



Review article

Are radiography lecturers, leaders?

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ABSTRACT

This review article aims to explore the concept of radiography lecturers acting as leaders to their student followers. Through a brief review of the literature, a definition of leadership is suggested and some leadership theories explored. The path-goal theory, leader–member exchange theory and the contemporary theory of transformational leadership are examined more closely. Links between lecturer-leader behaviour and student motivation and learning are tentatively suggested with transformational leadership appearing to offer the optimal leadership style for lecturers to adopt. The paucity of literature relating directly to radiography is acknowledged and areas for further research are suggested. The article concludes with some of the author's practical ideas for incorporating transformational leadership styles and behaviours into radiography education today.

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Introduction

Within the United Kingdom (UK), radiographers have a pivotal role in modern health care¹ in a truly multi-professional environment.² Good team working skills are essential³ and for the radiography profession to develop, high quality graduates are needed to provide the workforce of the future.⁴ Consequently the role of the radiography educator may be considered as one to grow radiographers of the future, ready for the modern National Health Service (NHS). This article seeks to explore whether, in this critical educator role, UK radiography lecturers are acting as leaders to a group of student followers; providing more than just information and knowledge. Initially this paper will examine what is suggested by the term 'leadership' alongside some of the many leadership theories in existence. A short review of the literature will be presented to investigate whether UK radiography lecturers may be considered as 'leaders' to student 'followers'. The article will conclude with suggestions for practice based upon the findings of this short review.

Leadership defined

There is much debate over the concept and definition of leadership. For over one hundred years a definition of the term has been

sought with little consensus.⁵ However some 'uneasy' agreement has recently been reached; leadership has the influence of others as a key concept. Northouse⁵ defines leadership as a 'process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal'. Such opinion is shared by Yukl⁶ who states that leadership

"..... involves a process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization."

The process concept of leadership is one of many theories. The 'group' view of leadership proposed by Bass in 1990 (cited in Northouse⁵) suggests the leader acts as a focal point for a group directing the will of the group, particularly during change and activity.

Trait or behaviour?

The trait prospective of leadership is well documented. It suggests certain individuals are born with 'leadership characteristics', implying the skill of leadership is innate.^{7–9} Such traits include both physical and personality qualities in addition to other characteristics such as intelligence and confidence. The trait concept of leadership was first promoted by Stogdill in 1948,¹⁰ suggesting that leadership lies within the grasp of a few – those born with appropriate qualities. Conversely, the process theory of leadership suggests that successful leadership behaviours can be learnt and that the interactions between leaders and followers result in the availability of leadership to everyone.^{11–13}

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In 1960, McGregor¹⁴ argued that an individual's views and assumptions of life could influence their approach towards leadership. Researchers at Ohio State suggested that leaders provided structure for subordinates (task behaviours) whilst also nurturing them (consideration behaviour).¹⁰ Both behaviours are considered independent of each other. Effective leaders may be those that are highly task orientated plus high in relationship behaviours. However this concept does not present as a robust theory, rather a framework to enable the assessment of leadership behaviours. Links between leader task and relationship behaviours have not been directly related to motivation, morale and satisfaction; but the concept clearly identifies to all leaders that their behaviour impacts upon others.⁵

This skills approach to leadership was first conceived by Robert Katz in 1955.¹⁵ Here, dissatisfied with the trait theory, leadership was characterised by a set of skills that could be developed. The skills model, more recently advanced by Mumford et al.,¹⁶ consists of five components: competencies (problem-solving skills, social judgement skills and knowledge) individual attributes (for example: motivation, personality, cognitive ability) leadership outcomes, career experiences and environmental influences. Although competences and individual attributes may clearly influence leadership success, the role of career experiences may be less obvious. Mumford proposed that experience gained by leaders throughout their career enabled better knowledge and problem-solving skills; thus making better leaders. The environmental influence, the success of the environment in which the leader is employed and the skills of the group they lead would not be possible in terms of trait theory.

