

## LEADERSHIP: A TOOL FOR ORGANISATIONAL EMPOWERMENT IN NURSING EDUCATION

Susan E van Niekerk, MCur Nursing Education  
Department of Nursing Science, Faculty of Medicine  
University of Pretoria

### OPSOMMING

Bemagtiging is die belangrikste faktor in die bereiking van die verpleegskool se missie, visie en strategiese bestemming. Suksesvolle leiers in Verpleegonderwys sal die waarde van bemagtiging insien en gebruik om te belê in uitnemendheid en daardeur personeel betrokkeheid, uitsette en diens bevorder.

Om bemagtiging te laat realiseer in 'n akademiese organisasie, vereis die identifisering van 'n stel kernwaardes, waarop aktiwiteite gebaseer word, en wat individueel en gesamentlik deur die leier en die personeel gedemonstreer word. Sukses in 'n professionele akademiese milieu, vereis die verskuiwing van besluitnemingsmag vanaf gesentraliseerde gesag na deelnemende besluitneming en bestuur. Leierskap het 'n substansiële effek op organisatoriese uitkomstes en die produktiwiteit van die verpleegskool. Leierskap moet bemagtiging bevorder - die gebruik van transformele leierskap verseker die gebruik van die personeel se besondere vakkundigheid, dit fasiliteer personeelontwikkeling en bevorder kollegiale verhoudinge in die Verpleegskool.

### ABSTRACT

Empowerment is the key ingredient in achieving the mission, vision and strategic direction of a nursing school. Successful leaders in Nursing Education will identify and use empowerment to invest in excellence, thereby maximising personal commitment, performance and service.

For empowerment to occur in an academic organisation, a core set of values must be defined, enacted and modelled individually and collectively by the educational manager and the personnel. To succeed in a professional academic milieu, decision-making power must be transferred from a centralised authority to participative management. Leadership has a substantial effect on organisational outcome, and the productivity of the nursing school. Leadership needs to be empowering - transformational leadership uses the expertise of personnel in managing, facilitates personnel development and enhances collegiality in the nursing school.

### INTRODUCTION

Empowerment is a key ingredient in achieving the mission, vision and strategic direction of a nursing school.

Successful leaders in Nursing Education will identify, realise and use empowerment to invest in excellence, thereby maximising personal commitment, performance and service.

The educational manager and the personnel have to define, enact and model a core set of values to promote empowerment in the nursing school. In order to succeed in a professional academic milieu, decision-making power should be transferred from a centralised authority, to participative management (Wesson, Helman & Vanatta, 1994:75).

Leadership has a substantial effect on personnel empowerment, organisational outcome, and the productivity of the nursing school. Organisational effectiveness is the ability of the nursing school to realise its goal, and in order to be effective, personnel must develop through the process of strategic planning, the setting of goals and a structured plan for personnel empowerment. The leadership style of the academic leader will influence organisational functioning. Success in an academic professional environment requires the development of a coaching and facilitating approach to leadership, instead of a domineering and controlling approach. The move towards participative decision-making, coupled with the corresponding need for increased critical thinking, will not occur in controlling environments often typified by fear and mistrust. Leadership needs to be empowering, not overpowering.

### LEADERSHIP DEFINED

Among the different definitions of leadership, the definition of Fiedler (in Sergiovanni & Carver, 1980:82) is found to be consistent with the nature of this discussion. He defines the leader as "the individual in the group given the task of directing and co-ordinating task-relevant group activities or who, in the absence of a designated leader, carries the primary responsibility for performing these functions in a group". It is important to keep in mind that the director of the nursing school is a leader of leaders. She does not have to execute all the required leadership functions herself, but should utilise the expertise of her personnel in order to get the job done. Group leadership in any institution enhances the effective functioning of the institution in question and empowers the personnel to greater productivity.

Cunningham (in Sergiovanni & Carver, 1980:87) emphasises the complexity and directness of leadership when he states: "It (leadership) is the curious blending of leading and following, provoking and calming, disturbing and stabilising, but always in a posture of movement, generating new strength and capability along the way."

### THE TASK OF THE EDUCATIONAL LEADER

Numerous functions form part of the task of the educational leader. She is responsible for the strategic planning of the

nursing school, networking with relevant stakeholders, and managing the school. She also facilitates personnel functioning and development and accepts the responsibility for structuring and guiding the activities of the nursing school. Failure to direct and co-ordinate group activities is comparable to the abdication of responsibilities.

