



Review

Transformational leadership in nursing: The case of Ebonyi State in Nigeria

Accepted 26th December, 2014

Onwe, Simon Nwigboji

Department of Nursing Science,
Faculty of Health Science and
Technology, Ebonyi State
University, Abakaliki, Nigeria

Author's Email:
onwesim@yahoo.com
Tel.: +2348036576867,
+447438291735

Nurses contribute substantially to health care delivery the world over but they are rarely involved in policy formulation and decision making on issues affecting health in many countries (World Health Organisation, 2007). This is attributed to the perceived low status of nursing education which is basically diploma-awarding schools of nursing (Senior and Fleming, 2006). Transformational leadership in nursing seems to be a proven solution to this problem. Ebonyi State experienced transition from trait based leadership style to transformational leadership in 2003. Prior to the transition in Ebonyi State, nurses had no voice and their needs were not communicated to the appropriate authorities. Many nurses who were due for promotion were stagnated as a result. After the transition, a graduate nurse with M.Sc. in nursing education took over as a substantive director of nursing in the state. The needs of the nurses were appropriately communicated and many whose promotions were hitherto stagnated were massively promoted. There was also a mass enrolment of many nurses who had diploma in nursing into a university-based degree in nursing. Although the transition experienced a lot of challenges, the impact was rewarding and it can be inferred that transformational leadership seems appropriate for the desired reforms in nursing.

Key words: Reforms, nursing, leadership theory, transformational leadership, Nigeria civil service rules

INTRODUCTION

Nurses globally contribute substantially to health care delivery the world over but they are rarely involved in policy formulation and decision making on issues affecting health in many countries of the world (WHO, 2007). Senior and Fleming (2006) attribute this situation to the perceived low status of nurses' educational preparation which is predominantly diploma-awarding hospital based schools of nursing. Nursing Education started in the era of Nightingale (1860-1910) and has experienced changes between then and now (Chin, 2008).

In Nigeria, Nursing Education started with a hospital based school of nursing in 1949 and degree programme in 1965. Out of the 160,000 registered nurses in Nigeria as at January, 2012, less than 30% has a degree in nursing science (N and MCN, 2012 ; Agbedia, 2012). Reforms in

Nursing Education in Nigeria are progressive and involve different leadership approaches in different parts of the country. In Ebonyi State in Nigeria, there was a transition from traditional trait theory to transformational theory of leadership in 2003 and each period experienced different results affecting all areas of nursing in the state.

The first leader is a male and has the trait of intelligence, strong drive for responsibility and willingness to tolerate frustrations and delay but lacked self-confidence, was unable to take initiatives in social situations and unwilling to accept consequences of decisions. The followers were not carried along and their needs not met. These qualities are found in leadership by trait theory (Northouse, 2010) and so he applied leader-centred trait leadership approach. The leader in the second stage is a female and in addition to

being intelligent and having strong drive for responsibility is charismatic, influential, self-confident, risk taking, inspirationally motivational and can exercise initiatives in social situations. The followers were carried along and their needs properly communicated to the right authorities where they received the desired attention. These qualities are typical of transformational leaders (Storey, 2010) so, her approach was transformational in nature. This essay however, focuses on the later stage which is transformative in approach. The essay presents a scenario of reforms in nursing education in Ebonyi State in Nigeria, reviews literatures on transformational leadership using the constellation model of leadership and analyzes critically the scenario presented with reference to the reviewed literatures. It highlights the author's involvement and future plans in the transformative process and finally draws conclusions based on the analysis.

Background of the scenario

Most nurses in Ebonyi State before 2003 had a Diploma in Nursing and some younger ones had a degree in other fields such as health education, nutrition and accountancy in addition to the Diploma in Nursing, (very few of the young nurses had an actual degree in Nursing). There was no substantive leadership- an acting deputy director of nursing in the Nursing Services Department of the State Ministry of Health was in place then because, according to Nigerian civil service rules, a non degree holder in a particular profession cannot be a deputy director or director in a department of that profession (Adekunle, 2010). The leadership style reflected trait theory and tended to be laissez faire.

Nurses had no voice in the state then (their needs were not communicated to the appropriate authorities by the leader) and many who were due for promotion were stagnated. Furthermore, nurses were not motivated to develop themselves professionally and those who wanted to do so at their own expenses were not given the opportunity by the administration. Every agitation of the nurses to move forward fell on the acting deputy director's deaf ear until 2003 when a director with a Masters in Nursing Education was appointed. Before this appointment, she had experience as a former tutor in a school of nursing, was a former chairman of a Local Government Council and former director of a non-governmental organization. As a transformational leader, she had clear vision for the profession, carried every member of the profession along and demonstrated high level of optimism in all her actions (Storey, 2010).

