

The Impact of Ethical Leadership and Perceived Co-worker Loafing on Intention to Stay in Employment among Taiwanese Hospital Nurses

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of ethical leadership and perceived co-worker loafing on nurses' intention to stay in their jobs. Retention of high quality nursing staff is an important issue for health care organisations. A total of 438 valid responses were collected and the data was analysed using structural equation model. The findings indicated that nurses' perception of co-worker loafing was the major reason for wanting to leave their organisations. In addition, ethical actions by leaders to minimise these unfair practices by co-workers increased their team members' intention to retain their jobs. Perceptions of unfairness are responsible for increasing nurses' intention to leave their jobs. It is therefore important to deal with problems in a group justly. Health care organisations should encourage nurse leaders to find ways of reducing loafing among their subordinates so as to encourage highly qualified staff to stay. In order for health care institutions to retain high quality nursing staff, nurse managers have an important job as role models and as those who influence the behaviour of subordinates.

Keywords: ethical leadership, perceived co-worker loafing, intention to stay, organisational justice, normative perspective.

Introduction

Today, high nursing turnover has resulted in many negative consequences for hospitals in Taiwan. It not only increases the workload of nurse managers who have to train the newcomers (Hassmiller and Cozine 2006, May et al. 2006) but also worsens stress among incumbent nurses

who have to keep establishing relationships with new co-workers (Fang 2001, Aiken et al. 2002). Most important, the loss of high-quality nursing staff leads to poor quality of care for patients (Castle and Engberg 2005, Tai et al. 2008) and high operational costs (Jones and Gates 2007, Jones 2005, Waldman et al. 2004). Hence, understanding the factors behind a worker's intention to stay in the job could assist hospital managers in coming up with appropriate retention strategies.

Retention of nursing staff is a complex issue. Many studies have identified various personal and organisational factors that influence staff retention among nurses (Tai and Robinson 1998, Takase et al. 2005, McCarthy et al. 2003, Ellenbecker 2004, McCarthy et al. 2007, Abualrub and Alghamdi 2012, Smith et al. 2012). Although many studies have suggested successful strategies for retention of nursing staff, few have focused on fair practices at the group level. Hence, deriving from organisational justice theory, this study extends the understanding on retention of nursing staff and explores the influence of perceived co-worker loafing on nurses' intention to remain in employment.

Furthermore, drawing from the theory of normative social behaviour (TNSB), people's behaviour is influenced by their normative beliefs (Rimal and Real 2005). Thus, the leader who has ethical norms would have these norms reflected in their area of influence. Furthermore, TNSB also proposed that normative-based intervention could influence people's behaviour. This means that when people perceive that their leader expects more ethical and fair behaviour, there is a greater likelihood that they will engage in that behaviour (Yukl et al. 2013, Brown et al. 2005, Eisenbeiss 2012). Ethical leadership could be viewed as a kind of normative-based intervention because the ethical leader would require and influence their subordinates' behaviour to correspond to specific conduct (Eisenbeiss 2012, Brown et al. 2005). Thus, the ethical nursing manager could reduce unfair or unjust situations, such as social loafing, in the organisation.

The purpose of the current study is threefold: Although many studies have been conducted on the intention to stay, the studies adopting normative and justice perspectives are still rather limited in number. The first purpose was to clarify the influence of perceived co-worker loafing on nurses' intention to stay. Taken from the theory of normative social behaviour, the second purpose was to find out whether the normative ethical conduct of group leaders would increase nurses' intention to stay. Finally, the third purpose was to find out whether normative-based leadership would decrease group perceptions of social loafing and further increase nurses' intention to stay.

Our study contributes to academic research and nursing management in several ways. First, based on justice theory, this study shows that the perception of unfairness increases nurses' intention to leave. To deal with justice issues in a group is therefore an important issue. Second, based on TNSB, hospitals should encourage leaders to ensure ethical normative conduct

because this will influence similar values in their subordinates. Finally, the normative conduct from the ethical leader would diminish social loafing by subordinates and further enhance their willingness to stay.

Research Framework and Hypotheses

Intention to stay

Many variables have been identified as those correlated with nursing turnover. The reasons could be generally separated into two categories: personal factors and organisational factors. Personal factors include age (Gray and Phillips 1994), marital status (Tai and Robinson 1998), job satisfaction, and family responsibilities (Robinson et al. 2005, Tai et al. 2008, Takase et al. 2005). Organisational factors refer to economic reward (Lum et al. 1998), perceived status within the organisation (McCarthy et al. 2003), promotion opportunities (McCarthy et al. 2007, Ellenbecker 2004), participation in decision making (Smith et al. 2012, Sjöberg and Sverke 2000), and organisational justice (McCarthy, Tyrrell, & Lehane 2007). Although many studies have explored successful strategies for retention of nursing staff, few have focused on fair practices at the group level. Hence, this study extends our understanding of the issue of nursing staff retention and explores the influence of perceived co-worker loafing on the intention by nurses to stay in the job.

