

**STATUS LOSS AND TURNOVER
AMONG VETERINARY PROFESSIONALS**

A Thesis

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of Cornell University

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Master of Science

by

Simon Gim
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ABSTRACT

This study examines how status changes affect turnover among professionals in corporatized settings, focusing on job title changes and multi-location work. Drawing on status theory and event history analysis, it analyzes longitudinal data from 2,990 veterinary professionals at Banfield Pet Hospital. The study theorizes that transitions from high-autonomy roles (e.g., “Owner”) to employee roles (e.g., “Manager”), and from single-site to multi-location work, act as symbolic status loss triggers that increase turnover risk. However, Kaplan–Meier and Cox models reveal the opposite: both transitions are associated with reduced turnover risk. Tenure moderates the title change effect—long-tenured professionals are more likely to exit after such changes—while it does not significantly affect the impact of multi-location work. These findings challenge traditional views of status loss as destabilizing, suggesting instead that symbolic status shifts can reflect adaptive organizational processes. The study contributes to research on professional identity, status dynamics, and turnover in corporatized environments.

Keywords: turnover; status loss; professionals; job title change; multi-location work; corporatization

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Simon Gim earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Sociology and Law from Sungkyunkwan University in February 2019. After working at a startup and research institutes, Simon entered the Master of Industrial and Labor Relations (MILR) program at Cornell University, during which he interned as a human resources analyst at Dell Technologies. After earning his MILR degree in December 2022, Simon entered the MS/Ph.D. program in the School of Industrial and Labor Relations (ILR) in August 2023 and is currently a second-year Ph.D. student in the Human Resource Studies department. Simon's research explores how workforce dynamics and organizational restructuring influence employee turnover. His interests include employee turnover, the effects of leadership transitions in startups, and how professionals respond to structural and symbolic changes. He is particularly interested in retention and corporate restructuring in specialized markets, such as high-skill labor markets and startups.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Biographical Sketch	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
Table of Contents	v
Introduction	1
Theoretical Background and Hypotheses	9
Methods	19
Results	31
Discussion	37
Conclusion	45
References	48

INTRODUCTION

Broadly defined, status refers to the level of esteem and respect an individual holds in the eyes of others, grounded in perceptions of competence, social worth, and significance (Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Ridgeway, 2019; Weber, 1922). While status often coexists with autonomy or power in organizational contexts, it is conceptually distinct. Status concerns the deference and prestige one receives from others. In contrast, autonomy refers to the freedom to act independently, and power entails control over valued resources or others' behaviors (Blader & Chen, 2014; Tyler & Blader, 2003). Unlike power and autonomy which relate to influence and decision-making control, status is a relational attribute rooted in how others perceive and value a person's role or contributions.

When defining status, early sociological theories distinguished between ascribed status, which is assigned based on inherent characteristics such as race, gender, or class (Linton, 1936), and achieved status, which is earned through demonstrated competence, performance, or credentials (Barnard, 1946; Magee and Galinsky, 2008). Initially, ascribed status drew scholarly attention focusing on understanding how birth determines individuals' standing and life outcomes. Over time, the research focus shifted toward achieved status, emphasizing how individual effort and accomplishments generate prestige within social systems. Studies have shown that factors such as education, professional certifications, and technical competence are foundational elements of achieved status, helping to form status hierarchies that guide social interactions and shape individuals' influence in

organizational settings (Berger et al., 2002; Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Ridgeway, 2014).

As research has increasingly emphasized achieved status as a driver of workplace dynamics, less attention has been paid to how subtle disruptions to that status can shape professionals' decisions to stay or leave. In bureaucratic or corporatized settings, signals such as job title changes or multi-location assignments may not alter formal roles or pay but can nevertheless undermine perceptions of prestige, influence, and embeddedness. These forms of symbolic status loss are especially consequential in high-status occupations where autonomy and identity are closely tied to stability and recognition. This study examines how such status disruptions contribute to turnover among professionals, extending status theory to better account for turnover as a relational consequence of diminished status.

Among various signals of achieved status, organizational research has paid particular attention to job titles, which serve as visible indicators of occupational prestige and social standing. Titles not only designate a formal role but also serve as status signals by conveying perceived competence, authority, and legitimacy within a social and professional hierarchy (Jensen, 2006; Podolny, 1993). These signals shape internal dynamics, such as task delegation and influence within teams, as well as external evaluations, including compensation, labor market value, and mobility opportunities (Kim & King, 2014; Smith et al., 1989). For example, experimental studies show that when individuals are assigned higher-status titles—even when responsibilities remain constant—they are more likely to be evaluated as more competent and their work deemed more valuable (Smith et al., 1989). This aligns with

theories of status-based anchoring, where evaluators' initial impressions are shaped by status cues such as titles, often leading to biased or inflated assessments (Bendersky & Shah, 2013). Additionally, Bowers and Prato (2017) demonstrate that when new title categories are created, individuals can experience unearned upward mobility by being reclassified into higher-status roles, illustrating how job title structures can reconfigure status hierarchies without any substantive performance change.

Given their symbolic weight, job titles have also been recognized as a common source of status loss, especially when title changes imply a downward movement in perceived prestige. While early research on demotions emphasized hierarchical reductions in rank as primary triggers of status decline (More, 1961), more recent work suggests that even lateral or ambiguous title changes—those without any reductions in responsibility or pay—can bring perceptions of diminished standing (Bowers & Prato, 2017). These subtle changes, which have recently increased due to roll-up mergers, often carry implicit messages about reduced authority or influence, which can impact self-perception, peer recognition, and organizational legitimacy. As a result, job title changes can constitute a powerful form of status loss by reshaping how professionals are perceived and how they navigate their organizational roles.

In addition to job title changes, working at multiple locations can also function as a form of status loss, particularly for professionals whose legitimacy is rooted in workplace stability, role consistency, and embedded relationships. Unlike employees in general corporate roles where mobility is normalized, professionals in fields such as veterinary medicine derive much of their occupational status from long-standing ties to a particular workplace, accumulated local knowledge, and the ability to influence

decision-making within stable teams (Derber, 1982; Freidson, 1988; McKinlay & Arches, 1985). When professionals work at multiple locations, they may experience a fragmented sense of workplace authority, diminished access to organizational routines and decision structures, and reduced visibility, all of which undermine their perceived standing. This form of mobility often disrupts informal leadership roles and impairs efforts to maintain a coherent professional identity. Research on job embeddedness supports this logic, showing that strong ties to a single location foster role clarity, organizational influence, and retention, while fragmented work environments increase relational disconnection and role ambiguity (Jiang et al., 2012; Mitchell et al., 2001). Accordingly, frequent location transfers can challenge professionals' ability to sustain their workplace status and identity, increasing the likelihood that they will consider exiting the organization.

Status loss resulting from either job title changes or working at multiple locations can significantly affect individual outcomes—most notably by increasing turnover. A growing body of research shows that when individuals experience a loss in perceived occupational status, such as through demotions or blocked advancement opportunities, they often respond by disengaging and ultimately exiting the organization. For instance, Hennekam and Ananthram (2020) found that involuntary demotions triggered strong turnover intentions and reduced organizational commitment among employees, even when compensation or job tasks remained unchanged. Other studies highlight the role of social comparison in status loss by showing that employees passed over for internal promotions were nearly twice as likely to resign, especially when a less-established outsider was hired instead (Dlugos

& Keller, 2021). These findings underscore that status loss—whether absolute (e.g., demotion) or relative (e.g., missed promotion)—can erode professional identity and activate exit behaviors. Although much of this work has emerged in recent years, the literature on turnover continues to underexplore the full range of status dynamics, making this study’s focus on veterinary professionals a novel contribution. Turnover in such contexts has especially high organizational costs, including knowledge loss, weakened cohesion, and reduced productivity (Hom et al., 2017). Furthermore, broader research shows that quitting decisions are shaped not just by dissatisfaction, but by structural and psychological mechanisms, such as job embeddedness and social comparison, that are often triggered when professional status is diminished (Felps et al., 2009; Swider et al., 2011).

