

Understanding the Role of the Nurse Manager: *The Full-Range Leadership Theory Perspective*

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Many healthcare organizations rely on the leadership talents of management as a mechanism to create and sustain a healthy work environment and optimize outcomes of patient care and staff satisfaction.¹ Within the management team, the leadership skills required of nurse managers cannot be undervalued. Leadership demonstrated by the nurse manager directly impacts staff's performance of patient care and therefore influences patient outcomes.¹⁻³



In the past, healthcare administrations have identified the nurse manager position as an entry-level leadership position. Often, candidates lack the theoretical understanding of leadership to exercise high-level leadership behaviors that inspire staff beyond their work assignment to achieve a transformative effect.⁴ Casida⁵ suggests that novice nurse managers rely on transactional leadership as their primary leadership style and, as a result, contribute to a decline in staff's job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which lead to increased employee turnover.⁶

However, the full-range leadership theory (FRLT) suggests that elements of transactional leadership are foundational in the quest to produce transformational results.^{7,8} With a meaningful understanding of the FRLT, the nurse manager can selectively and purposefully execute effective transactional leadership behaviors as groundwork for reaching transformational leadership practices. The purpose of this paper is to gain a greater understanding of the scope of leadership required of the nurse manager from the perspective of the FRLT framework, specifically the intricate relationship that exists between transactional and transformational leadership practices.

THE FULL-RANGE LEADERSHIP THEORY

The FRLT is a contemporary leadership theory rooted in 3 theoretical perspectives of leadership: transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and laissez-faire leadership.^{9,10} There are 4 dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration, and 3 dimensions of transactional leadership: contingent reward, management-by-exception (active), and management-by-exception (passive). The sole perspective of laissez-faire leadership references a lack of leadership or no leadership.⁸

Research suggests that successful implementation of transformational leadership practice can produce outcomes such as a staff's willingness to exert extra effort, the perception that the leader is effective, and high-levels of satisfaction with the leader.^{7,11-13} FRLT attempts to explain "high-level leadership" or transformation in that followers and leaders move beyond the parameters of resource exchange (transactional) to achieve a higher level of change driven by a moral or utilitarian motivation.^{8,14,15} By contrast, laissez-faire leadership reflects a leader's avoidance in decision making and demonstrates a reluctance to take leadership action.^{7,11} Avolio⁷ suggests that a leader will demonstrate behaviors within all 3 leadership perspectives; however, the best leaders demonstrate an optimal blend of transformational and transactional behaviors.^{13,15} Therefore, a meaningful understanding of the intricate nature that exists in the relationship between transactional and transformational leadership practices requires further exploration.

FRLT recognizes that transformational and transactional leadership are distinct concepts and do not represent the same concept on opposite ends of a single continuum.¹³ A "fundamental"⁷ assumption of the transformational-transactional leadership theory is the augmentation effect that stipulates that transformational leadership adds to the effect of transactional leadership.^{13,14,16} An important consideration of FRLT is that transformational leadership does not replace transactional leadership.¹⁵ Rather, without a base of transactional leadership, transformational effects may not be possible to achieve.^{7,13}

The success of establishing a transactional base is contingent on establishing trust between the nurse manager and staff, which is imperative in the transactional exchange. Laschinger and Finegan¹⁷ contend there is a long history of nurses distrusting management, stemming from generations of poor nursing leadership practices. Establishing trust will diminish the hierarchical nature inherent in the relationships between the nurse manager and staff. Further, building trust in the work environment is identified as a critical leadership responsibility.¹⁸ The importance of the nurse manager establishing trust from the onset through a series of successful transactional exchanges is a sound leadership strategy in building relational groundwork for future transformational practices.¹⁹

TRANSACTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Transactional leadership is frequently measured using 3 dimensions: contingent reward, management-by-exception (active), and management-by-exception (passive). Contingent reward is the only dimension of transactional leadership that associates positively with transformational leadership,²⁰ producing highly effective outcomes comparable to outcomes achieved through transformational leadership.¹³ Contingent reward is the epitome of transactional leadership, representing "the exchange of rewards for acceptable performance."²⁰ However, successful implementation of contingent reward strategies rests highly on the constructive nature of clarifying the expectations for both parties. Therefore, contingent reward requires the leader to

clearly articulate the tasks and parameters required of the follower in exchange for pay, praise, recognition, merit, promotions, bonuses, or honors.^{11,21,22} Successful transactions or exchange between the leader and follower(s) in the form of contingent rewards will contribute incrementally to establishing trust between the nurse manager and staff. Moreover, the success achieved using contingent reward will be the basis for transformational leadership.¹³

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Although transactional leadership is an integral component of the FRLT, it is the integration of transformational leadership behaviors that elevates leadership to optimal functioning for the modern leader.^{12,13} Transformational leadership is rooted within the social construct of humanity, and capitalizes on the importance of the relational exchange between the leader and the followers. Leaders are thought to provide meaning or vision, act as role models, evoke emotions, and respond to individual needs to foster a climate of trust.²³ In addition, there is a larger goal of developing or transforming followers into leaders concurrently promoting individuals to reach their full potential.²

Transformational leaders inspire followers beyond their own self-interests to an altruistic vision that aligns with the values and mission of the organization. However, Andrews et al.² highlight that leaders delegated with "operational" responsibilities, such as the nurse manager, are consistently perceived by staff as less transformational than higher-level administrative leaders, such as directors or the chief nursing officer. Nurse managers responsible for the daily operations of a unit can become overwhelmed managing the human resource tasks of the unit. As a result, the nurse manager can miss or dismiss opportunities to engage with staff, capitalizing on relational elements required for high-level leadership.²

The challenge for nurse managers is to execute a delicate balance of operational tasks (transactional exchange) in concert with transformational leadership behaviors. With thoughtful planning, the nurse manager can build on the benefits of contingent reward with behaviors that will elevate transactional leadership into the dimensions of transformational leadership. With insight and reflective practice, the nurse manager can enhance the common transactional exchange between followers and craft a more meaningful interaction represented within the dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, influential motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration.

Idealized Influence

Idealized influence, defined as the social charisma or charismatic behaviors displayed by the leader is often considered to be the defining attribute of a transformational leader.¹³ A charismatic nurse manager has the ability to articulate an organizational vision and showcase how that vision aligns with staff's beliefs. As well, the nurse manager demonstrates admirable behaviors that resonate with followers' on an emotional level.¹³ The acknowledgement, understanding, and respect between the 2 parties at a transformational level

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