Recently, some researchers have suggested that leadership style has an influence on nursing staff's job satisfaction, burnout, and intention to leave (Abualrub and Alghamdi 2012, Raup 2008, Coomber and Barriball 2007, Duxbury et al. 1984). This study follows this research approach. Incorporating the theory of normative social behaviour, this study views a nursing manager's ethical leadership as a normative intervention and holds that ethical conduct by managers affects the behaviour of nursing staff and reduces organisational injustice.

Justice theory and perceived co-worker loafing

Justice is perceived fairness in granting rewards according to the contribution made (Murphy et al. 2003, Comer 1995). Perceptions of justice influence people's attitudes and behaviour (Colquitt and Greenberg 2003, Greenberg 2006). Furthermore, the extent to which individuals perceive justice in the organisation or group is related to their positive outcomes, such as job satisfaction (Daileyl and Kirk 1992, Tepper 2001), organisational commitment (Folger and Konovsky 1989, Konovsky and Cropanzano 1991), citizenship behaviours (Masterson et al. 2000, Moorman et al. 1998), and intention to stay (Tepper, 2001). On the other hand, if people feel there is injustice in their group, they will decrease their productivity and commitment to the group.

Social loafing is the tendency of individuals to reduce effort when they are working in groups (Latane et al. 1979, Murphy et al. 2003). Drawn from a justice perspective, people would compare the rewards they gain and contribution they make with their colleagues' pay

and gain. If their co-worker could get the same gain with a lower contribution, people would perceive their co-worker's loafing. If the situation cannot be corrected, the feeling of injustice would lead to their intention to leave. Hence, hypothesis 1 is proposed:

***Hypothesis 1:** Perceived co-worker loafing has a negative influence on nursing staff's intention to stay.*

The theory of normative social behaviour and ethical leadership

TNSB provides a number of ways how behaviours are influenced by people's normative beliefs (Rimal and Real, 2005). TNSB also proposed that norm-based interventions can successfully correct and guide people's behaviours. There are two types of norms affecting people behaviours: descriptive norms and injunctive norms (Cialdini et al. 1990). Descriptive norms refer to individuals' perception about what is normal, whereas injunctive norms refer to the guidance about what ought to be done.

Brown, Trevino, and Harrison (2005) defined ethical leadership as 'the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making' (Brown, Trevino, and Harrison, 2005, p.120). Hence, ethical leadership has been viewed as a value-oriented leadership style that influences the behaviour of subordinates because the leader's conduct is appreciated by the followers and the leader also promotes such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision making (Yukl et al., 2013, Brown et al., 2005, Eisenbeiss, 2012). Therefore, ethical leadership can be viewed as a normative-based intervention which enforces the descriptive and injunctive norms simultaneously and can decrease the subordinates' incorrect and unfair behaviours. In the same vein, this study suggested hypothesis 2:

***Hypothesis 2:** Ethical leadership has a negative influence on perceived co-worker loafing.*

Furthermore, Eisenbeiss (2012) adapted the normative approach and suggested that there are four central ethical orientations—humanity, justice, responsibility and sustainability, and moderation orientation—that guide ethical leaders' normative conduct. The normative conduct and ethical values will be appreciated by subordinates (Zhu et al. 2004, Yukl et al. 2013, Walumbwa et al. 2011). When the nursing leader continuously keeps the ethical considerations in mind, the nursing staff will tend to feel their manager is trustworthy and identify with that specific manager. Nurses identified their relationship with the manager as an important factor for their intention to stay (Force 2005, Boyle et al. 1999, Cowden et al. 2011). Hence, value-oriented leadership could effectively retain high-quality nursing staff. The hypothesis 3 is recommended:

***Hypothesis 3:** Ethical leadership has a positive influence on nursing staff's intention to stay.*

Method

Procedure and Sample

All participants volunteered for the study, and their details remained confidential. Survey packets, which included a questionnaire and cover letter, were placed in envelopes. Potential participants who met the set criteria were invited individually to participate in the study by research assistants and nurse managers. Those who agreed to participate completed the questionnaires, which they sealed in envelopes and deposited in boxes that were placed in each department. The envelopes were periodically collected by research assistants. The survey was conducted between March 2013 and June 2013. In total, 1,000 questionnaires were distributed to potential participants and 452 questionnaires were returned. After removing uncompleted questionnaires, 438 samples were valid (valid response rate: 43.8 per cent).

