

SPECIAL PAPER

Goal Orientation and Professional Commitment of Nurses in Malaysia: A Conceptual Analysis

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Abstract

Introduction: In the wake of nurses shortage and realizing the importance of professional standard in nursing care, professional commitment has been regarded as one of the important factors in providing high level of healthcare services and retaining nurses in their profession. According to the goal orientation theory, goal orientation is perceived as individual's dispositions towards engagement and commitment. Hence, it is believed that if nurses possess the suitable goal orientation, it will certainly assist them in enhancing their professional commitment.

Aim: The aim of this paper is to provide a conceptual analysis of goal orientation and professional commitment of nurses in Malaysia. This paper is guided by goal orientation theory in the process of establishing the proposed theoretical framework.

Results: Our conceptual analysis suggests that learning goal orientation and performance-approach goal orientation will be positively related to nurses' professional commitment whereas performance-avoidance goal orientation will be negatively related to nurses' professional commitment.

Research Implications: This study provides an avenue to future researchers to examine nurses' professional commitment by using goal orientation as the predictor. It also offers suggestion to the healthcare managers to identify their nurses' goal orientation so that training programs can be designed to provide motivation and guide them to achieve the desired professional commitment.

Keywords: learning goal orientation, performance goal orientation, performance-approach, performance-avoidance, professional commitment, nurses.

Introduction

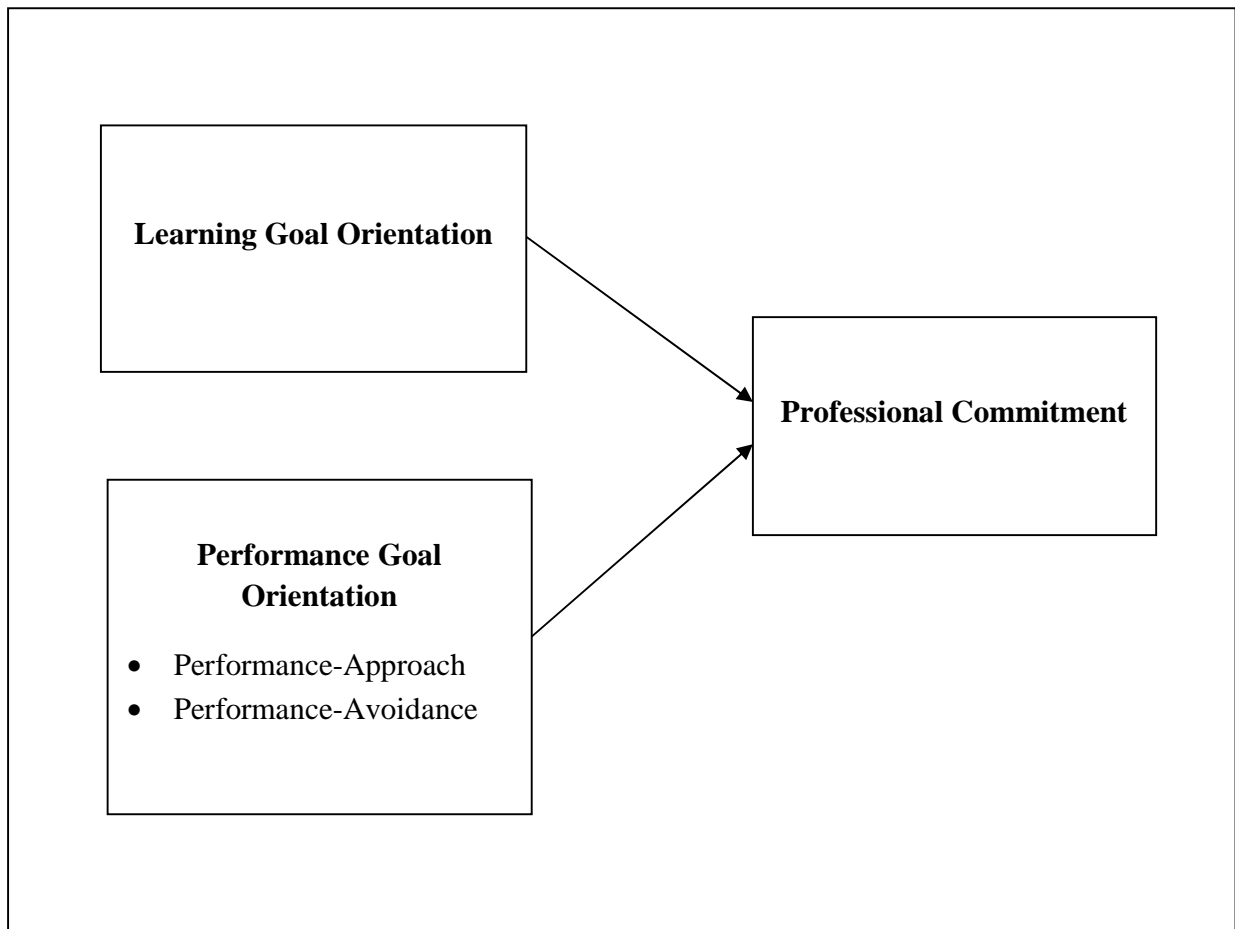
In Malaysia, nurses represent the largest workforce in the healthcare sector. Nurses comprised 2-3% of the female workforce in the country (Barnett, Namasivayam & Narudin, 2010). The total number of nurses is targeted to reach 174,400 by the year 2020 with 1:200 nurse-to-resident ratio (Barnett, Namasivayam & Narudin, 2010). In 2006, the number of nurses in Malaysia was 47,642 with a nurse-to-population ratio of 1:559. However, the present ratio is one nurse to 375 people and there are about 117,305 nurses in the country. Presently, the government is in the process of recruiting another 15,700 nurses of which 4,037 fresh graduates from various higher learning institutions have been taken in. In order to achieve 174,400 nurses by 2020, the government has been

