



Research Article

Path Analysis of Empowerment and Work Effectiveness among Staff Nurses



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SUMMARY

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to test a predictive model that could predict and explain work effectiveness among staff nurses at local hospitals.

Methods: Between April 1 and May 15, 2009, 340 nurses were recruited from two hospitals (one in Ulsan and one in Yangsan). Data were collected via self-administered questionnaires and analyzed using structural equation modeling.

Results: A modified model was retained, as the final path model showed a very good fit with the data. Job characteristics and compensation justice were found to have direct and positive effects on empowerment. Job characteristics, transformational leadership, and empowerment were found to directly and positively affect work effectiveness. In addition, job characteristics were found to have a greater effect on empowerment and work effectiveness than other factors do.

Conclusion: This structural equation model was used to test the relationships between these factors and work effectiveness. Empowerment mediated the relationship between job characteristics, transformational leadership, and work effectiveness. Findings from this study can be used to design the strategies for increasing work effectiveness in Korean nurses.

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Introduction

Medical environments around the world are rapidly changing. For example, there is an increase in patients' expectations and needs with regard to medical services, and competition among medical institutions is growing. To stay abreast of changes in the medical environment, hospitals now must develop a variety of plans that enable them to succeed against their competitors (Park, 2007).

A hospital's work-related efficiency is directly linked to the efficiency of its nurses. Many medical services provided in a hospital are nursing-based. Nurses can significantly affect not only a hospital's image but also the evaluations of its users. In practice, improving nursing work effectiveness directly relates to increasing a hospital's competitiveness. With regard to performance-based pay systems, factors found to affect organizational performance are perceived compensation justice (e.g., organizational justice & compensation equity; Kim & Park, 2006) and job characteristics

(e.g., skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, & feedback; Lim, Kim, & Kim, 2008). Leadership (Seomun, Chang, Cho, Kim, & Lee, 2006), motivation, role-conflict, professional identity (Lim, 2005), and organizational psychological factors (Lee, 2007; Yang, 2006) also affect organizational performance. Furthermore, organizational culture and climate are related to work effectiveness. Therefore, work effectiveness appears to affect and be affected by multiple factors: individual psychological factors, organizational factors, and job characteristics.

In nursing, empowerment is frequently used (Bartunek & Spreitzer, 2006) to characterize nurses who successfully act within their organizations to deliver effective patient care. Empowerment emerges from interactions among individual, organizational, and sociocultural factors (Rao, 2012). Empowerment has a direct impact on nursing work effectiveness, including job satisfaction and work productivity (Park & Park, 2008), and is a mediating factor in job characteristics and leadership of managers (Lim et al., 2008; Wong & Laschinger, 2013).

Job characteristics can create conditions for high levels of work motivation, satisfaction, and performance. Work outcome and high levels of motivation are related to fulfilling one's potential through one's work (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Nurses experience job

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meaningfulness through skill variety, task identity, and task significance, and are empowered by the recognition of work outcomes through feedback (Lim et al., 2008). Therefore, such mechanisms lead to high levels of work outcome and satisfaction, as well as improvements in work effectiveness among nurses.

With regard to employee motivation, transformational leadership of managers—which emphasizes both creative thinking and action—seems the most appropriate type of leadership at a time when the medical environment is rapidly changing (Bak, 2002). Moreover, transformational leadership of managers can be especially effective when it presents a vision of the future that helps achieve above-average goals and motivates staff members to work toward that vision (Bak, 2002; Kim & Lee, 2001). Transformational leadership also has been reported to affect both empowerment (Bak, 2002; Bass, 2000) and work effectiveness (Wang, Chontawan, & Nantsupawat, 2011).

Compensation also affects members' attitudes and behaviors. For the members of an organization, compensation is both a reward for exertion and a means of supporting themselves and their families. However, for an organization, compensation is an expense that it bears in exchange for motivating its members and accomplishing the activities necessary to meet organizational goals (Lee, 2008; Suh & Jung, 2007). When members think they are being fairly compensated by an organization—based on an accurate evaluation of their exertion and performance levels—member empowerment and work effectiveness may increase. Members may also participate more actively in tasks that help fulfill organizational objectives, and thus improve the effectiveness of the organization (Park, 2007).

