

*A Causal Model of Professional Nurse Engagement Using Organizational Nurse Engagement*

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**Abstract**

Employee engagement has become a hot topic in recent years. Many studies have been published that identify organizational factors that drive employee engagement. One of the important factors was organizational communication. The purpose of this study were: (a) to validate a causal model of professional nurse engagement with organizational communication as the mediator; and (b) to study the patterns of direct and indirect effect on professional nurse engagement via organizational communication. The research sample was 402 professional nurses from private hospitals in Bangkok, Thailand. The data were collected using questionnaires and were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and structural equation modeling (SEM). This study demonstrates how effect of constructive culture and transformational leadership on professional nurse engagement in private hospital using organizational communication as a mediator. Implications of the study are discussed together with limitations and suggestions for future research.

Keywords: Employee engagement, Constructive culture, Organizational communication.

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## Introduction

Current healthcare industries suffer from lack of workforce, especially professional nurses. This issue can be attributed to various reasons such as requiring constant interactions with patients, relatives, and other personnel at all levels, working in dangerous and potentially hazardous environments, working overtime and in night shifts, not having similar holidays as other jobs, and having organization policies and management that do not satisfy their needs (Sawangdee 2551). Because of the competitive environment and poor health insurance. Sawangdee (2553) further stated that continual self-improvement is needed for nurses to survive in this industry. As a result, burn out from work can arise, encouraging nurses to resign, transfer or get new jobs.

In addition to losing its desired revenues, leaving a job position open resignation can cause an organization to waste funds on public relations, advertisement, and human resources development (Sadangharn, 2555). Based on many studies, alleviations to this problem may be done by promoting employee engagement, which reduces burn out and thus, reduces voluntary resignation (Caponetti, 2012; Maslach et al., 2001; Sundaray, 2011; Ngobeni & Bezuidenhout, 2011; Sanglimsuwan et al., 2556). Especially in nurses, employee engagement is associated with lower mortality (Lanchinger & Leiter, 2006), better motivation and positivity (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004; Rothmann & Jr., 2010; Ram & Prabhakar, 2010), and higher work efficiency (Kompaso & Sridevi, 2010; Gruman & Sak, 2011; Falkoski, 2012;).

As a part of positive psychology, Employee engagement (EE) and its concepts were originally conceived in 1990 by Kahn (cited in Perrin, 2005). EE is defined as the expressions/feelings/connections? of an employee as part of/belonging to an organization. Engaged employees perform the given tasks with enthusiasm and express themselves through behavior, cognitive and emotional capability. In 2012, Soane et al. produced a model to measure employee engagement based on the 3 components of EE; intellectual engagement, social engagement and affective engagement (Kahn, 1990). Analysis of construct validity found that the components were similar to the results from empirical evidence.

To date, there still lacks research on employee engagement, both at Thai and international level, as most dealt with work engagement and organizational commitment. Since different organisations have distinctively different beliefs and core values, organisational culture is one of the most extensively studied factor of EE (Dave & Crane, 2010), and a determinant of the organisation's success or failure (Schein, 2004). Innovative organizational culture (Cooke & Lafferty, 1989) places emphasis on staff importance, determination to succeed, skills development and teamwork, enabling the staffs to understand the work's value, and consequently, promoting employee engagement. The concept has been implemented in the healthcare industry in various countries including Thailand (Klakovich, 1996; Aarons & Sawitzky, 2006), and the level can be quantified by the 4 major components; achievement, self-actualization, humanistic encouragement, and affiliation. Jiony et al. (2015) studied the effect of organizational culture on employee engagement and the effectiveness of the organization, with organizational communications as a mediating factor, and found that there are relationships among the 3 factors. An increase in employee engagement can promote staff responsibility and overall effectiveness of the organiza-

tion, while effective communications can further augment the staff ability to achieve the missions and targets of the organization.

