Using Grounded Theory with your Research Model

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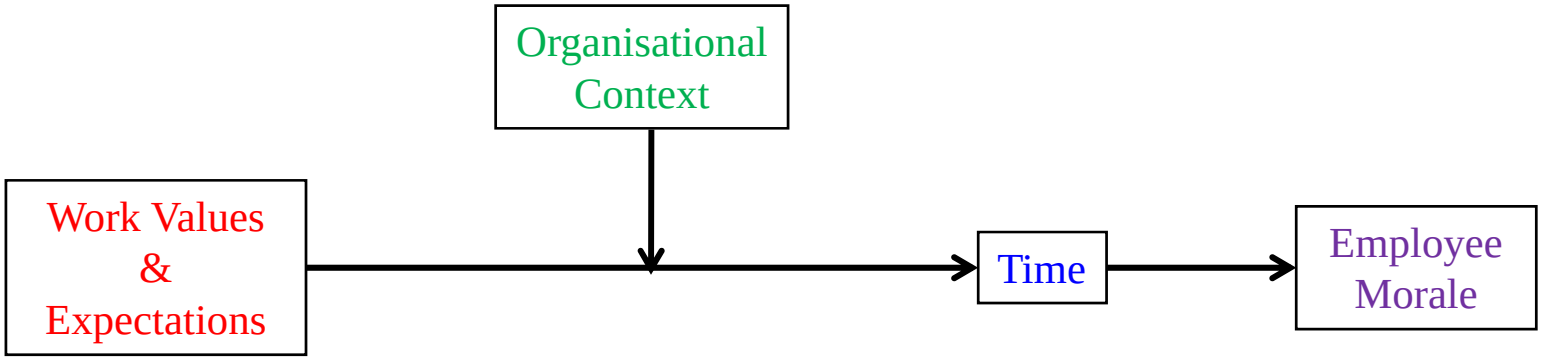
Using the literature, you will develop a model of the topic that you wish to explore. As an example, let's look at nursing morale in hospitals. First of all, we can construct a very simple model of employee morale. This would obviously be developed from existing theory:



Basically, this model is suggesting that employee work values and expectations together with the amount of time given to undertake a task will influence morale. For example, if the values and expectations of the organisation is one of good quality but employees are only provided with very limited time to undertake their tasks, then morale will probably be reduced. However, the model is also saying that the organisation's environment will also have an impact on time and morale. For instance, a new information system may be implemented which will reduce the time needed to undertake a task, therefore, reducing pressure on the staff and enhancing morale.

However, "work values", "expectations", "organisational context" and "employee morale" are very broad terms. How would we define them and what would we include in each category?

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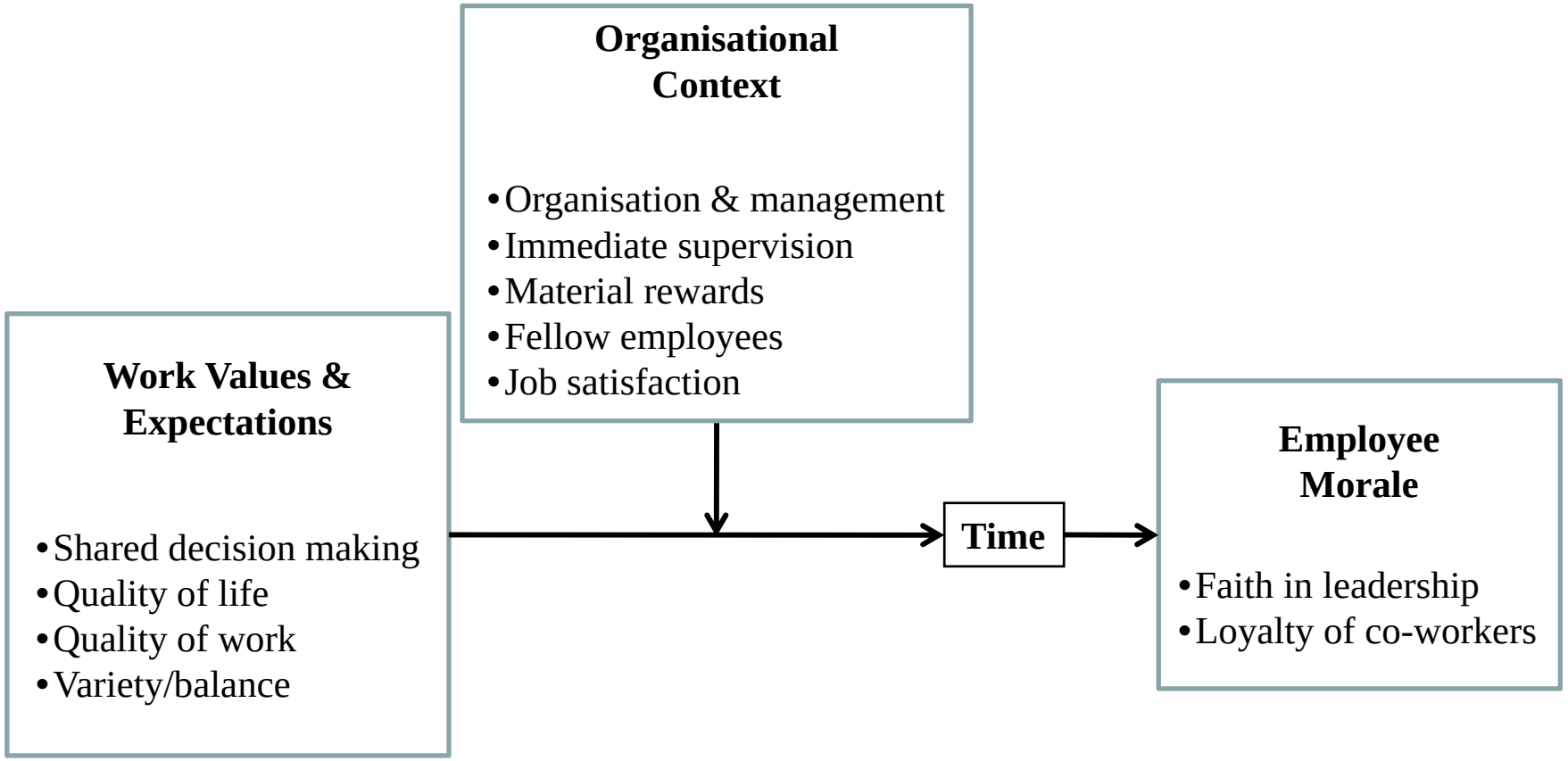
By defining these terms (and how we measure them), we could, in fact, expand the information required for each box. For example:



The model could be developed further in order to explore nursing morale in hospitals :

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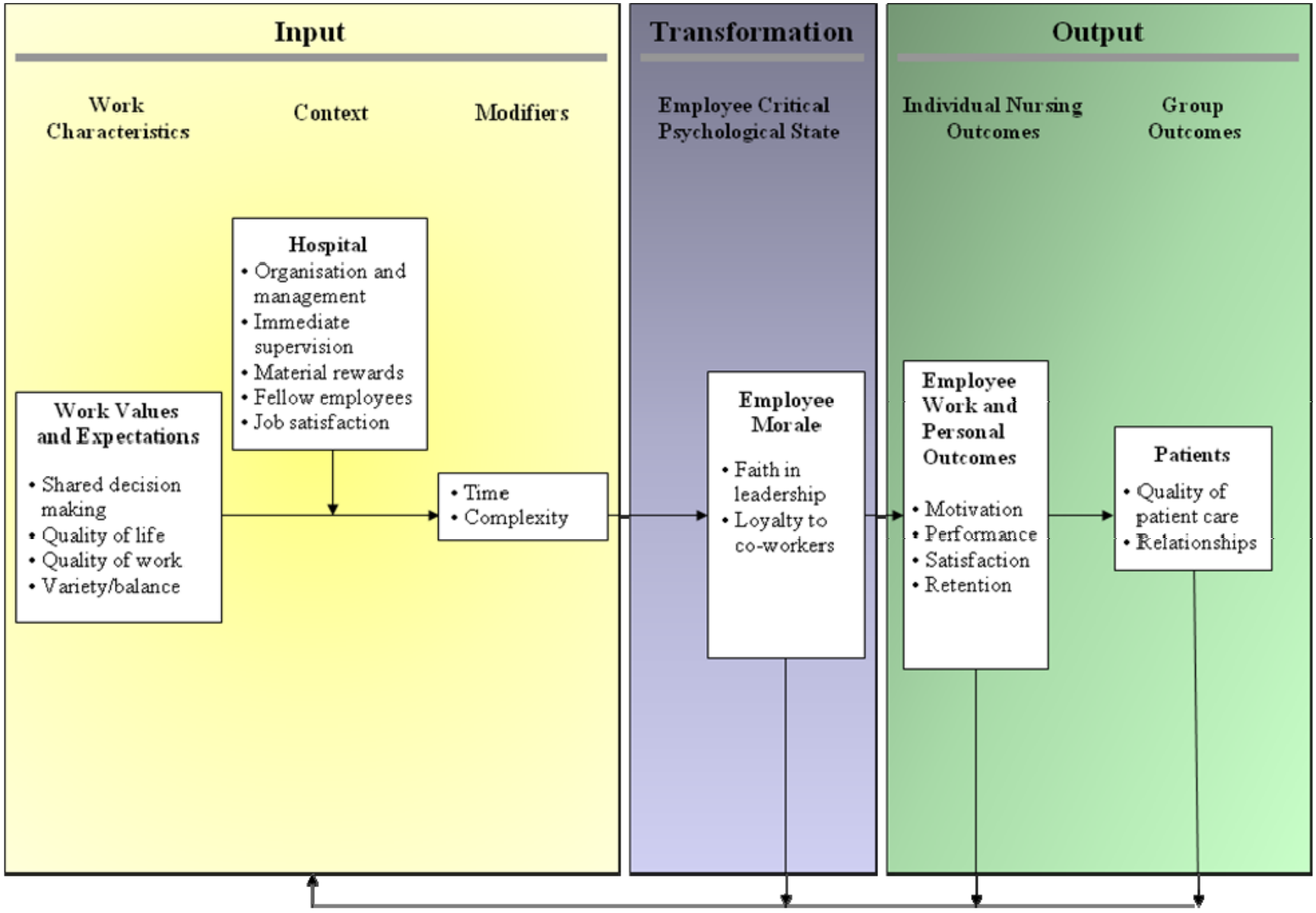

