Abstract
The updated Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) standards of proficiency for nurses emphasise the importance of nurse leadership, while the NHS has also developed models to support leadership development. There are several approaches to leadership that are applicable in nursing practice. Transformational leadership is an approach that focuses on the attributes and behaviours of the leader required to empower and motivate team members. This article outlines the four elements of transformational leadership – idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration – and discusses these in relation to the NMC standards. It also describes the advantages and disadvantages of transformational leadership, and suggests ways that this approach can be applied in nursing practice.

Introduction
In 2018, the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) (2018a) published Future Nurse: Standards of Proficiency for Registered Nurses. These standards identify the knowledge, skills and attitudes that nurses must have achieved at the point of their professional registration, and state that the role of nurses in the 21st century requires them to ‘provide leadership in the delivery of care for people of all ages’ (NMC 2018a). The NMC (2018a) standards also specify that the context in which nurses work is one of ‘continual change, challenging environments, different models of care delivery, shifting demographics, innovation, and rapidly evolving technologies’. It is within this complex and challenging environment that nurses are required to learn how to provide leadership that empowers and enables teams to meet the rapidly changing demands placed on them.

The NMC (2018a) standards have been divided into seven themes or ‘platforms’. Platform 5 – ‘leading and managing nursing care and working in teams’ – is particularly relevant...
Leadership

There are various definitions of, and approaches to, leadership in general, and particularly in relation to leadership in healthcare and nursing practice. Most definitions of leadership consider how the leader provides a vision and energy for their team, and how their team can be led to work towards a clear goal. This is summarised by Stogdill (1950), who suggested that ‘leadership may be considered as the process (act) of influencing the activities of an organised group in its efforts toward goal setting and goal achievement’.

One tool that can assist nurses to consider their leadership practice is the Healthcare Leadership Model (NHS Leadership Academy 2013), which focuses on nine dimensions as follows:

- Inspiring shared purpose.
- Leading with care.
- Evaluating information.
- Connecting our service.
- Sharing the vision.
- Engaging the team.
- Holding to account.
- Developing capability.
- Influencing for results.

Each dimension of this model is assessed on a scale comprising four levels: essential, proficient, strong and exemplary.

TIME OUT 1


Leadership / CPD

evidence & practice

Consider your leadership behaviours and identify three areas you wish to develop

With a wide range of leadership approaches available, it may be challenging for nurses to identify which of these approaches could be useful in their day-to-day practice. Transformational leadership is an approach that may be beneficial in healthcare. This approach was developed by Bernard Bass, based on work undertaken by Downton (1973) and Burns (1978).

Burns (1978) identified two types of leaders: transactional and transformational. Transactional leaders engage followers in an exchange process, whereby the leader rewards staff for effective performance. In contrast, transformational leaders encourage changes in the beliefs, values and needs of followers, and are able to motivate followers to act for the greater good, rather than for their own interests (Burns 1978). He asserted that leaders’ behaviour is either transformational or transactional.

Bass (1985) subsequently developed Burns’ leadership concepts, with a particular focus on transformational leadership and the extent to which a leader influences followers. Following on from this work, Avolio and Bass (2002) developed the full range leadership model, which contends that there are three leadership styles: transactional, transformational and laissez-faire. The laissez-faire style is considered a passive leadership approach, whereby the leader avoids exerting influence on the followers, keeps their involvement at the possible lowest level and allows their followers freedom to act. Avolio and Bass (2002) suggested that all three leadership styles and behaviours could be applied in different situations.

Transformational leadership

Avolio and Bass (2002) explained how individuals and organisations can implement the transformational leadership approach. Central to transformational leadership is the notion that people require a sense of mission and purpose to be able to work effectively, which extends beyond receiving a thank you or a reward for effective performance (Avolio and Bass 2002). This is particularly relevant to nurses, who often enter the profession with a mission to care for others or to ‘do something good’ for humankind (Weiss and Tappen 2015).

Therefore, the transformational leadership approach may be suited to nursing, because of its emphasis on the vision, morals, needs and values of the followers (Jambawo 2018).

Other definitions of transformational leadership assert that this approach identifies a change that is required, for example within an organisation, creates a vision for the change, and implements the change with support and commitment from the followers (Northouse 2013).

There are four elements of transformational leadership, often referred to as the ‘four Rs’. These are (Bass 1985, Avolio and Bass 2002):

- Idealised influence – leading by example and setting expectations.
- Inspirational motivation – inspiring people to reach new heights.
- Intellectual stimulation – encouraging learning and growth.
- Individualised consideration – coaching and empowering to success.

