

# A Reform in the Department of Nursing Sciences, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Nigeria Using Transformational Leadership Style

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**Abstract:** *The health care delivery system is an ever evolving system that requires essential skills for qualified personnel's (Walker et al. 2011). Thus, the leaders should understand the appropriate concept of leadership practices and approaches required to achieve the goal of the organization (Northouse 2013). This can be ascribed to nursing education in Nigeria such as Ebonyi State University. The transition of nursing education from hospital based to university in Nigeria has to the establishment of the department. However, the department of nursing in the University has experienced sort of setback due to lack of transformational leadership style. Therefore, transformational leader is needed to propel the department to achieve its educational and professional objectives. This is aimed to build human capacity that will support to achieve the current reform that is going on in nursing education in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Nursing, healthcare, nursing, leadership theory and transformation leadership.

## 1. Introduction

Globally, leadership in health care is a valued commodity sort by various health professionals. The health care delivery system is an ever evolving system that requires essential skills for qualified personnel's (Walker et al. 2011). According to World Health Organization (WHO), in developed countries such as United States, United Kingdom, nurses as an integral part of the health care delivery system contribute to the formulation and decision making in the health care (WHO 2007; Curtis et al 2011). In developing countries, nurses are yet to make an impact as a result of their perceived low educational status (diploma certificate) in hospital based education which has undergone several changes to become university based education (Chin 2008 and Adebajo and Olubiyi 2011).

A reform in nursing education in Nigeria has made the nursing education shift from hospital based to university education since 1965 (Ndatsu 2004). The reform has been progressive; this led to the establishment of nursing department in Ebonyi State University in 2002 (Ndatsu 2004). However, the leadership of the department since its inception went through a transition from traditional trait theory of leadership to transformational theory of leadership which will be explained later in the essay. As the former leader seems to have trait of intelligence, honesty, self-confidence, knowledge of the organisation, strong drive for responsibility, can tolerate any condition; however, not steady in decision making, not motivational and lacks transparency and never willing to accept the consequences of the outcome of decision (Judge et al. 2002; Bass and Bass 2008 and Northouse 2013). According to Northouse (2013), the above characteristics are common to trait theory (*laissez faire*). The leadership approach was leader-centred approach. The current leader who replaced the former leader described above can be considered to be intelligent, understand the knowledge of the organization, self-confident, strong drive for responsibility, transparent, motivational, risk taking,

creative and goal oriented with high expectation. Hence, the leader applies the above attribute in carrying the followers along in the in the decisions and activities of the organization. Literature asserts that, such characteristics are the attributes of transformational leadership approach (Murphy 2005; Sue et al. 2011 and Northouse 2013).

The essay will focus on the transformational leadership approach. However, this will be based on the case study of a reform in department of nursing in Ebonyi State University, Nigeria. The application of the concept of constellation model in transformational leadership in the context will also be explained. It will also reflect on the authors' involvement in the reform. Relevant literatures were consulted in the writing of the essay and were referenced accordingly.

## 2. Background of the Case Study

The department of nursing of Ebonyi State University was established in 2002 with 40 pre-degree students and the Head of Department (the leader) was appointed by the university authority. The leader is the key of the progress and development of any organization (Rainey 2009). As a new department, it was expected that, those necessary requirements that will make the nursing education programme successful such as the provision of quality staff, learning materials, good learning environment, and accreditation of the department would be made available. On the contrary, the department continued without graduating students until the year 2010. Consequently, the above situation led to students' peaceful demonstration which drew the attention of Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria and other stakeholders to the department to address the problem (Idike 2012). This style of the leadership was reflected to a trait theory (*laissez faire*) where the leader lacks motivational will to enhance the growth and development of the organization (Bass and Bass 2008 and Sue et al 2011); such as the above named department which is the case study until the appointment of a new leader (transformational

leader) in the year 2008. Some experts describe a transformational leader as one who is motivational, a visionary; strong will drive in accomplishing a task, transparent, a catalyst for a change in other to achieve the organizational goal (Bass et al. 1987; Dunham-Taylor 2000 and Stordeur et al. 2000).