The impact of status loss often depends on the status and occupation of the individual experiencing it. High-status professionals appear especially vulnerable to disruptions in esteem and recognition, as such shifts can undermine their perceived legitimacy and curtail future career prospects (Azoulay et al., 2014). For occupations like law and medicine—where identity is closely tied to expertise, autonomy, and prestige—even symbolic disruptions can have acute effects on self-concept and career stability (Freidson, 1988). Although status loss is ultimately experienced at the individual level, it is frequently precipitated by broader structural changes. One increasingly visible source of such disruption in professional contexts is the rise of roll-up mergers—corporate strategies in which investors consolidate multiple small businesses into larger entities (Briscoe, 2003; Hearn et al., 2023). While these mergers initially gained traction in fragmented markets such as auto parts and retail, they have

expanded into professional services including accounting, law, and healthcare. For example, between 1998 and 2017, 1,573 hospital mergers occurred in the U.S., and in 2023 alone, 48 law firm mergers were recorded (Hearn et al., 2023). Though often justified in terms of efficiency and profitability, such consolidations can introduce new bureaucratic hierarchies that marginalize formerly autonomous professionals and destabilize established status orders.

This transition—from autonomous professional to employee within a corporate structure—represents a shift in status, even when job responsibilities remain unchanged. The bureaucratic frameworks accompanying roll-up mergers tend to reinforce this shift. Classic sociological research has long argued that bureaucracy is often incompatible with professional work, particularly when it curtails autonomy and redefines authority (Blau, 1965; Scott, 1965; Wallace, 1995). Professionals who once operated independently may experience diminished control over clinical or operational decisions, contributing to a perceived loss of both autonomy and status (Derber, 1982; McKinlay & Arches, 1985). This is especially salient when professionals are required to work across multiple locations, which can fragment workplace influence, weaken social capital, and diminish professional visibility which are all key components of occupational status. However, some studies suggest a more nuanced relationship between professionals and bureaucracy. Briscoe (2006) argues that large-scale organizations may also create new forms of career opportunities, including enhanced mobility pathways and structured development programs. In these contexts, bureaucratization may offer compensatory mechanisms that sustain, or even enhance, professional satisfaction and retention. Together, these contrasting perspectives

highlight the complex and still unresolved relationship between bureaucratic organizations and professionals' experiences of status, autonomy, and career stability.

Despite these insights, research on the relationship between status loss and turnover remains limited. First, there is limited research examining the direct impact of status loss on turnover, particularly when status loss stems from job title changes or working at multiple locations. Existing research has primarily focused on the psychological and emotional consequences of status loss such as decreased motivation or job satisfaction but has largely treated turnover as an indirect or secondary outcome (Blalock, 1967; Neeley, 2013). Second, the role of bureaucratic organizational structures in either exacerbating or reducing the effects of status loss for professionals remains insufficiently theorized. While traditional scholars argue that large-scale organizations constrain professional autonomy and heighten dissatisfaction (Wallace, 1995), others suggest that structured systems may provide support and mobility opportunities that mitigate adverse effects (Briscoe, 2007). Lastly, existing literatures on professionals focus on large-scale transformations such as mergers and acquisitions and overlook the more subtle, yet consequential, changes that professionals experience (Bowers & Prato, 2017; Jensen, 2006). Moreover, these literatures on professionals have predominantly focused on physicians or star players, leaving other professional fields largely unexplored.

Thus, the intended contributions of this paper are as follows. First, it extends status theory by examining how status loss influences turnover decisions in professional occupations, emphasizing that status reductions can occur even in the absence of formal demotions or salary cuts. Existing research has primarily focused on

hierarchical status changes, such as downward mobility within rigid corporate structures, while this study demonstrates that subtle shifts can similarly trigger perceptions of status loss with significant career consequences. This challenges the traditional demotion-based framework of status loss studies and broadens its applicability to professional settings where titles and mobility serve as critical markers of status. Second, the paper contributes to research on professionals and organizational restructuring by showing how structural changes tied to corporatization reshape status dynamics and turnover patterns in high-status occupations. While prior work has documented firm-level effects of corporatization, this study offers an individual-level perspective by tracing how status disruptions tied to role reclassification and working at multiple locations influence retention. This contribution is especially important for understanding the consequences of corporate governance in professionalized settings where career legitimacy is tied to autonomy, embeddedness, and long-term status maintenance. Finally, this study contributes to clarifying the ambiguous relationship between bureaucratic organizations and professionals, a topic that remains contested in organizational research. By focusing on the veterinary profession—where autonomy, status, and bureaucratic restructuring are particularly salient—this study offers an adequate empirical context for exploring this relationship. Rather than merely replicating prior findings in a different industry, this study leverages the veterinary setting to generate new theoretical insights into how professionals respond to status changes within bureaucratic organizations—particularly in contexts where formal authority is low, yet occupational prestige, autonomy, and place-based embeddedness remain central to professional identity. By integrating these contributions, this study

enhances our understanding of the status-turnover relationship and provides a novel framework for analyzing turnover among high-status professionals.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Status Theory

Status has become an increasingly prominent construct in organizational research, with scholars examining how an individual's position within a social or professional hierarchy influences behavior and decision-making (Piazza & Castellucci, 2014). Initially, status theory emphasized the social hierarchy that arises from individual attributes such as race, gender, and demographic background. For example, early scholars such as Weber (1922) and Ridgeway (1991), conceptualized status as a function of ascribed characteristics, where individuals are assigned different levels of esteem and prestige based on socially constructed group distinctions. These distinctions, reinforced through interpersonal interactions, shape power dynamics and access to opportunities within society. As status research progressed, scholars expanded their focus beyond ascribed status to examine achieved status, particularly in the context of organizations. Studies on achieved status show that organizational status is primarily conferred through structural roles rather than inherent traits (Piazza & Castellucci, 2014). This shift led to an exploration of status hierarchies within workplaces, where professional roles and occupational prestige became key determinants of status conferral (Bowers & Prato, 2017; Magee & Galinsky, 2008).

Within organizational studies, the relationship between status and formal structure has become a particularly significant area of research. Scholars emphasize

how organizational signals, such as job titles, institutional affiliations, and hierarchical positioning, shape perceptions of competence, authority, and legitimacy (Jensen, 2006; Podolny, 1993). For example, studies have shown that evaluators tend to anchor their assessments based on a person's initial status indicators, including their formal roles, and insufficiently adjust for contextual nuances (Bendersky & Shah, 2013; Smith et al., 1989). This aligns with the broader view that status functions as a symbolic resource that operates independently from formal power, influencing how individuals are recognized and rewarded within organizations (Blader & Chen, 2014; Ridgeway, 2014).

While formal hierarchy and title serve as key mechanisms of status attribution, recent work has emphasized that status is also deeply relational. Studies have shown that status is shaped by how others interpret one's identity, competence, and value in specific social contexts (Berger et al., 2002). In this sense, status is not just a structural designation, but a dynamic and socially constructed perception that evolves over time (Sauder et al., 2012). This theoretical perspective lays the groundwork for understanding how even subtle organizational changes, such as lateral shifts in titles or working at multiple locations, may trigger status re-evaluation, regardless of material or functional role changes. These insights help conceptualize status as an intangible but consequential force that structures workplace dynamics, shapes career paths, and influences both job attitudes and behaviors such as turnover.

