

Impact of Leadership and Span of Control on Patient Satisfaction, Staff Satisfaction and Turnover

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We examined the effects of leadership and span of control on patient satisfaction, staff satisfaction and turnover using a conceptual model linking three theories: Transformational Leadership theory, Span of Control theory and Contingency Leadership theory. Seven hospitals, 41 managers, 51 units, 717 nurses and 680 patients participated in the study. Measures used included: Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire Form 5X, a section from the Patient Judgments of Hospital Quality Questionnaire, and McCloskey-Mueller Satisfaction Scale. Hierarchical linear model and multiple regressions were used to test the study hypotheses.

We found transactional leadership style and span of control to be the strongest predictors of patient satisfaction. Patient satisfaction was higher on units where managers used a transactional leadership style. Patient satisfaction was lower on units where managers had wide span of control. Three leadership styles (transformational, transactional, and management by exception) were significant predictors of staff satisfaction. Managers who used a transformational or transactional leadership style had more satisfied staff. Managers who used a management by exception style of leadership had less satisfied staff. Transformational leadership style and span of control were found to have a significant influence on staff turnover. Units with managers who had a wide span of control had higher levels of staff turnover. Units with managers who used a transformational leadership style had lower levels of staff turnover. A wide span of control also reduced the positive effects of transformational and transactional leadership on patient satisfaction and staff satisfaction. The most compelling finding was that no leadership style could overcome a wide span of control.

Implications for practice include: organizations should implement management training programs to develop transformational and transactional leadership styles; and policies need to be developed regarding optimum span of control for managers.