



Authentic leadership and its impact on creativity of nursing staff: A cross sectional questionnaire survey of Indian nurses and their supervisors



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ABSTRACT

Background: Nurses play a dominant role in the healthcare sector. However, the working condition of nurses in India is far from satisfactory due to a variety of factors. This is further compounded by the lack of respect for nurses and their profession. Therefore, there is a need to examine factors that could mitigate this situation.

Objective: The objective of this paper is to examine the relationship between authentic leadership and employee creativity, while determining the mediating effect of knowledge sharing behaviour and moderating effect of use of information technology on this association.

Design: A questionnaire-based survey was used to collect the data. Macro process (Hayes) was used to examine the mediating role of knowledge sharing behaviour and the moderating role of use of information technology in the relationship between authentic leadership and employee creativity.

Settings: Data was collected from 43 small- and medium-sized hospitals in the state of Uttarakhand, India.

Participants: The participants in the present study were 405 nurses and their 81 supervisors from the above hospitals.

Results: Results indicate that authentic leadership is positively linked to the creativity of employees. Further, knowledge sharing behaviour is found to mediate the relationship between authentic leadership and employee creativity, while use of information technology acts as a moderator between knowledge sharing behaviour and employee creativity. The findings of this investigation can help healthcare managers understand the importance of knowledge creation and knowledge sharing among healthcare workers. This paper draws attention to the need for hospital administrators to establish an appropriate information technology infrastructure to effectively manage the knowledge pool of the organization. This study also highlights the importance of effective leadership style, namely authentic leadership, in positively influencing employee creativity in healthcare institutions, a service oriented industry.

Conclusion: This study contributes to existing research on authentic leadership and employee creativity by showing that knowledge sharing behaviour and use of information technology are important and relevant variables that affect the degree of influence that authentic leadership has on employee creativity.

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What is already known about the topic?

- Hospital Managers and Nursing Leaders are routinely required to manage challenging healthcare work environments and difficulties faced by the workforce, in particular, the nursing staff.

- Significant amount of research has investigated the impact of specific leadership styles of nursing leaders and the work outcome of the nursing staff.
- Contribution of knowledge sharing activity among the healthcare workers and its influence on the work outcomes of nursing staff has also been studied by researchers.

What this paper adds

- It examines the work environment of the nursing workforce in developing economies such as India and the related issues.

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- Empirically tests, in the Indian healthcare sector, the connection that authentic leaders increase the creative abilities of their followers by raising their positive emotions and psychological state. By doing so, they make them more willing to share knowledge with one another.
- Results of this study show that the impact of knowledge sharing on creativity is enhanced by managing the knowledge efficiently and effectively by appropriate use of information technology tools.

1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, the healthcare sector in India has expanded to become a major industry and is one of the largest sectors in terms of employment and revenue. This market, which was estimated at USD 40 billion in the year 2010, has been growing at a compound annual growth rate of 22% and is projected to reach USD 280 billion by the year 2020 (Vashist and Jain, 2013). A major contributing factor to this growth has been the increased demand for healthcare services by the growing urban middle class population, leading to increased coverage of healthcare services and higher expenditure by public and private players. The private healthcare sector, which contributes about 80% to the total market, needs to remain highly competitive and profitable to survive and prosper (Vashist and Jain, 2013). To do so, it is necessary that the players innovate on a continual basis and offer new products and services to their patients (customers), otherwise it is likely that certain health care service providers will be pushed out of the market by their competitors (Omachonu and Einspruch, 2010).

