Transformational Leadership in Nursing

What We Know

› Nursing leadership is a broad term that is commonly used to describe an individual’s ability to define a vision within a specific competency. Visionary nursing leaders are necessary to promote the future of the nursing profession\(^5,7,9,13\)

• Nursing leadership is complex and multifaceted; nursing leaders are constantly adapting to complex government regulations and policy, economic, technology, and social challenges of the current resource-constrained healthcare delivery system

• Developing a vision to guide the accomplishment of organizational goals and promote positive change (e.g., improved patient outcomes) is a core concept of leadership\(^3,8,9,12,13\)

› For more information regarding leadership, see Nursing Practice & Skill ... Effective Nursing Leadership: Performing and the series of related Evidence-Based Care Sheets

James McGregor Burns, a political scientist and noted scholar in leadership studies, established the transformational model of leadership in 1978 to describe an individual’s ability to develop a long-term vision, remain committed to the vision, and empower others regarding the vision\(^3,8,9,12,13\)

• Empowering others regarding the vision establishes a common bond, or shared vision (i.e., shared interest for the future), and provides meaning to the life of the individuals working in the organization for which the vision was created

• Transformational leadership is effective in business, the military, sales, education, and human services industries

› The goal of transformational leadership is for the leader and his/her followers (e.g., staff, colleagues, employees) to grow in their respective professional roles, discover meaning and purpose in their work, and exceed their expectations. Transformational leaders are inspirational, compassionate, and have high ethical standards (for more information, see Evidence-Based Care Sheet: Ethical Nursing Leadership). The four components of transformational leadership, along with strategies for achieving each, are as follows:\(^3,8,9,12,13\)

• Idealized influence (II), which is divided into 2 elements: the behaviors of the transformational leader and the elements that are attributed to the leader by followers. Followers view transformational leaders as trusted and determined role models with extraordinary capabilities. Transformational leaders are willing to take risks, are consistent, and practice honest and ethical behaviors. Followers admire and respect their transformational leader and are inspired to emulate his/her high standards for personal and professional characteristics and behaviors
  – Strategies for effective II include being visible and approachable to others, modeling expectations, and demonstrating competency and integrity that are consistent with the vision. Transformational leaders hold all followers accountable to the same standards

• Inspirational motivation (IM), which is the leader’s ability to elicit team spirit and promote teamwork by practicing enthusiasm, optimism, and clearly communicating expectations of followers. Leaders who practice IM offer meaningful challenges and purpose to follower’s work tasks in order to accomplish goals, objectives, and a shared vision
Strategies for effective IM include providing frequent feedback and acknowledging followers who accomplished goals. Transformational leaders praise teamwork and collaboration in order to promote open communication and foster participation from others.

- Intellectual stimulation (IS), which is the leader’s ability to evaluate the needs and abilities of their followers. Transformational leaders develop learning opportunities and provide resources to foster their follower’s creativity and skills regarding solving problems.
  - Strategies for effective IS include encouraging participation in educational opportunities at staff meetings and creating a trusting work environment for followers to exercise and communicate ideas for solving problems. Transformational leaders allow others to learn from their mistakes.

- Individualized consideration (IC), which is the leader’s ability to convey concern, respect, and recognition to each follower. Transformational leaders practice active listening and mentor their followers in order to promote professional growth and development.
  - Transformational leaders seek to know each follower on a personal level and express genuine caring to their followers. Strategies for effective IC include recognizing each follower’s strengths and matching those strengths with appropriate work tasks.

Transformational leadership contributes to higher levels of morale and commitment to the organization by nursing staff; it is one of the five key components of the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) Magnet Recognition Program for establishing Magnet status in nursing care (for more information, see Evidence-Based Care Sheet: Goal Attainment).

