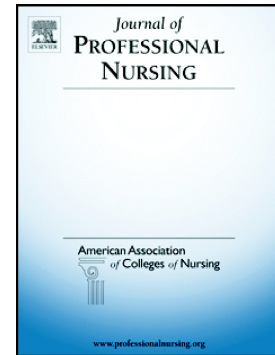


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Transformational leadership: What every nursing dean should know

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Transformational Leadership: What Every Nursing Dean Should Know

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Transformational Leadership: What Every Nursing Dean Should Know

Over the last two decades, the roles of academic nursing leaders have undergone significant change and have become increasingly complex. Nursing deans and directors are charged with overseeing the daily operations of the organization (budget, facilities, and human resources), sustaining the school's central missions (teaching, research, practice, and service), and representing the school within the greater university and with external constituents. The role requires working with many different stakeholders (frequently with competing demands and often involving complex circumstances). Successful deans find a balance between meeting expectations of the president and provost by upholding institutional policies and regulatory requirements, supporting faculty governance, meeting faculty expectations, and addressing the interests and needs of community stakeholders. Nursing deans must have a solid understanding of the various components of the role, as well as the multidimensional contexts in which they reside, such as the rapidly changing landscape of healthcare and higher education.

Transformational leadership (TFL) has become a predominant leadership style practiced by leaders across many industries and disciplines, including nursing (Beck-Frazier, White, & McFadden, 2007; Broome, 2013; Cummins et al., 2010; Wilkes, Cross, Jackson, & Daly, 2015). The American Organization of Nurse Executives considers TFL "the preferred" leadership style for nursing leaders - this preference is supported by the perspective that transformational nurse leaders are "the key to strengthening health-systems worldwide" (Ferguson 2015, p353).

An extensive body of literature on TFL exists across multiple disciplines. In nursing, the vast majority of TFL literature is in the context of clinical practice leadership with scant representation from academic nursing leadership. A literature search using the keywords “deans, academic” and “nursing” and “transformational leadership” only yielded two journal publications in the past 15 years (between 2002 and 2017) in the Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL) database and only one publication in the PubMed database. Thus, despite a strong emphasis on TFL and volumes of published literature on the topic, scholarly inquiry specifically from the lens of academic nursing has been negligible.

Why is TFL a preferred leadership style, and what should new nursing deans know about it?

The purpose of this article is to define and clarify TFL, present general findings from the literature about the benefits and challenges of this leadership style, discuss TFL in the context of academic nursing leadership, and make recommendations for future work in this area.

Defining and Clarifying Transformational Leadership

Transformational leaders focus on building relationships with people and creating change by emphasizing values. More specifically, TFL has been defined as a leadership style intended to “motivate and inspire followers to pursue higher-order goals through the transformation of followers’ attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors” (To, Tse, & Ashkanasy, 2015, p543). In other words, these leaders can bring about successful organizational change by influencing followers

to change their own views and beliefs about what is important – and thus shaping a shared vision among those within the organization.

Transformational leadership originated from the concept of *transforming leadership*, introduced by James MacGregor Burns as a result of his work studying the ability of political leaders to inspire and motivate followers (Burns, 1978). Burns conceptualized leadership on a continuum of transactional leadership (characterized by exchanges with followers) and transforming leadership (characterized by stimulating, inspiring, and motivating followers). The concept of transforming leadership evolved as a result of the work of Bernard Bass, who not only advanced Burns original work further through explanation, interpretation, and research, but also began referring to this concept as *transformational leadership* (Bass, 1985). According to Bass, TFL is situated on the far end of the Full Range Leadership Model, which also includes transactional leadership (TAL) in the middle (including contingent reward and management by exception), and Laissez-Faire on the opposite end. Bass proposed that TFL augments or expands TAL because it incorporates both task (directive) and follower oriented (participative) orientations (Bass, 1995).

Over time, four components or concepts of TFL have evolved: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration.