The new leader utilising the transformational approach organized departmental board meeting where the issues affecting the department were discussed and opinion of the staff were considered. Their suggestions were channelled towards the above challenges inherited by the current leader in order to proffer possible solutions to the problems. Through the current leaders' approach, the department gained their accreditation and was able to graduate her students in 2010. New academic staff was employed, learning materials provided and good leadership-followers relationship was established. The approach according to Dunham-Taylor (2000) and Storey (2010) assert that, a transformational leader seeks to effect a change for the progress of organization. Other achievement of the new leader in the department includes: the establishment of work and study programme (where nurses with registered nursing certificate such as general nursing, midwife commence their degree programme), establishment of post graduate diploma programme (PGD) (where nurses with RN and degree in any other related field can apply their PGD). In addition, due to lack of manpower in the department, the leader initiated the idea of continuous professional development programme (where short mandatory courses are planned to enhance staff update of their knowledge on the current trends in nursing education) and sponsorship of the staff to study in the United Kingdom.

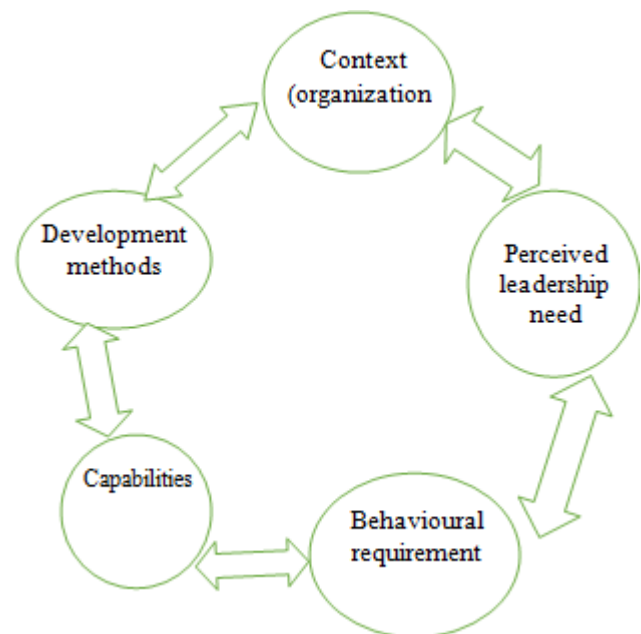
Nevertheless, every leader has challenges to overcome (Clegg 2001). One of the challenges facing the leader is how to see that the numerous students who have over stayed in the department graduate quickly. Hopefully, due to his support of further studies of some of the staff may help to overcome the challenges by increasing the number academic staff of the department as mentioned earlier.

### 3. Review of Literature/Conceptual Model

Globally, leadership has been a common topic of discussion in every culture and there are several definitions of leadership (Bass 2008 and Stogdill 1974, cited in Northouse 2013). For example, leadership is defined as "the nature of the influencing process and its resultant outcomes that occurs between a leader and the followers and how this influence is explained by the leader's disproportional characteristics and behaviours, follower perception and attributions of the leader and the context in which it occurs.....leading to an outcome" (Antonakis, et al. 2004, p. 79). Some studies believe that, there are two main categories of leadership namely, old and the modern leadership. The old category includes contingency, skill, traits and situational while the modern categories includes transactional, congruent or action centred and transformational leadership (Carol 2006; Barr and Dowling 2012; Dignam et al. 2012; Northouse 2013 and Roussel 2013). However, the theory applied in the case study is transformational leadership.

"Transformational leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality in other to achieve the organizational goal" (Burns 1978, cited in McDowelle 2009).The transformational leadership is applied to the case study because of its application by the leader to bring a reform in the department stated in the case study. In addition to the earlier stated characteristics of transformational leadership, the leader has long term vision, inspirational, works to effect a change in the organization, promotes the development of the followers and transforming them to become leaders and moral agent (Bass 1995; Bower 2008 and Burns 1978, cited in Nortouse 2013).

However, the concept of constellation model was applied in the transformation leadership approach in the above case study. According to Storey (2004, p.34), the concept of constellation is "a system of factors relating to leadership development which comprises context, perceived leadership need, behavioural requirement, capabilities and development methods. This model is represented in the diagram below.



Constellation model (storey 2004)

The model advocates that, leadership and its developmental approach should be an integrated process instead of arising from an individual alone (Storey 2004). Storey (2004, p.34) states that, within the constellation model, "the leadership need of the organization, leadership capabilities, behaviours and context are interdependent".