Organizational communication is another factor interested by many academics (Welch, 2011; Mishra, Boynton & Mishra, 2014) as it is a system for communicating strategies and missions. Mishra et al. (2014) interviewed executives on the role of organizational communication on employee engagement. They found that with clear and direct communications, staff perception and trust towards the organization improve. Staffs are able to understand their roles to work more effectively, and increase employee engagement (Buckingham and Coffman, 1999). Face-to-face communications can also reduce resignation rate. Generally based on the 5-step Likert Scale, organizational communications can be assessed in multitudes of ways, eg survey on organizational communications, measuring awareness and effectiveness of news and information communications through various means. Thomas, Zolin & Hartman (2009) developed a model that determines the effect of staff participation in setting the organisation's goals, with trustworthiness to exchange information within organisation and the organisation openness as causal factors. Trustworthiness is determined by quantity of exchanged information, and quality, which is assessed by accuracy, timeliness and usefulness of the data.

O'Reilly (2007) studied a driver-mediated model of employee engagement and reported an association between organizational communication and leadership styles. Likewise, organizational culture is associated with leadership (Block, 2003; Dartey-Baah, Amponsah-Tawiah and Sekyere-Abankwa, 2011; Michael et al., 2015). Block (2003) studied the association between organizational culture and leadership in a renowned trading company and found that staff with transformational leadership had higher work efficiency, more understanding of the company's mission and more interaction with the organization than those with transactional leadership. Furthermore, he also found that supervisors have the most power to promote understanding of organizational culture. This is in line with the studies of Dartey-Baah, Amponsah-Tawiah & Sekyere-Abankwa (2011) who found that different styles of leadership have an important role in work efficiency in public sectors, and also effectiveness. While Bass et al. (2003) observed that both transformational and translational leadership improve work efficiency, a study by Diana (2014) on the association between awareness of organizational justice and employee engagement, with transformational and translational leadership mediating factors found that supervisors with transformational leadership are responsible for staff awareness of organizational justice and increasing employee engagement. Shuck & Herd (2012) similarly reported that transformational leadership strongly affects work confidence and employee engagement more than translational leadership. Therefore, transformational leadership, as discussed by many researchers, is a key factor for improving employee management (McGregor, 1960; Tannenbau, Weschler, & Massarik, 1961; Blake & Mouton, 1969; Redding, 1970; Burns 1978; Ouchi 1980; Bass, 1985).

Hence, it can be seen that constructive organizational culture, transformational leadership and organizational communications are all interconnected, and all impact employee engagement. Whilst a model of the effect of organizational culture with organizational communications as the mediating factor on employee engagement (Jiony et al., 2015) and many studies on the effect of transformational leadership on employee engagement do exist (Arakawa & Greenburg, 2007; Biswas & Bhatnagar, 2013;

Ghafoor et al., 2011; Schaubroeck et al., 2012; Shuck & Herd, 2012; Saul, Kim W., & Kim T., 2014), there has yet to be a study to see the combined effects of these three factors on employee engagement. With the aforementioned issues found in professional nurses, the objective of this study is to determine the causal factors of nurses engagement, namely constructive organizational culture, transformational leadership and organizational communications, for improving employee engagement of staffs in healthcare industries.

### **Tool development and validation**

Constructive culture measurement (Cooke & Lafferty, 1989, cited in Genetzky-Haugen, 2010). Professional nurses perception of the transformational leadership of their direct manager questionnaires were modified to suit the concepts of Bass & Avolio (1994). Organizational communication measurement considered factors used in the study of Thomas, Zolin and Hartman (2009). Professional nurses engagement measurement, questionnaires were modified to follow Soane et al. (2012).

Quality of the tools was assessed with content validity by experts. Construct validity was confirmed. Preliminary data were collected from private hospitals in Bangkok. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was analysed for all factors to determine confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and internal consistency.