Idealized Influence

The transformational leader is charismatic and uses *idealized influence* to build confidence, trust, admiration, respect, pride, and optimism among followers. The leader articulates high

expectations for the organization and consistently displays commitment and alignment around a shared organizational purpose and vision, with an emphasis on the needs of others. As a role model, the transformational leader exhibits the desired behaviors of others in the organization including high moral standards, ethical behavior, commitment, and passion (Allen, et al., 2016; Martin, 2015). Followers identify with, and strive to emulate, the transformational leader. Thus, there are two aspects of idealized influence – the leader’s observed behavior and elements attributed to the leader by the followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Inspirational Motivation

The transformational leader practices *inspirational motivation* to articulate a clear vision for the organization – one that followers can understand and enthusiastically support. Leaders engage, motivate, and persuade followers to envision and work toward “attractive future states” (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Followers must have a strong sense of purpose within the context of the organization, and to integrate their own personal values for the benefit of the organization or leader. Transformational leaders sell themselves and their vision by demonstrating a sincere and passionate commitment to that vision, goals, and people within the organization as well as clearly communicating expectations (Doody & Doody, 2012). When this occurs, employees are encouraged about the future of the organization and are more committed in their work. Inspirational motivation, along with idealized influence, fosters alignment around those shared goals that supports and strengthens shared governance in an academic community.

Intellectual Stimulation

The transformational leader encourages people within the organization to question and challenge assumptions, and to look at old problems in new ways. The leader is willing to take risks and abandon inefficient systems, including those that are long standing practices within an organization. Creativity and innovation are fostered by encouraging followers to think deeply about problems, and to propose new ideas to accomplish the work (Allen, et al., 2016). For such an environment to be achieved, public criticism of differing opinions as part of creative practice should be avoided (Bass & Riggio, 2006). By involving others in the process of change, the transformational leader is able to increase the acceptance of new organizational practices.

Individual Consideration

The transformational leader gives individualized consideration to each follower, with an emphasis on growth and achievement. Individual differences and needs are recognized and accepted. A variety of skills (including coaching, mentoring, listening, advising, empathy, encouragement, and feedback) are used to create a supportive environment for success (Allen, et al., 2016; Marshall, 2011). Such an environment empowers followers to achieve their full potential enabling them to complete work more successfully, leading to positive self-esteem and increased self-efficacy (Doody & Doody, 2012). The leader recognizes, appreciates, and celebrates the contributions of each person; thus, individuals feel valued for their efforts. Collectively, this creates a culture of collaboration which encourages members of the organization to work toward shared goals and commitment.

Benefits of Transformational Leadership

Because of the widespread appeal of TFL, a large volume of literature has been generated on this topic in many disciplines and industries since inception thirty years ago. Early research on TFL initially was conducted on military leadership; later TFL research shifted to applications in business, governmental institutions, education, and health care settings. Perhaps the best summary of findings associated with TFL comes from a meta-analysis conducted by Wang and colleagues (2011) which included 113 primary studies on TFL and follower performance published over a 25-year period. The three primary findings from the study included 1) TFL is positively linked to individual performance, with a stronger relationship between contextual performance than task performance; 2) TFL is positively related to performance among teams and organizations; and 3) TFL augments team and organizational performance over TAL, but not individual performance (Wang, Ohm Courtright, & Colbert, 2011). Since that time, TFL has also been found to be associated with lower workplace stress among employees, perhaps because of a strong perception among employees having access to psychosocial resources (Schmidt et al., 2014).

TFL and Nursing Leaders in Healthcare Settings

A large number of studies have been conducted evaluating TFL in the nursing discipline in the context of healthcare care organizations. A meta-analysis of 53 quantitative studies published between 1985 through 2009 evaluated leadership styles and nursing outcomes (Cummins et al., 2010). The study found that the leadership styles focusing on people and individual relationships are associated with higher job satisfaction. TFL is the primary example of such a

leadership approach. The study also concluded that task oriented leadership (associated with TAL style) is not associated with optimal nursing outcomes.