Many researchers have argued that job characteristics, transformational leadership, compensation, and empowerment affect organizational effectiveness. However, the influence of transformational leadership, compensation, and empowerment on nursing work effectiveness—which is closely related to the work efficiency of a hospital—has not been studied extensively. Moreover, studies that examine antecedent variables and empowerment (a psychological variable) with regard to nursing work effectiveness are few. When situations are structured in such a way that employees feel empowered, the organization is likely to benefit in terms of its effectiveness. According to Laschinger, Finegan, and Wilk (2009), empowerment is an essential component of workplace environment that represents intrinsic task motivation, or employee rewards, inherent to empowering work conditions. Critical structural components of an empowered workplace can contribute to a healthy, productive, and innovative nursing workforce that increases job satisfaction and retention (Wagner et al., 2010).

Local hospitals, in particular, are suffering from a shortage of nurses. Therefore, strategies to improve nursing work effectiveness are highly desirable. In addition, regional hospitals are facing a nursing shortage, as well as a lower empowerment of nurses because of low wages and poor working condition (Park & Park, 2008). Therefore, in order to improve nursing work effectiveness of regional hospitals, it is necessary to consider studies on nurses in these hospitals. To develop a successful strategy that improves nursing work effectiveness, this study will show how nursing work effectiveness is affected in regional hospitals.

The four variables, job characteristics, transformational leadership, compensation justice and empowerment, are potentially related to empowerment and work effectiveness in staff nurses. Given the possibility of multiple pathways to work effectiveness, structural equation modeling (SEM) was considered the most appropriate way to predict and explain nursing work effectiveness from these earlier variables (Figure 1). Therefore, in this study we used SEM for the following purposes: (a) to examine the causal and mutual relationships that contribute to work effectiveness, and (b)

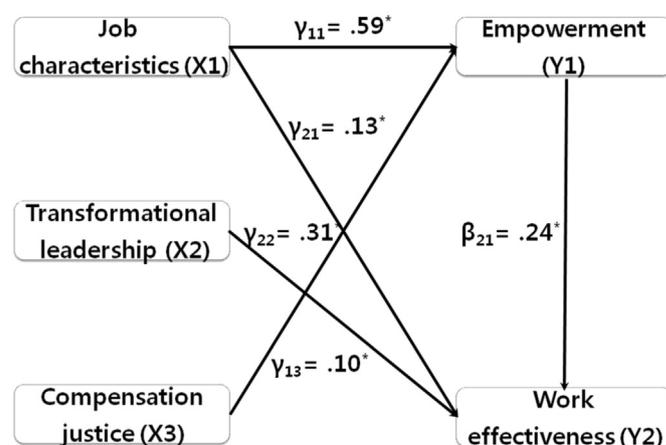


Figure 1. Modified work effectiveness and empowerment—a path analytic model. Note. * $p < .05$.

to develop path diagrams for determining the strategies that are useful for targeting factors with the potential to improve work effectiveness.

The purpose of this study was to test a predictive model that could predict and explain nursing work effectiveness, as well as the mediating factors between empowerment and job characteristics, transformational leadership, compensation, and work effectiveness. Based on the research results, this study aims to pinpoint strategies that, when leveraged by an organization's human resources management, will improve nursing work effectiveness.

Methods

Study design

Nurses from two hospitals participated in this quantitative, cross-sectional study, which aimed to identify the predictors of nursing work effectiveness along with job characteristics, transformational leadership, perceived compensation justice, and empowerment.

Setting and sample

Participants consisted of 340 registered nurses with over 6 months of work experience at a local hospital in the cities of Ulsan or Yangsan, South Korea. All of these regional hospitals have 500 beds or more. Inclusion criteria for the study were (a) registered nurses working for at least 6 months in one of these hospitals and (b) general nurses and nursing supervisors. In total, 368 nurses were screened; 28 were excluded because they returned blank questionnaires. The remaining 340 nurses were enrolled in the study. For each hospital, the nursing supervisor recruited the staff nurses by distributing study questionnaires to nurses who were eligible to participate. Data were collected from April 1 to May 15, 2009.

Ethical consideration

Approval from the hospitals' research and ethics committees was obtained before initiation of the study. Prior to data collection, a research assistant explained to the participants the research objectives, assured them of anonymity, described privacy-assurance requirements, and explained that their participation could be discontinued at any time at their request. All participants were provided a written consent document prior to participation.

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