And further still…

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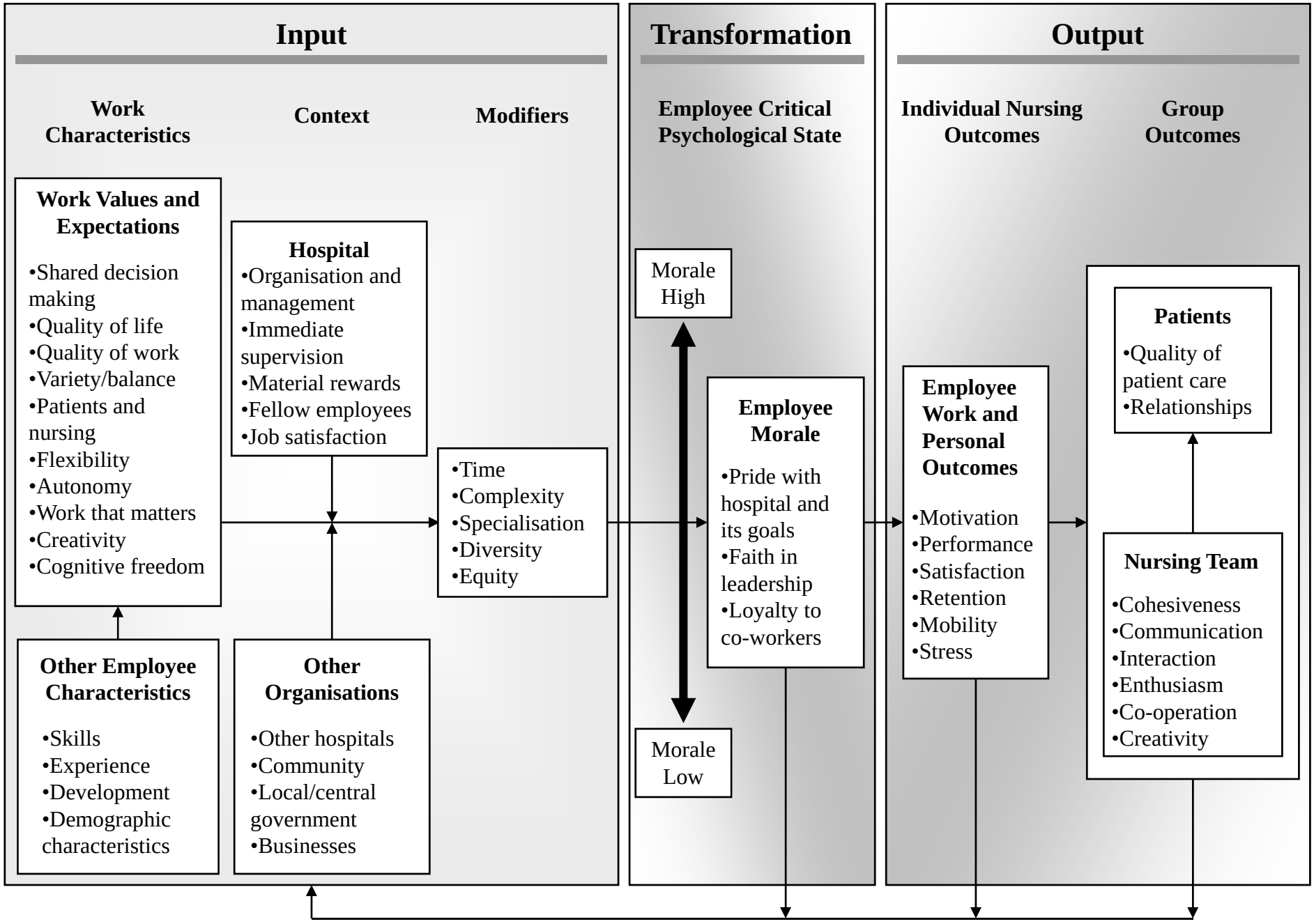

Source: McFadzean and McFadzean (2005)