Status Loss: Changes in Job Titles and Working at Multiple Locations

Status loss refers to a decline in an actor's position in the status hierarchy, often triggered by organizational or individual events (Jensen & Roy, 2008). In organizational research, scholars have identified a range of status loss triggers, most notably structural transformations such as mergers, acquisitions, and job reassignments. These changes often disrupt established hierarchies and reconfigure perceptions of prestige, legitimacy, and influence. For example, a study from an ecological perspective suggests that roll-up mergers reshape industry landscapes by erasing long-standing distinctions between firms and professionals, thereby leading to status loss (Haveman & Cohen, 1994).

A key area where this plays out is in job title changes. Historically, research on demotions served as a foundation for understanding title-based status loss. Early studies emphasized that downward mobility in formal rank leads to reductions in perceived competence, diminished decision-making power, and workplace alienation (More, 1961). The psychological consequences of demotion include reduced motivation, lowered self-regard, and increased isolation from organizational networks (Neeley, 2013). However, this body of work has several limitations. First, much of the literature has focused exclusively on hierarchical status shifts, often neglecting more subtle forms of status erosion. More recent research finds that even lateral or nominal changes in job titles—without reductions in pay or responsibilities—can signal status loss, particularly when they imply a shift away from roles previously associated with autonomy or authority (Bowers & Prato, 2017). Second, studies that examine individual-level experiences of status loss often focus primarily on psychological or

attitudinal responses such as diminished motivation, identity threat, or reduced job satisfaction, while treating turnover as an indirect or downstream outcome rather than analyzing it directly (Kwon & Milgrom, 2009).

Status loss may also arise from organizational practices that fragment an employee's work environment such as requiring professionals to rotate across multiple locations. While such mobility is often framed as a strategy for expanding skills or enhancing operational flexibility, it can undermine the development of embedded workplace relationships and long-term professional influence. Research on workplace embeddedness emphasizes that professionals derive status not only from formal titles but also from consistency, accumulated knowledge, and social capital within a single organizational context (Mitchell et al., 2001). Disruptions to this embeddedness—such as when an individual moves from a stable, single-location role to a multi-site assignment—may be perceived as a loss of standing, particularly if the shift is involuntary (Kwon & Milgrom, 2009).

The consequences of working at multiple locations are exacerbated when such movements are imposed by the organization rather than initiated by the individual. Employees in this position may experience role ambiguity, weakened workplace identity, and diminished influence, all of which contribute to the erosion of perceived status (Anton, 2009). Furthermore, they may feel marginal or peripheral to organizational life, which undermines both morale and retention. Despite these implications, literature on workplace mobility tends to overlook how mobility inside the organization, especially within bureaucratic structures, can undermine status. It is important to note that while both title changes and working at multiple locations can

trigger status loss, they do so through distinct mechanisms. Whereas title-based status loss stems from changes in formal markers, location-based status loss arises from disrupted embeddedness and diminished professional identity.

Status Loss and Turnover

Regardless of whether it stems from job title changes or working at multiple locations, status loss can have profound career implications, often compelling individuals to reevaluate their place within the organization and consider exit as a means to restore their professional standing. As a result, turnover frequently emerges as a primary consequence of status loss, particularly when individuals perceive their diminished standing as irreversible or misaligned with their professional identity. Psychological contract theory suggests that employees develop implicit expectations regarding career progression, stability, and recognition (Rousseau, 1995). When these expectations are violated through an unexpected title change or forced mobility, employees may experience a sense of betrayal and misalignment with organizational values, thereby increasing their motivation to seek external opportunities (Lee & Mitchell, 1994). Extensive research has documented the costs associated with turnover, including disruptions in team dynamics, loss of institutional knowledge, and significant financial burdens for organizations (Hom et al., 2017). The relationship between status loss and turnover is well supported by turnover models, which emphasize that employees assess their job satisfaction, mobility prospects, and organizational commitment before making exit decisions (Lee et al., 1999). Employees who experience status loss often begin seeking roles where their status and

expertise are more fully recognized (Swider et al., 2011). However, while turnover research has extensively explored antecedents such as job satisfaction and embeddedness, relatively little attention has been given to how subtle status shifts such as title changes without formal demotion affect employees' turnover decisions. Given the serious consequences of status loss, it is critical to investigate turnover not merely as an organizational concern but as an individual-level response to perceived career stagnation or devaluation.

Another important note regarding research on the consequences of status loss is that these consequences vary significantly depending on an individual's occupation. Research suggests that status is particularly salient for professionals, whose careers are grounded in expertise, legitimacy, and social recognition, rather than solely on hierarchical advancement (Freidson, 1988). For professionals such as physicians, attorneys, and veterinarians, status operates as a core marker of expertise and credibility, shaping both internal organizational dynamics and external labor market positioning. Unlike other employees, who may expect frequent role changes as part of career progression, professionals often derive status from long-term workplace stability, accumulated domain-specific expertise, and sustained influence within a particular setting (Derber, 1982; Freidson, 1988). Disruptions to these factors can result in perceived status erosion, weakening professionals' ability to maintain workplace authority and legitimacy. Whereas employees in hierarchical organizations may view lateral or downward shifts as part of normal career progression, professionals are more likely to perceive such changes as a threat to their legitimacy and future career prospects.

Despite the growing influence of corporate restructuring on status loss among professionals, the specific impacts of these changes remain underexplored. This study addresses two major gaps in the literature. First, while most existing research on status loss has largely focused on large-scale organizational transformations such as mergers and acquisitions, this study shifts attention to subtler yet consequential organizational processes—specifically, job title changes and working at multiple locations—as overlooked mechanisms of status loss for professionals. These structural changes often carry implicit signals of diminished prestige or legitimacy, yet their impact on professional identity and career outcomes is still insufficiently explored. Second, although scholars have long debated the effects of bureaucratic structures on professionals, the link between bureaucratic organization and professional status remains conceptually ambiguous and empirically underdeveloped. By investigating how professionals respond to status loss within corporatized, multi-location work environments, this study examines how bureaucratic systems can either erode or reshape professional autonomy, legitimacy, and retention. Rather than simply applying existing frameworks to a new setting, this study uses the veterinary profession as a theoretically illuminating case in which high-status professionals with limited formal authority are increasingly subject to corporate restructuring. This unique combination of occupational prestige, an identity rooted in autonomy, and rising bureaucratic control offers new insight into how organizational structures subtly erode status and shape professional retention.

Hypothesis Development

The purpose of this study is to investigate how specific forms of status loss—transitions from “Owner” to “Manager” titles and changes from working at a single location to working at multiple locations—influence turnover among professionals. Prior research has shown that status loss can play a meaningful role in individuals’ decisions to leave an organization. Building on this work, this study examines how within-person changes in job title and work location affect turnover in professional contexts, where maintaining authority and professional reputation is central to career progression.

H1: Status Loss Due to Title Change

A job title is an important marker of professional status and career legitimacy. Within hierarchical organizations, titles reflect an individual’s authority, expertise, and influence, shaping perceptions of career progress and professional standing. A transition from Owner (a position that signals autonomy and leadership) to Manager (a role associated with employee status and reduced authority) may constitute a form of status loss, particularly for professionals who previously had independent decision-making power. Research on professional identity and career mobility suggests that employees who perceive a decline in status are more likely to experience dissatisfaction and leave their organization (More, 1961).