The skills model is attractive as it suggests leadership skills can be developed by all. However it provides no direct link between performance in various skills and leadership performance. It may also be suggested that although the model dismisses trait theory as skills are developed, it does include factors within competencies that may well be considered to be personality traits themselves. However problem solving, listening skills and knowledge can be argued to be essential for today's workforce.^{3,4}

Situational leadership

This concept was developed in the 1960s by Hersey and Blanchard.^{5,17} It considers two dimensions; a directive and a supportive dimension applied appropriately to varying situations. The theory suggests as followers' motivation and skills vary with time so should the degree of support and direction, thus leadership would also need to vary over time. An effective situational leader would interpret the needs of their followers and vary their own style to complement those needs.^{5,12,13,18} Within situational leadership, a directing style focuses mainly on achieving a goal with supervision. The coaching style also involves achieving goals but with an increased awareness of the emotional needs of the follower in terms of communication and encouragement.^{5,12,13,18} As skills develop, the leadership style moves further towards a supporting style (listening, asking for input and giving feedback) with less emphasis upon direction. Finally, as competence has developed a low directive and low supporting style is utilised; the delegating style.

Situational leadership offers a practical, straightforward approach with clear boundaries whilst being focused on the follower and their individual needs; however little research has been done to support the concept and use of situational leadership. Motivation, skill and competence are interlinked in this model but no explanation is offered as to how or why motivation and commitment may decrease when a task is achieved.¹⁸ In addition, the situational leadership concept may be considered appropriate with the one to one approach. How this would translate to group

leadership requires further investigation and is beyond the scope of this review paper.

Path-goal theory

A further leadership theory, with motivation and enhanced performance as key elements, is the 'path-goal' theory proposed by House in the early 1970s.¹⁹ The basis of this leadership style is that followers will be more motivated if they feel capable and valued, with positive outcomes. A successful path-goal leader would carefully assess the follower's motivational requirements and adopt the appropriate behaviour to enable followers to achieve their goals. Leaders should facilitate a clear path, free from obstacles, with support and well defined goals.^{5,19} Path-goal theory is complex; varying leadership behaviours react differently with the various characteristics of followers and indeed the task involved. Such behaviours may be supportive, directive, participative and achievement orientated.¹⁹

A great strength of the path-goal theory is the ever present practical purpose of leadership; for followers to successfully achieve a goal through guidance and coaching from their leader. However the complexity of path-goal theory and a limited body of supporting research can be a criticism. Similarly the actual reasons why varying methods of leadership style achieves success (for example: directive leadership when a task may be considered ambiguous or vague) are not explained within path-goal theory. In addition the concept is almost totally focused upon the leader carrying responsibility for success and goal achievements. It may be argued that such style of leadership would fail to fully realise the capabilities of followers, developing a relationship of dependence.^{20,21}

Leader–Member Exchange

A further theory, Leader–Member Exchange, concerns the process of leadership in terms of the relationship between leader and follower (Member). The theory was first developed by Graen in the mid 1970s,²² essentially involving the dyadic relationship between leader and follower. Since then several amendments have been suggested to enhance the theory, moving it from the differences between, 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' towards encouraging leaders to develop positive exchanges with all followers.²²

The Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) theory fully embraces the benefits of positive relationships as central to successful leadership. In general other leadership theories have related directly to the qualities or characteristics of the leader, whereas LMX focuses on interaction and communication. A considerable body of research supports the positive outcomes from this style of leadership theory, making it a practical and reliable theory to put into practice.^{22–24} Despite these positive influences, LMX is not without potential limitations. The concept of equality and fairness are not embedded in LMX as it acknowledges the formation of in groups and out groups. Although leaders are encouraged to foster high quality relationships with all members, the theory does not fully explain how this may be achieved in practice. The potential impact on the out group followers should not be overlooked; emotionally this may be detrimental to those in less positive leader–member exchanges.

Transactional and transformational leadership

A more recent theory emerging from the 1970s and 1980s is that of transformational leadership.²⁵ Transformational leadership describes the process of enabling change or transformation of people.^{25–28} It fully embraces the motivational and empowering affects upon followers; considering the emotions and values of people and

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