

Transformational leadership and its evolution in nursing

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Transformational leadership is based on the trust and respect that employees feel about their leader and therefore are motivated to do much more than is expected from them. Transformational Leaders have a vision for the future, seek change and are challenged from their followers.

Purpose: The exploration of the implementation of transformational leadership in nursing.

Results: Since the early 1990s, transformational leadership started to be supported by nursing scholars. The first article advocating transformational leadership as a choice strategy for nursing, published in 1988. Later, it was stressed that modern health care requires new visions and enhanced models of nursing practice and the catalyst for that is transformative leadership and

gradually, it was argued that successful leaders are the transformational leaders. In the 21th century it was obvious that transformational leadership was important for nursing from the growing number of published articles on the topic. Transformational leadership is affecting positively the nurses' job satisfaction and contributes on reducing exhaustion, anxiety of nurses.

Conclusions: The positive impact of transformational leaders on work performance and nurses satisfaction is evident, nevertheless much more effort has to be paid by nursing managers for increasing its use in the nursing departments of the hospitals.

Keywords: Nursing, nursing staff, transformational leadership.

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a natural element of nursing, as most of the nursing practice activities are carried out by working groups and therefore a type of leadership applies in such situations [1]. A particularly challenging situation is to lead a team as it is necessary to persuade individual goals to adopt a shared mission, to create a social environment that supports information sharing and task completion [2].

Transformational leadership is a leadership style based on the trust and respect that employees feel about their leader. For this reason, employees are motivated to do much more than are typically expected from them and to achieve organizational goals [3].

Transformational leadership has been positively correlated with staff's attitudes and behaviors in both nursing management and nursing practice. Many scientists have referred to them and recognize them as transformational leadership practice [4,5,6].

Since 1993, Biordi [4] argued that transformational leadership could give optimism to the constantly changing environment of the health sector. He stressed that it is a form of leadership particularly suited to the nursing profession. A transformational leader has a vision for the future, seeks change, develops the capabilities of each one of his followers and is challenged from them [7,8].

Transformational leadership includes the characteristics of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration [9,10].

The present paper discusses the transformative leadership and its application in nursing as is presented in the international nursing literature.

The aim of the present study was the exploration of the implementation of transformational leadership in nursing.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A review of the literature regarding the transformational leadership in nursing was performed in the databases Pubmed, Google scholar and ProQuest.

DEFINITIONS OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The term transformational leadership emerged after the half of the 20th century and various related approaches have been used in an attempt to define its content.

Burns [11] was the first one who conceived the concept of transformational leadership, arguing that it occurs when the leaders

encourage their followers to strengthen their moral values, motives, beliefs, and perceptions in order to comply with the goals of the organization.

Bass and Avolio [12] worked on Burns [11] initial work on transformational leadership and stated that is a kind of leadership whose leaders convert values, needs, expectations and priorities of the followers by encouraging them to go beyond these expectations.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The transformational leadership theory was introduced by Burns [11] in 1978 and later developed further by Bass [3].

Transformational leadership is the key to change through influential factors idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, inspired motivation, individual consideration refers to a process that focuses on the exchange of views between leaders and followers as well as by motivating the followers to work towards the desired changes. This theory has achieved a predominant position in recent theories and in empirical studies on leadership.

Burns [11], made a special reference to the motivation that is given by the leaders of various organizations, but also by the heads of departments to their subordinates. He dealt also with the exploration and definition of the concept of transformational leadership, using the description of the actions of political leaders who influence and transform the beliefs and values of their supporters.

Bass [3] and Bass & Stogdill [13] expanded the application of transformational leadership also to the business area in order to include the implementation of transformational leadership within the structures of governing bodies. Gradually, transformational leadership became a model of leadership that was widely accepted and studied because of its emphasis on changing labor standards by providing motivation to employees in order to act even beyond their own individual aspirations. There is a general belief that transformative leaders, in order to achieve the desired outcomes, aim at transforming the goals of their employees in order to be in line with the goals of the governing body and to provide employees with an inspiring vision for the future.