Studies in organizational psychology and labor markets indicate that employees who experience involuntary role shifts are at higher risk of turnover, especially when the transition involves a perceived loss of status (Kwon & Milgrom,

2009). In the veterinary field, where career autonomy and professional reputation are central to occupational identity, transitioning from Owner to Manager may weaken perceived authority, disrupt workplace influence, and lead to dissatisfaction, ultimately increasing turnover risk. Thus, I predict:

H1(a). Professionals who experience a job title change from “Owner” to “Manager” are more likely to leave their organization than those whose job titles remain unchanged.

While status loss is expected to increase turnover, its effects may not be uniform across all professionals. One key factor that may moderate this relationship is tenure. Research on organizational commitment and career stability suggests that employees with longer tenure develop stronger attachments to the workplace and hold higher expectations for career continuity and advancement (Ng & Feldman, 2010). As a result, when long-tenured professionals experience unexpected status changes, the disruption may feel particularly acute, which triggers stronger reactions such as dissatisfaction and the desire to exit. Thus, tenure may amplify the negative consequences of status loss. Based on these theoretical considerations, I predict:

H1(b). Among professionals who experience a job title change from “Owner” to “Manager”, those with longer tenure are more likely to leave the organization than those with shorter tenure.

H2: Status Loss Due to Working at Multiple Locations

Beyond title changes, another organizational signal that may contribute to status loss in professional settings is working at multiple locations. Prior research emphasizes that workplace stability plays a critical role in shaping professional identity and career satisfaction, particularly in occupations where embedded relationships and local authority matter (Derber, 1982; McKinlay & Arches, 1985). Professionals in these contexts derive status not only from titles but also from accumulated knowledge, stable workplace relationships, and local authority (Mitchell et al., 2001). Rotating across different worksites can weaken those ties, reduce visibility, and challenge a professional's sense of autonomy and influence which are all core components of occupational status.

Although multi-location work is sometimes framed as a means of enhancing flexibility or developing broader expertise, it may also signal marginalization, diminished prestige, or reduced control over one's role. In the veterinary profession, where continuity and place-based authority are central to career legitimacy, being assigned to multiple clinics can undermine status even in the absence of formal demotion.

This study focuses on within-person transitions, specifically examining how turnover risk changes when a professional moves from working at a single site to working across multiple locations. Professionals who begin working at multiple clinics after being based at a single location may experience disruption to their embeddedness, continuity, and localized authority, which could lead to increased exit behavior. Thus, I predict:

H2(a). Professionals are more likely to leave the organization when they begin working at multiple locations, compared to when they continue working at a single site

As with job title changes, the effect of multi-location work on turnover may depend on tenure—particularly in cases where the individual experiences a shift from single-location to multi-location work. Professionals with longer tenure often have deeper organizational roots, stronger expectations about role stability, and more established relationships with colleagues and clients. When long-tenured professionals shift to multi-location roles, the disruption may feel greater, increasing their likelihood of exit. In contrast, professionals with shorter tenure may be more adaptable or less anchored to a specific site. Therefore, I predict:

H2(b). Among professionals who transition from single- to multi-location roles, those with longer tenure at the time of the transition will be more likely to leave the organization than those with shorter tenure.

METHODS

Context

Over the past few decades, significant structural transformations have reshaped professional fields, particularly in industries that have undergone extensive corporate consolidation through roll-up mergers. Traditionally, many professionals, such as veterinarians, physicians, and legal practitioners, operated in independent “mom-and-

pop” practices, where they retained control over both clinical decisions and business operations. However, with the rise of corporate acquisitions and private equity investment, many of these professionals have transitioned into employee roles within large, bureaucratically structured organizations. This shift has produced visible changes to job titles: roles once labeled “Owner” or “Partner” are increasingly replaced by titles such as “Manager” or “Associate.” These new titles reflect not only changes in employment arrangements but also potential status loss, as they signal reduced autonomy, authority, and professional standing.

In addition to title changes, corporatization has increased the number of professionals assigned to work across multiple clinic locations. This study focuses on professionals who transition from single-site to multi-site assignments over time, marking a within-person disruption that may challenge continuity, embeddedness, and the development of localized workplace relationships. These transitions may affect how professionals perceive their role stability and influence, ultimately shaping their decisions to stay or leave the organization.

Research Setting

To examine these dynamics, this study analyzes data from Banfield Pet Hospital—the largest general veterinary practice organization in the United States with over 1,000 clinics. Banfield serves as ideal research setting due to its central role in the corporatization of veterinary medicine and the availability of extensive longitudinal data. Originally composed of independent veterinary hospitals, Banfield underwent a major structural transformation following its acquisition by Mars,

Incorporated (Mars) in 2007—marking its transition into one of the largest corporate players in the veterinary industry. This corporatization was further deepened in 2017 when Mars acquired Veterinary Centers of America (VCA) Inc., another leading provider of pet healthcare services. With more than 1,000 locations across the U.S., Banfield exemplifies the growing influence of bureaucratic corporate structures within a traditionally high-autonomy profession (Reuters, 2017).

Additionally, veterinarians represent a high-status professional group that traditionally values autonomy and clinical discretion, making them particularly sensitive to the constraints imposed by corporate mergers. Given the strong link between status shifts and career decisions, Banfield’s transformation offers a strategic research context to investigate how symbolic status loss affects veterinarians' turnover decisions.

Data

I collected individual-level panel data on veterinary professionals affiliated with Banfield Pet Hospital locations from Data Axle, a widely recognized provider of business records compiled from public sources, business directories, and proprietary datasets. As a widely used source in studies of organizational dynamics, Data Axle is well-suited for tracking career trajectories and job title transitions. The raw dataset spans 1997–2023 and includes records on 3,258 unique veterinary professionals and 1,511 Banfield Pet Hospital locations, offering a comprehensive foundation for tracking professional mobility and status transitions before applying sample restrictions for analysis.

The raw dataset consisted of 19,513 individual-level observations, many of which were repeated entries across years, capturing updates in executive roles, organizational structure, or location data. Each record reflected a professional's affiliation with a specific Banfield location and included variables such as full name, title, gender, SIC code, and year of record. However, inconsistencies in naming conventions, title variations, and missing gender data required a multi-step cleaning process. Key steps included disambiguating name spellings, standardizing title categories (e.g., merging variants of "Manager" or "Owner"), and resolving duplicate entries across years. To preserve data integrity, missing or ambiguous gender entries were left as blanks, while tenure and mobility were derived from the longitudinal structure of the records. These transformations enabled consistent individual-level tracking of role changes and mobility patterns over time.

The final cleaned dataset includes 47 standardized variables after recoding, duplicate removal, job title classification adjustments, and location data alignment with organizational restructuring over time. The baseline demographic characteristics of the 3,258 unique veterinary professionals included in the final cleaned dataset are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Veterinary Professionals in the Data

Baseline characteristic	Full sample	
	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		

Female	2180	66.9%
Male	980	30.1%
Missing	98	3%
Title		
Manager	2,551	80.5%
Owner	306	9.7%
President	116	3.7%
CEO	79	2.5%
Vice President	66	2.1%
Other / Missing	50	1.6%
Location		
Single Location	2768	85%
Multiple Location	490	15%
Years in Organization		
0-10	279	8.6%
11-20	1656	50.8%
21-30	1225	37.6%
31+	98	3%

Note. Title and Location values are derived from individuals' full longitudinal records. Each individual is assigned the highest-status title and broadest location type (e.g., multi-location) ever observed during their tenure. Gender reflects a consistent identifier matched to each unique individual.

