Leadership Frames of Nursing Chairpersons and the Organizational Climate in Baccalaureate Nursing Programs

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ABSTRACT

Department chairpersons are responsible for creating an organizational climate that motivates faculty members to achieve in their respective faculty roles. This study was undertaken to examine the use of leadership behaviors by nursing chairpersons and the relationship of these behaviors to the organizational climate of nursing departments as perceived by the faculty. Bolman and Deal's leadership theory of frame analysis was used as the theoretical framework. This theory separates leadership behaviors into four frames (structural, human resource, political, and symbolic). Findings indicated that 60.5% of the chairpersons were perceived by faculty members to demonstrate or use the behaviors as described in one or more of the leadership frames. Faculty members perceived their chairpersons to use the human resource frame the most, followed by the structural frame, the symbolic frame, and the political frame. The strongest relationships occurred for (a) the human resource leadership frame with the organizational climate domain of

consideration, (b) the structural frame with the production emphasis domain, and (c) the political frame and the symbolic frame with the consideration domain. The use of combinations of leadership frames (paired frame, multi-frame, and all four frames) by chairpersons was most associated with the organizational climate domains of consideration, intimacy, and production emphasis, as opposed to no frame or single frame use. This study proposes that the leadership theory of frame analysis should be included in graduate programs that educate nurses to assume leadership roles. In addition, the findings may prove useful to search committees when selecting new department chairpersons.

Keywords: Nursing Education, Leadership, Organizational Climate

Introduction

Academic departments form the building blocks of institutions of higher learning, and their functioning heavily depends upon the department chairperson's leadership ability. Department chairs are charged with creating a shared vision for the department, and they are responsible for developing a climate conducive to motivating faculty members and encouraging scholarship. In addition, they should create a supportive communication climate that emphasizes listening skills, thus demonstrating respect and empowerment for faculty members and students. The organizational climate exudes excitement when department leadership is strong, and it is the chair who creates the climate.[1] Creation of a positive climate is critical to faculty retention.[2] Overall commitment to a department should increase when an open environment is present and faculty members believe they are making meaningful contributions.[3]

In classic studies outside nursing, leadership behavior is a factor that has been found to be a significant determinant of organizational climate.[4-7]

Unfortunately, limited studies have been done on the climate in nursing education and the factors associated with it.[8] There is also a dearth of research relating the leadership behaviors of nursing chairpersons to organizational climate. Additionally, no nursing research has been done using Bolman and Deal's leadership theory of frame analysis.[9] Thus, this investigation was undertaken to examine the use of leadership frames among nursing chairpersons and their relationship to the organizational climate of nursing departments as perceived by the faculty.

Leadership

The study of leadership was initiated early in the twentieth century, beginning with trait theory, which suggested that leaders are endowed with specific traits that differentiate them from followers.[10] A shift in the emphasis from the personal characteristics of leaders to their behaviors as leaders began as a result of Stodgill's initial research.[11] This behavioral approach, emphasized from the late 1940s to the late 1960s, was concerned with leader behavior that is capable of being changed, focusing on the differences in the behavior of effective and ineffective leaders.

However, scant attention had been paid to the possibility that leader behavior was contingent upon the situation, thus leading to the contingency approach in the 1970s, which emphasized the importance of situational factors and the nature of the external environment.[12]

An additional approach to studying leadership, transformational leadership, was initiated by Burns in the late 1970s.[13] Transformational leaders define the need for change, create a vision and a commitment to the vision, and inspire subordinates to achieve goals. Personal values and beliefs form the basis of transformational leadership. Leaders are able to produce higher levels of performance by uniting followers and changing their goals and beliefs.[14] Additionally, transformational leadership can be considered part of a newer approach to the study of leadership, viz. the symbolic approach. Cultural and symbolic theories represent a paradigm shift in leadership studies. They do not view leadership as an objective act in which leaders display traits or behaviors to influence followers, but rather as a subjective act where leaders construct a reality that reflects desired ends and is congruent with followers' beliefs.[15] The leader invents a reality through shared meanings that influence perceptions and activities. Leaders manage meaning rather than processes.[16]

