

Learning to Fly, Dance, and March:

Three Frameworks That Transform Nursing Renewal

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Twenty-three years ago, I stood before nurses from around the world at the Sigma Theta Tau International biennial convention and issued an organizational call to action: 'Create the Future through Renewal.' That call was born from observing a troubling pattern — nurses increasingly trapped in conversations of regret rather than hope, overwhelmed by complexity, and disconnected from the joy and meaning that originally drew them to the profession.

Two decades later, that call resonates with even greater urgency. The intervening years have brought pandemic trauma, workforce crises, moral injury, technological disruption, and widening inequities that would have seemed unimaginable in 2003. Renewal has moved from aspiration to survival necessity.

What I want to share with you today is not a revisiting of the past, but a deepening of it — a synthesis of three theoretical frameworks that, taken together, provide the most architecturally complete account of professional renewal I have encountered in fifty years of nursing scholarship. These frameworks are my own Renewal Ecosystem, Frederic Hudson's Cycle of Renewal, and William Smith's Appreciation-Influence-Control (AIC) model. Together, they reveal something essential about what it means to create the future through renewal — and why so many well-intentioned renewal efforts fall short.

The Three Frameworks: A Brief Orientation

The Renewal Ecosystem (Pesut, 2003/2025)

Six interdependent domains — Spirit & Purpose, Self, Scholarship, Service, Systems, and Society — through which professional flourishing is cultivated across careers and institutions. Spirit and Purpose occupies the center: the animating force that gives meaning to everything else.

The Cycle of Renewal (Hudson, 1999)

Adult life unfolds in cycles of chapters, each moving through four phases: Go For It (high energy, clear vision), the Doldrums (fading momentum), Cocooning (deep inward reflection), and Getting Ready (experimental re-engagement). Six core values — Personal Power, Achievement, Intimacy, Play & Creativity, Search for Meaning, and Contribution — fuel each chapter.

The AIC Model (Smith, 2008/2009)

Purpose is the source of Power. Every purposeful endeavor generates three power fields: Appreciation (perceiving the whole), Influence (relating and collaborating), and Control (acting with self-direction). Smith called these 'learning to fly, learning to dance, and learning to march.' Creative power emerges from integrating all three.

The Heart of the Integration: Purpose Is Everything

Before I map the frameworks together, I want to name what strikes me most about their convergence: all three place purpose — not technique, not programming, not resilience apps — at the center of renewal. For Smith (2008/2009), Purpose is literally the source from which the three power fields of AIC arise. Without a clear, compelling purpose, the power field is dissipated and the organizing effort collapses into busy work. For Hudson (1999), purpose is the gyroscope — the internal compass that keeps self-renewing adults oriented through turbulence and transition. For me, Spirit and Purpose occupies the center of the Renewal Ecosystem, understood as the animating force that gives coherence and meaning to the entire system of professional flourishing.

Renewal that does not begin with purposeful inquiry is renewal theater — it produces the appearance of flourishing without the substance.

This convergence carries a practical implication that I want to be direct about: any nurse, leader, educator, or organization that approaches renewal as a set of wellness activities — without first asking what we are ultimately here to do and whether our current way of being faithfully expresses that purpose — will produce activity without transformation.

Learning to Fly, Dance, and March: The AIC Framework

William Smith spent decades asking a deceptively simple question: how does purpose generate power, and how is that power organized into effective action? Working with the World Bank and organizations around the world, he identified three universal dimensions of purposeful power that he organized into the AIC model.

APPRECIATION Learning to Fly	INFLUENCE Learning to Dance	CONTROL Learning to March
Perceiving the whole field — stepping back from daily execution to sense what is truly real and what is genuinely possible. The domain of Spirit & Purpose, foresight, and Cocooning.	The relational domain — engaging stakeholders, building alliances, co-creating futures. The domain of Service, Systems, and Society.	Value-anchored action — self-directed, purposeful execution in service of a renewed calling. The domain of Self and disciplined Scholarship.

What Smith discovered — and what I find so resonant with the Renewal Ecosystem — is that effective organizing requires all three domains working together. The person who only knows how to march has

control without vision. The person who only appreciates has vision without capacity to act. The person who only influences negotiates endlessly without executing. Creative power — the kind that transforms individuals, organizations, and professions — emerges from the dynamic integration of all three.

Crucially, Smith insisted that power in this framework is not power over others. It is power to — the capacity to act in service of a purpose larger than oneself. And as higher levels of shared purpose are identified and embraced, the total power available to a group expands. This is the creative power that names his book.

Where the Three Frameworks Meet: A Renewal Map

When I map Hudson's Cycle, Smith's AIC, and the Renewal Ecosystem together, a comprehensive renewal architecture emerges. Here is the key insight:

Hudson's Cocooning = Smith's Appreciation = Pesut's Spirit & Purpose The inward turn that renews vision, purpose, and the capacity to perceive what is genuinely ending and what is genuinely possible.

Hudson's Getting Ready = Smith's Influence = Pesut's Service, Systems & Society The relational re-engagement that co-creates futures through collaboration, dialogue, and expanded stakeholder connection.

Hudson's Go For It = Smith's Control = Pesut's Self & Scholarship The disciplined, value-aligned execution of a renewed purpose — marching with clarity, not merely marching with habit.

This mapping reveals something important about the renewal journey. The natural sequence of renewal is not Control → Influence → Appreciation (which is how most organizations approach it, jumping to plans and programs before establishing shared vision). The generative sequence is Appreciation → Influence → Control: perceive first, relate second, act third.