Utilizing her wealth of experience, she organized the first Continuous Professional Development Programme (CPDP) for nurses in the state using the experienced senior nurses and the few young graduate nurses, including the author, as the organizing committee. Among the resource persons were lecturers drawn from the Nursing Department of the University of Nigeria, high ranking staff of the civil service commission and the governor of the state who was also the

special guest in the opening ceremony of the programme. As a follow up to the Continuous Professional Development Programme, the organizing committee led by her (the leader) paid advocacy visit to the executive committee of Ebony State Government and the Head of Civil Service Commission of the state. During the visits, issues affecting the nurses were discussed and assurance of urgent attention gotten from these two Authorities.

Storey (2010), maintains that a transformational leader seeks to challenge and change a system. The Professional Development Programme and the follow up activities brought some changes and challenges to the existing nursing and nursing education structures in the state. The changes include the working class nurses with a diploma in nursing registering for a degree programme in nursing science, the nurses with degrees in nursing working towards a Masters' degree programme, the establishment and accreditation of a Department of Nursing Science in Ebonyi State University and offering accelerated promotion for the nurses that had a degree in nursing. Furthermore, the young graduate nurses, including the author, were offered teaching appointments in the Department of Nursing Sciences of Ebonyi State University. The leader, although the state director of Nursing Services Department, was as well offered a teaching appointment in the university though on part-time basis.

The challenges however, were the intra-professional crises arising from preferential promotion of graduate nurses, disagreement over criteria for leadership and classification for those with diploma in nursing and degree in other fields. Although the crises were administratively handled, the effects are still lingering to date.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

In this section, the author defined leadership, discussed transformational leadership theory, described the constellation model of leadership and its' application in leadership roles. Leadership has to do with a process, an influence, groups and goal attainment. It is therefore, "a process of influencing a group of individuals to attain a common goal" (Northouse, 2004). Leadership also involves a collective effort and in the light of this, leadership can be defined as "a social influence process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person or group over other people or group to structure the activities and relationships in a group or organization" (Yukl, 2002). There are two paradigms of leadership (the old and the modern paradigms). The old paradigm includes trait, skill, contingency and situational theories while the modern paradigms are congruent or action centred, transactional, team approach and transformational leadership theories (Avery 2004; Northouse 2010 and Carroll 2006).

The theory applied to the scenario above is transformational theory of leadership. This is chosen because the activities of the leader that brought reforms in the above scenario tends more towards transformational approach. The term was first coined by Downton in 1973

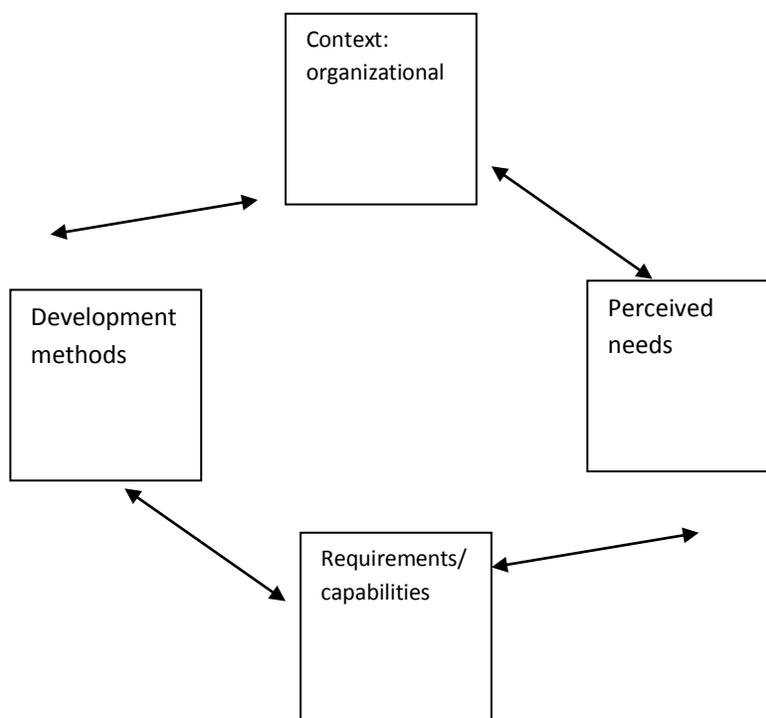


Figure 1: Constellation model (Storey, 2010).

and in 1978, MacGregor promoted its use in politics by linking the roles of leadership and followership (Northouse, 2010). Transformational leadership theory is concerned with bringing a positive change in the subordinates with the interest of individuals and the group in general in mind (Warrilow, 2012 and Mike 2009). A transformational leader is charismatic, motivational, influential, gives individual consideration and inspires confidence (Northouse 2010). With motivation, the transformational leader carries the followers along and inspires them to achieve the desired change for the organizational benefit. Furthermore, this type of leader is open-minded, sets a clear vision, makes it desirable and achievable and communicates it effectively to the subordinates with a view to gaining their full commitment (Bass 1990). In this way, all subordinates are focused on achieving the desired change in the interest of the organisation which they belong to.

