Leadership Styles of Educational Leaders in Healthcare & Academia

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Abstract

This study sought to determine the main leadership style used by clinical professors and other educational leaders in academic settings as well as the leadership style they used when teaching in clinical settings. There were eight (n = 8) voluntary interprofessional educational leaders who took part in this study. It was determined that the servant leadership style was predominantly being practiced among these clinical professors in the healthcare setting; whereas, the coaching leadership style was preferred for educational purposes. This research demonstrated that there was a consistent pattern among professors who practiced in the health sector relied on the servant leadership style predominantly and this stemmed from their clinical background and experiences. It was unanimous that while teaching and interacting with a student in the academic environment, all participants practiced the coaching leadership style.

Keywords: healthcare leadership, educational leaders, servant leadership, transformational leadership, situational leadership, coaching leadership, academic, clinical practices, professors, teaching, students

1. Introduction

Leadership in an academic and clinical setting is essential for our society. What we are taught at an early age tends to remain with us for the rest of our life. And typically, these learnings are applied to change the world. Educational leadership is a collaborative process that brings together the abilities and forces of teachers, students, and parents to improve educational quality and the overall education system. Influencing students, staff, and families to think, believe, and conduct in ways could be challenging, but based on their personal and professional principles, educational leaders create a vision for their schools and clinical settings. These leaders integrate their vision within the school's philosophy, teaching/non-teaching activities, and in clinical settings. These educational leaders are the fundamental key to the success of our future society; hence, it is critical to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena of leadership style that is being practiced among professors. Kellish (2014) stated: "Many allied health professions rely on clinicians in the clinical setting to be a clinical educator and share their clinical expertise with students…" (Pg 20). There are not enough individuals in society who express interest in being an academic environment; yet, the fact of the matter is that the professors are the fundamental role models for our society. The role of faculty is undoubtedly critical for the betterment of society. Professors are undeniably the leaders, but have you ever imagined which leadership style they practice in their clinical and academic settings? This study's goal was to determine what leadership style educational leaders such as clinical professors practice in clinical settings and how it differs in an academic environment.

1.1 Literature

The literature is replete with leadership research studies; conversely, there is a limited number of studies that highlight educational leaders' leadership styles in clinical and academic settings. Leadership style pertains to those who lead, how they lead, the situation they lead, and lastly who follows. A few key leadership theories which will be discussed in this research are: 1) Coaching 2) Visionary 3) Servant 4) Transformation and 5) Situational.

1.2 Coaching

A high-performing culture thrives under a coaching leadership style. This culture is marked by cooperation, empowerment, and fulfillment. The most significant of these traits is collaboration, which is frequently contrasted with a command-and-control approach that suffocates potential. Coaching leadership is a type of leadership that combines coaching ideas and actions to get the most effective results. Unlocking and empowering one's potential is one way to do this. This contrasts with typical command and control administration, which can suffocate potential. A coaching leadership style is defined by clear skills and ethics, which include significant concerns such as teamwork and belief in possibilities, trust, safety intentions, feedback, learning, growth, and active listening.

1.3 Visionary

Visionary leadership style sets an example for the communities or institutions by communicating their vision in an inspiring rather than authoritative way. True visionary leaders empower their others to figure out the best way to reach their goals while also understanding that attaining them would need a lot of discipline and dedication. Persistent, inspiring, magnetic, open-minded, inventive, imaginative, courageous, collaborative, goal-oriented, well-organized, passionate, responsible, and emotionally aware are some of the qualities of visionary leaders.

1.4 Servant

The servant leader, according to Greenleaf "begins with the natural desire that one strives to serve, to serve first," and then "intensifies to lead." Both a set of leadership behaviors and a set of personality traits are included in servant leadership. Greenleaf was the first to propose the idea of servant leadership. Greenleaf stated: "The servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is a leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions...The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them, some shadings and blends are part of the infinite variety of human nature" (Dittrich, 2019). The requirements of followers will probably come before their own since this leader is concerned with their needs.

1.5 Transformational

This leadership style provides followers wih a vision, motivates them, and empowers them to accomplish any objectives. This type of leader has integrity, emotional intelligence, self-awareness, authenticity, empathy, and humbleness (Cherry, 2019). Transformational leadership style can cause some conflicts as well as challenges, especially for those who are not aligned with the innovative, risk-taking, and thinking outside the box mentality within the organization. Though they inspire and motivate people toward a goal or vision, transformational leaders may find it difficult to bring about the necessary step-change in the healthcare system because of their leadership style (Trastek, 2014).

1.6 Situational

This model was created by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard in 1969 who introduced this as life cycle theory. In this style, leaders have to be flexible to be able to adapt according to the situation. This style requires the leader to adapt to the situation otherwise the leader will fail. This style could work in an academic or healthcare setting.