Sample description

The personal and work-related characteristics included gender, age, education, years employed at the current hospital, and job status. All the samples were of female staff. The ages of the participants ranged from 20 to 48 years and the average age was 33.87. Seventy-eight per cent of participants have a bachelor's degree. The years employed at their current hospitals ranged from 1 to 18 years, and over half of the subjects have worked for their current hospital for over 5 years. Regarding job status, 92 per cent of the respondents are full-time first-line nurses.

Measures

Intention to stay Intention to stay measures individual's perception of staying in present job. This study adapted McCain's Behavioural Commitment Scale and five-item scale is used to measure nursing staff's intention to stay (McClosky & McCain 1987). Each item shows five response options ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The value of Cronbach alpha was 0.921.

Perceived co-worker loafing This study used the questions developed by Mulvey and Klein's (1998) and 4-item was used to measure perceived co-worker loafing. Each item shows five response options ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The value of Cronbach alpha was 0.861.

Ethical leadership Ethical leadership was measured by Yukl et al.'s (2013) 15-item scale. Responses were made on a five-point scale (1=strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree). The value of Cronbach alpha was 0.870.

Control variable

Two control variables are included into the research model because several studies

clarifies that these two variables are highly correlated to social loafing (Liden et al. 2004, Murphy et al. 2003, Hung et al. 2009). Task visibility referred employee's beliefs about the extent of effort they contribute to the job are aware by their supervisor and a 6-item scaled was adapted from George (1992) Negative affectivity refers employee's different feelings and emotions and ten items proposed by Tellegen et al. (1988) such as distressed, upset, and hostile were used to assess negative affectivity. Responses were made on a five-point scale (1=strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree).

Analysis and Results

Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

The descriptive statistics of all variables, including mean, standard deviation, and the Cronbach's alphas, are presented in Table 1. It can be noted that the values of Cronbach's alphas of all variables are between 0.861 and 0.921. The result demonstrated the instrument has a good level of the reliability.

Table 1 Descriptive statistic and correlations

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1.Task visibility	3.001	1.029	--				
2. Negative affectivity	3.096	0.918	-0.028	--			
3. Ethical leadership	3.925	0.514	0.354**	0.440**	(0.870)		
4. Perceived Co-worker loafing	2.290	0.597	-0.352**	-0.255**	-0.518**	(0.861)	
5.Intention to stay	3.906	0.583	0.383**	0.203**	0.460**	-0.412**	(0.921)

Note: Values within the parentheses are the value of Cronbach's alphas of each variable.

*p<0.05, ** p<0.01, ***p<0.001

The composite reliability (CR) of measurable variable is between 0.8581 and 0.9224. All the values are above 0.6 recommended by Bagozzi and Yi (1988) and Fornell and Larcker (1981) and reveal the acceptable composite reliability. We also measure the convergent validity and discriminate validity suggested by Gerbing and Anderson (1988). Table 1 shows that the factor loading is between 0.628 and 0.889. The average variance extracted (AVE) of measurable variable is between 0.6059 and 0.7041. It shows that the measurement model has good convergent validity. The square root of AVE for each pair of constructs was compared with the correlation between them. The compared results demonstrate that all the square root of AVE values exceeded the correlation values. The results certify that the measured variables have good discriminate validity.

Hypotheses Testing

After the test of reliability and validity, we conducted structural equation model analysis via Amos 18 to certify the hypotheses. The SEM results indicated that the hypothesized

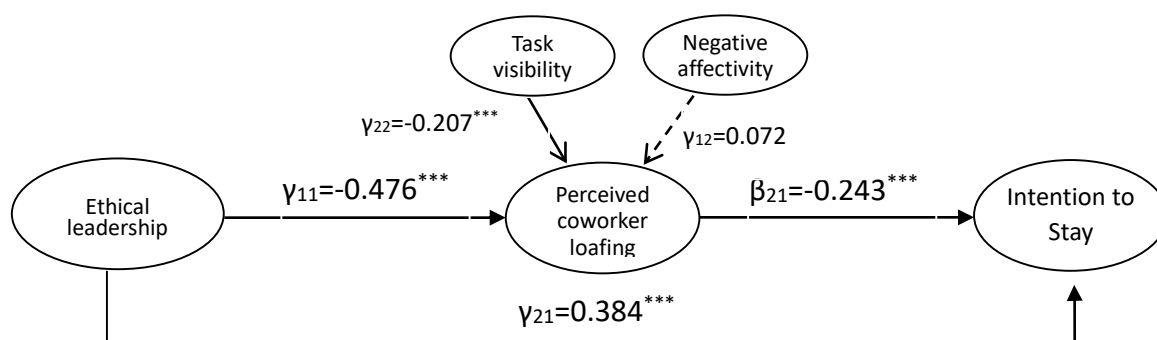
structural model provided a satisfactory fit to the data ($\chi^2/df=2.702$; RMR=0.026; GFI=0.931; AGFI=0.900; NFI=0.944; CFI=0.964; RMSEA=0.062) (Figure 1).