The next section of this article outlines the four elements of transformational leadership with reference to the NMC (2018a) standards.

Idealised influence

The focus of the ‘idealised influence’ element of transformational leadership is on the leader influencing their followers, for example by acting as a role model (Fischer 2017). Doody and Doody (2012) suggested that idealised influence develops confidence, admiration, respect and trust, which gives the followers a mission through the leader’s motivational actions. The notion of influence can be described as charisma, whereby the leader is highly respected by their followers, and has high standards that encourage the followers to go beyond their usual efforts and work towards achieving a goal (Tappen 2001). This is relevant to the NMC (2018a).
Transformational leadership has a strong focus on motivating and engaging staff, and providing an environment that empowers them to become effective and creative team members.

**Key points**

- In 2018, the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) (2018a) published Future Nurse: Standards of Proficiency for Registered Nurses. These standards identify the knowledge, skills and attitudes that nurses must have achieved at the point of their professional registration, and state that the role of nurses in the 21st century requires them to ‘provide leadership in the delivery of care for people of all ages’ (NMC 2018a).

- With a wide range of leadership approaches available, it may be challenging for nurses to identify which of these approaches could be useful in their day-to-day practice. Transformational leadership is an approach that may be beneficial in healthcare.

- Central to transformational leadership is the notion that people require a sense of mission and purpose to be able to work effectively, which extends beyond receiving a thank you or a reward for effective performance.

**Intellectual stimulation**

Intellectual stimulation refers to the ability of the leader to challenge assumptions, take risks and consider team members’ ideas (Raes et al 2013). Leaders encourage their followers to think innovatively and creatively in their practice, and to think ‘outside the box’ (Fischer 2017). They also stimulate critical thinking and problem-solving, which can empower the followers (Thompson 2011). Furthermore, as part of platform 5 of the NMC (2018a) standards, nurses are expected to ‘demonstrate the ability to challenge’, which relates to challenging assumptions.

**Individualised consideration**

In the ‘individualised consideration’ element of transformational leadership, the leader encourages and supports followers to obtain high levels of achievement (Northouse 2013). In nursing practice, this could relate to providing feedback to colleagues to improve their performance or achieve team goals, or supporting a colleague’s development by referring them to useful resources. The leader pays particular attention to an individual’s needs, focusing on their development and the mentoring process (Raes et al 2013). Intertwoven within this element is the care and compassion the leader shows the followers to support their growth and development (Renjith et al 2015). Support for individual team members’ development is an important part of the NMC (2018a) standards, particularly platform 5. Proficiencies in this platform identify the need for the leader to identify how to optimise the contributions of others in the team, to guide, support and motivate individuals, and to supervise others effectively.

Transformational leadership has a strong focus on motivating and engaging staff, and providing an environment that empowers them to become effective and creative team members. Various authors have suggested defining characteristics or attributes of a transformational leader. Box 1 lists the characteristics that Renjith et al (2015) identified as important for transformational leaders.

**Time out 2**

Review the transformational leadership characteristics in Box 1. Which do you think apply to yourself and why? Reflect and give examples of when you have applied these characteristics in your clinical practice.

It could be suggested that some of these characteristics are present in all nurses and are not specifically applicable to transformational leaders. For instance, the Real World Group (2017) stated...
that personal characteristics of transformational leaders include being honest, consistent and acting with integrity, which are also requirements of nurses as stated in The Code: Professional Standards of Practice and Behaviour for Nurses, Midwives and Nursing Associates (NMC 2018b).

Advantages of transformational leadership
Transformational leadership is often regarded as an effective leadership style, involving vision, purpose, and positivity (Jambawo 2018). There are several advantages of this leadership style for individuals, working with others, and healthcare organisations. These categories form the basis of the pre-registration leadership learning model (HEE 2018).

Individuals and working with others
One of the main advantages of transformational leadership is its positive effect for teams. For example, it can enable teams to become increasingly innovative and creative when problem-solving (Govier and Nash 2009). The nurse leading by example, providing encouragement and nurturing the team can result in a self-sufficient and self-directed team. Team members also feel valued, listened to, motivated and encouraged. This can result in lower rates of sickness, stress and burnout among staff (Govier and Nash 2009). With a transformational leader, individuals and teams are increasingly likely to embrace and support change within the workplace (Tomlinson 2012), because they will have been involved and communicated with at the beginning of any change process, and will feel part of the vision and the change itself.