The concept of a constellation model was used in the transformative process in the scenario presented above. Constellation model according to United Way of Calgary and Area-Neighbourhood Strategy (2011) is “a self governing action-team that operates in a broader governance structure and is responding to needs in a community”. The aim of forming a constellation is to formulate the expected outcomes of identified needs in an organization and work towards achieving them. The model is as shown in Figure 1 below.

In this situation (nursing education in Ebonyi State in Nigeria) the context is organizational, which is nursing

education in Ebonyi state in Nigeria that is in need. The perceived needs are needs for change with respect to better education, promotion of members and participation in formulation of policies affecting the welfare of members which were identified by both the leader and the followers.

For the change to take place, there are some capacities required. These in the opinions of Goleman (2002), Humphrey (2002), Vitello-Cicciu (2002) and Wolff et al. (2002), depend on such skills as: ability to mobilize support, good communication skills, ability to carry followers along, ability to listen, taking a supportive stance and ability to empower others through training. The opinions of these authors, suggest that the skills of the leader and the followers are necessary for the change to occur.

In the words of Robert Fulmer as cited by Storey John, “Leaders and followers who keep learning may be the ultimate source of sustaining competitive advantage” (Fulmer et al. cited in Storey, 2010). The method of development of the team members is through training on general organizational goals and specific roles of the team members. The series of training forms the sustainability plan of the organization.

Critical analysis of the scenario

Transformational theory of leadership, like other theories of leadership, has strengths and weaknesses which Judge, Piccolo and Kosalka (2009) described as “bright and dark

sides of leadership". The strengths are; "ability to initiate and implement change, empowerment of members, being a role model, specifying members roles and carrying members along while the weaknesses are; being too broad with ambiguous vision and the characteristics overlapping with those of other leadership theories" (Northouse, 2010). The author therefore, critically analyzed the scenario based on those two sides of transformational leadership theory.

The transformational leader described in the scenario above initiated, developed and implemented the change in Nursing Education in Ebonyi State. She did this by forming a constellation of nurses, selling her vision to them and organizing training for them. Jung, Chow and Wu (2003) opine that empowerment of members of an organisation by the leader enhances their full commitment to the organizational goal. Although Bryman (1992) argues that training in transformational leadership does not work since transformational leadership theory has some elements of traits and traits cannot be changed, it worked well in this case.

Following the training was role clarification for each team member depending on the member's values, interests and ability. This aligns with the claims of Avolio (1999) that transformational leadership model emphasizes followers' values, needs and interests in role specifications. The author was in the team responsible for information and communication which was assigned the roles of writing and distributing circulars, sourcing and inviting resource persons and other information and communication related roles as specified by the planning committee. Things worked well because the team members were assigned the things they valued and had interest in doing and as Howell and Avolio (1993) suggest, they team members were moved to higher level of moral responsibility.

It is not just enough to initiate a change process and watch from a distance expecting that things will work as planned. Transformational leaders are role models and will always be at the forefront of any change process they initiate (Avolio and Gibbons, 1998). In the scenario being analyzed, the leader was assigned the role of coordinating the activities of all the teams. She did not only coordinate but was part and parcel of each sub-committee to make sure things worked according to specifications. She corrected when necessary and at the same time very flexible to modification of plans as deemed necessary by the team members. Her flexibility to followers' suggestions made the followers feel a sense of belonging and ownership of the change process. This element of flexibility in transformational leadership is probably what Tejada, Scandura and Pillai, (2001) criticized as being an element of situational leadership and *laissez-faire* factor. Whatever the criticisms, the important thing is that it worked; it made the followers part and parcel of the change process and not aliens in their own business.

One other outstanding characteristic demonstrated by this transformational leader under review was her ability to encourage and reward her followers intermittently.

Although Kuhnert (1994) and Kuhnert (1987) argue that giving rewards to followers is a transactional approach, it is natural for people to want to be recognized after accomplishing a task as recognition makes them want to do more (Kouzes and Posner, 2002). This transformational leader organized an appraisal meeting from time to time and in the meetings, the contributions of every member were rewarded by verbal praises or commendation letters; some times, the success of the change process might be published in the press media, mentioning the names of the committee members. This was a big moral booster to many of the committee members and even those not in the sub-committees were encouraged by the publicity to show more commitment.