Transformational leadership supports the transformation of organizational beliefs, values, and behaviors to promote positive change and meet future and shared visions as a collaborative process among staff. Effective transformational nursing leaders of Magnet organizations focus less on managing change and more on strategies to systematically transform organizational change with effective communication, influence, and innovation. Nursing leaders seeking to lead their organization to the achievement of Magnet status must be of strong character, knowledgeable about all levels of the organization, articulate, imaginative, and visionary thinkers. The three categories of the transformational leadership component for the Magnet Recognition Program are strategic planning, advocacy and influence, and visibility, accessibility, and communication (1, 8, 11).

- Strategic planning focuses on outcomes in nursing practice to improve the effectiveness and efficacy of a healthcare organization; evidence-based practices are the driving force for strategic planning in order to meet the demands of healthcare delivery system challenges. For example, strategic planning can formulate specific goals for delivering patient care (e.g., increase national nursing certification by 25% in one year), physical work environment (e.g., initiate strategies for noise reduction on units), technology improvements (e.g., implement a computerized self-schedule for nurses), and healthcare teams (e.g., improve communication among staff members).
  - The advocacy and influence category focuses on system level performance improvement changes. For example, a nursing leader can advocate for more telemetry beds to meet the healthcare demands of the population the organization is committed to serving.

Visibility, accessibility, and communication require consistent commitment regarding listening to others for suggestions of methods to improve the organization, work environment, and patient care; transformational leaders must ask nurses who provide direct care for their input and opinions to foster shared decision making.

Nursing leaders can implement the components of transformational leadership to increase job satisfaction, improve staff retention, and improve quality of care (11, 13, 14).

- The four components of transformational leadership contribute to staff recognition and create a meaningful environment in which staff is valued and challenged to deliver high quality care to meet patient needs (13).

- Investigators report that recognition and praise of staff by nurse managers and achievement and responsibility of staff were the highest scoring components that contributed to overall job satisfaction in 238 RNs at a hospital in China. Nursing managers are viewed as role models by staff nurses, and organizations should develop training programs to promote the leadership knowledge and skills of nursing managers (14).

- Transformational leadership can promote retention of nursing staff and nurse managers by committing to the Magnet Recognition Program component of transformational leadership. Nursing leaders who advocate for employee-assisted programs (e.g., life mentoring) provide nurses with the framework to meet personal goals and priorities, discover personal limitations, and improve self-awareness to reduce compassion stress and fatigue (i.e., the feeling of deep empathy or sorrow for others and the demand for action to relieve the stress of others) (11).

Patient advocacy and transformational leadership in nursing have overlapping and similar key skills and values. Patient advocacy in nursing represents a moral approach to patient care, implementing problem solving, communication, and
collaborative skills, and challenging injustices. Nurses who develop a vision, inspire and empower others, have sound morals and ethics, use initiative to find solutions, and are transparent and accessible to others, are transformational leaders.

The Joint Commission (TJC) is a national, non-profit organization that accredits and certifies more than 19,000 healthcare organizations (e.g., hospitals, ambulatory care centers) and programs in the United States. TJC seeks to continuously improve healthcare, patient safety, and patient outcomes through performance standards.

- TJC contends that nursing leadership development is an ongoing process; it is a structured educational plan that strives to continuously cultivate and foster inexperienced staff into experts.
- It is imperative that healthcare organizations invest in adequate resources to promote leadership development as a priority.
- It is the responsibility of the healthcare organization to listen to nurses who speak up and out against errors in operation or practice within an organization.

Investigators report that nurses who demonstrate the strongest level of leadership practices are those who are in positions of director or higher. Nurses on or below the managerial level require additional transformational leadership training and education to implement leadership practices within healthcare organizations.

What We Can Do

- Become knowledgeable about transformational leadership so you can collaborate to develop a long-term vision, remain committed to the vision, and empower others in your facility with the vision; share this information with your colleagues.
- Practice the four components of transformational leadership to develop a shared vision and accomplish your organization’s goals.
- Refer to the ANCC Magnet Recognition Program Model to promote improved nursing care, staff retention, and positive change in your organization at http://www.nursecredentialing.org/Magnet/ProgramOverview/New-Magnet-Model
References