increasing the establishment of nursing colleges so that it can produce more nurses and provide adequate healthcare services to the patients (Barnett, Namasivayam & Narudin, 2010). In this case, the mushrooming of nursing colleges and dramatic expansion of nurses has directly affected the nurses' commitment towards their profession.

According to Anthony (2010), a Malaysian practical surgeon, addressed that the major cause of this unfavourable situation is owing to the over privatization and commercialization of health services which led to over production of nurses. In the enthusiasm to produce more nurses, the selection criteria for nursing candidates may have been compromised with sub-optimal qualifications. Therefore, it is not surprising if nursing school produce large number of nurses who are of

questionable standards in managing patients. In addition, the quality of the nursing education

Figure 1: Proposed Theoretical Framework



maybe compromised owing to the fact that the nursing schools are not adequately monitored by the national accreditation body.

Although the country aims to attain the recommended World Health Organization (WHO) nurse-to-population ratio of 1:200 by 2020, it has to be planned in a gradual manner without compromising the professional standards in nursing care. To make matters worse, the government is currently embarking on a large scale of healthcare industry which is termed "health tourism". In order to ensure the health tourism industry develops healthily, there must be some guiding principles and guidelines to promote health tourism. Otherwise, the health tourism industry will become merely a wealth creation to the country. A huge number of newly graduated nurses entering the nursing workforce has caused in changes to the skill mix of the hospitals.

The aim of this paper is to provide a conceptual analysis of goal orientation and professional commitment of nurses in Malaysia. This paper is guided by goal orientation theory in the process of establishing the proposed theoretical framework.

Patient care is now more likely to be staffed by younger and inexperienced nurses. The new generation of nurses will also have different attitudes and behaviour towards the patients. This scenario has been identified as the contributing factor to the criticism levelled at nurses in terms of their lack of commitment towards patients and decline in the standard of professionalism (Barnett et al., 2010). Lack of professional commitment has been regarded as the main issue in nursing recently which led to various complaints registered at the National Consumer Complaints Centre (NCCC). According to Malaysia Complaints (2011), an annual report of the NCCC, 882 complaints have been received against the healthcare service providers in the year of 2011 and that was the highest number of complaints since 2008. The patient complaints reflected the unsolved issues of healthcare services especially in the private medical centres. The complaints were related to poor services (57.1%) by nursing staffs where patients were not given the necessary care and information with regard to their treatment. The complaints are expected to increase in years to

come if the situation does not improve. In response to this situation, there is a need to examine professional commitment among the nurses and identify the motivational factors that influence professional commitment.

It is believe that by displaying high level of professional commitment, nurses are able to perform better, gain more job satisfaction and improve patients' overall experience in the hospitals. In line with the country's Nurses Day 2014 theme: "Nurses a force for change, a vital resource for health", this paper attempts to provide a theoretical framework which explains professional commitment of nurses by using goal orientation with the aim at getting nurses at all levels to engage in high level of professionalism and competent in delivering their services.

Professional Commitment

Professional commitment has been selected as the main topic of this study because it involves nurses' pledge, beliefs, ethics, job commitment and loyalty towards their profession (Fang, 2001). Professional commitment in nursing is defined as employee's engagement to his or her profession with regard to acceptance of professional values, nursing ethics, willingness to maintain membership and a definite desire to build a belief in the profession (Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979). Throughout the past few decades, researchers have reported that the concept of professional commitment is related to professional growth and job performance (Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979; Gardner, 1992, Tsai, 2000). It was found in most studies that nurses who possess higher level of professional commitment displayed higher job performance and job satisfaction (Mowday, Steers, Porter, 1979; Tsai, 2000; Yin & Ann, 1999; Yu, Hu & Chou, 1999; Chou, 2001).