Table 2 The reliability and validity analysis of each measurable variable

		Factor loading	T value	CR	AVE
Ethical leadership	ELF1	0.839	14.716	0.8638	0.6164
	ELF2	0.889	15.184		
	ELF3	0.731	16.952		
	ELF4	0.661	--		
Perceived coworker loafing	SL1	0.846	16.699	0.8581	0.6059
	SL2	0.886	17.151		
	SL3	0.628	14.508		
	SL4	0.727	--		
Intention to Stay	ITS1	0.799	--	0.9224	0.7041
	ITS2	0.842	20.039		
	ITS3	0.875	21.108		
	ITS4	0.811	19.034		
	ITS5	0.866	20.822		

Note: CR refers to composite reliability and AVE refers to average variance extracted

According to the results revealed on Table 3, perceived co-worker loafing has significantly positive impact on intention to stay ($\beta_{21}=-0.243$, $t=-3.970$, $p < 0.001$). Hence, hypothesis 1 is partially supported. In addition, the results show that the ethical leader could directly decrease perceived co-worker loafing in the group ($\gamma_{11}=-0.476$, $t=-6.908$, $p < 0.001$) and increase staffs' intention to stay ($\gamma_{21}=0.384$, $t=5.934$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, hypothesis 2 and 3 is supported.



Note: 1. Value shown are standardized parameter estimates

2. * refers to $p < 0.05$; ** refers to $p < 0.01$; *** refers to $p < 0.001$

3. Model fit index: $\chi^2/df=2.702$; RMR=0.026; GFI=0.931; AGFI=0.900; NFI=0.944; CFI=0.964; RMSEA=0.062

Figure 1: Structural Equation Model

Finally, in terms of the mediating effects of perceived co-worker loafing between the relationship of ethical leadership and intention to stay, we conduct bootstrap test to certify the mediation of organizational identification. The result shows that because zero does not appear

in the 95% confidence intervals generated by bootstrap distribution, we can conclude that the indirect effects are indeed significantly different from zero at $p < .05$. Henceforth, perceived coworker loafing mediates the relationships between ethical leadership and intention to stay. It shows that hypothesis 4 is supported. It needs to be noticed that the indirect effect of ethical leadership on intention to stay ($\gamma_{11} \times \beta_{21} = 0.116$).

Table 3 Estimates of path coefficients and model fit indexes

Hypotheses	Path	Parameter	Standardized Estimates	t value	Bootstrap test
H ₁	Perceived coworker loafing → Intention to Stay	β_{21}	-0.243	-3.970***	--
H ₂	Ethical leadership → Perceived coworker loafing	γ_{11}	-0.476	-6.908***	--
H ₃	Ethical leadership → Intention to Stay	γ_{21}	0.384	5.934***	--
H ₄	Ethical leadership → Perceived coworker loafing → Intention to Stay	$\gamma_{11} \times \beta_{21}$	0.116	--	support

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Conclusion

Previous studies related to nurses' intention to stay in their jobs have proposed many reasons for a high turnover rate. Derived from the perspective of organisational justice, this study proposes that nursing staff's perception of co-worker loafing would be the major reason why a nurse would want to leave his or her current organisation. In addition, this study adapted TNSB and tried to explain that the normative conduct of ethical leaders could diminish the unfair and unjust behaviours in their team and thereby increase their team members' intention to stay. Using the analysis of structural equation model, this study shows that ethical leadership in nursing units could effectively decrease nursing staffs' perception of co-worker loafing and enhance their intention to stay in the current unit.

Implications for nursing management

This study considered different perspectives and provides several suggestions for nurse leaders and health care managers. First, the reason nursing staff want to leave might not be due to lack of job satisfaction, economic reward, promotion opportunities, or job involvement, but rather because of perceived unfairness in the working team. Second, to decrease the influence of such perceived unfairness on staff turnover, leaders' ethical conduct could be used to encourage good normative behaviours. Finally, to retain high quality nursing staff in health care institutions, nurse managers have an important job as role models and as those who influence the behaviour of subordinates.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

To increase the number of valid responses to conduct empirical analysis, this study used convenience sampling, and this could lead to inaccurate interpretation. Future studies could use random sampling or experimental survey to increase the representativeness of the sample. In

addition, this study elaborated the research framework from an organisational justice perspective and TNSB only; other theories might decrease the role of perceived co-worker social loafing on staff retention. Future research could incorporate more variables into the research framework.

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