To validate the dataset's accuracy, a multi-step verification process was conducted. Veterinarians' names and professional details were cross-referenced with state veterinary license portals, LinkedIn, and Facebook to verify employment history, job title changes, and location stability. Additionally, I conducted seven one-hour interviews with current and former veterinarians who appeared in the dataset and were

employed at Banfield. These interviews were used to confirm employment start and end dates, clarify job title transitions, and verify work location histories. This validation process played a crucial role in ensuring the consistency of job title classifications and identifying patterns in employment transitions.

One key challenge in analyzing tenure and turnover within Banfield Pet Hospital was the issue of left-censoring, where some individuals may have begun their employment prior to the dataset's earliest available year (1997). Because these individuals' true start dates were unknown, their total tenure could not be fully observed, potentially leading to an underestimation of their actual time in the organization. This poses a risk of biasing the analysis against long-tenured individuals, as those with the longest service histories may be partially observed or excluded altogether.

To mitigate this issue, a 2003 cutoff was implemented, restricting the analysis to individuals first observed in the dataset in 2003 or later. This approach ensures that all included individuals had employment histories captured from their initial observation onward, reducing the potential bias of left-censored tenure data. As a result, 2,990 entrants were included in the analysis, while 267 individuals who first appeared between 1997 and 2002 were excluded to prevent bias related to untracked prior employment. By excluding these cases, the dataset avoids inaccurate modeling of tenure effects while maintaining a sufficient sample size for statistical analysis.

These data validation processes also highlighted a critical shift in job title classifications before and after the 2007 Mars acquisition of Banfield. Before the merger, independent veterinarians were typically classified as "Owners," reflecting

their autonomy in private practice. After Mars acquired Banfield, many veterinarians who stayed became employees and were reclassified as "Managers," signaling their transition into a corporate employment structure. This organizational shift and title changes, along with records of locations individuals worked, serve as a key indicator of status loss, forming the basis for this study's analysis of how job title changes impact turnover decisions.

Variables

Dependent Variable. The dependent variable in this study is turnover, defined as whether a veterinary professional exited Banfield Pet Hospital during the observation period (2003–2023). Turnover was determined by tracking each individual's presence across annual records. If a professional's record was absent in any year prior to 2023, their exit year was coded as their last year of appearance. Individuals who remained active through 2023 were treated as right-censored to reflect ongoing employment. This approach ensures consistent tracking of exits while accounting for censoring due to data limits.

Independent Variable. To assess how role-based status changes affect turnover (H1), the analysis captures whether a professional experienced a shift from an ownership title (e.g., "Owner") to a managerial role (e.g., "Manager") within the organization. This transition reflects a change from autonomy to a more bureaucratically embedded employee position. The dataset records annual titles for each individual, enabling identification of whether and when such a change occurred. Once a title change occurred, the individual was treated as at risk under status loss

conditions from that year forward. Additional title-based transitions, such as shifts from Manager to Owner or other combinations, were also coded to support subgroup comparisons and robustness checks.

The second form of status loss (H2) concerns the transition from working at a single clinic location to working across multiple locations. Multi-location work was captured dynamically, based on annual records of worksite addresses. Each year, the number of distinct locations associated with an individual was tracked. If a professional began working across multiple locations in a given year, they were coded as having transitioned to multi-location work in that year. This exposure remained active unless the individual returned to single-site work, which was separately flagged. This within-person approach allows for precise modeling of how transitions in work arrangements over time influence turnover risk.

Control Variables. To rule out confounding effects, two key control variables were included. First, Gender was included to account for gender-based differences in career progression and turnover behavior, as prior research has documented variations in retention patterns between men and women. This variable was coded as a binary indicator (0 = Male, 1 = Female). Second, the tenure main effect was controlled for, as longer tenure is often associated with increased job stability, accumulated firm-specific knowledge, and stronger organizational commitment, all of which can influence turnover likelihood. This variable was measured as the total number of years an individual had spent in the organization, ensuring that mobility effects were analyzed independently of overall tenure effects before testing tenure as a potential moderator. By incorporating these control variables, this study aimed to isolate the

effects of status loss coming from title change (H1) and multi-location work (H2) on turnover, ensuring that the observed relationships were estimated independently of demographic or tenure factors.

By incorporating these dependent, independent, and control variables, this study provides a framework for analyzing how professional status loss impacts turnover in a corporatized veterinary setting. The dataset structure enables precise tracking of career trajectories, employment transitions, and retention patterns, enhancing our understanding of how title changes and multi-location work influence turnover.

Analytic Approach

This study uses event history analysis (EHA) to examine how status loss—through job title transitions and multi-location work—affects the likelihood of turnover among veterinary professionals. All analyses are conducted using a consolidated person-year dataset of 14,039 observations across 2,990 unique individuals employed at Banfield Pet Hospital between 2003 and 2023. Each row in the dataset represents a single year of employment for each individual, allowing for precise modeling of time-to-event outcomes. Professionals who remained employed through 2023 were treated as right-censored cases, consistent with standard survival analysis procedures. A summary of the demographic characteristics of this sample is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of the Analytical Sample (N = 2,990)

Baseline characteristic	Full sample	
	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Female	2065	69.1%
Male	869	29.1%
Missing	56	1.9%
Title		
Manager	2460	82.3%
Owner	290	9.7%
President	100	3.3%
CEO	70	2.3%
Vice President	50	1.7%
Other / Missing	20	0.7%
Location		
Single Location	2614	87.4%
Multiple Location	376	12.6%
Years in Organization		
0-10	2541	85.0%
11-20	439	14.7%
21-30	10	0.3%

Note. Title and Location values are derived from individuals' full longitudinal records. Each individual is assigned the highest-status title and broadest location type (e.g., multi-location) ever observed during their tenure. Gender reflects a consistent identifier matched to each unique individual.

To explore baseline differences in turnover probabilities, Kaplan–Meier survival analysis was used to generate non-parametric survival curves across

subgroups defined by the key independent variables. For instance, professionals who experienced a job title change from Owner to Manager were compared to those who did not go through title changes. Similarly, those who transitioned from single- to multi-location work were contrasted with peers who remained at one site. The log-rank test was used to evaluate whether the observed differences in survival curves were statistically significant. While Kaplan–Meier estimates provided initial insight into turnover trends, they do not control for covariates or account for competing influences.

To estimate the hazard of turnover while adjusting for covariates, Cox proportional hazards models were employed. These models estimate the effect of each type of status loss on turnover risk while controlling for gender and tenure. The outcome of interest is the hazard of turnover, measured annually using the variable capturing time since entry into the organization. Key predictors include binary indicators of status loss due to job title changes (*own_mgr*, *mgr_own*, *Event*) and indicators of working at multiple locations (*Event2*, *Sing_Multi*, and *Multi_Sing*). Each variable was coded to reflect either a discrete event or a persistent state depending on the underlying theoretical premise. For example, *own_mgr* was coded as 1 from the year of the Owner-to-Manager title change onward.

To test Hypothesis 1, which examines whether transitioning from Owner to Manager increases turnover risk, both Kaplan–Meier and Cox regression were applied using *own_mgr* as the main independent variable. Additional models included *mgr_own* and the broader *Event* indicator to explore other forms of title-based change.

These analyses isolate the effects of symbolic status loss stemming from reduced autonomy or prestige.

Hypothesis 2 focuses on the impact of multi-location work on turnover.