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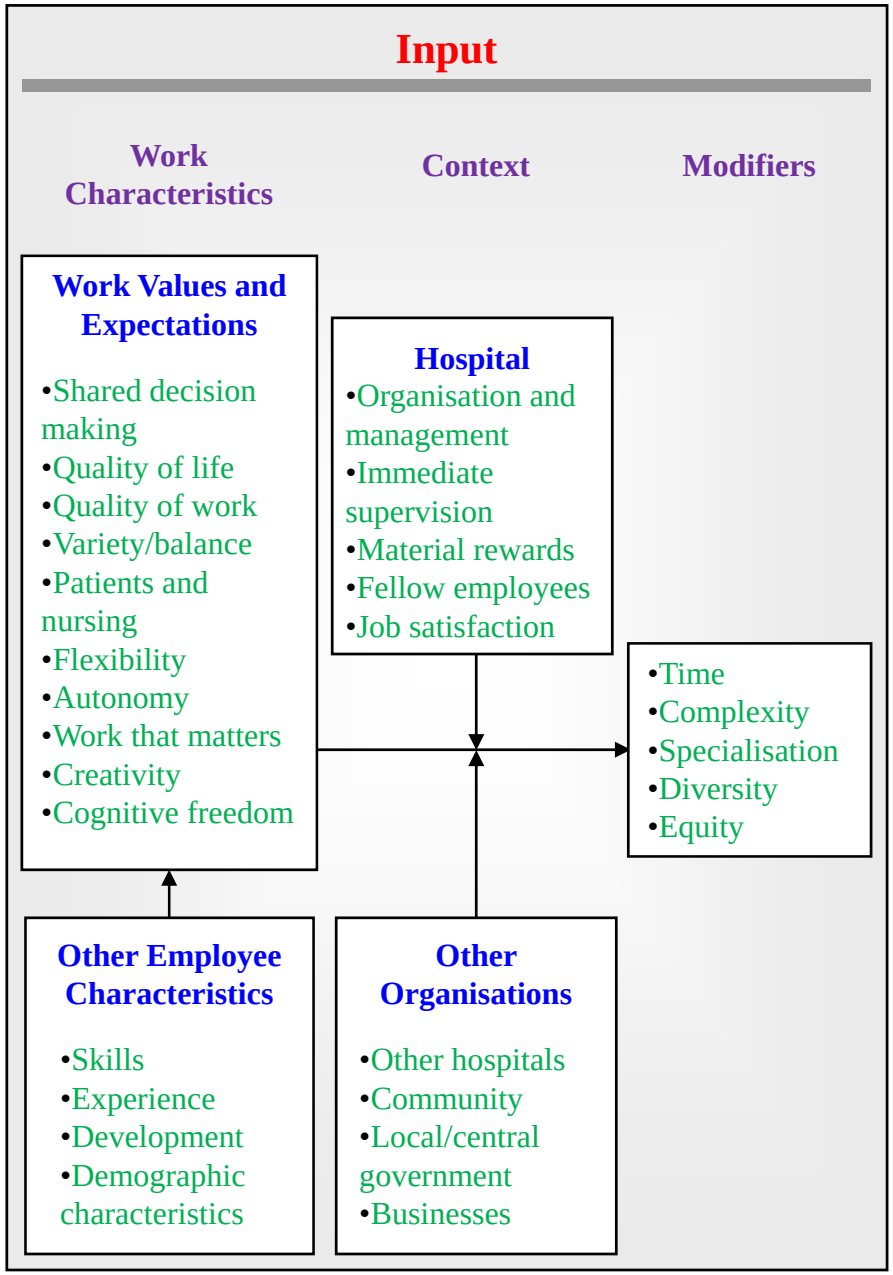

Part of this model illustrates very nicely the categories, sub-categories and the internal and external environment included in this topic. As you can see, the model has a hierarchy of "categories". "Input", "Transformation" and "Output" are top level categories. Each of these also includes a number of categories. In the Input section, for example, there are three categories, "Work Characteristics", "Context" and "Modifiers". In turn, each of these have lower level categories (or sub-categories) e.g. "Work Values and Expectations" and "Other Employee Characteristics". Each of these sub-categories include a number of variables.

One of the high level categories shows the contextual sub-categories. In this instance, there are two, namely the "Hospital" and "Other Organisations". The Hospital obviously refers to all the relevant contextual information inside the hospital such as culture, leadership etc. These are the internal contextual variables. "Other Organisations", on the other hand, refer to external contextual variables. In other circumstance they might include competitors, the political environment, customers and so on.