### **Survey development**

A new survey was developed by removing some questions for the sample (103 participants). Sample size was calculated with SEM equation. There are 5 parts in the survey; 1) general information, 2) 20 questions for constructive culture measurement, which involves four topics; achievement, self-actualising, humanistic encouragement, and affiliation by reliability ( $\alpha = .88$ ) 3) 20 question for professional nurses perception of the transformational leadership of their direct manager, which also involves four topics; idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration by reliability ( $\alpha = .90$ ) 4) 10 question for organisational communication measurement, which involves two topics; quality of information and enough of information by reliability ( $\alpha = .84$ ) 5) 15 questions for professional nurses engagement measurement, which involves three topics; intellectual engagement, social engagement and affective engagement. ( $\alpha = .85$ )

### **Data analysis**

Data (402 samples) were analysed for frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviations for all factors. Following data collection, they were analysed by LISREL 8.72 to assess the goodness of fit to the empirical model.

### **Results**

The majority of the participants ( $n = 402$ ) has been working for below 6 years (26.6%), the education level of most participants were undergraduates/ at Bachelor's degree (99.80 %). Of all the participants, slightly more than half were in medium size hospital.

**Table 1 The effect of factors on professional nurses engagement**

Variables	สถิติ	ตัวแปรผล								
		Constructive Culture			Organizational Communication			Employee Engagement		
		DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE
Transformational Leadership	SE	0.07	-	0.07	0.06	0.05	0.05	0.08	0.05	0.08
	t	10.33** *	-	10.33** *	4.64***	8.04***	12.99** *	5.85***	6.21***	9.23***
	β	0.71***	-	0.71***	0.28***	0.43***	0.71***	0.45***	0.31***	0.76***
Organizational Communication	SE	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.07	-	0.07
	t	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.96**	-	2.96**
	β	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.21**	-	0.21**
Constructive Culture	SE	-	-	-	0.07	-	0.07	0.07	0.04	0.06
	t	-	-	-	8.88***	-	8.88***	3.61***	2.88**	5.85***
	β	-	-	-	0.61***	-	0.61***	0.23**	0.12**	0.36***
	R <sup>2</sup>	0.50			0.50			0.58		
$\chi^2 = 47.34$ ; $df = 33$ ; $p\text{-value} = 0.05056$ ; $GFI = 0.982$ ; $AGFI = 0.951$ ; $RMSEA = 0.0329$ ; $RMR = 0.00609$ ; $CN = 456.746$										

Model testing showed that the constructed model of nurse employee engagement was consistent with the data ( $p = 0.05056$ , Table 6) , and was further supported by high degree of fit indices ( $\chi^2 = 47.34$ ;  $df = 33$ ;  $p\text{-value} = 0.05056$ ;  $GFI = 0.982$ ;  $AGFI = 0.951$ ;  $RMSEA = 0.0329$ ;  $RMR = 0.00609$ ;  $CN = 456.746$ )

The developed model of nurse engagement showed that the most influential factor were TL , CC and OCom respectively . Besides, Both TL and CC are two main factors which influenced the EE , while having the Ocom as a mediator . described in figure 1