The effectiveness of any leadership theory can best be assessed by the achievement recorded by a leader using it. The transformational leader presented in the scenario recorded wide range of achievements ranging from many nurses enrolling for degree certificates in nursing, accelerated promotion for degree holders in nursing, establishment and accreditation of Department of Nursing Science in Ebonyi State University to according more recognition to nursing profession in the state. The assertion of Yukl (1999) that transformational leadership theory is effective is therefore, supported by these numerous achievements.

Transformational leadership, as broad-based and efficient as it seems, one would expect that a transformational leader should not encounter challenges in the course of leadership. The transformational leader in this scenario experienced three major challenges which included intra-professional crises arising from preferential promotion of graduate nurses, disagreement over criteria for leadership and classification for those with diploma in nursing and degree in other fields. Bryman (1992) and Bass (1995) argue that the broad based nature of transformational leadership makes the vision of a transformational leader ambiguous. This is probably true because judging from the achievements as mentioned earlier, the vision transcends nursing education to clinical nursing practice and nursing administration. The issues of disagreement over criteria for leadership and classification for diploma and graduate nurses were partly administrative and partly clinical.

Tejada, Scandura and Pillai (2001) and Bryman (1992) further argue that the broad-based nature of transformational leadership allows some elements of *laissez-faire* and trait. Furthermore, Bass and Avolio (1993) and Avolio (1999) add that transformational leaders become anti-democratic in bid to be on the lead and maintain the ideal because they assume that nothing works without them. Logical as it may sound, it should not be forgotten that if a vision bearer retreats, the vision may die in the hands of those that do not know the origin. Moreover, in the author's opinion, pursuing an ideal with persuasion is neither anti-democratic nor *laissez-faire* but diplomacy.

Notwithstanding the challenges facing the leadership at present as mentioned earlier, challenges are not signs of

leadership failure but opportunities to do better and sustaining achievements depends on the leader's ability to manage change (Burnes, 2009 and Ago 2009). Storey (2010) states that, no matter the leadership approach a leader uses, challenges are inevitable. The author therefore, suggests that the leader and the committee members should be more proactive in handling the challenges.

The author's reflection on his involvement in the reforms process

The author was actively involved in the change process as a member of the organizing committee and one of the internal resource persons. As one of the young graduate nurses at the beginning of the reforms processes, he was asked by the committee to handle the topic "current issues in nursing profession and the way forward". His involvement in the reforms process and continuous interaction with the leader exposed him to the successes and challenges of leadership especially, transformational approach.

Bass and Riggio (2006) suggest that transformational leaders emphasize on intrinsic motivation and development of the followers as opposed to trait approach which is leader characteristics centred. This tends to be true because, for the author of this scenario analysis, the reforms period was a period of development and mentorship in leadership (Avolio, 1999 and Bass, 1990).

Given any leadership opportunity in Ebonyi State University where the author works, he hopes to apply transformational leadership approach with some elements of transactional and team leadership approach. The transformational approach is appropriate because the staff and students need to be inspired, motivated and stimulated intellectually (Kuhnert, 1994). As stated by Northouse (2010), contingent reward factor in transactional leadership makes it appropriate for motivating students and lecturers to perform better academically. The potentials of the staff and students need to be adequately harnessed by getting them committed in leadership of the school. This can be achieved using team leadership approach which as Northouse (2010) states, reduces conflicts by allowing team leaders within the organization to manage their teams independently but for the common goal of the organization. The combination of leadership approaches, the author believes, makes leadership more proactive in handling challenges.

Conclusion

Nursing Education began with Florence Nightingale in 1860 and has experienced several reforms globally between that time and now (Chin, 2008). In Nigeria, Nursing Education started in 1949 and various leadership approaches have been employed to reform the low level of preparation. Ebonyi State in Nigeria had a transition from the trait approach to transformational approach in 2003. The

reform was necessitated by the growing demands of the nurses which the former leader could not meet.

There are several definitions of leadership however, Northouse (2004) states that leadership is a process of influencing a group of individuals to attain a common goal. There are old and modern paradigms of leadership and each paradigm has sub divisions (Avery 2004; Northouse 2010; Carroll 2006). Transformational leadership (sub-division of modern paradigm) was used in the reforms process. The scenario under review was the situation of nurses in Ebonyi State before 2003, the reforms that took place when transformational leader took over and the results of the reforms process was a huge success.

The critical analysis of the scenario was done using the strengths and weaknesses of transformational leadership theory to reflect on the reforms process (activities of the leader, the committee members, the successes and the accompanying challenges). The author, who was fully involved in the reforms process from the beginning to date, standing on the opinion of Bunes (2009), maintained that challenges in leadership do not suggest failure but opportunity to improve.

The author finally reflected on his involvement in the reforms process and proposes that if given the opportunity to take any leadership position in nursing, he would combine transformational leadership approach with some elements of transactional and team approach for greater effectiveness.

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