Planning and Selecting Evaluation Designs for Leadership Training: A Toolkit for Nurse Managers and Educators

SIMON DUNNE, PhD*, CORA LUNN, MSc†, MARCIA KIRWAN, PhD*, ANNE MATTHEWS, PhD*, AND SARAH CONDELL, PhD‡

Leadership development training and education for nurses is a priority in modern health care systems. Consequently, effective evaluation of nurse leadership development programs is essential for managers and educators in health care organizations to determine the impact of such programs on staff behaviors and patient outcomes. Our team has identified a framework for the evaluation of the design and implementation of such programs. Following this, we provide practical tools for the selection of evaluation methodologies for leadership development programs for use by health care educators and program commissioners. (: Index words; Nursing leadership; Leadership education; Training methodologies; Training evaluation) J Prof Nurs 31:475–481, 2015. © 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

THE EVALUATION OF leadership development training and education programs is increasingly being recognized as an essential component of burgeoning organizations. In nursing, the strategic importance of leadership development has been identified through established links between advancements in leadership behaviors and improvements in patient outcomes (Wong & Cummings, 2007). Wide variation in leadership development programs exists, and their implementation is often tied to organization-specific preferences (Cacioppe, 1998). Consequently, evaluation of the effectiveness of specific leadership development programs is important for health care organizations, although this area has been underdeveloped.

As part of a research service to the National Leadership and Innovation Centre, Office for the Nursing and Midwifery Services of the Health Service Executive in Ireland, a framework for the planning and selection of leadership training program evaluation strategies was developed through an examination of the literature on leadership program evaluations and from our experience of engaging in such evaluations. As the development of this research framework did not directly involve human subjects, institutional review board approval was not required. This article shows how this framework may be used to provide practical guidance for nursing and health care educators and managers for the evaluation of leadership training programs. The first section identifies a structured framework for the effective design and implementation of leadership development programs for nurse educators and their associated evaluation phases. This is followed by two decision trees for the selection of appropriate evaluation methodologies for leadership training programs.

Structured Leadership Development Programs and Their Associated Evaluation Phases

It is widely recognized in the literature on leadership development that organizations who undertake leadership training programs need to be adequately prepared for such endeavors. For instance, Collins and Holton (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of 83 studies involving leadership interventions and found that leadership development programs can lead to significant improvements in knowledge and skills but only when adequate preparation for such interventions had taken place beforehand. In particular, they indicated that improvements in leadership knowledge and skills were only

*School of Nursing and Human Sciences, Dublin City University, Ireland.
†National Leadership and Innovation Centre for Nursing and Midwifery, Office of the Nursing and Midwifery Services Director, Limerick, Ireland.
‡Office of the Nursing and Midwifery Services Director, Dr Steevens Hospital, Dublin, Ireland.
   Address correspondence to Dr. Dunne: School of Nursing and Human Sciences, Dublin City University, Collins Avenue, Glasnevin, Dublin 9, Ireland. E-mail: simon.dunne@dcu.ie
8755-7223

```
  ┌─────────────┐                              ┌─────────────┐
  │ 1. Needs    │ ◄──────────────────────────  │ 6. Reward   │
  │ assessment  │                              │ success     │
  │             │                              │ & address   │
  └─────────────┘                              │ deficiencies│
         │                                     └─────────────┘
         │                                            ▲
         ▼                                            │
  ┌─────────────┐                              ┌─────────────┐
  │ 2. Audience │                              │ 5. Employ   │
  │ selection   │                              │ leadership  │
  │             │                              │ program     │
  └─────────────┘                              │ evaluation  │
         │                                     └─────────────┘
         │                                            ▲
         ▼                                            │
  ┌─────────────┐        ┌─────────────┐              │
  │ 3. Ensure   │        │ 4. Develop a│              │
  │ supporting  │ ─────► │ learning    │ ─────────────┘
  │infrastructure│       │ system      │
  │ is in place │        │             │
  └─────────────┘        └─────────────┘
```
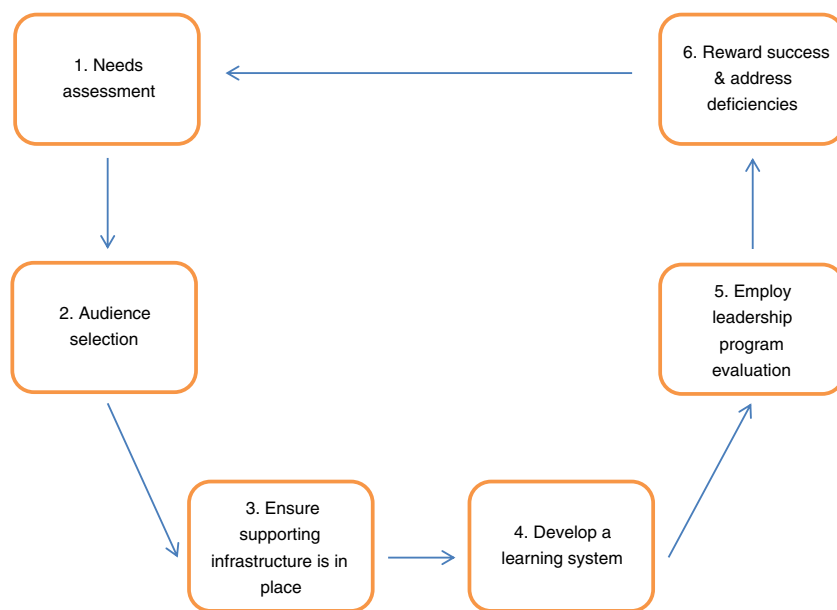
Figure 1. Structure of leadership training program implementation (derived from Leskiw & Singh, 2007).