Development of personnel and potential leaders forms another important part of effective organisational performance. A culture of excellence must be cultivated, in which all the staff members will strive towards quality work, and to self-development. The traits of the leader, should therefore include

- a strong drive for responsibility and task-completion,
- vigour and persistence in the pursuit of goals,
- originality in problem-solving, initiative in social situations,
- self-confidence and a sense of personal identity,
- willingness to accept the consequences of decision and action,
- readiness to absorb interpersonal stress and to tolerate frustration and delay,
- ability to influence other people's behaviour, and
- the ability to structure interaction systems to the purpose at hand (Hoy & Miskel, 1991: 254).

Today's leaders are challenged to lead the nursing schools into the information age, to participate and empower people to shape the metamorphosis of educational purpose and organisational structures. Technology has become an important part of the daily practice in education, to such an extent that the "Virtual Campus" is fast becoming a reality at South African Universities. Students have the prospect of studying, meeting their financial responsibilities towards the University, and obtaining study guides etc. through the Internet. Already Nursing Departments at universities are establishing their own websites. In this changing world of education, the leader must have a wide knowledge base, interact with tutors to assess educational needs in this regard, and utilise her own expertise. The executor must become an initiator, moving her process focus to concentrating on outcomes. She must become a risk-taker, leading to be in the centre of a web of interpersonal relations, not the apex of the organisational pyramid. She must achieve results with people, not through them (Murphy, 1992: 125).

The leader must become the visionary in terms of what the nursing school can become, and mobilise forces to change towards the new vision. The changing situation in education today, gives a mandate to leaders who commit people into action, who convert followers into leaders, and who transform leaders into change agents.

## **EMPOWERMENT OF PERSONNEL**

Nurses have always been conditioned to believe that decision-making is the prerogative of the few people with more information and power. The same can be said of nursing

schools. The director and deputy directors, attend all the meetings, make all the decisions with regards to school management although groups within the school structure are allowed to decide on curriculum matters. Personnel who are allowed greater involvement in school governance, and not only in deciding on curriculum matters, will accept greater responsibility and ownership of the management of the school, its failures and successes. To enhance co-operative functioning within a nursing school, personnel need to be empowered with regard to managerial knowledge and skills. The educational leader should therefore, apart from a personnel development program to promote subject expertise, also create opportunities for personnel to develop managerial and leadership skills.

Nugent and Lambert (1994: 227) describe the power of knowledge as having impact through the ability to influence - the capacity to affect the behaviour of others, and to control valuable resources and to enhance excellence. Personnel with a greater input in school management and control of the organisation will promote the culture of excellence, and the quality of outputs to a greater extent. The leader of the school has therefore to create an environment where members will be empowered by a culture of excellence.

Organisational culture is composed of shared beliefs, expectations, values and norms of conduct of members, interacting with the formal organisational structure and control systems. To achieve organisational empowerment, the leader of a nursing school has to initiate the creation of a dynamic developing organisation. In situations where personnel are pursuing excellence and functioning on high achievement levels, with high personal standards and high standards for others, the leader will have to stay abreast of new developments on national and international levels, in order to stimulate and motivate the staff members. Personnel get used to maintaining high standards, and expect continuous high-level performance. Organisational effectiveness is the result of functioning in a culture of excellence.

## **Sources of Power**

The leader as Head of Department, or the Director of academic nursing, has a certain amount of power invested in her. Her use of this power can promote organisational effectiveness, or cause irreversible harm to the institution. The sources of power, as found in practice, are not always legitimate power. Although authority implies power, power can be misused by leaders to influence the behaviour of others. Sources of power are:

### **Reward power**

The leader rewards desired behaviour of subordinates. Rewards such as merits, promotion, attendance of symposia, and so forth. Rightfully, this power should be used to achieve organisational objectives. Attempts to influence behaviour must be ethically correct.

### ***Coercive power***

This is the opposite of the power mentioned above - it is the ability of the leader to punish subordinates for undesirable behaviour. Punishment can vary from reprimands to strict enforcement of office rules or denial of salary increments.

### ***Legitimate power***

This is the ability to influence behaviour simply by means of formal position. The leader is empowered by the organisation to make decisions within a specific area of responsibility. This area of responsibility defines the activities over which the leader has legitimate power (Hoy & Miskel, 1991: 83). Outside of this zone, legitimate power fades.

### ***Referent power***

This implies the leader's ability to influence behaviour based on a subordinate's identification with the leader. The individual with referent power is respected, admired and serves as a role model, based on interpersonal skills and/or extraordinary personality. Individuals and groups can have referent power, based on trust, respect and loyalty.

