

Support nurses with job embeddedness

Use this model to promote nurse retention.

By Zelda Gibbs, PhD, MSN, RN



DURING the COVID-19 pandemic, the nursing role has expanded to include emotional supporter, caregiver, and the last person a patient bonds with before they die. The extreme patient load many nurses are experiencing leaves them with no time to grieve or debrief. Instead, they “hold it together” and move on to the next patient. Many researchers (including Cai and colleagues, Li and colleagues, and Raudenská and colleagues) report staggering numbers of post-traumatic stress disorder among healthcare workers. How will the pandemic affect nurse retention in the long term?

As a nurse manager, you’re looking for ideas to enhance nurse retention, provide a healthy work environment, and maintain quality patient care. The job embeddedness model focuses on the reasons why nurses stay with an organization and guides administrators in reviewing every positive aspect of the workplace and strategizing to make what is good even better.

What is job embeddedness?

In 2001, two business management researchers, Mitchell and Lee, developed the job embedded-

ness model. Since then, many healthcare organizations have adopted it to successfully retain nurses by focusing on the positive organizational and community ties that keep nurses embedded. The tighter the web, the more embedded the nurse will be.

Organizational ties

The organizational dimension of the embeddedness model consists of three concepts: Fit-organization, links-organization, and perceived sacrifices-organization if a nurse decides to leave.

- **Fit-organization** refers to the compatibility between a nurse’s ethical morals and values, career goals, personality, and personal goals with those of the organization. When personal goals and ambitions align with those of the organization, fit-organization will improve retention.
- **Links-organization** describes a nurse’s connections and relationships with others, involvement in decision-making, committee service, and work team participation. The commitment and engagement of these activities will strengthen the links-organization concept.
- **Sacrifices-organization** indicates the perceived sacrifices a nurse makes when leaving an organization. These sacrifices can be obvious losses (such as salary, pension funds, sick leave, and paid time off), but they also include subtle psychological sacrifices (such as loss of seniority, office space, parking privileges, opportunities for advancement, job stability, and loss of further experience and knowledge that would help the nurse cope and succeed).

Community ties

The community dimension involves the same three concepts but applies them to the community in which the nurse lives.

- **Fit-community** includes compatibility be-

Increasing job embeddedness

Not all of these examples of job embeddedness efforts by Fortune 100 Companies apply to nursing, but they may be worth considering.

Dimension	Application
Fit-organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide extensive information to recruits about career opportunities within the organization.• Use realistic job previews.• Select employees whose values fit with organizational values.• Provide socialization opportunities to newcomers so they can get to know other employees, especially group or team members.• Encourage employee input into decisions that directly affect them.• Assist employees with career planning.• Provide training and development opportunities that help employees meet their long-term career goals.• Involve employees in developing schedules that fit their needs (e.g., full-time or part-time, shifts, hours).
Links-organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allow employees to choose which teams or projects to join.• Provide mentors to sponsor and coach new or young employees.• Facilitate peer recognition.• Provide opportunities for knowledge sharing among employees to improve customer service and skill development.• Offer employee referral bonuses.• Sponsor a mothers' network for current and former employees and provide other on-boarding assistance.
Sacrifice-organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide creative benefit alternatives or cafeteria plans, tailoring benefits to meet individual needs and enhance work-life balance.• Provide incentives or perks based on tenure.• Allow employees to have input in designing the work environment and company celebrations.• Provide on-site childcare.• Support telecommuting and other family-friendly work arrangements.• Pay employees well.• Contribute to retirement funds generously.• Share profits.• Offer restricted stock grants or stock options.• Allow personal use of a company car.
Fit-community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recruit most heavily in markets or communities near the organization. Avoid relocating employees as much as possible.• Provide employees with information about community activities and resources.• Locate new facilities near employees or commuter lines.
Links-community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support employee community service (e.g., 2 days off per year for community service), especially projects undertaken by employee groups.• Promote employee involvement in local schools (e.g., as mentors).• Encourage involvement in community-based civic or professional organizations.• Sponsor children's sports teams and community leagues for employees.• Provide English as a Second Language classes for interested employees.
Sacrifice-community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote employees without requiring a transfer.• Provide home-buying assistance.• Offer local transportation assistance.

Source: Holtom et al. Reprinted with permission.



Supporting nurses now

Nurses who have worked on COVID-19 units and may be on the brink of burnout and post-traumatic stress disorder need support to move forward. Timely efforts to improve job embeddedness may help prevent a significant exodus from the profession.