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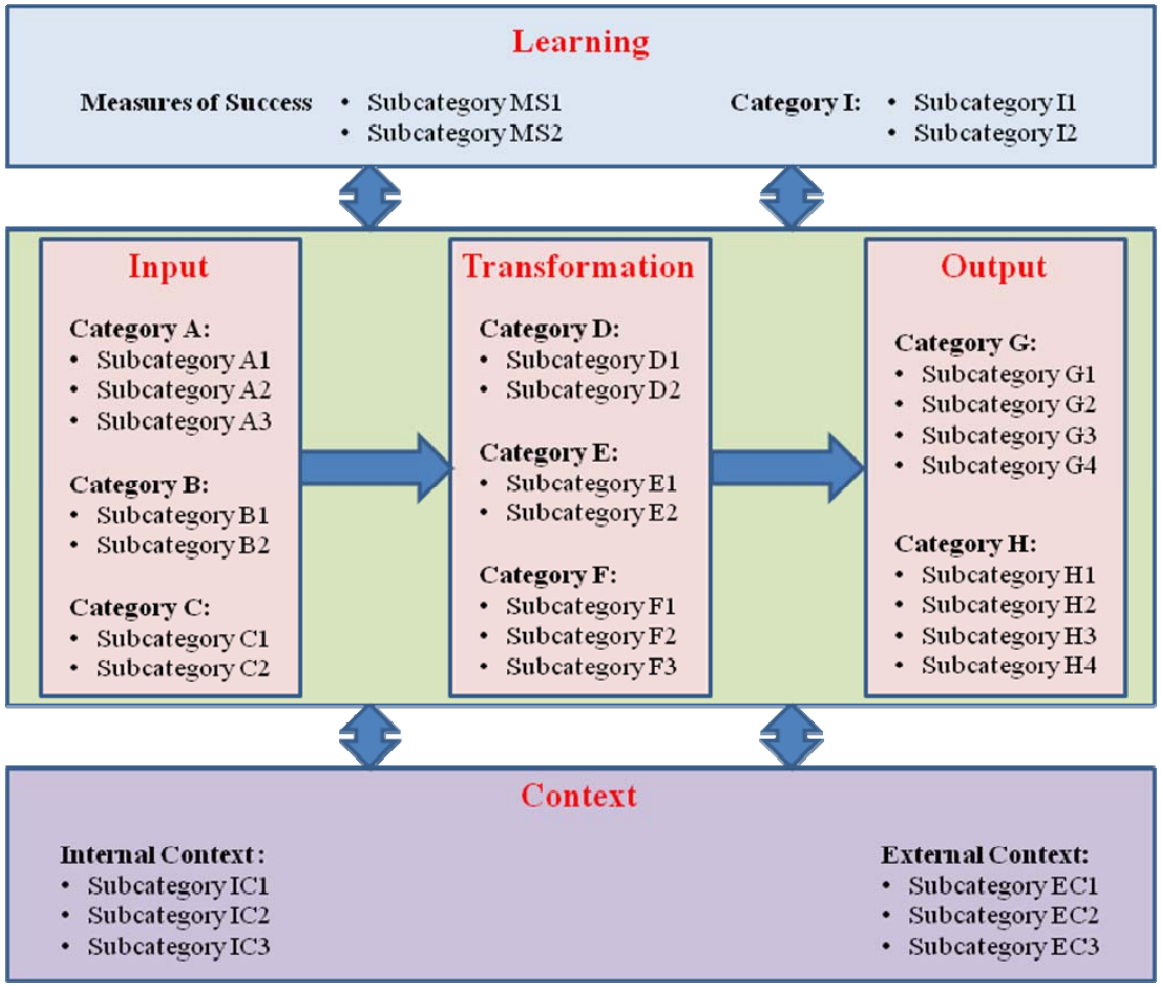
The model that you have developed in your literature review will also include categories and sub-categories. It may consist of input, transformation and output categories and variables. It may also include contextual and feedback (or learning) categories like the model below:



Your model, though, won't necessarily look like this. This is just an example.

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Why is this important?

It is important because you can use your research model – your product from Chapter 2, your literature review – to help you to develop your interview questions as it acts as a framework for what you want to find out (i.e. you want develop an understanding of these categories, sub-categories and variables, how they relate to one another, what their strengths, weaknesses are, what their impact is, how they can be improved etc.

From these results, you will be able to construct a second model – similar to the first – but with a lot more detail and including practical knowledge. This model will be set within a specific context – the organisation(s) that you will be working with – and therefore, the contextual data is important.

Secondly, the model can help you with your analysis. Strauss and Corbin use three types of coding to fragment and re-construct qualitative data. Have a look at the document called Grounded Theory for more information on this. Basically, though, you start to code each line or paragraph of your interview transcripts. These codes will equate to your variables within your research model (although you should also have extra ones). These codes will then be sorted into sub-categories (axial coding), which will equate to your lower level categories. These , in turn, can be grouped into higher level categories. One high level category is then chosen as your core category. This usually depends on your research question. In the above example, for instance, the core category would be morale as this is the central theme of the research. Once you have chosen your core category, you can link the other main categories to it. From this, you can develop your model. Thus, if you use the morale example, we could end up with something like the following:

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Open Coding

- Shared decision making
- Quality of life
- Quality of work
- Variety/balance
- Patients and nursing
- Flexibility
- Autonomy
- Work that matters
- Creativity
- Cognitive freedom
- Skills
- Experience
- Development
- Demographic characteristics
- Organisation and management
- Immediate supervision
- Material rewards
- Fellow employees
- Job satisfaction
- Other hospitals
- Community
- Local/central government
- Businesses
- Time
- Complexity
- Specialisation
- Diversity
- Equity
- Pride with hospital and its goals
- Faith in leadership
- Loyalty to co-workers
- Motivation
- Performance
- Satisfaction
- Retention
- Mobility
- Stress
- Quality of patient care
- Relationships
- Cohesiveness
- Communication
- Interaction
- Enthusiasm
- Co-operation
- Creativity
- Leadership
- Relationships
- Rules and regulations
- Culture
- Hierarchy
- Etc

NB The codes in blue have been taken from the research model, the codes in red are new codes.