### ***Expert power***

This may well be the only power which, if the leader continuously develops her expertise, will last in the academic world. This power is earned, and respected by others and never given to a person. This power is based on specialised knowledge and skills. The leader has to demonstrate specialised subject-knowledge, as well as knowledge and skills with regard to academic management. The ability to guide decisions, structure school management and use participative decision-making may define the limits of expert power (Hoy & Miskel, 1991: 93).

The leader with expert power can use these abilities to empower her personnel with regard to management skills and also as didactic skills. This leader will most probably have a democratic approach, use participative management, and facilitate the development of personnel.

## **TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

Transformational leadership is defined by Marriner-Tomey (1993:12) as a process in which leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. Transformational leaders are described as people following four leadership strategies: "attention through vision, meaning through communication, trust through positioning, and deployment of the self. Empowerment in this regard, is considered as a dependant variable".

Transformational leadership involves the uniting of people in the pursuit of higher goals. It focuses the attention of the people on the goals of the organisation, and the social relationship between the organisation and the community (Sergiovanni & Starrat, 1993:186). The charismatic aspects of transformational leadership empower organisa-

tional change in response to challenges in the environment. Part of this environment is the community with whom we have a social contract, and the student, who is now becoming a client. The nursing leader has to assess the environment, and make the necessary changes to accommodate community needs in educational management. There should be a paradigm shift to pursue the concept of quality management, where the student (as client) is emphasised, where there is no hierarchy, where personnel evaluate their own performance, communication on all levels is effective, and the team takes responsibility for quality outputs.

Transformational leaders demonstrate charismatic authority, in their self-confidence, dominance, and in a strong conviction of the moral righteousness of their mission. Their actions create the impression of their own competence, and they communicate their high expectations of follower's abilities to achieve a goal. Apart from raising the follower's levels of motivation and accommodating their needs, transformational leaders also use conflict to exert influence by making followers aware of their needs. Conflict purposively exploits the tension within the follower's value system. It shapes and alters the goals and values of followers to achieve a collective purpose that is beneficial to the academic organisation (Marriner-Tomey, 1993: 22).

Leadership in Nursing Education must be based on professional expertise and moral imperative, rather than line of authority. Nurse Educators need to belong to, and participate in a team, while being allowed to be individually creative and innovative. Transformational leadership cannot exist unless there is organisational trust, which will promote group and individual relationships, creativity, innovation, and empowerment.

## **CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE**

Academic organisation involves shared expectations, values and attitudes, and exerts influence on individuals, groups and the organisational process. Culture culminates in the symbols, language and assumptions of academics, and the behaviours that manifest in their norms and values. In relation to leadership and organisational excellence, Edgar Schein (in Hanson, 1991: 178) argues that one of the principle functions of leadership is shaping and directing the organisation's culture.

To achieve organisational excellence, a culture of excellence must be evident in the Nursing School. All the personnel must strive for excellence in their task of facilitating learning, in interpersonal communication, community service and research. The leader must create an environment where quality education is possible, where there is time and opportunity to do research, and where student and personnel development is a high priority.

A culture of excellence in an academic organisation is



demonstrated in all the activities. When a post is advertised, the advertisement is completed in such a way that only the best will apply. In the case of an interview, questions will be included to establish the individual's perspective on quality and excellence. A culture of excellence in a school will motivate people with high educational standards to apply for posts. People strive to be associated with a Nursing School where quality and excellence form part of the daily task, where excellence is always assumed, regardless of the assignment.

Functioning within a culture of excellence, personnel participate willingly in generating nursing science knowledge, do research and continually expand their own knowledge and skills. Leadership for excellence is required to create a culture for excellence - "every organisation has an invisible quality - a certain style, a character, a way of doing things that ultimately determines whether success will be achieved" (Marriner-Tomey, 1993: 75).

A successful leader recognises the power of culture and the need to manage it pro-actively, and respect the integrity of the desired culture by her membership. In practice, cultural leadership must ensure congruity between decision-making practices and strategic planning. Academics need effectiveness in their daily practice, be it didactics or guiding students in their care of patients. They need to accept ownership of the work setting, a trusting environment, a sense of security, adequate recognition, rewards and meaningful work. Marriner-Tomey (1993: 77) emphasises the need for transformational leadership to enhance a culture of excellence. This form of leadership is based on participative decision-making, shared governance models, collaborative practice models and excellence in practice, within limited resources. A strong cohesive culture promotes quality performance and high job satisfaction. Transformational leadership facilitates a culture of excellence.