Nurses are a critical element of the healthcare system. The quality of patient care and the productivity and image of a hospital are directly dependent on them (Malik and Dhar, 2016). Therefore, it is necessary for hospitals to focus on nurses' motivational levels in order to fully harness and leverage their creative potential, as individual creativity is the first step to organizational innovation (Manion, 1993). Creativity may be understood as creation of new usable knowledge or effective and novel use of existing knowledge (Zhou and Shalley, 2003). There is agreement among experts that knowledge is one of the major factors that determines the success of any organization and provides a sustained competitive edge (Finnegan and Willcocks, 2006; Hallin and Marnburg, 2008). Further, when knowledge is shared, it leads not only to its effective use, but also to creation of new knowledge. Hence, organizations need to foster a climate of knowledge sharing among individual nurses, nurses in a team, between teams and across the entire organization. To this end, individual factors, such as knowledge sharing intention and behaviour of employees (Connelly and Kevin Kelloway, 2003) should be identified. However, difficulties may arise due to certain barriers to knowledge sharing. Riege (2005) has argued that there are three types of barriers, namely, individual barriers, organizational barriers and technology barriers. At an individual level, perhaps the strongest barrier is the belief that sharing of knowledge may lead to erosion of authority or power and jeopardize job security (Abd El Aziz et al., 2013). To manage knowledge, a vital resource, it is essential that hospitals set up effective knowledge management systems and structures within their organizations. Hospitals are very complex organizations with various professional groups, such as specialist doctors, nursing specialists, clinical technicians and other specialists, possessing different skills and significant information and knowledge. Decision making processes are complex, as well (Lee and Hong, 2014). Hence, a large amount of vital knowledge is created in hospitals over time. Thus, it is necessary for them to have fast, precise and long term sharing of this vast pool of knowledge so that

patients receive the best possible medical treatment and care (Kim and Jang, 2009).

The above presents a dynamic and complex scenario which requires effective management to obtain the desired outcomes. Such management calls for, in addition to efficient systems and structures, an effective leadership that can motivate, build trust, instill ethics and inspire confidence and transparency among employees. According to George (2003, 2010), authentic leaders create an environment of trust, ethical behaviour and transparency among followers, which also helps in dispelling the myth that sharing of knowledge is loss of power or authority and job security (Cabrera et al., 2006).

It may be said that authentic leaders create a climate where employees are motivated to share their knowledge with others, thereby significantly improving the quality of their work. Sharing of knowledge and experience can also give rise to new ideas and working methods, leading to increased employee creativity (Dyer and Nobeoka, 2000; Tsai et al., 2001). Studies by Yeh et al. (2006) have found that many organizations lack the infrastructure to store, retrieve and apply knowledge when and where it is needed the most. Proper application of information technology can assist organizations in creating structured and labeled databases which help not only in retrieving knowledge using key words, but also in dissemination of information where and when required.

While substantial research has examined the link between authentic leadership and employee creativity, very little work has been carried out to investigate the effect of authentic leadership on employee creativity while considering the mediating role of knowledge sharing behaviour. Furthermore, no study has been conducted on the aforementioned link in the context of nursing staff, especially in the Indian healthcare sector. Research (Sherman and Pross, 2010) has shown that nurse leaders play a very important role in enhancing work environment, but there is not much research on the mechanism by which these leaders influence creativity among nurses.

The present work examines the impact of authentic leadership on creativity of nursing staff working in the Indian healthcare sector, while considering the mediating role of knowledge sharing behaviour and the moderating role of use of information technology. In doing so, the study seeks to determine the effectiveness of authentic leadership in inspiring creativity among nurses in the above sector.

2. Literature review

2.1. Theoretical framework: authentic leadership and employee creativity

Authentic leadership has drawn significant attention due to the evidence that leaders help followers find connection and meaning at their workplace, thereby making a fundamental difference to organizations (Cartwright and Holmes, 2006; George, 2003). Such leaders achieve their authenticity through self-driven internal regulatory processes and not with the help of any outside standards. According to Walumbwa et al. (2008), four unique components that characterize authentic leadership are: 1) an internalized moral perspective—refers to setting moral standards for conduct which they strongly believe and follow; 2) balanced processing—before arriving at any decision, they carefully examine pertinent data and information; 3) self-awareness – refers to the understanding of a leader about his or her own strengths and weaknesses and their impact on others; and 4) relational transparency – reflects the extent to which a leader is ready and open to share feelings and thoughts and encourages followers to do the same.

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