Considering the case study narrated above, the context is the department of nursing which is the organization. The perceived needs are the need for reform (change) in nursing education such as accreditation, teaching and learning materials, qualified academic staff, students' graduation. However, for a change to occur, the behavioural requirement of the leader such as good communication skill, listening skill, carrying the followers along, motivational and innovative spirit and good time management will make the leader to become capable to initiate good developmental leadership approach (Wolff et al.2002; Anne 2004; Storey 2004; Proctor-Thomson 2006 and Nothhouse 2013).

#### **4. Critical analysis of transformational leadership as it is applied to the case study**

The intention of any leader should be geared towards the achievement of the organizational goal. Transformational leadership seems to have gain more influence more than any other leadership theory as it covers wider scope of leadership characteristic and activities such as creating vision, acting as social architecture, building trust, motivation and giving of nurturance (Northouse 2007; Jackson and Parry 2008 and Northouse 2013). Literature also asserts that, the transformational leader has some other elements such as idealised influence, intellectual stimulations, inspirational motivations and individual considerations (Liethwood and Duke 1999; Kim 2006; Northouse 2007 and McDowelle 2009). Although, Tracey and Hinkin(1998) argues that, transformational lacks conceptual clarity as it covers wide range of activities. However, studies have validated transformational leadership based on vital relationship with the followers and its productivity (Bass and Riggio 2006).

Therefore, the leader in this context utilised the constellation model to influence and effected a change (reform) in the organization (Department of Nursing Sciences, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Nigeria) through transformational leadership. The transformational leader has the burden of the growth and success of the organization (Kruger et al.2007). Similarly, Northouse (2013) agrees that, a transformational leader has a clear vision of leadership role. The transformational leader stated in the case study used team work approach to gain support of the followers by involving them in the decision making and implementation. The leader was believed to be able to make his vision clear and easier for the followers to understand and how they can participate in implementing the leadership ideology. In addition, through good communication and listening skill, the leader motivated the followers to accept his leadership philosophy and plan for the organization.

Furthermore, the leader created trustworthiness and role model in the course of discharging his duty. Literature asserts that, the transformational leader as a role model establishes trust in the organization in other to create sense of integrity favourable to build healthy organization (Northouse 2013). The leader in the case study embarked on the work by articulating a sense of direction and constantly implementing the organizational new plan of work by building trust, motivation delegating duties to the followers and co-ordinate the activities in a flexible manner and evaluating them. This is to facilitate the achieving of the organizational goal, developing the followers as agent for a change. Avolio and Gibbons (1988) believe that, the transformational leader becomes a strong role model for the followers in other to create a change. Although, Avolio (1999) and Tejada et al. (2001) criticised the transformational leadership as antidemocratic and elitist by the influence to control the followers indirectly. On the contrary, Dragoni et al (2009) and Northouse (2013) maintain that, transformational leader is seen to be directive, transparent and participative. The leader in the case study demonstrated his transformational leadership charisma by constantly organizing departmental board meeting with aim

to facilitate the evaluation of the progress of the plan and seeking opinion from the followers to ensure that, the desired change was achieved. Studies indicate that, the effectiveness of a leader is based on the achievement of the organizational set goal (Doody and Doody 2012; Morales-Garcia et al. 2012 and Moynihan et al.2013). However, the stated goals above as the challenges were believed to be achieved by the leader. For example, the department have started graduating their students, teaching and learning material provided, new academic staff employed.

Moreover, transformational leader considers the welfare of the followers using friendly and approachable manner (Pastor and Mayo 2006). The leader in the case study ensures that, the followers received their promotion on time and engaged them in continuous professional development such as study leave with pay, scholarship, provision good learning environment. However, the validity of the performance of a transformational leader has been challenged by some authors as not having substantive measuring criteria (Tejada et al.2001). Notwithstanding, literature believe that, Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire proved transformational leadership to be effective in various leadership situation such as satisfaction of the followers performance, promotion and achieving the organizational goal (Northouse 2013). This claim can be supported by the recent award to the leader on his performance in 2012 and 2013 by the Ebonyi State Nurses Association and the University Authority respectively.

#### **Authors' involvement/critical reflection**

The authors were involved in the case study to ensure that the reform was achieved. As a member of the staff in the above department, they served in various capacities such as the clinical co-ordinator, member of examination and result reconciliation committee, staff adviser to the departmental student union. The exposure of the authors in the reform process and loyalty to the leadership helped them to understand the concept of transformational leadership. The transformational leadership exhibit selfless inspirational process through which the leader and the follower learn from each other in the process of discharging their duties (Kouzes and Posner 2007 and Bass 1978, cited Northouse 2103). Thus, the authors learnt a lot from the leader such as dedication to duty, ability to carry others along, team work approach, and good time management. However, the authors believe the leader learnt from them loyalty, assertiveness and respect to authority.