## LEADERSHIP AND COLLEGIALLY

Collegiality is defined as: "Independent working conditions, ... in which they (academics) can work together, learn from each other, share and develop their expertise together, and where empowerment, critical reflection, feedback, and commitment to continuous improvement are a recognised part of their professional obligation," (Congdon & French, 1995: 749). Balsmeyer, Haubrick and Quinn (1996: 265) refer to Webster's definition of collegiality as equal sharing, marked by power or authority vested in each of a number of colleagues, and Jarvis' description of collegiality as encompassing respect, friendship, praise and support of colleagues that nurtures a culture supportive of scholars.

Collegiality in Nursing Education has to do with professional relationships that leads to genuine collaboration, potentiated individual endeavours, and mutual respect. Institutional structure, values and processes may enhance or impede this attitude. The aspects of collegiality relating to leadership include shared decision-making, and staff

consultation, and correlates positively with high productivity and institutional effectiveness. The concept of collegiality in the academic setting relates to areas of interpersonal relationships and group dynamics. The confidence and support that comes with collegiate sharing enhance the willingness to take risks, and to experiment. It enhances the commitment to personal and professional development amongst personnel, as a recognised part of their obligation.

Collegiality, as included in a transformational approach, does not necessarily imply that there is always consensus on everything. Hegyvary (1990: 505) warns that, just as administration is often equated with the bureaucratic style, faculty governance and collegiality often are equated with decision consensus. It is important to note that collegiality denotes that the prevailing norm in decision-making is discussion. In big groups, total agreement in decision-making becomes almost impossible to achieve. The effective transformational leader will use a collegial approach in management of the academic institution, with regard to organisational as well as academic management.

## POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

"Political ability" said Winston Churchill, "is the ability to foretell what is going to happen tomorrow, next week, next month and next year. And the ability to explain afterward why it didn't happen" (Swick, 1997: 19). Politics is especially important when dealing with highly intelligent and independent academics, operating in an environment characterised by multiple missions, diffuse goals and limited resources. Effective political leadership requires the leader to employ power, in a benevolent way, to advance the goals of the Nursing School. This power arises from several sources, such as the power of position, availability of information, access to different sources, the control of rewards, the daily agenda and personal influence, but "the power conferred by position is rarely enough to get the job done" (Swick, 1997: 19).

Leininger (in Marriner-Tomey, 1993: 179) defines power as the ability to change or influence the behaviour and decisions of others. Politics in an academic environment implies that the leader can use the strategies and tactics of conflict - she must be comfortable to work in a confrontational environment, and use conflict to the best benefit of the school. Conflict over academic matters stimulates creative thinking, and the innovative abilities of personnel are used - to change policies, take decisions and so forth. "Leaders can never fully escape a fundamental dilemma: how to confront the realities of diversity, scarcity, and self-interest, and still channel human action in co-operative and socially valuable directions" (Swick, 1997: 20).

Although power in an academic institution rests with the leader, and one or two others, everybody is still in control of his own decisions, and has thus individual power. Marriner-Tomey (1993: 182) refers to Victor Frankl's work,

when she emphasises that although a person cannot always control what happens, he can always control his reactions. It is this freedom to choose that gives meaning to life - what people become, depends on the decisions they make and act upon, not on the conditions around them. The more a person is able to forget about himself or herself, commit to a cause, vision or another person, the more actualised they become. The academic leader must utilise this situation and create an environment where people can make their own decisions, and participate in corporate decisions. The knowledge and insight into human behaviour can be used to foster the development of the new leadership mentality that facilitates the creativity, commitment and self-actualisation needed for a successful academic organisation.

Political know-how is important for organisational effectiveness, and to influence Health Care and changes in Nursing as a profession. Nursing academics need to accept the responsibility of staying informed about politics. The political know-how and skills must be used to the benefit of Nursing and Nursing Education. The most benign bill being considered by legislature can become a route for some interest group to attempt to limit nursing practice and/or education, to force articulated curricula or to exert power over Nursing and its resources. Political involvement is hard work, but it can be energising and exiting. Politics is an essential activity of the Nursing Profession. Power is the ability and willingness to affect the behaviour of others to bring about change. Nurses have the ability to exercise power in politics if we energise and articulate collectively.

## CONCLUSION

Nursing Education is in a period of change in this country - driven by economic, political personal forces, opening new ways of organisational restructuring and creating a new paradigm for management. The old hierarchy where power was centred in a few is giving way to an organisational network of shared power. This new paradigm is cultured through the medium of transformational leadership, by which the leader, through the use of positive political strategy, is able to place the followers at the heart of the

endeavour and to create an openness that can release and use creative ideas and find meaning in life. Empowerment occurs when everybody within the network shares the same vision, pool energy and creativity and move towards the same goal. Effective leadership and organisational success empowers people, enhances productivity and creates a culture of excellence.

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