In contrast, those who possess lower level of professional commitment tend to engage in absenteeism and tardiness (Mowday et al., 1979). Further, Greenfield, Norman and Wier (2008) stated that individuals with high level of professional commitment will not involve in activities that are injurious to individuals or organization. On the same note, Van Hooft (1987) emphasized that nurses with high level of professional commitment prioritize patient health.

Therefore, it is believed that successful nursing care needs high level of professional commitment. However, past studies have found that nurses' professional commitment diminishes substantially during their first year of employment and varies significantly throughout their tenure as nurses in the hospital (Gardner, 1992; Teng, Shyu & Chang, 2007). Therefore, it is imperative that nurses maintain high level of professional commitment the first day they join the nursing workforce to ensure long term personal success in terms of health professionals and organizational excellence as a whole (Hoft & Mandell, 2001). In view of nurses' professional commitment in Malaysia has been a topical issue in recent times, it is the intention of this paper to explain what is all about professional commitment in nursing and how goal orientation can influence professional commitment in the healthcare context. As the level of nurses' professional commitment is still remain unknown in the healthcare sector, it is believed that it might lead to many complaints registered in the hospitals especially in the area of services and professionalism. A study conducted by Blau (2003) found that non-commitment to a profession may cause decrease in social recognition and career identity. It may also involve occupational investment costs of an organization. In addition, it is perceived that professional commitment is able to affect an organization performance especially when the profession is related to human health. In the study of nurses' professional commitment, Lin, Wang, Li and Huang (2007) described that professional commitment can be explained in few domains: Understanding of nursing, nursing compliance, involvement of nursing professionals, devotion to the nursing profession and retention of nursing professionals. The domain of understanding of nursing describes the nurses' commitment towards nursing as a lifelong career. Nurses, who understand well about their career, will feel their job is interesting and it is meaningful to have chosen the nursing profession. They are willing to promote and discuss about nursing with other people. On the other hand, nursing compliance refers to self-determination among nurses in realizing their dream in terms of contribution towards society and increase personal life experience. It is also about fulfilling the professional nursing practice in accordance with

the Code of Professional Conduct for Nurses (1998).

Further, involvement of nursing professionals explains about the nurses' awareness on the future development of nursing profession, dedication towards the profession and competency in delivering their services. Nurses who are actively participate in this domain exhibit conscientiousness behaviour and try to understand patients' needs when performing their duty. They are enthusiastic in their profession and consistently providing appropriate care plans. Another domain namely devotion to nursing profession, is related to personal commitment towards the career where job activities were treated as individual experiences. To gain a better understanding of devotion to nursing profession, nurses are expected to treat the patients as their family members and provide utmost care to help them recovering. They attempt to overcome difficulties that they encounter and willing to spend extra time in promoting nursing profession to others. Finally, the last domain of nurses' professional commitment is related to the retention of nursing professionals. It is about the perseverance showed by the nurses in upholding their career persistently even if the salary is not satisfying. Additionally, they will still stay in the nursing profession after they get married. They will not leave their position even there is a better offer of non-nursing job. In summary, professional commitment focuses on the extent to which an individual withholds to the ideal tenets of a profession (Hall, 1968). In this study, nurses' professional commitment is discussed in a way that it bears a close affinity to those tenets such as professional involvement, beliefs, ethics, loyalty and job satisfaction.

Goal Orientation

Goal orientation is related to the difference of individual disposition in pursuing their goals and the subsequent patterns of responses the individual displays in achievement situations (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Past literature has suggested that there are two types of goal orientations: Learning goal orientation and performance goal orientation (Dweck & Elliot, 1983; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Since the introduction of goal orientation, researcher has started to relate goal orientation with employees' outcomes especially on the

pursuit of goals at work (Pomaki, Maes & ter Doest, 2004).

It is believed that the motivational processes of goal orientation will lead to career and professional commitment. When individuals start to pursue goal oriented actions, they will produce motivated behaviours that contribute towards professional commitment. Since professional commitment in nursing is a strong belief in accepting professional values, it needs definite desire, goal oriented actions and considerable efforts to become professional (Mowday, Steers & Poter, 1979). Hence, individuals needed to begin with an understanding of their professions coupled with goal oriented actions to develop professional commitment. However, Dweck and Leggett (1988) explained that people oriented themselves with different goal orientations will bring different responses towards professional commitment.