Several operationalizations of spatial disruption were tested: (1) Event2, a within-person indicator capturing any location-type change (single to multi or vice versa) (2) directional indicators for specific location transitions (Sing_Multi and Multi_Sing). These variables were used to estimate how both sustained and dynamic changes in work location relate to turnover risk. A summary of the data used to test these hypotheses is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for the Analysis Data

Variable	n	M	S												
			D	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
1. Time in Org ^a	13,056	4.39	3.49	—											
2. Observation Year ^a	13,056	2014.5	5.07	0.38	—										
3. Turnover ^b	13,056	0.15	0.36	-0.01	-0.04	—									
4. Owner to Manager ^c	13,056	0.07	0.26	0.45	0.07	-0.03	—								
5. Manager to Owner ^c	13,056	0.02	0.15	0.17	-0.02	-0.03	0.35	—							
6. Any Title Change	13,056	0.12	0.32	0.48	0.04	-0.04	0.77	0.41	—						
7. Single to Multi ^d	13,056	0.05	0.21	0.21	0.01	-0.03	0.11	0.07	0.17	—					
8. Multi to Single ^d	13,056	0.03	0.18	0.22	0.03	0.01	0.1	0.09	0.16	0.69	—				

9. Any Location Change ^e	13,056	0.05	0.23	0.21	0.0	-	0.11	0.07	0.16	0.94	0.79	—	
10. Gender ^f	13,056	0.67	0.47	-	0.13	-	-0.1	-	-	-	-0.03	-0.04	—
				0.08		0.01		0.05	0.12	0.04			

Note. n = 13,056. All values represent Pearson correlation coefficients.

a Time in Org refers to years since organizational entry; Year of Observation indicates the calendar year of observation.

b Turnover was coded as 1 = left the organization, 0 = remained.

c Owner to Manager and Manager to Owner indicate title changes (1 = yes, from year of change onward).

d Single to Multi and Multi to Single indicate directional location transitions (1 = yes, in the year of change).

e Any Location Change captures within-person shifts in location type (1 = yes).

f Gender coded as 0 = male, 1 = female.

To assess whether tenure moderates the relationship between status loss and turnover (Hypothesis 2b), interaction terms between each location-based status loss variable and total tenure in the organization (TimeYrs) were included in separate Cox models. These models evaluate whether longer-tenured professionals are more sensitive to changes that undermine embeddedness or disrupt expected career trajectories.

By integrating Kaplan–Meier analysis with covariate-adjusted Cox regression, the analytic strategy leverages both descriptive and inferential methods to assess whether status loss, either symbolic or spatial, increases the likelihood of exit in a corporatized professional setting.

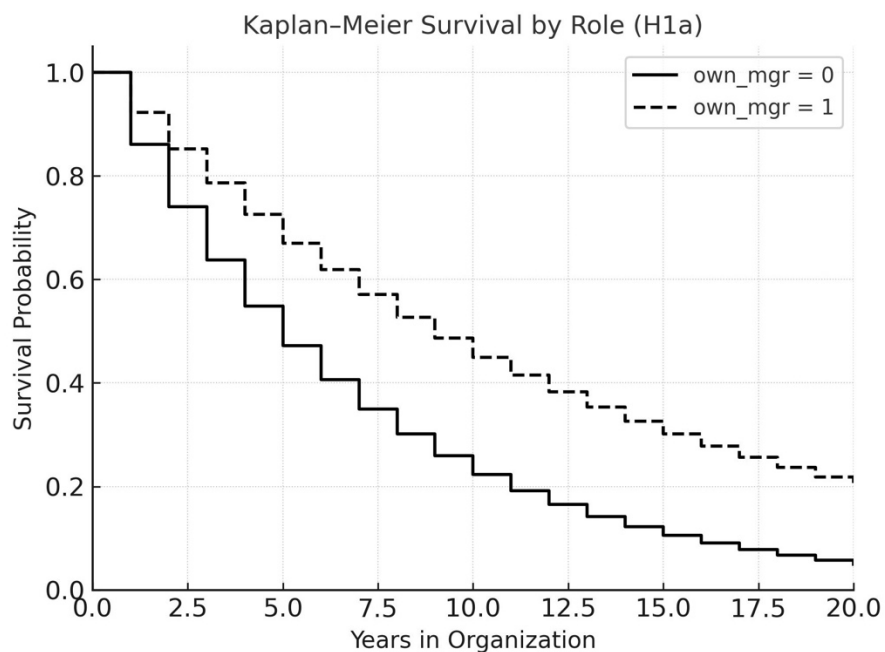
RESULTS

H1: Status Loss Due to Title Change

To test Hypothesis 1(a), both Kaplan–Meier survival analysis and Cox proportional hazards models were conducted. The Kaplan–Meier survival curves compared turnover risks between individuals who experienced a job title change from

Owner to Manager ($\text{own_mgr} = 1$) and those who did not ($\text{own_mgr} = 0$). Contrary to expectations, the survival curve for the $\text{own_mgr} = 1$ group remained higher throughout the observed period, indicating a lower likelihood of turnover. This pattern was statistically confirmed by a log-rank test ($\chi^2 = 10.78, p = .001$), which showed significant differences in survival distributions between the two groups. These results suggest that, rather than increasing turnover risk, transitioning from Owner to Manager was associated with greater retention. Therefore, the findings do not support Hypothesis 1(a), which had predicted that status loss through a title change would lead to higher turnover. The survival curves are displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Kaplan–Meier survival curves for H1 (a)



Building on these descriptive results, a Cox proportional hazards model was estimated to assess whether the experience of a title change predicted time-to-exit. Contrary to Hypothesis 1(a), the model showed that individuals who transitioned from Owner to Manager were significantly less likely to leave the organization (HR = 0.76, $p = .015$, 95% CI: [0.60, 0.95]), indicating a 24% reduction in turnover hazard. A broader indicator for any title change (Event) yielded similar results (HR = 0.68, $p < .001$, 95% CI: [0.57, 0.81]), and the reverse transition from Manager to Owner (mgr_own) was also associated with reduced turnover risk, although this effect was not statistically significant (HR = 0.70, $p = .082$, 95% CI: [0.47, 1.05]). These results suggest that title transitions may be linked to greater organizational retention, potentially reflecting the security or benefits associated with role changes in corporatized settings. Therefore, Hypothesis 1(a) is not supported.

To evaluate Hypothesis 1(b), which proposes that tenure moderates the effect of title change on turnover, a Cox model was estimated with time-varying interaction terms between title-change indicators (“own_mgr” and “mgr_own”) and tenure (“TimeYrs”). The interaction between “own_mgr” and tenure was statistically significant (HR = 1.07, $p = .04$), indicating that the effect of transitioning from Owner to Manager becomes more positive, higher risk of turnover, as tenure increases. In contrast, the interaction between “mgr_own” and tenure was not significant ($p = .30$). These results support Hypothesis 1(b), suggesting that among professionals who experience a downward title change from Owner to Manager, those with longer tenure are more likely to leave than those with shorter tenure. A summary of the analysis results is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Cox Proportional Hazards Models Predicting Turnover Likelihood (H1 Results)

Predictor	Model 1 (Directional Title Changes)	Model 2 (Any Change)	Model 3 (Interaction)
Gender (Male = 1)	0.94 (0.05)	0.94 (0.05)	0.94 (0.05)
Owner to Manager	0.76* (0.09)	–	0.76* (0.11)
Manager to Owner	0.70 (0.14)	–	0.70* (0.14)
Any Title Change	–	0.68*** (0.06)	–
Owner to Manager × Tenure Interaction	–	–	1.07* (0.04)
Manager to Owner × Tenure Interaction	–	–	1.04 (0.05)
Log Likelihood	-14164.4	-14161.4	-14161.0
LR χ^2 (df)	70.2*** (1)	83.0*** (2)	76.7*** (2)
N (individuals)	2,668	2,668	2,668
Events (turnover)	1,983	1,983	1,983

Note: Hazard ratios (HR) reported; standard errors in parentheses. An HR < 1 indicates reduced turnover hazard.