Hudson called the failure to honor this sequence 'future blindness' — the inability to envision or author new chapters of professional life. Smith called it over-marching — executing without flying. I have seen it manifest in nursing as the Doldrums that never resolve into transformation: nurses and organizations that keep doing more of the same with diminishing return, unable to cocoon productively and unable to imagine a next chapter that is genuinely different.

The Renewal Ecosystem Through the AIC Lens

The Renewal Ecosystem's six domains come alive when viewed through the AIC framework. Each domain has a primary AIC resonance:

Spirit & Purpose	Self	Scholarship	Service	Systems	Society
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Spirit & Purpose → Appreciation (Flying)

This is where renewal begins. Spirit and Purpose, like Appreciation, requires the capacity to step back from daily execution and perceive the whole field of one's professional life: What am I ultimately here to do? Which of my core values are most alive and most depleted in this season of my career? What does the full situation require? This is not a question answered in five minutes between charting and handoff. It requires protected spaciousness — the kind of productive Cocooning that our productivity-addicted culture makes heroic rather than normal.

Self → Control (Marching)

The domain of Self is where renewed purpose becomes embodied practice. Value-anchored self-direction, healthy boundaries, sustainable work-life integration, and the disciplined habits that sustain wholeness over careers — these are the march of the renewal practitioner. Hudson's quality of being value-driven is enacted here: I act in alignment with who I am and what I most deeply value, rather than in response to the emergency of the moment.

Scholarship → Appreciation + Control

Scholarship weaves across both Appreciation and Control. Reflective practice — the structured inquiry into what experience is actually teaching us — is Appreciation applied to the domain of professional knowledge. The translation of that reflection into evidence-based practice, continuing education, and mentorship is Control in service of learning. Scholarship is how nurses transform experience into wisdom and wisdom into improved care.

Service, Systems & Society → Influence (Dancing)

Service, Systems, and Society are the relational domains of renewal. Meaningful contribution, organizational transformation, health equity advocacy, and professional association engagement all require the capacity to dance: to attune to diverse stakeholders, negotiate competing purposes, and co-create futures that serve the common good. Hudson's core values of Intimacy and Contribution find their professional expression here.

What Future Blindness Actually Looks Like — and the Antidote

I want to be concrete about what Hudson called 'future blindness,' because I believe it is one of the most consequential — and least discussed — dynamics in nursing today.

Future-blind nurses and nursing organizations are not passive or uncaring. They are typically working very hard. But their hardness is concentrated almost entirely in the Control domain: executing, marching, doing more with less, checking boxes. The Appreciation domain has atrophied — there is no genuine, protected space for perceiving the full reality of what has ended, what is emerging, and what the profession truly needs next. The Influence domain has narrowed — relationships are confined to those who reinforce the current chapter rather than those who might challenge and expand it.

From a Renewal Ecosystem perspective, future blindness manifests as depletion in Spirit and Purpose — loss of contact with calling — and atrophy in Society: disconnection from nursing's larger role in creating flourishing and just worlds.

The antidote is not marching anymore. The antidote is learning to fly again.

The corrective sequence is Appreciation → Influence → Control: perceive honestly what is ending and what is possible, widen the relational circle to include diverse and challenging voices, and only then commit to the specific, value-aligned actions that will enact a genuinely new chapter. This is Hudson's Cocooning honored. This is Smith's AIC process respected. This is the Renewal Ecosystem inhabited with full intentionality.

Three Reflective Questions That Changed My Practice

Over decades of working with nurses, nurse leaders, and nursing organizations, I have come to rely on three integrative questions — one for each AIC domain — that together constitute what I now call the Purposeful Renewal Inquiry. I offer them to you:

Appreciation: What is the full reality of this moment?

What chapter of my professional life is genuinely alive, and what chapter is genuinely ending? Which of my core values — Personal Power, Achievement, Intimacy, Play & Creativity, Search for Meaning, Contribution — are most vibrant and most depleted right now? What does my Spirit and Purpose domain reveal when I perceive it without filters? What does the whole field of my professional situation actually require?

Influence: Who needs to be part of this next chapter?

Is my relational world expanding or contracting? Am I dancing with new colleagues, mentors, and communities, or only with familiar partners who reinforce my current chapter? Which domains of my Renewal Ecosystem — Service, Systems, Society — call for renewed relational engagement? Whose voice am I missing that would most challenge and expand my sense of what is possible?

Control: What am I prepared to commit to?

What specific, value-aligned practices am I ready to establish in my Self and Scholarship domains — not heroically, but sustainably? What boundaries must I establish? What disciplines will embody the purpose I have re-identified through Appreciation? What will I march toward — and what will I stop marching toward — as I begin the next chapter?

These questions work at every level: for the individual nurse at any career stage, for the team or unit seeking to transform its culture, for the healthcare organization designing its renewal architecture, and for the professional association discerning its next chapter of disciplinary contribution.

A Renewed Call to Action

Twenty-three years after the original call, I find myself more convinced than ever that renewal is nursing's foundational discipline — not a practice among others, but the practice from which all sustainable professional contribution flows.

The person who has learned to fly — to perceive the whole field of professional possibility with open, courageous Appreciation — and to dance — to engage colleagues, patients, and communities in the relational co-creation of purposeful next chapters — and to march — to act with disciplined, value-anchored Control in service of a purpose larger than immediate circumstance — is the nurse whom Hudson would recognize as genuinely self-renewing, whom Smith would celebrate as creatively powerful, and whom I would honor as a faithful steward of nursing's covenant with humanity.

May we create the future through renewal, together.

This is not a solo journey. Renewal is ultimately relational — it connects the 'me' to the 'we,' the individual chapter to the larger professional story. And it is, in the end, the most consequential professional practice available to nurses who wish not merely to survive the extraordinary challenges of this moment, but to transform them.

The work continues. The conversation advances. The future awaits our creation.

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