In the 1980s, Bolman and Deal developed one of the most useful organizational typologies for viewing and studying leadership.[17] They synthesized existing theories of leadership and organizations into four traditions, which they labeled as "frames."[18,19] Frames are considered to be both windows on the world and lenses that bring it into focus. Frames help to order experience and allow people to gather information and to make judgments. The four frames of leadership, as described by Bolman and Deal, are the structural frame, the human resource frame, the political frame, and the symbolic frame.

The first frame, the structural frame, postulates that effective leaders define clear goals, establish specific roles for people, and coordinate activities through the use of rules, policies, and a chain of command. Structural leaders set direction and hold people accountable. The second frame, the human resource frame, focuses on human needs. Leaders value feelings and relationships, and leadership is accomplished through facilitation and empowerment. The third frame, the political frame, assumes a continuing competition among different constituencies for scarce resources and emphasizes individual and group interests. Political leaders advocate, negotiate, and value pragmatism. With the last frame, the symbolic frame, leaders develop symbols and culture within the organization to provide a shared sense of mission and identity.

Research has been conducted to investigate how leaders use leadership frames, i.e., whether they demonstrate the behaviors as described in each leadership frame. In a study that sampled educational administrators in US colleges and universities, US public schools, and public schools in Singapore, results revealed that the percentage of those who used more than two frames was less than 25% in the three samples, while only about 5% used all four frames. In all three populations, the symbolic frame was used in fewer than 20% of the cases while the structural frame was used in about 60% of the samples. The three groups varied widely in their use of the political and

human resource frames.[20] Bolman and Deal have asserted that in an increasingly complex world, the ability to use more than one frame should increase a person's ability to act effectively and make clear judgments.

Organizational Climate

The concept of organizational climate was first described in the late 1950s. Different definitions exist, but some basic properties of climate have emerged over time.[21] Organizational climate characterizes properties of an organization and describes a unit rather than evaluating it. In addition, it results from routine organizational practices and influences members' attitudes and behaviors.

In research studies climate has been shown to influence variables such as motivation, productivity, and job satisfaction.[22-24] Climate is also considered beneficial for organizational development efforts.[25] In other studies, the variable of leadership was found to have an important influence on organizational climate.[26-29]

Borrevik,[30] after reviewing the work of Halpin and Croft,[31] concluded that there were four climate domains, or categories of organizational climate, found in higher education. The four climate domains are: (1) consideration, characterized by the chair's supportive role toward faculty (an open climate); (2) intimacy, which refers to a social-needs satisfaction not necessarily related to task accomplishments (an open climate); (3) disengagement, related to fractionalization within the faculty (a closed climate); and (4) production emphasis, associated with close supervision of the faculty (a closed climate). Borrevik developed the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire-Higher Education

(OCDQ-HE) to measure the four climate domains in higher education.

Edwards[32] used the OCDQ-HE and found a significant relationship between the dean's leadership style, as measured by House's Leader Behavior Scale, and faculty perceptions of climate in collegiate schools of nursing. Lewis[33] found a weak correlation between a measure of power orientation using Cavanaugh's Power Orientation Scale, and the disengagement domain as measured by the OCDQ-HE, in schools of nursing.

Research Questions

Three research questions were posed:

1. Which leadership frames do nursing faculty members perceive that nursing chairpersons use?
2. What are the relationships between single leadership frame use by nursing chairpersons and the organizational climate domains of consideration, intimacy, disengagement, and production emphasis as perceived by the nursing faculty?
3. What are the relationships between the use of combinations of leadership frames by nursing chairpersons and the organizational climate domains as perceived by the faculty?