***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05.

Overall, Hypothesis 1(a) is not supported, as the findings indicate that professionals who experience a job title change from Owner to Manager are significantly less likely to leave the organization than those who do not undergo such transitions (HR = 0.76, p = .015). This result contradicts the theoretical expectation that a reduction in formal status would elevate turnover risk. However, Hypothesis 1(b) is supported, as the interaction between the title change and tenure was

statistically significant ($HR = 1.07, p = .036$), suggesting that the protective effect of the title change weakens with tenure. In other words, professionals with longer tenure are more likely to leave after a title change than those with shorter tenure. These findings challenge the idea that symbolic status loss through job title changes universally undermines retention but suggest that tenure shapes how such transitions are experienced.

H2: Status Loss Due to Working at Multiple Locations

To test Hypothesis 2(a), which proposes that professionals are more likely to leave the organization after beginning to work at multiple locations, a Cox proportional hazards model was estimated using “Sing_Multi” as the key time-varying indicator. The results indicate that transitioning from single-site to multi-location work is associated with a significantly lower turnover hazard ($HR = 0.43, p = .000, 95\% CI: [0.31, 0.60]$). Contrary to the proposed hypothesis, professionals who began working at multiple locations were less likely to exit the organization than when they remained at a single site.

To evaluate the robustness of this finding, additional models were estimated. A broader indicator capturing any type of location change (Event2) also showed a non-significant association with turnover ($HR = 0.82, p = .079, 95\% CI: [0.66, 1.03]$). A second directional variable, “Multi_Sing” (indicating transitions from multiple sites back to a single location), was positively associated with turnover ($HR = 2.18, p < .001, 95\% CI: [1.60, 2.98]$), suggesting that returning to single-location work may

increase exit risk. However, these findings were supplementary and not the core operationalization used to test H2(a).

To assess Hypothesis 2(b), which proposes that tenure moderates the effect of multi-location work on turnover, a Cox model was estimated with time-varying interaction terms between location-change indicators (“Sing_Multi” and Multi_Sing) and tenure (TimeYrs). The interaction between “Sing_Multi” and tenure was not statistically significant (HR = 0.99, $p = .873$, 95% CI: [0.90, 1.10]), indicating that the effect of transitioning from single-site to multi-location work does not meaningfully vary by tenure. Similarly, the interaction between “Multi_Sing” and tenure was also non-significant (HR = 1.00, $p = .680$, 95% CI: [0.93, 1.13]), suggesting no tenure-related difference in the effect of returning to a single site after working across multiple locations. These results do not support Hypothesis 2(b), as neither direction of location-based change appears to interact with tenure in shaping turnover risk. A summary of the analysis results is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Cox Proportional Hazards Models Predicting Turnover Likelihood (H2 Results)

Predictor	Model 1 (Directional Location Change)	Model 2 (Any Change)	Model 3 (Interaction)
Gender (Male = 1)	0.95 (0.05)	0.95 (0.05)	0.95 (0.05)
Single to Multi	0.43*** (0.08)	–	0.43*** (0.15)
Multi to Single	2.18*** (0.39)	–	2.18*** (0.41)

Predictor	Model 1 (Directional Location Change)	Model 2 (Any Change)	Model 3 (Interaction)
Any Location change	–	0.82 (0.09)	–
Single to Multi × Tenure Interaction	–	–	0.99 (0.05)
Multi to Single × Tenure Interaction	–	–	1.00 (0.05)
Log Likelihood	-14156.1	-14169.5	-14155.9
LR χ^2 (df)	31.00*** (2)	4.18 (2)	31.24*** (4)
N (individuals)	2,668	2,668	2,668
Events (turnover)	1,983	1,983	1,983

Note: Hazard ratios (HR) reported; standard errors in parentheses. An HR < 1 indicates reduced turnover hazard.
 ***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05.

Taken together, the results suggest that transitions to multi-location work are not destabilizing in the way theorized. While the original expectation was that such transitions would undermine embeddedness and increase turnover, the findings consistently show the opposite pattern: professionals who begin working across multiple locations experience reduced exit likelihood, and this relationship does not vary significantly by tenure.

DISCUSSION

This study builds on foundational questions in organizational theory concerning how status changes affect professional retention. Specifically, it examines symbolic forms of status loss—such as job title changes and working at multiple locations—and their influence on turnover in corporatized veterinary organizations.

These changes reflect broader structural dynamics that can alter perceived prestige and identity within a professional hierarchy.

By analyzing transitions from Owner to Manager (H1a, H1b) and within-person shifts to multi-location work (H2a, H2b), this research offers insight into how organizational restructuring intersects with individual career outcomes. The findings extend theoretical perspectives on status dynamics and professional identity, while also offering practical implications for managing turnover in increasingly consolidated and corporatized service sectors.

The EHA results for Hypothesis 1(a) do not support the expectation that professionals who undergo a job title change from Owner to Manager are more likely to leave the organization. Both the Kaplan–Meier survival analysis and the Cox regression indicate the opposite pattern: those who experienced the title change had significantly lower turnover risk than those who did not. The survival curve for the Owner-to-Manager group remained consistently higher over time, and the log-rank test confirmed this difference was statistically significant. These results suggest that, despite appearing symbolically downward, the title change may not function as a trigger for exit. Instead, such transitions may reflect structural realignments that do not necessarily disrupt professionals' intentions to remain. In fact, the shift from an ownership role to a managerial position may offer greater work-life flexibility, reduced administrative burden, or access to new career development pathways—factors that could increase retention despite a potential loss in perceived status.

The moderation analysis for Hypothesis 1(b) yielded a statistically significant interaction between title change and tenure. Specifically, the effect of transitioning

from Owner to Manager became less protective as tenure increased. This suggests that professionals with longer tenure were more likely to leave following the title change than those with shorter tenure. These findings support the idea that professionals with more years in the organization may respond differently to status changes, possibly due to greater investment in their previous roles or expectations of continued advancement.

Hypothesis 2(a) tested whether professionals who begin working at multiple locations are more likely to leave the organization than when they remain based at a single site. The results do not support this hypothesis. The analysis found that individuals who transitioned from a single to a multi-location role were significantly less likely to exit. This suggests that transitions to multi-location work do not function as destabilizing events in the way initially theorized. In fact, multi-location roles may offer increased opportunities for professional growth, exposure to diverse cases, or scheduling flexibility that enhances retention. As a point of comparison, professionals who moved from multiple to single locations (Multi_Sing) were found to have significantly higher turnover risk, although this directional effect was not the focus of hypothesis testing.

The moderation analysis for Hypothesis 2(b) assessed whether tenure moderated the effect of transitioning to multi-location work. The interaction between tenure and the location-change variable was not statistically significant, indicating that the relationship between beginning multi-location work and turnover risk does not vary meaningfully by tenure. Thus, Hypothesis 2(b) is not supported.

Taken together, these results challenge prevailing assumptions about the destabilizing effects of symbolic or spatial status loss. Rather than uniformly prompting exit, job title and location transitions appear to be associated with lower turnover risk in this corporatized setting. These transitions may reflect internal reconfigurations that sustain retention, rather than acting as signals of marginalization. While further research is needed to clarify the complex factors shaping how professionals respond to such changes, the present findings suggest that these transitions do not necessarily undermine organizational attachment.