Dimension	Application
Fit-organization	Provide on-site, 24-hour pastoral support and licensed, credentialed counselors to help nurses process grief, anger, resentment, and despair.
Fit-organization	Leave caring notes to let nurses know that they're still valued in this fight and to boost the spirits of those who doubt themselves, their purpose, and their goals.
Sacrifice-organization	Parking privileges closer to the hospital or in a parking garage might seem insignificant, but they can mean the world to a tired body.
Sacrifice-organization and Links-community	Onsite laundry services support nurses and show a caring attitude toward their families. Nurses report the inconvenience of changing clothes in a garage and taking a shower before they can hug their children.
Sacrifice-organization	Low-cost adjustments, such as turning break-rooms into an area where nurses can truly relax and reenergize, can help nurses feel supported and valued.

tween ethical morals and values with those of the community. A compatible culture and climate, as well as amenities, can strengthen the fit-community concept.

- **Links-community** involves such aspects as

church activities, service on community committees, and children's school involvement. Married nurses with school-age children, for example, will most likely sacrifice more than a nurse with no community links.

- **Perceived sacrifices-community** can include the prospects of selling a house, moving children out of the school they love, moving away from friends or family, or leaving a spiritual family behind.

Many healthcare organizations concentrate on these concepts to attract nurses, but they frequently overlook the fact that all ties must be in place and weaved into a strong enough web to keep nurses embedded. Impressive benefit packages—such as sign-on bonuses, retirement benefits, salaries, excellent healthcare insurance, and opportunities to enhance professional development—may not be enough to keep a nurse embedded, and they'll leave the organization as soon as their contracts expire. Using the job embeddedness model as a guideline, administrators can explore other options to strengthen the fit and links concepts.

How to improve job embeddedness in nursing

The nursing environment is versatile, with different education levels, qualifications, and generations. Gibbs and Duke found that adapting to the differences among employees (rather than creating a one-size-fits-all benefit package) can help improve retention. For example, RNs place a high value on the links-community concept, so emphasizing community service, employee involvement in local schools and community-based organizations, and sponsoring sports teams are just a few ways to increase RNs' job embeddedness.

In this same study, significant differences in the links-organization concept were demonstrated between generations. Suggested changes include facilitating peer recognition and providing opportunities for seasoned nurses to mentor novice nurses. Knowledge sharing among employees will improve customer service and patient care and also recognize individual contributions. Allow individual preferences by letting employees choose teams and projects to join.

In addition, provide career advancement opportunities for nurses who are improving their professional qualifications or educational level. Some nurses, as their educational levels increase, will begin to feel overqualified for

their current role and may seek another position. However, if they're embedded in the organization, they will look for internal opportunities. (See *Increasing job embeddedness*.)

Using locus of control as a hiring strategy can strengthen organizational job embeddedness. For example, Ng and Feldman found that employees with a strong internal locus of control can better negotiate deals for unique contracts and develop strong social network links, thus improving the fit- and links-organization concepts. Leaving the organization will be more of a sacrifice for these employees than for those who don't make those investments in their careers.

Examples of job embeddedness in healthcare

Stroth explains the advantages of applying job embeddedness strategies in rural areas and provides specific examples.

- A hospital in Arkansas, with a turnover rate of 127% among patient care intake specialists, adopted the job embeddedness model and focused their retention efforts on the fit con-

cept. They reduced the turnover rate to 15%.

- A rural hospital in Illinois focused on the sacrifice-community concept and offered their employees down payment assistance to buy a house. The hospital incorporated stipulations, including that the employee must stay for at least 5 years and that the house should be no more than 10 miles from the hospital.
- Another organization allows employees to take 5 days off per year to attend their children's school activities.
- One organization offers employees onsite oil changes and laundry services.

Supporting nurses

Nobody can predict the long-term consequences of the pandemic on the nursing profession. However, when organizations make efforts to improve job embeddedness now, they're performing an act of care that will support the nursing workforce. (See *Supporting nurses now*.) **AN**

Access references at myamericannurse.com/?p=291022.

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Don't throw prescription bottles with your name on them in the trash. Peel off the label and shred it before disposing of the bottle.

Protecting your nursing license

Never share your nursing license card with anyone, and don't carry it with you. In most states, nurses renew their licenses electronically. When you complete and submit your renewal, check that none of your data have been changed without your knowledge. If you detect a change, contact your board of nursing and correct the information. Also consider placing a credit freeze on your accounts because someone who steals a nursing license may use it to open credit accounts.

Know what to do

Identity theft is common. Taking preventive steps can stop thieves from stealing your personal and professional information. Knowing what to do and taking immediate action if your identity is stolen can reduce financial and reputational damage. (See *What to do if your identity is stolen*.) **AN**

What to do if your identity is stolen

To reduce the impact of identity theft, take these steps:

- Contact the Federal Trade Commission (877-ID-Theft, identitytheft.gov).
- Call your local police department and file an official report.
- Put a fraud alert on your credit report with all three credit bureaus, and then freeze your credit.
- Request copies of all three credit reports (one every month about a month apart to allow time for changes to be recorded).
- Cancel all credit cards in your name.
- Contact your bank.
- Contact your board of nursing.

Linda Vincent is the owner of Vincent & Associates, which offers The Identity Advocate educational resource at www.theidentityadvocate.com.

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