Methods

Institutional review board approval was obtained prior to initiation of the study. A descriptive study design was used to survey the nursing faculty, in which leadership frame use by nursing chairpersons was examined in relation to organizational climate. A query letter was sent to the nursing chairpersons of all 136 baccalaureate nursing programs in the American Association of Colleges

of Nursing (AACN) North Atlantic Region (as designated by the AACN), requesting the names of the instructional faculty members who had no administrative title and who held a full time position as a professor, associate professor, assistant professor, or instructor. Seventy chairpersons responded, with 60 schools providing the names of 605 faculty members. Each of the 605 faculty members received a packet including: an introductory letter guaranteeing confidentiality, a leadership instrument, an organizational climate questionnaire, a demographic questionnaire, and a stamped, faculty-coded return envelope. Envelopes were coded only as a follow-up mechanism to non-responders. The instruments (n = 253) were returned directly to the researcher for data analysis, for a response rate of 42 percent. Data were reported in aggregate form and did not identify faculty members, chairpersons, or institutions.

Instruments

Three questionnaires sent to nursing faculty were: (1) Bolman and Deal's Leadership Orientations Instrument (Other), (2) Borrevik's Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire-Higher Education (OCDQ-HE), and (3) a demographic questionnaire. Approximately 15 to 20 minutes were required to complete all three components.

The leadership instrument exists in two parallel forms: one for leaders to rate themselves (self), and one for subordinates to rate their leaders (other). This study used the Leadership Orientations Instrument (Other), that consists of 32 questions addressing leader behaviors from the viewpoints of subordinates, consistent with Bolman and Deal's four frames of leadership.[34]

Bolman and Deal have reported Cronbach's alpha for the four frame measures as high, ranging from .91 to .93. Additionally, factor analysis using principal components and varimax rotation, yielded a high degree of internal consistency.[35,36]

Each of the four frames of leadership is represented by eight items describing leader behaviors. Using a five-point Likert scale, each faculty member rated his or her department chairperson, defined as the administrator of the nursing program, in terms of demonstrating leader behaviors (1= Never, 5 = Always). A mean score was calculated for each frame. Leadership frame use was operationally defined as a mean of 4.0 or higher for a given subset of leadership questions; thus, chairs were perceived as using a leadership frame with a mean score of 4.0 or higher. Accordingly, this definition yielded reasonable splits between endorsements and non-endorsements, and was conceptually based on the parameters of the five-point Likert scale.

The OCDQ-HE assesses the organizational climate of academic departments in institutions of higher learning. The 42-item form of the OCDQ-HE contains four subsets addressing the climate domains. Cronbach's alphas for the climate domains were .93 for consideration (12 items), .84 for intimacy (9 items), .68 for disengagement (11 items), and .71 for production emphasis (10 items). Factor analysis, using varimax rotation, established construct validity.[37]

Nursing faculty members used a five-point Likert scale to rate the extent to which the survey items occurred in their academic department (1 = Almost Never, 5 = Always). Means were calculated for each climate domain on every survey.

The demographic questionnaire collected information on age, highest degree earned, academic rank, tenure status, number of years in present position, and the number of years employed in baccalaureate nursing education. Other questions related to the institution and the experience of the chair.

Results

Highest earned degree held was the master's degree for 114 faculty and doctorate for 138 faculty. Academic rank ranged from instructor to full professor with the following numbers: 21 instructors; 118 assistant professors; 84 associate professors; and 29 professors. Of the 252 faculty who reported on tenure, 124 were tenured. Faculty members were at their current institutions for a mean of 10 years and in baccalaureate nursing education for a mean of 13 years. Respondents were employed in public ($n = 130$) and private ($n = 120$) institutions. Nursing faculty estimated that their chairs held their positions for an average of 5.5 years, and the mean head count enrollment as 222 students. One of the demographic surveys was unusable, as there were several items for which no response was given.