In more recent studies, TFL has been associated with employee satisfaction in a number of ways. Enwereuzor and colleagues conducted a study in which a sample of 224 staff nurses rated their managers leadership style using the Transformational Leadership Behavior Inventory. The researchers reported a positive predictive relationship between TFL style and work engagement among the nurses (Enwereuzor, Ugwu, & Eze, 2016). Likewise, in a sample of 253 healthcare managers, Deschamps and colleagues reported that TFL (as measured by the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire) influenced employee motivation through procedural and interpersonal organizational justice (Deschamps, et al., 2016). TFL has also been linked to employee empowerment and was shown to mediate the effect of job satisfaction among nurses and medical assistants (Choi, Goh, Adam, & Tan, 2016). The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire was also used in a study involving 87 staff nurses to measure the perceived leadership style practiced by their nurse managers. Nurse managers who were perceived by staff to have TFL styles had higher job satisfaction compared to nurse managers with TAL styles (Morsiani, Bagnasco, & Sasso, 2016). Although Brewer and colleagues did not find a direct relationship between TFL on job satisfaction or intent to stay among registered nurses, TFL was associated with greater organizational commitment among nurses (Brewer et al, 2016).

Using the Leadership Practices Inventory, Clavelle and colleagues conducted a survey of 384 chief nursing officers from Magnet organizations and found a positive relationship between

CNO experience and education level and TFL characteristics (Clavelle, Drenkard, Tullai-McGuinness, & Fitzpatrick, 2012). Echevarria, Patterson, and Krouse (2016) surveyed 148 nurse managers using the Genos Emotional Intelligence Inventory and the Multi-factor Leadership Questionnaire and reported a strong relationship between TFL and emotional intelligence among nurse managers.

Studies have also linked TFL to patient outcomes. In a concept analysis of TFL in nursing, Fischer concluded that TFL is associated with high-performing teams and improved patient care (Fischer, 2016). Lievens and Vlerick (2014) conducted a survey to investigate the relationship between head nurses' leadership style (measured using the Multifactorial Leadership Questionnaire) and hospital nurses' safety performance. The researchers reported a significant positive impact of transformational leadership style on safety performance of nurses.

TFL in Academic Settings

Academic settings are clearly different than healthcare settings, but both are dynamic and complex. Although TAL has been a traditional leadership approach in academic health centers in the past, a movement toward transformational leadership practices benefit academic health center leaders (Allen, et al., 2016; Smith, 2015). Studies investigating leadership behaviors and styles of academic leaders certainly suggest behaviors and skills consistent with TFL are predominant. For example, in a sample of 15 deans of education, Beck-Frazier and colleagues (2007) reported that the most common leadership orientation was the human resource leadership behavior frame (which includes empowerment, needs, skills, and relationships).

These are strongly linked to the central concepts of TFL. Martin (2015) conducted a survey involving a sample of 50 library deans using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire and reported a strong correlation between years of experience and behaviors consistent with TFL.

Only two published studies specifically investigating TFL among academic nursing leaders have appeared in the nursing literature during the past 15 years. Chen, Beck, and Amos conducted a study, investigating the perceived leadership styles and job satisfaction among a sample of 286 nursing faculty in Taiwan. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire was used to measure faculty perception of leadership style practiced by their academic nursing leader. Investigators reported that faculty were most satisfied with leaders who had strengths associated with the individualized consideration component of TFL and TAL (contingent reward) leadership style. They were least satisfied with leaders who practiced management by exception (Chen, Beck, & Amos, 2005).

The other study, conducted by Broome, involved self-reported leadership styles among nursing deans of baccalaureate and higher degree nursing programs in the United States. Among the 344 deans who completed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, 77% of the highest scores were consistent with TFL and 21% with TAL style. These results ranked in the 80th percentile for self-reported behaviors associated with TFL compared to over 3,000 leaders in other disciplines completing the same survey (Broome, 2013).

Although not specifically focused on TFL, another study investigated self-reported leadership attributes among a sample of 30 nursing deans from three countries (Canada, England, and Australia). Many of the most commonly reported personal and positional

leadership attributes were consistent with TFL. The strongest personal attributes included vision, communicator, consistency, facilitator, resourceful, resilient, not infallible, not always popular, excite, and supportive whereas the strongest positional attributes included advocator of nursing, vision, be a nurse, communicator, change agent, role model, good manager, and connection to external stakeholders (Wilkes, et al, 2015).

