management. She has published papers in journals such as *International Journal of Technology Management*, *Journal of High*

Technology Management Research, Journal of Technology Management in China, Journal of e-Business (Chinese) and Journal of Knowledge Economy.

Wan-Yu Chen is an Assistant Professor in the TransWorld University, Taiwan. She received her PhD in Management from National Yunlin University of Science and Technology in Taiwan. Her research interest focuses on organizational behavior, knowledge management and entrepreneurial education. Her works have appeared in *International Journal of Technology Management, Journal of High Technology Management Research, Journal of Technology Management in China, Journal of e-Business (Chinese), The Journal of Commercial Design (Chinese) and Taiwan Economy (Chinese).*