Leadership Frame Use
Faculty reported that 60.5% of their chairpersons used leadership frames in directing the nursing programs, while 39.5% of the chairs showed no leadership frame use. In other words, the faculty perceived that 39.5% did not demonstrate the behaviors that comprise the four leadership frames as described by Bolman and Deal in their leadership questionnaire. Of the 60.5 % who were perceived to demonstrate use,

16.6% of the chairs used a single frame [structural (ST), human resource (HR), political (PO), or symbolic (SY)], 12.6% used paired frame combinations (two of the four frames), 9.2% used multi-frame combinations (three of the four frames), and 22.1% used all four frames. There were 6 different paired frame (ST-HR, HR-SY, ST-PO, ST-SY, HR-PO, PO-SY) and 4 different multi-frame combinations (ST-HR-PO, ST-HR-SY, ST-PO-SY, HR-PO-SY). Within the reported frame combinations (single, paired, multi, and all four frames), faculty members perceived their chairpersons using the human resource frame the most (49.8%), followed by the structural frame (43.5%), the symbolic frame (32.4%), and finally, the political frame (32.0%).

Statistically significant relationships between single leadership frame use by nursing chairpersons and the organizational climate domains as perceived by the faculty were also found. The highest correlation was seen between the human resource frame and consideration ($r = 0.86$, $p = < .01$). The structural frame correlated the highest with production emphasis ($r = 0.75$, $p = < .01$), while the political frame's strongest correlation was with consideration ($r = 0.68$, $p = < .01$). Lastly, the symbolic frame had its highest correlation with consideration ($r = 0.78$, $p = < .01$). All four frames negatively correlated with disengagement. Both Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients and analysis of variance were used to analyze these same data in two different ways. Both tests yielded similar results.

Combinations of Frames and Organizational Climate
Statistically significant relationships between the use of combinations of

leadership frames by nursing chairs and the organizational climate domains as perceived by the faculty were found as well (Table 1). The use of all four frames showed the highest endorsement of consideration, followed by paired frame use, multi-frame use, single frame use, and no frame use ($F = 54.80$, $df = 4$, 247, $p < .01$). Paired frame use demonstrated the highest endorsement of intimacy, followed by all four frame use, multi-frame use, single frame use, and no frame use ($F = 12.76$, $df = 4$, 247, $p < .01$). No frame use showed the highest endorsement of disengagement (a closed climate), followed by multi-frame use, single frame use, all four frame use, and paired frame use ($F = 7.79$, $df = 4$, 247, $p<.01$). Finally, all four frame use demonstrated the highest endorsement of production emphasis, followed by paired frame use, multi-frame use, single frame use, and no frame use ($F = 27.54$, $df =4,247$, $p < .01$). Tukey's HSD Test, a post hoc test, indicated that the means of the five combinations of leadership frames differed significantly from all other combinations for each of the four climate domains.

Discussion

All four leadership frames (structural, human resource, political, and symbolic) correlated positively with the organizational climate domains of consideration, intimacy, and production emphasis, while all four frames negatively correlated with disengagement. The finding that all four frames correlated with the closed climate domain of production emphasis was unanticipated. Production emphasis is signified by close supervision of the faculty by the chair, and the chair is known to place the mission and goals of

the department above individual faculty concerns. Nursing faculty in baccalaureate nursing programs may expect close supervision by the chair, with the understanding that the formal goals of the department are given stronger emphasis than individual goals. In addition, production emphasis may not be considered a closed climate in baccalaureate nursing education, especially if it is balanced by chair endorsement of other open climates.

Combinations of leadership frames yielded significant findings as well. Chairpersons using the leadership frame combinations of all four frames, the multi-frame, and the paired frame demonstrated the highest endorsement of the organizational climate domains of consideration, intimacy, and production emphasis, as opposed to single and no frame use. In contrast, no frame use was most associated with disengagement. Based on these results, faculty perceptions that 39.5% of chairpersons used no frame and 16.6% used a single frame were discouraging findings.