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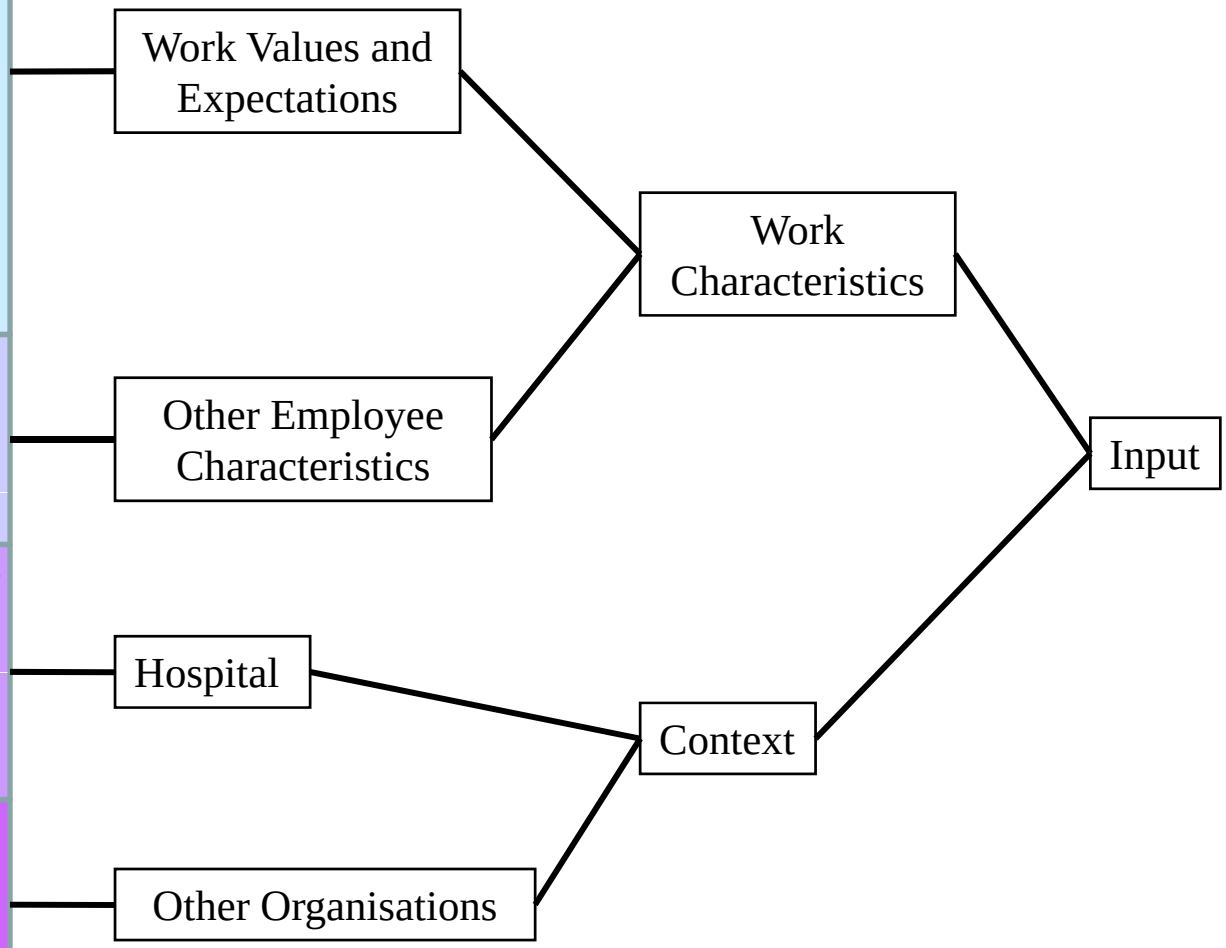
Axial Coding

Open Codes

- Shared decision making
- Quality of life
- Quality of work
- Variety/balance
- Patients and nursing
- Flexibility
- Autonomy
- Work that matters
- Creativity
- Cognitive freedom
- Skills
- Experience
- Development
- Demographic characteristics
- Organisation and management
- Immediate supervision
- Material rewards
- Fellow employees
- Job satisfaction
- Other hospitals
- Community
- Local/central government
- Businesses