Another advantage of transformational leadership for individuals is the mentoring associated with this approach. A transformational leader will mentor their followers in developing professional values, accountability, and responsibility for themselves and the team, which will enable them to become an effective team member (Renjith et al 2015). Individuals and teams can feel empowered by the transformational leader. There is also evidence to suggest that the transformational leadership style not only applies to nursing managers and teams, but may also apply when mentors support and guide junior staff in practice, such as newly qualified nurses and nursing students (Huang et al 2016).

Healthcare organisations
One advantage of transformational leaders who inspire and motivate their followers is that change can be implemented quickly in healthcare organisations (Lavio-Tremblay et al 2016). With healthcare organisations continually experiencing rapid changes, the empowering and motivating aspects of the transformational approach can effectively support change.

According to Govier and Nash (2009), another advantage of transformational leadership is that it can also lead to a healthier workplace and organisation. Although these authors do not define the term ‘healthier workplace’, it could be suggested that this refers to reduced sickness levels within organisations. Govier and Nash (2009) also found that transformational leadership can lead to reduced levels of stress and emotional exhaustion among staff members and teams. This can lead to improved staff productivity, decreased employee turnover rates and improved overall job satisfaction (Johnson et al 2012).

Transformational leaders can achieve these benefits by listening to their staff, supporting their needs, encouraging power-sharing by involving staff in decision-making, acting as a role model, and motivating and empowering staff. As a result of the transformational leader exercising these characteristics, individuals may feel safe, supported, happy, empowered and motivated, which improves productivity and nurses’ performance in teams (Brady Germain and Cummings 2010). This leadership style also affects patient care, with transformational leadership in nursing practice being associated with improved patient outcomes, increased patient satisfaction, reduced mortality rates, reduced medication errors and lower rates of hospital-acquired infections (Wong et al 2013).

Disadvantages of transformational leadership
Several potential disadvantages of the transformational leadership style have been identified, primarily for the leader and their followers.

Individuals and working with others
The transformational leader undertakes a range of activities, including motivating and influencing followers, sharing their vision, and having a creative and inspiring approach (Doody and Doody 2012). Thus, one potential disadvantage is that this approach might be overwhelming for the leader and their followers at times.

While some followers will feel inspired by a transformational leader, others may feel pressured to display positivity and regularly demonstrate highly motivated behaviour in their presence (Thompson 2011). The continual pressure to strive towards a grand vision and take pride in the organisation’s achievements may lead to demotivation and burnout in some employees, and might also be emotionally draining for the leader. However, it could be suggested that the transformational leader would not need to display all of these leadership behaviours all of the time, and could use their emotional intelligence to identify when they need to apply them, depending on the situation.

Another potential disadvantage of the transformational leadership style is that it could be used inappropriately. For example, leaders might manipulate the leadership style for their own gains by using charisma for self-promotion within an organisation (Renjith et al 2015). However, this could also occur in other leadership styles, and it may be that the positive effects of the transformational leadership style naturally result in promotion and rewards for the leader, as well as recognition of effective practice by the team.

Healthcare organisations
One disadvantage of transformational leadership for
healthcare organisations is that it is often challenging to teach transformational leadership skills and behaviours to staff (Renjith et al 2015). Renjith et al (2015) suggested that because many of the behaviours and characteristics associated with transformational leaders occur naturally in some individuals, for example the ability to inspire and motivate people, this can be challenging to teach. However, specific transformational leadership training programmes are available in the UK, and Duygulu and Kublay (2011) reported that such programmes have improved leadership practices in healthcare settings among nurse leaders in Turkey.

It should also be noted that NMC-approved education providers are required to teach nursing students about leadership theories, styles and behaviours in the classroom, as well as in clinical practice, where nursing students will observe, demonstrate and reflect on their leadership styles and behaviours (NMC 2018a). HEE (2018) guidelines for the development of learning in relation to leadership are supportive of this approach.

Applying transformational leadership in nursing practice
It has been reported that the transformational leadership approach aligns well to nursing practice (Moen and Core 2013, Alban-Metcalfe and Alimo-Metcalfe 2018). Transformational leadership may be used in various situations in clinical practice, for example the introduction of a new project, shift-working pattern, admission procedure or technology. It could also be used when introducing large-scale service improvements such as new services or teams across departments and organisations. The leader may also use the four elements of transformational leadership – idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration – in their day-to-day practice to ensure that nursing care is effective. This leadership style can be used not only within a change process or service improvement, but also in any clinical activity that involves teams or followers who want to optimise the care they provide.