Learning Goal Orientation

Learning goal orientation emphasizes on the development of competence and self-referential standards on learning and skills development (Ames & Archer, 1988). Individuals who possess learning goal orientation give attention on improving personal competence. When they face difficulties or encounter setbacks in their job, they tend to seek for alternative ways to overcome the situation and excel considerable efforts to resolve the difficulties. In addition, they are willing to engage with learning tasks and employ effective learning strategies to gain new information for improvement (Fisher & Ford, 1998). Previous studies indicated that learning goal orientation has a positive relationship with intrinsic motivation (Elliot & Church, 1997) and job performance (VandeWalle, Brown, Cron, Slocum, 2001; Porath & Bateman, 2006). Hence, nurses who pursue learning goal oriented actions are intrinsically motivated, treating every situation as an opportunity to learn and react to difficulties and challenges with mastery responses. They evaluate the level of task to reflect their competence and progress (Sujan, 1994; Bouffard, Boisvert, Vezeau & Larouche, 1995). Their actions will further enhance their standard of service delivery especially in providing professional healthcare to the patients. The motivated behaviour exhibited by the nurses will encourage them in pursuing their

nursing career persistently even there is a setback in their profession. Generally, those nurses who are learning oriented will seek out challenges and maintain their good performance through acquiring new skills and knowledge. These motivational actions will surely foster their professional commitment. Therefore, in light of the above discussion, it is proposed that:

Proposition 1: Learning goal orientation will be positively related to nurses' professional commitment.

Performance Goal Orientation

Performance goal orientation generally refers to individuals who perceive one's intelligence as a fixed entity, pursue performance goals that demonstrate their competence and avoid negative judgment with regard to their competence (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). However, in the trichotomous framework by Elliot (1999), Elliot and Church (1997), Elliot and Harackiewicz (1996), they divided the performance goal orientation into two components: performance-approach and performance-avoidance goal orientation. Performance-approach goal orientation concentrates on gaining competence relative to others whereas performance-avoidance goal orientation focuses on avoiding incompetence relative to others. Past studies have found that performance-approach orientation is positively related to job performance (Porath & Bateman, 2006), task performance (Elliot & Church, 1997), task involvement and enjoyment (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996). Nurses who possess performance-approach goal orientation focus on demonstrating competence in their tasks. They are prone to acquire favourable feedback that accentuates their competence. They have the desire to attain positive judgment of competence in their duties which in turn will motivate themselves towards professional commitment. Conversely, performance-avoidance oriented personnel tend to avoid challenges and situations that are not favourable to their ability and competence. Their job performance declines when facing with obstacles and difficulties (Diener & Dweck, 1978; Ames & Archer, 1988) Research has indicated that performance-avoidance orientation was discovered to be related negatively to employee outcomes and

intrinsic motivation. Nurses who are performance-avoidance oriented have the tendency to avoid situation that disproves their competence. When they encounter task failure, they tend to ascribe failure to their inability and demonstrate withdrawal behaviour. Their helpless responses and anxiety will result in a decrement of performance which diminishes professional commitment. Therefore, in view of the explanation above, it is proposed that:

Proposition 2a: Performance-approach goal orientation will be positively related to nurses' professional commitment.

Proposition 2b: Performance-avoidance goal orientation will be negatively related to nurses' professional commitment.

Theoretical Framework

The proposed theoretical framework in this study is guided by goal orientation theory. Goal orientation theory explains why and how people are trying to achieve various objectives (Anderman & Maehr, 1994). According to goal orientation theory, goal orientation is perceived as individual dispositions towards commitment and engagement (Nicholls, 1992). Different goal orientations are associated with different outcomes of professional commitment. Therefore, it is the intention of this paper to provide conceptual analysis and propose a theoretical framework that guides future researchers in examining the relationship between goal orientation and professional commitment in the nursing context. By referring to the rational and propositions as presented in this paper, the proposed theoretical framework is established as depicted in Figure 1.

Research Implications

This study intends to show a better understanding of nurses' professional commitment and explain how important it is in upholding the nursing profession. In line with the government's target to achieve nurse-to-population ratio of 1:200 by the year 2020, professional commitment plays an important role in fostering job engagement and ensure all levels of nurses competent in delivering healthcare services. With just a few years left to achieve the target, it is a need for us to look into

what actually contributes to nursing professional commitment and how it can be identified and cultivated among the nurses. Therefore, goal orientation has been selected in this study to predict professional commitment because it has emerged as an important theoretical perspective on motivational orientation that contributes towards engagement and commitment in a work related context. By knowing the nurses' goal orientation, healthcare managers will be able to design training that provides motivation and guide them to achieve the desired professional commitment.

Conclusion

To date, the issue of nurses' shortage is still unsolved and the government is still working towards to achieve the 1:200 nurse-to- population ratio. Hence, it is concluded that professional commitment is vital in enhancing nursing professionalism and at the same time retaining nursing professionals to achieve the targeted ratio.

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