



Refinement and validation of the Work Readiness Scale for graduate nurses

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ABSTRACT

The transition from student to registered nurse is often stressful and has been attributed to a lack of work readiness. Understanding what comprises work readiness for newly registered nurses, or graduate nurses as they are referred to in Australia, may reduce attrition and improve transition into the workplace. The 64-item Work Readiness Scale (WRS), developed with a generic population of graduates, has yet to be validated against specific disciplines to confirm applicability as a measure of work readiness. This study adapted the original WRS for use with a graduate nurse population (WRS-GN). The aim was to refine and validate the WRS-GN and determine whether the original four factor construct was supported. The WRS-GN was completed by 450 graduate nurses. Exploratory factor analyses supported the original four-factor solution (social intelligence, personal work characteristics, organizational acumen, and work competence). The final WRS-GN consisted of 46 items, showed excellent reliability, and explained 73.55% of the variance.

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Work readiness is the degree to which graduates possess the characteristics and attributes that prepare them for success in the workplace (Caballero & Walker, 2010). In particular, it is indicative of career advancement potential, role performance, and job success (Atlay & Harris, 2000; Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006; Gabb, 1997; Gardner & Liu, 1997; Hambur, Rowe, & Luc, 2002; Stewart & Knowles, 1999). There is a lack of consensus about the specific attributes that comprise work readiness, and these attributes are yet to be clearly defined (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). Nevertheless, studies examining graduate work readiness have reported that employers find that some graduates are not work ready, particularly in areas of

personal and relational competencies—skills not necessarily taught within a university setting (ACNielsen Research Services, 2000; Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006; Gardner & Liu, 1997). For long-term success, employers expect graduates to possess a diverse range of skills and attributes beyond discipline-specific competencies, such as problem solving, communication, teamwork, and innovation (ACNielsen Research Services, 2000; Hager & Holland, 2006; Hart, 2008).

A range of terms are used interchangeably throughout the literature to identify graduate skills including “generic skills,” “transferable skills,” “core skills,” “profile of attributes,” and “employability skills”

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(Atlay & Harris, 2000; Caballero, Walker, & Fuller-Tyskiewicz, 2011; Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006; Dolnicar & Stern, 2003; Gardner & Liu, 1997; Stewart & Knowles, 1999). Similarly, work readiness has also been referred to in the literature as “work preparedness,” “generic attributes,” and “graduate employability” (Atlay & Harris, 2000; Caballero et al., 2011; Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006; Dolnicar & Stern, 2003; Gardner & Liu, 1997; Stewart & Knowles, 1999). The inconsistency of terms used and discrepancy between the attributes that comprise work readiness may explain the difficulty of assessing the construct of work readiness (Caballero et al., 2011; Stewart & Knowles, 1999). Bridgestock (2009) identified a distinction between generic skills (job skills that can be used across multiple situations), discipline-specific skills (job skills specific to a certain occupation), and underpinning personal traits and dispositions (precursors that aid in the successful development and application of skills). Generic graduate attributes are the skills, qualities, and understandings developed through university and life experiences that consequently shape the graduate’s contribution as an employee and as a citizen (Bowden, Hart, King, Trigwell, & Watts, 2000).

Caballero et al. (2011) explored the characteristics and attributes of work readiness and, from their findings, developed the Work Readiness Scale (WRS). The 64-item scale was validated with a sample of 251 Australian graduates from a range of industry disciplines including engineering, science, commerce, business, accounting, finance, law, and combined business/science fields. Four work readiness dimensions were identified: work competence, organizational acumen, social intelligence, and personal characteristics, suggesting that work readiness is a multidimensional construct. However, validating the scale across various disciplines and work contexts is necessary to confirm its applicability and reliability as a measure of work readiness.

The health industry is one area that may benefit from a systematic assessment of the skills and attributes that comprise work readiness for health graduates. Numerous studies of health graduates over the past 40 years have identified high incidences of job burnout within the first 18 months of entering the workplace because of exhausting and disorientating workloads (e.g., Cho, Laschinger, & Wong, 2006; Duchscher, 2008; Kramer, 1974; Laschinger & Leiter, 2006). The transition from student to registered practitioner has been identified as a period of turbulence characterized by stress, anxiety, and reality shock (Duchscher, 2009; Goh & Watt, 2003). For newly registered nurses (referred to as graduate nurses in Australia), it has been reported that 33% to 61% plan to leave the profession or change their place of employment within their first year of work (Bowles & Candela, 2005; Cowin & Jacobsson, 2003; Duchscher, 2009; Unit, 2000). Nurse turnover because of work-related stress is also consistently high (Lim, Bogossian, & Ahern, 2010) and may lead to health care institutions having

to replace highly competent practitioners with graduate nurses. Graduate nurses generally lack both confidence and experience in the clinical environment while increasing workloads and mounting patient acuity add to their stress (Duchscher, 2008; Roberts & Farrell, 2003). Understanding the attributes and characteristics that comprise work readiness of graduate nurses would improve health care delivery, reduce practitioner attrition, and facilitate a more successful transition and integration into the workplace.

A qualitative study by Walker et al. (2013) explored the work readiness of graduate health professionals from the perspective of 41 new graduates and five organizational representatives of a regional Australian public hospital. Similar to the findings of Caballero et al. (2011), four main graduate work readiness categories emerged: organizational acumen, social intelligence, work competence, and personal characteristics. Additional themes relevant to health graduates were identified including resilience, flexibility, conflict management, and responsibility.

The current study aims to extend the research of Caballero et al. (2011) and Walker et al. (2013) by refining and validating a revised WRS for graduate nurses (WRS-GN). The extent to which the revised WRS-GN supports the original four-factor construct of work readiness will also be investigated.

Methods

Participants

Participants were 450 graduate nurses recruited over a 3-year period (2012–2014) from four health organizations located in regional and metropolitan Victoria, Australia. Participants were recruited during graduate nurse study days held at the commencement of the graduate nurse year-long program at each participating organization. The study involved 426 women and 22 men, which is below the average 10% of male nurses in Australia (Health Workforce Australia, 2013). The mean age of the participants was 25 years with an age range from 20 to 54 years.

Measure

Based on the findings of Walker et al. (2013), the 64-item WRS developed by Caballero et al. (2011) was adapted for the current study. A number of original items were rephrased or removed dependent on their suitability for a graduate nurse population. This resulted in a 60-item self-report WRS-GN that included 51 items from the original scale and nine new items relevant to graduate nurses (Table 1). Items were measured on a 10-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree and 10 = completely agree), with high scores representing a higher level of perceived work readiness. The original WRS had good internal consistency

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