Working as a nurse leader can be challenging because of pressures related to changes to service provision, staffing issues and the complexity of clinical care (Alban-Metcalfe and Alimo-Metcalfe 2018). However, the transformational leadership approach could be beneficial in this type of environment. For example, the ‘idealised influence’ element of transformational leadership could be beneficial in leading change (Moen and Core 2013). Moen and Core’s (2013) study of ward nurse managers found that the personal power, credibility and integrity of the nurse managers was fundamental to how they brought about change. Tomlinson (2012) also suggested that transformational leadership is useful in supporting teams to meet organisational and team goals because it increases staff engagement.

The next section of this article discusses how the four elements of transformational leadership relate to nursing practice.

TIME OUT 3
Reflect on your clinical practice and transformational leadership, in particular the four elements of this approach. In what situations have you observed your colleagues using this leadership style? Have you used it in your clinical practice?

Idealised influence
Idealised influence involves the transformational leader developing confidence, acting as a role model for staff and providing a sense of mission (Northouse 2013). To do this, the transformational leader could develop mission statements explaining what aims need to be achieved and clearly articulating their vision to staff. They will involve various people in this activity, such as staff, patients and families. It may be that there is a senior team leading a project, or it may be the responsibility of a single person. As part of this stage, the leader and the team set and agree outcomes and realistic timeframes for the project. The leader needs to identify a clear focus for the project to be able to influence their followers, for example determining if the project is small-scale and involves one clinical area, or is larger-scale and will be rolled out across a division or organisation.

As part of this element, the transformational leader needs to establish trust with the team, for example by spending time with them, and discussing and agreeing outcomes. The leader can also use their charisma, assertiveness and emotional intelligence to establish trust among the team, while at the same time providing clear expectations. Role modelling is an important aspect of being a nurse leader and can provide leadership by example (Owen 2018).

Inspirational motivation
Inspirational motivation involves the transformational leader inspiring and motivating the team. These leaders will describe a project idea and its aims clearly, whether this is a large service improvement or a small project. An essential leadership skill required for inspirational motivation is effective communication. The leader may communicate via electronic newsletters, email updates or face-to-face discussion with the team, or by offering drop-in sessions for staff. There may also be formal consultation meetings or question-and-answer sessions for the people involved in inspiring the team, such as staff, patients and families. In this element, the leader encourages and motivates others to achieve the goals and aspirations of the project. They communicate how the project mission and vision relates to them individually and to the wider healthcare organisation.

Inspirational motivation also involves motivating the team. Transformational leaders are usually highly motivated individuals who have the ability to motivate others (Renjith et al 2015). There are various theories about motivation, and these are generally divided into two groups: content theories and process theories (Sullivan and Garland 2010). Content theories consider motivation in relation to individual needs and the factors that satisfy those needs; for example, the nurse might have the need...
to feel safe in the workplace, to have job security, to be able to take regular meal breaks and to feel a sense of belonging within the team. In contrast, process theories are concerned with how motivation encourages a staff member to perform effectively; for example, the nurse might be motivated to achieve professional goals that they set for themselves such as learning a new skill or completing training (Sullivan and Decker 2009). Transformational leaders can motivate staff members by using positive reinforcement and offering praise for completing work in challenging circumstances. However, to be truly transformational, the leader should empower staff to want to take a project forward themselves. Leaders can inspire others by being appreciative of staff members, particularly during challenging times.

Intellectual stimulation

Intellectual stimulation involves the transformational leader challenging assumptions, taking risks and encouraging staff to question working practices (Raes et al 2013). Transformational leaders encourage staff to propose new ideas, which can empower staff and enable them to feel listened to and valued. This intellectual stimulation may take place through discussions during team meetings or informally. The leader may establish working groups in which staff resolve issues, review progress and identify innovative solutions.

Providing an environment that enables staff to feel empowered is an important requirement of effective leadership and will assist in ensuring that any project is undertaken successfully. It has been reported that an empowered workforce can lead to improvements in staff health and job satisfaction, as well as contributing to an effective and productive workforce (Laverack 2006). Welford (2002) also suggested that leaders who empower their staff can benefit patients, since empowered staff will provide high-quality care.

Individualised consideration

Individualised consideration involves the transformational leader supporting and encouraging staff to achieve and to be successful. These leaders take into consideration the needs and feelings of staff, and demonstrate care and compassion for them. Examples of applying individualised consideration in practice include spending time listening to staff members, responding to their questions and requests, or making adjustments to working practices. The leader may also agree individual actions and targets for a project, taking into consideration a staff member’s needs and preferences. By taking this approach when leading a project, the transformational leader is increasingly likely to be successful, and to engage, empower and motivate staff (Moen and Core 2013).