Moreover, Bass [3] pointed out that transformational leadership is a process of building employee loyalty in order to meet the visions, goals and strategies of the organization and is based on a creative relationship between leader and supporters in the effort to fulfill the vision of the organization through the change of dominant values. Quite often, transformational leaders are emerging in times of crisis, of changes and development.

Burns [11], argued that for leaders and followers is good to seek collaboration and to

support each other for achieving higher levels of motivation and morality. The leader who has a vision and can empower his subordinates by infusing this vision is a transformational leader. Transformational leaders give motivation for performance beyond expectations, through their ability to influence people's attitudes [14].

Transformational leadership is a conscious process to create the conditions that will enhance the realization of the desired practice [11].

An individual can be trained to become a transformational leader provided he/she is trained to recognize the characteristics of this type of leader, to develop awareness of the creative intensity and of the factors that limit the achievement of goals and the realization of a vision [11].

Transformational leaders create a culture of active thinking through intellectual stimulation, a culture that encourages workers to become more involved with the organization and its development [11].

According to Bass [3] transformational leaders have:

- Charisma that makes leaders act as a role model, create a common vision, instill pride and faith in their people by overcoming obstacles.
- Inspired motivation that empowers their subordinates so that they can enthusiastically embrace and pursue challenging goals and missions.
- Individualized consideration which is manifested by demonstration of –personal respect for their people, showing them special attention, treating them as unique individuals and recognizing the individual needs of each one of them.
- Intellectual stimulation by facing old problems in new ways, generate new ideas, encourage their people to consider of old practices in new ways.

Several studies on transformational leadership argue that its implementation can be used in many different organizations, in different situations, at different levels, in analyses and in intercultural situations [10,15,16].

In addition, many scientists agree that transformational leadership plays an important role in enhancing employee performance, trust and commitment to organizations [10,17,18].

The reason for this is that transformational leadership can be understood as a process of creating a vision and giving a sense of belonging to the employees [19].

Transformational leadership builds a mission-oriented culture within the organization through a process of social influence among its employees [20].

NURSING AND TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

In the era of globalization, with innovations and technological developments, the demands of service users are constantly increasing and there is no room for complacency in the area of nursing science. Nursing, is developing its ways of practicing it and nurses are involved in the reorganization process of hospitals and other health care institutions.

Since the early 1990s, it became obvious that transformational leadership was more preferable among nurses in comparison to the transactional leadership [1,21], as healthcare requires leaders who have the ability to inspire others with the vision of what can be achieved [22]. The first nursing paper that advocated transformative leadership as a selection strategy for nursing was published by Cottingham [23] in 1988. In the late 1980s, as well as in the early 1990s, transformational leadership was more preferable than transaction leadership in nursing, as in the healthcare field leaders inspiring others with a vision of what can be achieved are needed [22]. Dunham & Klafehn [24], argued that effective nurse manager leadership is of prime importance for modern healthcare, and such a leadership includes the qualities of a transformational leader and, to a much lesser extent, of a transactional leader. Gradually, in the early 1990s, papers dealing with the issue of transformational leadership began to increase [25-28].

In 1993, Trofino [27], stressed that healthcare in the 21st century would require new visions and enhanced professional models of nursing practice and argued that the catalyst for this transformation would be a new type of leadership, the transformational leadership.

A few years later, Taccetta-Chapnick [29] claimed that the rapid changes to healthcare systems caused competition between healthcare institutions and hospitals and as these are being restructured for increasing customer satisfaction, this would result in the need for a new style of leadership. The healthcare team, which can cope with changes and conflicts, considers restructuring of services as a positive change and approaches customer satisfaction with the energy it intends to give.

She stressed that institutions with transformational leadership are the ones who will survive the transition. Moreover, Geuder & Muller-Smith [30], pointed out that traditional management and leadership skills are not so effective in a constantly changing environment. The successful leader is the one who can offer transformational leadership to the staff.

Davidhizar [31], argued that transformational leadership was the new leadership model used by modern nursing managers. She emphasized charisma as an important feature for leaders wishing to mobilize the interpersonal characteristics of their subordinates. Cassidy & Koroll [32], also stated that the modern health area requires a clear distinction between leadership and administration, and there is a clear change in traditional leadership roles to address the ethical issues arising from reforms in healthcare services. In addition, Trofino [28], pointed out that one of the most important developments in the healthcare field is the observed transition in nursing, showing a shift from management to leadership.