Additionally, some results of this study contrasted with Bolman and Deal's findings.[38] In this investigation, 31.3% of the respondents perceived their chairs to use more than two frames as opposed to less than 25% in Bolman and Deal's study, and 22% were perceived to use all four frames as opposed to about 5% in Bolman and Deal's research. The structural frame was perceived to be used less in this study (43.5%) as compared to Bolman and Deal's (60%), while the symbolic frame was perceived to be used 32.4% of the time, as opposed to less than 20% in Bolman and Deal's study. These differences might be attributable to the fact that the overwhelming percentage of nursing chairpersons and faculty members are

women, who may use frames differently. Further study in this area is warranted.

Implications

The findings of this study have implications for nursing education. For instance, chairpersons might explore how they generally define goals, establish specific roles for people, and coordinate activities through the use of rules and policies as seen in the structural leadership frame. Chairs could reflect on how they foster participation and involvement, and if they listen to new ideas as promoted in the human resource frame. In addition, they could examine how they advocate and negotiate as seen in the political leadership frame, and explore how they create a shared sense of mission and identity for which the symbolic frame is noted. In this study, the political and symbolic leadership frames were not perceived as being used as much as the human resource and structural frames. Chairs could make a concerted effort to try and address these frames, since all four frame use by chairs, as perceived by the faculty, demonstrated the highest endorsement of consideration, while ranking low in disengagement.

Additionally, the findings have implications for graduate programs preparing students for administrative positions. Graduate programs that educate nurses to assume leadership roles should address the concept of leadership frames and should plan the use of learning activities such as case studies, role-playing, leadership simulations, and internships that would help to provide experiential learning.

The results of this study might prove useful to search committees when selecting new department chairs. Members of search committees may wish to structure their interview questions in ways that address Bolman and Deal's leadership frames. Similarly, the findings may prove beneficial to prospective nursing faculty members seeking employment. They can use the leadership and organizational climate questionnaires to help construct questions that aid them in ascertaining which leadership frames are used by the chair and the organizational climate domains that exist within the department.[39]

Administrators and faculty members also may wish to use the instruments to assess themselves and their own departments. Use of the leadership questionnaire may assist chairs in examining and adapting their own leadership behaviors. The organizational climate instrument could provide information to those interested in assessing the climate in their own programs and making necessary improvements.

The size of the sample, the geographic restrictions, and the use of faculty perceptions limit the results of the investigation. Further studies could address replication with another regional or national population, and variables such as the experience of the chair and the size and type of the institution. A valuable follow-up to the present research could compare chairpersons' perceived leadership frame use with faculty perceptions of chairpersons' leadership frame use and the relationship to the organizational climate in the department.

Although additional research is warranted, the present findings suggest relationships between leadership frame use by chairpersons and the organizational climate in baccalaureate nursing programs. The organizational climate domains of consideration,

intimacy, and production emphasis were most associated with chairpersons' use of the paired frame, the multi-frame, and all four leadership frame combinations as opposed to no frame or single frame use.

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Table 1

Means and Ranks for Combinations of Frames and Climate Domains

| | | Climate Domains | | | | | | | | | |
| | | Con | | Int | | Dis | | PE | |
Frame Combinations	*n*	*M*	(Rank)	*M*	(Rank)	*M*	(Rank)	*M*	(Rank)
No Frame	100	3.13	(5)	2.64	(5)	2.74	(1)	3.29	(5)
Single Frame	42	3.85	(4)	3.00	(4)	2.46	(3)	3.55	(4)
Paired Frame	32	4.16	(2)	3.26	(1)	2.30	(5)	3.86	(2)
Multi-Frame	23	4.11	(3)	3.21	(3)	2.47	(2)	3.84	(3)
All Four Frames	56	4.44	(1)	3.24	(2)	2.31	(4)	4.05	(1)

Note: Con = Consideration; Int = Intimacy; Dis = Disengagement; PE = Production Emphasis

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