Different Levels of Axial Codes



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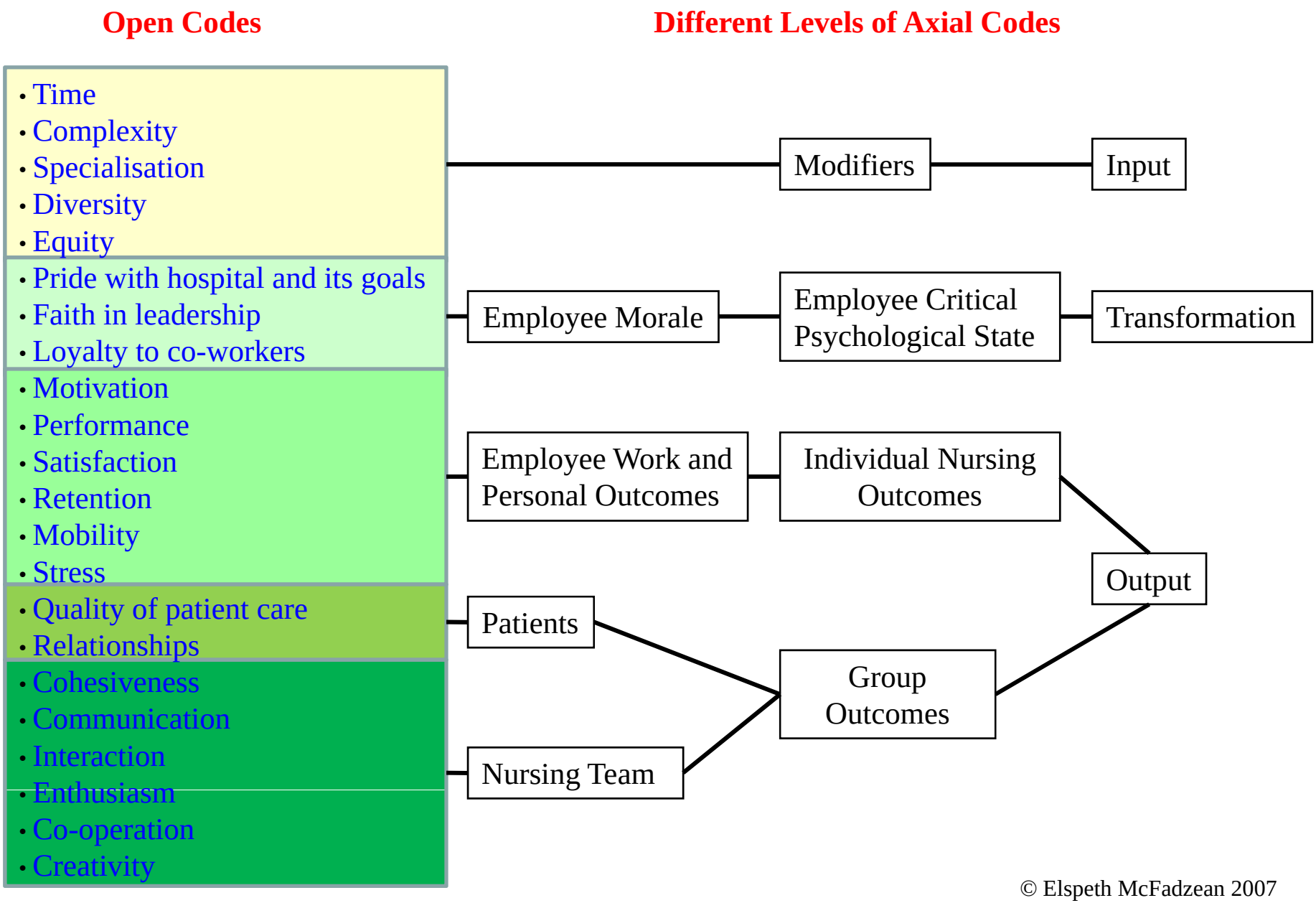
Axial Coding cont.



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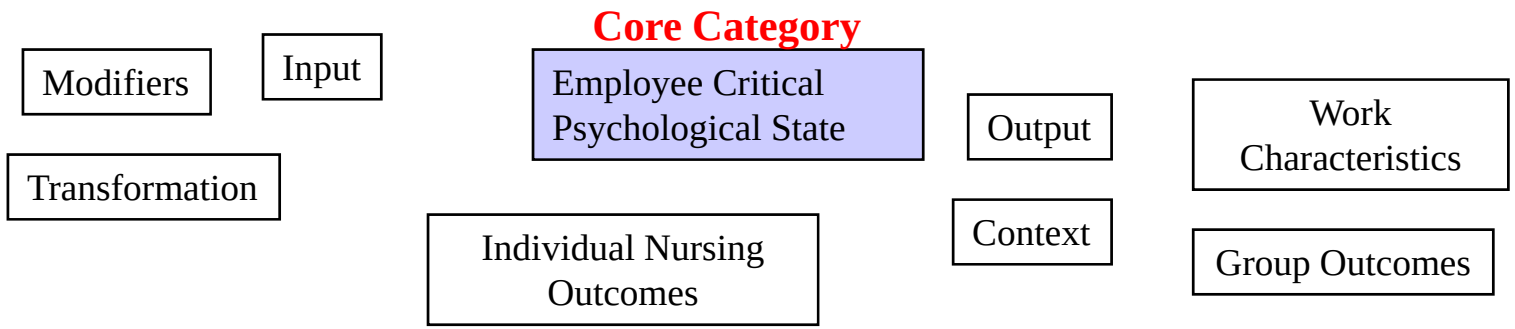
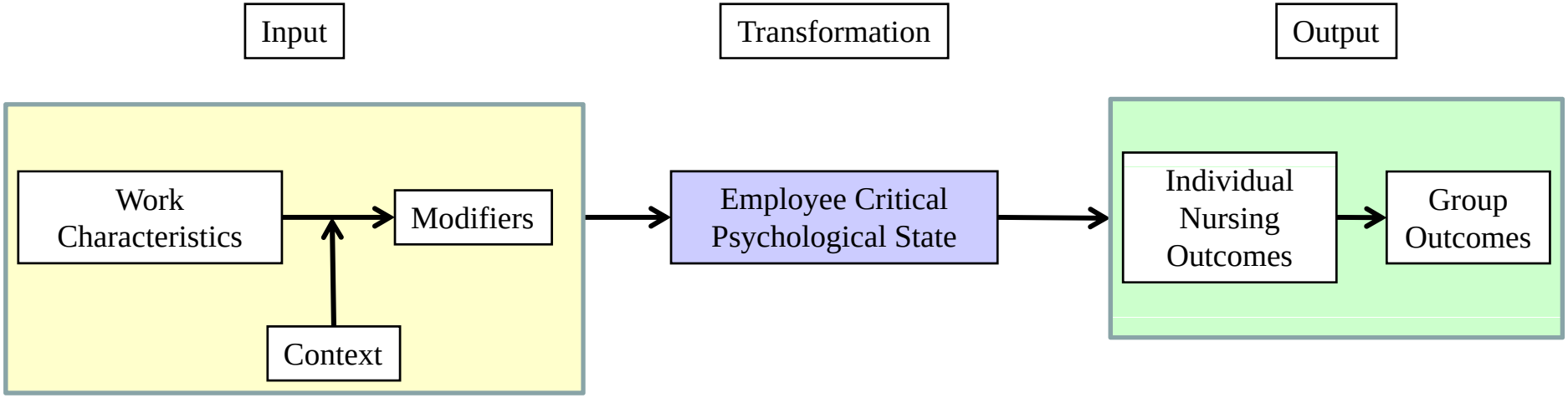
Selective Coding:

1. Choose Core Category



2. Link the Core Categories with the Other Appropriate Categories



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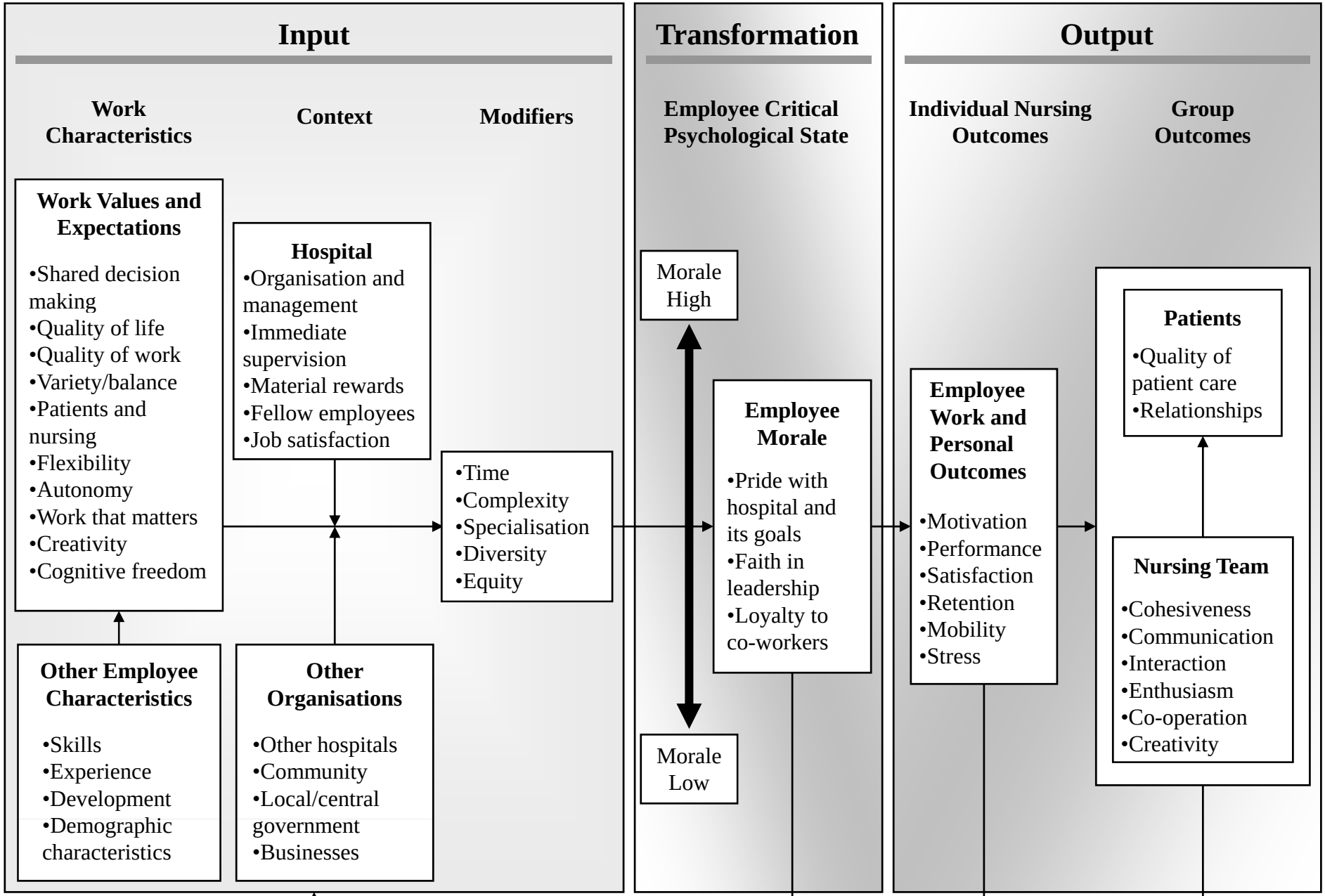
Develop your Theory by inserting sub-categories and variables and explaining the relationships



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Source: McFadzean and McFadzean (2005)

References

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Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1998), *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, California.

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