The transformational leader also provides support and positive feedback as a project progresses. To be able to do this effectively, the transformational leader needs to demonstrate emotional intelligence. According to Goleman (1996), emotional intelligence involves four domains: self-awareness; self-management; social awareness; and relationship management. Thus, to be emotionally intelligent, the transformational leader needs to have the self-awareness to know and understand themselves, as well as the ability to know and understand the staff members and recognise their emotions and feelings.

References


Conclusion

The transformational leadership approach has several potential advantages for nurses. For example, as part of their role, nurses often act as role models for members of the team, and this is an important aspect of transformational leadership. This leadership style can also be motivating and empowering for teams, potentially leading to innovation and creativity in practice. Furthermore, transformational leadership may be beneficial in terms of improving healthcare services and care. However, nurses should also be aware that this approach may have disadvantages, such as being emotionally draining for leaders and presenting challenges in teaching individuals to develop transformational leadership skills. In accordance with the NMC (2018a) standards of proficiency, nurses are expected to act as role models and enable and motivate their teams. The transformational leadership approach may support nurses to meet these standards.


Transformational leadership

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE BY COMPLETING THIS MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUIZ

1. In accordance with the Nursing and Midwifery Council standards of proficiency, nurses are required to:
   a) Provide leadership in the delivery of care for people of all ages  
   b) Act as role models  
   c) Supervise teams  
   d) All of the above

2. Which of the following is not one of the nine dimensions of the Healthcare Leadership Model?
   a) Inspiring shared purpose  
   b) Sharing the vision  
   c) Auditing outcome measures  
   d) Developing capability

3. What is transactional leadership?
   a) An exchange process, whereby the leader rewards staff members for effective performance  
   b) A passive approach, whereby the leader avoids exerting influence on staff members  
   c) An authoritarian approach, whereby the leader makes all of the decisions without any consultation with staff members  
   d) An informal process, whereby the leader gives all power to staff members, allowing them to make decisions independently

4. One of the ‘four Is’ of transformational leadership is intellectual stimulation, which involves:
   a) Coaching and empowering to success  
   b) Leading by example and setting expectations  
   c) Encouraging learning and growth  
   d) Inspiring to reach new heights

5. In which of the ‘four Is’ would the transformational leader encourage followers to obtain high levels of achievement?
   a) Inspirational motivation  
   b) Individualised consideration  
   c) Idealised influence  
   d) Intellectual stimulation

6. Which of these is considered a characteristic of a transformational leader?
   a) Risk averse  
   b) Motivational  
   c) Disorganised  
   d) Passive

7. One advantage of transformational leadership for teams is:
   a) It reduces the need for mentorship and guidance of junior staff members  
   b) It increases staff’s dependence on the leader  
   c) It can enable innovation and creativity when problem-solving  
   d) It increases resistance to change in the workplace

8. One disadvantage of transformational leadership for healthcare organisations is:
   a) It is not suitable for nursing practice  
   b) It may be challenging to teach some of the behaviours and characteristics associated with transformational leaders  
   c) It focuses on completing small tasks rather than working towards achieving a grand vision  
   d) It can only be used for large-scale service improvements or projects, rather than day-to-day practice

9. How could nurses apply transformational leadership to their practice?
   a) By explaining what aims need to be achieved and clearly articulating their vision to staff  
   b) By encouraging staff to propose new ideas, which can empower them  
   c) By considering the needs and feelings of staff, and demonstrating care and compassion for them  
   d) All of the above

10. Which of these is not one of the domains of emotional intelligence?
   a) Self-awareness  
   b) Self-management  
   c) Social awareness  
   d) Professional development

How to complete this quiz

This multiple-choice quiz will help you to test your knowledge. It comprises ten questions that are broadly linked to the CPD article. There is one correct answer to each question.

You can test your subject knowledge by attempting the questions before reading the article, and then go back over them to see if you would answer any differently.

You might like to read the article before trying the questions.

Subscribers making use of their RCNi Portfolio can complete this and other quizzes online and save the result automatically.

Alternatively, you can cut out this page and add it to your professional portfolio. Don’t forget to record the amount of time taken to complete it.

Further multiple-choice quizzes are available at rcni.com/cpd/test-your-knowledge

This multiple-choice quiz was compiled by Alex Bainbridge

The answers to this multiple-choice quiz are:

1. d 2. c 3. a 4. c 5. b

6. b 7. c 8. b 9. d 10. d

This activity has taken me ___ minutes/hours to complete. Now that I have read this article and completed this assessment, I think my knowledge is:

Excellent  
Good  
Satisfactory  
Unsatisfactory  
Poor

As a result of this I intend to: 

______________________________

© RCN Publishing Company Limited 2019