Results of these studies suggest that TFL is a common leadership style among academic nursing deans. However, the reliance of self-reporting as a mechanism to measure TFL in these studies (as well as many other studies) presents methodologic challenges. There may be a difference between the leadership behaviors a respondent believes they display and the way employees perceive the leader. It is also quite possible that people rate themselves higher for TFL behaviors, particularly if they believe this is a desired response.

Discussion: Application of TFL in Academic Nursing Leadership

The academic nursing leader practicing TFL exhibits most or all of the four components of TFL (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration) to varying degrees – depending on experience and situation. The nursing dean exhibiting TFL behaviors will consistently display commitment to the nursing school and university and gain respect by displaying high moral standards. The dean builds confidence and optimism among faculty and staff by clearly communicating a shared organizational purpose and vision for the school that aligns with the university and in a way that faculty and staff not only understand but fully embrace. This is done through frequent, consistent, and authentic messaging – repeating that message in many venues and formats so it becomes ingrained in the

culture of the school. Academic nursing leaders can support intellectual stimulation in many ways – such as encouraging and supporting faculty to transform a nursing curriculum and/or teaching strategies. Although giving individualized consideration to faculty and staff within a very large nursing school may be a challenge, the academic nursing leader practicing TFL will make a point to know every employee by name and engage in conversation with them. By doing so, employees are more likely to feel valued for what they do. Individualized consideration can further be facilitated by working closely with other leaders within the school to remain informed of individual accomplishments, to maintain an awareness of the needs of employees throughout the organization, and provide professional development opportunities for faculty and staff.

TFL and Leading Change

One of the hallmarks of transformational leaders is leading organizations through successful change. In fact, TFL style is most effective within organizations where change is needed and desired – in an environment where followers are open to change. Contemporary higher education might best be described as a continuous vortex of change, thus academic nursing leaders must be skilled at leading through change, as opposed to continually reacting to change. However, transformational leaders must be mindful of the risk for follower burnout or change fatigue in the face of too much change (Wang, et al., 2011). The human brain's natural initial reaction to change is heightened awareness and threat. When people are threatened, an amplified emotional state occurs activating the limbic system which may impair the ability to process information in the frontal cortex. Thus, academic nursing leaders should not underestimate the effect of change on faculty and staff. New deans and directors may inherit

schools or colleges that have poor operational processes requiring a need for significant reorganization over a few years to address basic functional needs. In situations such as these, the transformational leader must prioritize and determine what changes are most needed, balance long- and short-term goals, and be cognizant of the organizational effect of change by gauging the needs and status of faculty and staff. Change stress can also be caused by institutional-level churn – that is, when major activities or events within the greater university affect faculty and staff within the school. For example, if the university implements new human resource policies, or changes employee benefits, the transformational leader recognizes faculty and staff may perceive the change as a threat, and works to minimize the negative reaction.

TFL and the Full Range Leadership Model

Although there is an emphasis on TFL as “the desired” leadership style, the complexity of academic nursing requires leaders to have a wide range of skills and an awareness of the situational context. A significant intersection between leadership and management competencies among nursing leaders exists (Jennings, Scalzi, Rodgers, & Keane, 2007) and adapting one’s leadership approach based on the situation and circumstance is consistent with the Full Range Leadership Model (previously described). It is widely believed that the most effective leaders are those who exhibit a combination of TFL and TAL behaviors (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Smith, 2015; Snodgrass & Shachar, 2008). Successful leaders exhibit TFL behaviors most frequently, TAL behaviors occasionally to frequently, and Laissez-Faire infrequently (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In other words, it is more desirable for leaders to display a range of leadership behaviors (TFL and TAL), depending on the situation. This flexibility is particularly important for academic nursing leaders, considering that the role often requires concurrently attending to

one or more of the organizational, political, financial, humanistic, and external needs of the organization.