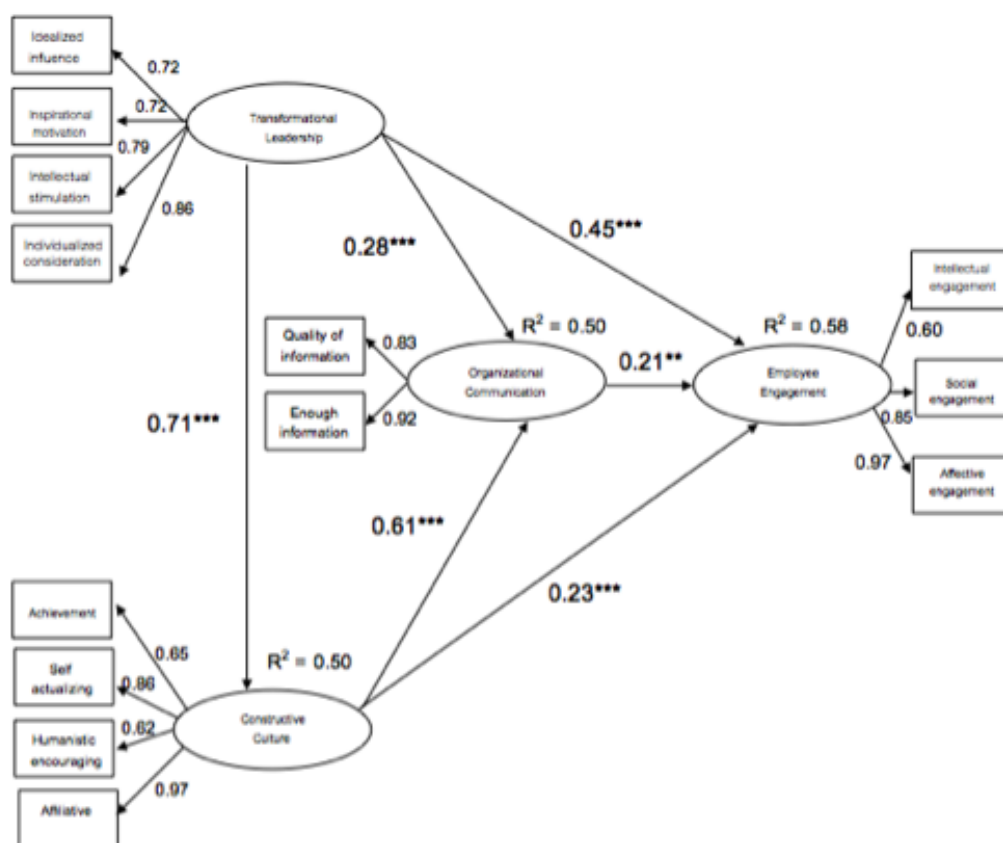


Figure 1: Multiple-group analysis of causal model of Nurse engagement.

## Conclusion and Discussion

Based on the predictive coefficient ( $R^2$ ), 58.50 % of EE can be attributed to the variables included in the constructed model. EE is directly affected by TL ( $\beta = 0.45$ ), CC ( $\beta = 0.23$ ), Ocom ( $\beta = 0.21$ ), as well as indirectly affected by TL ( $\beta = 0.31$ ) and CC ( $\beta = 0.12$ ). Jiony et al. (2015) also similarly reported that higher EE produced higher organization effectiveness, with strong OCom further augmented the understanding of roles and responsibility of staffs within the organization, and acceptance of organizational culture. Reliable OCom makes the organization perceives as being open and encourages the employee to get involved in establishing the organization's objectives. Further, Thomas, Zolin & Hartman (2009) and O'Reilly (2007) both found that styles of leadership is associated with OCom, as well as organizational culture.

Notably, OCom is also directly affected by TL ( $\beta = 0.28$ ) and CC ( $\beta = 0.61$ ) and CC is directly affected by TL ( $\beta = 0.71$ ). Studies have reported that TL promotes employees participation (James et al., 2008), perception of organizational justice and EE (Diana, 2014). The effect of TL on EE is stronger than that of transactional leadership (Shuck & Herd, 2012). Similarly, high level of EE requires effective, reliable, and consistent two-way communications between the organization and the employee to increase effectiveness and reliability of the business (Garber, 2007; Spreitzer & Mishra, 1999). Many studies supported that effective communications promote achievement of the organization's objectives and visions (Barge & Shockley-Zalabak 2008; Ziuraitė, 2008; Hahn, Lippert & Paynton, 2013)

### **Limitation and further study**

This study further deepens the understanding of employee engagement (EE) and its causal factors; CC, TL and OCom, which can be used to established directions, projects and activities to improve EE in hospital and healthcare-related businesses. Results support that executives should encourage transformational leadership development in leaders, as well as stimulating constructive culture to boost EE. Moreover, effective and sufficient communication within the organization will also improve EE. The study, however, is not without weaknesses. Due to the quantitative nature of the data and subjective responses, results may be biased and not fully representative. Further study should aim to include nurses in private hospitals outside Bangkok, and to determine the difference with nurses in public hospitals.

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