possible if sufficient analysis of leadership needs is carried out before program implementation and the program itself is specifically designed to meet these needs. As such, it is particularly important to plan the structure of a leadership development program and incorporate program evaluation methodologies into the needs assessment and evaluation phases of the program. In addition, there is a need for an adequate allocation of time toward an initial needs-assessment phase and the structured planning of a leadership program before proceeding with program implementation and evaluation. In this regard, Leskiw and Singh (2007) identified a structured framework for leadership program development and implementation, which is outlined in Figure 1 and described in detail below.

Leskiw and Singh (2007) indicate that leadership development programs should begin with a thorough needs assessment. This includes defining the needs of a particular program according to the mission statement of an organization and identifying appropriate content of the program to fit that mission statement. Such a needs assessment should incorporate an evaluation of the extent to which current leadership practices in an organization meet the leadership needs of the organization. In the context of nursing education, such a needs assessment might involve identifying the current nursing leadership practices of the faculty and designing a leadership program to meet the gaps between current practices and the objectives of the faculty through the provision of appropriate skills and knowledge training. Appropriate evaluation methodologies for this phase are identified in Decision Tree 1 in the following section of this article.

The second and third phases of (Leskiw and Singh (2007) structure for leadership development programs involve audience selection and ensuring that a supporting infrastructure is in place. Audience selection involves identifying relevant candidates for leadership development training that would serve the strategic purposes of the organization. Relevant candidates may be individuals in a critical position who demonstrate a high level of responsibility for patient care and a high level of technical proficiency in appropriate nursing practices. Ensuring that supporting infrastructure is in place involves assessing whether there is ongoing support and involvement from senior management to allow leaders to train staff and implement the skills they learn through leadership development initiatives. For nursing educators, this phase would involve assuring that there is appropriate staffing cover for the training period and adequate resources for leadership training in the faculty. Without such an assessment, there may be a considerable gap between learning from a leadership development program and its application. It should also be emphasized that audience selection and infrastructure assessment require objective criteria based on organizational needs as identified through the initial needs-assessment phase (Leskiw & Singh, 2007).

The fourth phase of leadership development concerns developing a learning system (Leskiw & Singh, 2007). This involves identifying a program that aligns with leadership staff needs and can be supported by the organizational infrastructure. Leskiw and Singh (2007) suggest that there are a number of approaches for developing a learning system. Action learning strategies, involving practical workshops where knowledge is applied directly, are one of the most enduring transfer-learning mechanisms that can be incorporated into such programs. An alternative approach is mentoring or coaching, where a more seasoned leader supports the development of junior nursing leaders. The latter approach may be preferable in nursing contexts because it may be better suited to the health service infrastructure where appropriate staff cover is essential. Nonetheless,