Prescribing to one leadership style is unlikely to work well when followers are a diverse group. This is an important point considering the wide range of employees typically associated with a nursing school (i.e. classified staff, professional staff, and faculty). A leader may find the TAL approach more effective with some employees (Martin, 2015) or in certain situations. For example, a nursing academic leader may have great success motivating the majority of faculty when exhibiting TFL behaviors, but may also find that some faculty don't respond to inspirational messages. Some faculty and staff may perceive transformational leaders as "too far in the clouds" thus, the leader may need to adjust messaging for some employees (such as simple, direct messaging; clearly being told what to do; articulating how merit-based pay is determined, etc.). The TAL approach is particularly appropriate in situations when consistency in behaviors are crucial, or when variations in policies, procedures or process can lead to negative outcomes (Bass & Riggio, 2016). For example, a nursing dean who favors the TFL style would not disregard financial aid policies and process over a desire to create new and innovative policies. As another example, human resource policies require that leaders who supervise staff clearly define the terms of work to be completed, determine metrics for evaluating employee performance and/or behavior, and determining compensation. When employees are not meeting job expectations, the leader must clarify expectations, and offer corrective counseling following specified policies and process. In this context a transformational leader would apply behaviors more consistent with TAL.

Developing and Improving Transformational Leadership Skills

It is widely agreed that TFL skills can be taught and learned, although early life experiences and early leadership experiences often influence later leadership development (Bass and Riggio, 2006). Leadership development requires that the leader is committed to developing his or her own leadership capacity through deliberate study, practice, feedback, and purposeful reflection. Without such commitment, it is unlikely that major changes in one's leadership effectiveness will be achieved.

A number of leadership training programs emphasize TFL and vary in length from weekends to multiple years. A common element of most programs includes a process to "know thy self" – usually by gaining feedback from a 360 survey (completed by boss, peers, and followers) and/or the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire survey to gain an understanding on how others perceive them. The most effective leadership training programs use information from these surveys to develop personalized plan for development. Also, effective programs that help an individual develop TFL will focus on development of leadership skills, as opposed to leadership tasks. Traits of effective leaders include having self-confidence, self-awareness, resilience, being willing to take risks, and having social and emotional intelligence. One of the challenges of leadership in general, particularly for the transformational leaders, is learning how to manage oneself in the midst of rapidly evolving change and churn. External forces create multiple distractions, making it difficult to maintain leadership presence – to maintain full awareness, full attention in the present moment. Such an environment also interferes with

creativity and innovation which are central traits associated with TFL. Mindfulness training is one area of leadership development that can help transformation leaders become more effective in their roles (Marturano, 2014). Such a strategy helps to “create space” for effective decision making (as opposed to making decisions in a distracted state).

Summary and Areas for Further Inquiry

Transformational leadership has become a predominate and desired leadership style in many areas – including academic nursing. Extensive research in multiple disciplines has shown many benefits to TFL. Effective transformational leaders have vision and the ability to create significant shifts in thinking and perception among their employees. Transformation leaders create environments fostering innovation and creativity which is necessary for an organization to achieve extraordinary results. This idealistic view of TFL must be balanced with an awareness that a “one-size fits all” approach to leadership is not realistic; the most effective leaders incorporate TFL as well as TAL as components on the Full Range Leadership Model continuum. Academic nursing leaders can develop and further enhance their TFL skills through professional development, purposeful reflection, and mindfulness.

Considering the limited research related to TFL and academic nursing leaders, this is an area where additional work would be beneficial. One of the limitations of many research studies in this area is that the measurement of leadership behaviors is often based on self-report. This may reflect one’s intent as a leader as opposed to their actual practice. Additional studies should be conducted where the self-report of the academic nursing dean is compared to the perceptions of faculty. Another area of research for consideration would be the effect of

leadership style and faculty governance – specifically with an analysis of the extent faculty governance enhances or inhibits a dean’s ability to lead. Inquiry focusing on the practice of TFL in multiple levels of academic nursing leadership (such as associate deans and program directors) and focus areas (academic programs, practice, and research) might also be informative. Another suggested area for further inquiry is a focus on adjusting leadership approaches for varying situations – and how exemplary academic nursing leaders navigate such situations. An often-used cliché is that leadership is a journey that has no clear beginning or ending. As academic nursing leaders, we share this journey with the hope for success for our profession, for our professional careers, and for our personal lives.

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