Theoretical Contributions

This research contributes to the growing literature on status loss, turnover, and professional career trajectories, particularly in the context of corporate mergers and structural change. While traditional perspectives argue that bureaucratization undermines professional autonomy and increases turnover, some recent studies have shown more nuanced patterns—where structural changes do not always trigger exit. This study helps clarify these ambiguities by examining two symbolic forms of status loss within corporatized professional settings: job title changes and multi-location work. Contrary to the theoretical expectation that such changes would destabilize professionals and increase turnover, the findings show that both title changes and transitions to multi-location work are associated with lower turnover risk. These results suggest that bureaucratic transitions may not be universally experienced as status threats but may instead reflect forms of internal adaptation that coincide with continued organizational attachment.

In addition, this study extends research on status hierarchies in professional settings by examining symbolic rather than formal status demotions. Prior work has typically focused on rank loss or salary reductions within rigid hierarchies such as academia, corporate firms, or sports organizations. By contrast, this study highlights how lateral title changes—such as moving from “Owner” to “Manager” without a clearly defined loss of functional responsibility—are not necessarily experienced as threats to legitimacy. These transitions may be part of organizational realignments or evolving role structures that do not provoke exit. These results challenge the assumption that all forms of symbolic status loss undermine professional identity and show that the relationship between role classification and turnover is more complex than previously assumed.

Moreover, the findings call for a reexamination of status-based exit models in professional environments undergoing corporatization. While theories of embeddedness suggest that disruptions to place-based authority would elevate turnover risk, the data reveal that professionals who transitioned from single-site to multi-location roles were less likely to leave the organization. Although directional shifts were not the focus of this study’s hypotheses, additional analyses showed that movement from multiple to single locations was associated with higher turnover. These patterns indicate that organizational mobility may not signal marginalization but instead reflect variation in internal work arrangements. Professionals may be retained through flexible deployment strategies that accommodate corporate needs while maintaining professional engagement.

Finally, this study contributes to a broader understanding of corporate restructuring in professional labor markets through an empirical focus on veterinarians. Unlike physicians or attorneys, veterinarians operate in a domain with fewer formalized status hierarchies, making them a revealing case for examining symbolic authority and professional legitimacy. The results indicate that even in this less codified setting, corporatization alters how status is conferred, sustained, or reinterpreted—yet not always in ways that prompt turnover. Instead, status shifts may reflect evolving norms of career continuity within consolidated professional fields.

Practical Implications

The findings have important implications for workforce retention strategies in corporatized veterinary settings. Contrary to initial assumptions, symbolic forms of status loss—such as job title changes from Owner to Manager and transitions from single-site to multi-location work—were associated with lower, not higher, turnover risk. These results suggest that corporate veterinary organizations may not need to view such transitions as destabilizing events but instead recognize their potential role in supporting professional continuity and retention.

For professionals undergoing a title change, the reduced turnover risk may reflect institutional efforts to stabilize employment or the functional alignment of managerial roles within corporatized structures. Rather than focusing solely on mitigating the perceived downsides of symbolic status loss, organizations might benefit from reinforcing the legitimacy and value of managerial positions. Initiatives such as structured onboarding, leadership development programs, and transparent

communication about the strategic role of Managers could further support retention following role transitions.

In the case of multi-location work, the finding that beginning to work across multiple sites is associated with reduced turnover suggests that such assignments may not be inherently disruptive. Organizations should consider investing in cross-location coordination, consistent supervisory support, and role clarity for professionals in mobile positions. Framing multi-location work as a reflection of organizational trust and integration, rather than marginality, may further reinforce its potential as a stabilizing employment arrangement.

More broadly, the results challenge common assumptions that structural changes within corporate systems inherently erode professional autonomy or organizational commitment. This has practical relevance for other consolidating sectors such as healthcare, education, and law, where professionals are navigating increasingly formalized and bureaucratic career paths. By recognizing that transitions in title and work settings do not automatically signal detachment or dissatisfaction, organizations can design policies and practices that promote career continuity and professional identity stability in the context of ongoing structural change.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between status loss and turnover in the veterinary profession, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the analysis is based on data from a single corporate entity, Banfield Pet Hospital, which may not fully capture the experiences of veterinarians in

other organizational contexts. Future research could expand the scope by examining other corporatized veterinary groups, independent practices, or adjacent fields such as human healthcare and law to assess whether similar patterns of symbolic status change and retention outcomes hold across professional service sectors.

Second, this study primarily focuses on job title changes and multi-location work as indicators of symbolic status loss. While both mechanisms were theoretically expected to increase turnover, the results revealed that they were associated with lower exit risk. These findings suggest that transitions from Owner to Manager and shifts from single-site to multi-site roles do not destabilize careers as initially hypothesized. Instead, these structural changes may align with role integration or retention strategies within bureaucratized organizations. Future studies might explore additional dimensions of symbolic status, such as access to decision-making authority, peer recognition, or internal influence, to develop a more holistic model of professional standing and its organizational consequences.

This study also underscores the importance of reexamining assumptions about status loss and organizational restructuring. Although status theory often frames downward mobility as a threat to professional identity, the findings here suggest that not all symbolic transitions are experienced as status-diminishing. In contexts like veterinary medicine, changes in title or work arrangement may reflect shifting organizational norms rather than a loss of legitimacy. Future research should examine how professionals interpret such transitions and whether those interpretations vary by tenure, occupational culture, or perceived legitimacy of corporate governance structures.

Finally, this study tested tenure as a potential moderator of status loss. The results showed that tenure significantly moderated the effect of title change, but not location change. Specifically, professionals with longer tenure were more likely to leave after experiencing a title transition from Owner to Manager, while tenure did not significantly influence turnover following a transition to multi-location work. These findings suggest that tenure interacts with some, but not all, symbolic shifts in role identity. Future research should explore how other factors—such as organizational support, perceived fairness, or professional networks—shape professionals’ responses to symbolic role changes in corporatized environments.

Despite these limitations, this study lays the groundwork for further research on professional retention in the context of corporate consolidation. As roll-up mergers and hierarchical structuring continue to reshape high-skill service professions, understanding how symbolic transitions are experienced and managed will be central to both organizational scholarship and workforce policy. Future work should examine whether alternative role designations, clearer career progression pathways, or autonomy-supportive policies can mitigate the unintended consequences of corporatization, particularly for professionals in client-facing and status-sensitive roles.

Conclusion

In sum, this study investigated how symbolic status loss influences turnover in corporatized professional settings by analyzing two mechanisms: job title changes and multi-location work. Contrary to initial hypotheses, the findings reveal that both forms

of status change were associated with lower, not higher, turnover risk. Professionals who experienced a job title change from Owner to Manager were significantly less likely to leave the organization, and those who began working across multiple locations similarly exhibited reduced turnover likelihood. These results suggest that such structural transitions may not be destabilizing but instead reflect internal career pathways or mechanisms that promote continuity within corporate practice environments.

Additionally, tenure was found to significantly moderate the effect of job title change. Specifically, the protective effect of transitioning from Owner to Manager diminished as tenure increased, suggesting that longer-tenured professionals may respond more sensitively to such symbolic transitions. In contrast, tenure did not significantly moderate the effect of transitioning to multi-location work, indicating that the influence of this form of status change on turnover risk remains relatively stable across tenure levels. These results highlight the importance of distinguishing how tenure interacts with different kinds of role transitions.

Together, these findings complicate conventional status-based predictions of professional exit and offer new insights into how corporatized organizations shape career stability. Rather than interpreting all transitions as threats to status and identity, this study shows that symbolic changes in job title or work location can function as part of an adaptive, and potentially stabilizing, career trajectory. Future research should explore how professionals interpret these changes, under what conditions symbolic shifts become destabilizing, and whether organizational practices, such as

autonomy-preserving policies or structured internal mobility pathways, can reinforce professional commitment amid structural change.

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