In the 21st century, the number of scientific articles published on transformational leadership has increased [33,34,35] and an increasing number of nursing research articles approaching the importance of the relationship between transformational leadership and nurses job satisfaction and other aspects of professional parameters of nurses' job began to emerge [36,37, 38].

Duffield et al. [39] argued that transformational leadership positively affects nurses' job satisfaction. However, they also emphasized for the need for a more transformative approach to nursing leadership, and for this purpose, middle-level nursing leaders require training and support from their own leaders. Support from the supervisor can be an important factor for nurses' job satisfaction [40] and the supervision of nurses by transformational leaders has a positive impact on their welfare and their ability to face stressful working situations [41]. An unsuccessful leadership, due to the absence of specialized nurse leaders, is possible to result in inefficient use of nursing staff, which feels degraded and ultimately less satisfied and committed [42].

Thyer [43] argued that healthcare leadership continues to evolve quite often a transactional leadership style pushing nurses to resign from their work. However, nurses may have the key to transform healthcare into the 21st century, by reforming their work practices, as modern nurses are visionary, creative, involved in decision-making and have the communication strategies needed by the healthcare sector, while Dunham-Taylor [44] argues that nurses are more often using transformational leadership. Nevertheless, job satisfaction and workgroup efficiency have been reduced, when nurses use more often transaction instead of transformational leadership.

According to Murphy [45], historical influences continue to permeate modern nursing practice. These are reflected in organizational philosophies, in imperial leadership styles.

Although there is a difference between theoretical definitions of leadership, there is a consensus regarding the necessary characteristics for achieving effective leadership. Transformational leadership is a new criterion for nursing managers and can be achieved through training, education and professional development in key leadership capabilities. Nursing managers who use and encourage transformational leadership can overcome oppressive traditions and successfully navigate in a complex and rapidly changing health environment.

When nursing staff is satisfied with employment, patient satisfaction is also rising and healthcare organizations can see the phenomenon of increasing patient satisfaction scores over time. Moreover, promoting effective communication and positive attitudes enhances a healthy environment for all employees [46]. Healthcare organizations should evaluate individually nursing leaders in order to promote the qualities of transformational leadership. It is argued that this will lead directly to staff satisfaction, staff retention and patient satisfaction [47]. The transformational leadership model followed in the last decades in nursing, has a significant impact on reducing nurses' exhaustion. Furthermore, it is supported that transformational leadership is significantly associated with increased satisfaction, as well as with increased staff well-being. It is also associated with reduced cases of nursing burnout and in reduction of the overall anxiety among the nursing staff [48]. In 2010, Lobo [49] stressed that as the current shortage of nursing staff is compounded by the aging of the population, the retention of first-line staff is becoming a priority. Studies have consistently shown that the leadership style of nursing managers plays an important role for this purpose. Applying the transformation leadership model provides the background and principles from which multi-generational management solutions are proposed [14,22,34,38,40]. Lievens and Vlerick [50] argue that applying safety rules in practice is a major challenge for healthcare services, prompting the need to identify key determinants and psychological mechanisms that affect it. Transformational leadership had a significant positive impact on the dimension of nursing safety performance and this has been mediated by the characteristics of knowledge related to work.

CONCLUSIONS

Leadership in nursing is in a state of change based on positive transformational changes. Effective leadership in hospital units directly affects the satisfaction of nursing staff and employees are interested in executives who can guide and manage the staff in a positive and encouraging way. In the present review paper, the positive impact that

transformational leaders have on the working performance of employees is evident. However, the exact psychological mechanisms that could explain the correlations between transformational leaders and the work performance of staff are not yet known. These mechanisms include also, behaviors that are not formal job requirements, but they facilitate the smooth functioning of the organization as a social system. Nursing leaders who implement transformational leadership improve working performance of their nursing employees and increase the effectiveness of the healthcare facility. The above are achieved by establishing a nurses sense of self-efficacy, while enhancing their active participation in the everyday routine of their field of work.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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