Every organization requires good leadership style to ensure its progress and sustainability (Peck 2005). The department of nursing of Ebonyi State University experienced a set back as a result of leadership style that lacks intrinsic motivation, a visionary and leader and follower teamwork. This seems to be a need of the department named in the case study. Acree (2006) asserts that leaders should be accountable for the success of the organization. In addition, leaders need to have the ability to influence, motivate the followers, promotes thought and actions which will facilities the achievement of the organizational goal. Furthermore, leadership behaviours have been found to be a great factor in the influencing the performance of the both the leader and



the follower (Chiok Foong Loke 2001 and Cummings 2004). The first leader in the case study could not meet the expectation of the organization as result of laissez faire leadership style. This led to the emergence of another leader with a transformational leadership approach.

The transformational leader established good working relationship with the followers when he assumed the position of leadership. This is assumed to have helped him to gain the trust, support and co-operation of the followers. With the transformational leadership approach, some of the expected reform in the department was achieved such employment of new academic staff, provision of good learning environment, accreditation of the department, first graduation of the students and continuous follower development. The transformational leader attempts to develop the follower to higher standards to enhance their performance responsibility (Howell and Avolio 1993 and Shamir et al 1993).

Some critics of the transformational leadership, claims that the leader uses the leadership role as a personality traits rather than behavioural situation where the follower can learn (Bryman 1992). In contrast, literature asserts that, if transformational leadership is based on traits leadership approach, it would be difficult to develop especially in changing followers' trait (Northouse 2013). Thus, a transformational leader inspires and shares the vision with the follower and both of them get involved in the implementation of the leadership role (Northouse 2013). The leader in the case study can be seen to be liberal and accommodating which enabled him to be able to accomplishes the above stated task.

Perhaps the authors will be given the opportunity to the leader of the department; they would like to apply the transformational leadership style. This may enable them to bring more innovations to support the effort of their current leader.

Recent studies indicate that, the transformational leader applies the following behaviour in the process of delivering the leadership role. These includes: Role model by defining the leader's value to the followers and live exemplarily live. The leader inspires the followers and creates enabling working environment to enhance good working relationship between them to understand the shared vision. Furthermore, the leader faces the process with innovative ideology to facilitate the method of achieving the desired change. The leader also motivates and inspires the followers by delegating the duties to them. The transformational leader encourages the followers by identifying with them, attain to their need, appreciating and celebrating their success (Bass and Riggio 2006; Kouzes and Posner 2007 and Gladwell 2008). This can help them to develop their leadership potentialities.

Therefore, the application of the transformational leadership approaches learnt from the current leader may help the authors to improve in their leadership role by involving the followers actively in the leadership and management of the department. Northouse (2013) suggests that, team work reduces friction and promotes the success and development of any organization.

## 5. Conclusion

The reform in nursing education in Nigeria is an on-going process. The situation of department of nursing Ebonyi State University actually requires a transformational leader to speed up the leadership process of achieving the desired goal of the department. One of the definitions of leadership is that, "leadership is seen as process of getting things done by influencing the group of individual" (Northouse 2007, p.123).

A transformational leader as one of the modern leadership theory focuses on the transformation of the follower and working as a team towards the achievement of the organizational goal. Evidence has shown that, among other leadership theory, transformational leadership has been accepted to be more effective leadership style (Storey 2010). Identification of an appropriate framework to apply with transformational leadership such as the constellation model may enhance the performance of a transformational leader.

The success of any organization depends on the type of leadership approach applied. For example, the case studies have indicated that a leader should be innovative, motivational, and transparent and have the ability to adopt a team work approach in order to accomplish the expected organizational goal. This was seen in the case study explained in the essay. The new leader applied good leader-follower approach in discharging his duty. This has made his administration to have more significant change more than the former leader who was assumed to be not inspirational and motivational.

The authors' participation in the case study helped them to develop better understanding of leadership theory. Reflecting on the case study, they discovered that, it is necessary for a leader to integrate flexibility and team work approach in the process of discharging leadership role. Again, the authors believe that, application of transformational leadership theory may contribute to better performance of both the leader and the followers in achieving the organizational goals.

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