2. Method

A previously developed leadership research instrument by Malak et. al. (2022) was utilized to evaluate the leadership styles of the participants for this research. The tool evaluated the participants' leadership style through a series of leadership attributes. Although this study may have characteristic of mix-method study design, but this was a qualitative study design where previously developed leadership research tool was used to evaluate the leadership styles of the participants for this research. Face validity, also known as logical validity, was conducted to validate the tool. A convenience sampling approach was taken for this particular research. A background in health and clinical practice was a requirement for inclusion in this study. All participants were full-time faculty members and had a clinical and healthcare background. This study provided the freedom to explore the developing themes while methodically and carefully interpreting the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Interviews were conducted using a combination of direct and open-ended questions. To prevent bias, the research study's participants all answered identical questions. Each participant was interviewed only once. Descriptive statistics were used to examine and summarize the data. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, Version 28.0, was used for the statistical analysis.

3. Results

3.1 Demographic

There was a total of eight participants (n = 8) were interviewed for this research. The overall response rate was 100%. All participants (n = 8) were from a health and nursing profession and were full-time professors. Fifty percent (n = 4) of participants' age range was between 60 to 79 years old. Twenty-five percent (n = 2) were 40 to 59 years of age. Thirteen

percent (n = 1) fell in 18 to 39 years of age and the remaining thirteen percent (n = 1) did not specify. Sixty-three percent (n = 5) were females and thirty-seven percent (n = 3) were males. Seventy-five percent (n = 6) were Caucasian, twelve percent (n = 1) were African American/Black, and the remaining did not specify. Eighty-eight percent (n = 7) of the participants had a doctoral-level degree and twelve percent (n = 1) had a master's degree. Table 1 provides a tabular summary of these statistics.

Table 1. Tabulated Demographic Results

Age	Frequency	%
18 - 39	1	12.5
40 - 59	2	25.0
60 - 79	4	50.0
Prefer not to answer	1	12.5
Gender	Frequency	%
Male	3	37.5
Female	5	62.5
Ethnicity	Frequency	%
African American	1	12.5
Caucasians	6	75.0
Prefer not to answer	1	12.5
Employment Status	Frequency	%
Full-time	8	100
Education	Frequency	%
Masters	1	12.5
Doctorate	7	87.5

3.2 Participant's Leadership Styles in Clinical Settings

Pre-interview, eighty-eight percent (n = 7) participants believed that they practiced the servant leadership style and twelve (n = 1) percent believed that they practiced the coaching leadership style. Post-interview it was determined that when in the field sixty-three percent (n = 5) practiced servant, and thirteen percent (n = 1) practiced transformational leadership. The remaining twenty-four percent (n = 2) was evenly split between situational and Laissez-faire leadership styles (see Table 2 for tabulated results).

Table 2. Tabulated Leadership Style Results in Clinical Settings

Participants believed they practiced this leadership style	Frequency	%
Coaching	1	12.5
Servant	7	87.5
Participants actual leadership style in clinical settings	Frequency	%
Servant	5	62.5
Transformational	1	12.5
Situational	1	12.5
Laissez-Faire	1	12.5

3.3 Participant's Leadership Styles in Clinical Settings

Eighty-eight percent (n = 7) of participants believed and practiced the coaching leadership style for teaching purposes in a university setting. The remaining twelve percent (n = 1) practiced situational leadership style when teaching the student in a classroom-like environment (See Table 3).

Table 3. Tabulated Leadership Style Results in Academic Settings

Participant's leadership style in an academic setting	Frequency	%
Coaching	7	87.5
Situational	1	12.5

4. Discussion

All participants were faculty in nursing and/or health professions representing multiple health care specialties. These participants were interprofessional with academic, industrial, and clinical backgrounds. The majority of participants were engaged in teaching and clinical practice in their respective specialty fields. According to this study, the individuals primarily used coaching leadership styles in academic settings, in contrast to the clinical settings where they primarily used servant leadership styles. This research's findings highlighted that majority of the participants who practiced the servant leadership style had also worked as a nurse and leaned on practicing this style during their career. During interviews, it was established that their leadership style stemmed from the values, beliefs, and responsibilities that they performed. This research contributes to Malak's (2022) findings that the majority of the clinical nursing community practiced a servant leadership style in a clinical setting. It can also be deduced from the interviews and statistics that all of the participants in an academic setting agree that coaching is the best type of leadership. Zuberbuhler (2020) stated: "…coaching is the main style of managing and working with others, with a predominant commitment to employees' growth..." (pg 2). Professors use the coaching technique to distinguish key opportunities in students for the betterment of their present and future growth. By using this style, professors put in place strategies to convert key areas of opportunities into strengths (see Table 4 for participants' opinions). This research provides an excellent baseline for educational leaders' leadership styles. Overall, the work of Kellish (2014) and Malak (2022) has benefited greatly from this research. The sample size was one restriction that may have affected the study's findings. Although for qualitative research, this study had more than sufficient subjects, but future studies should consider a larger sample size.

Table 4. Quotes from the participants

Subject	Academic Position Title	Clinical Leadership Style	Academic Leadership Style	Quotes
#1	Assistant Dean & Clinical Professor	Transformational	Coaching	"I practice coaching style when teaching students. The beauty of the academic environment is that all attributes and diversity of elements can be embraced."
				"We need transformational right now (predominantly) with servant leadership style (to support) and coaching to guide."
				"We need transformational leaders (predominantly) in combination with servant leadership style (to support) and coaching to guide."
#2	Assistance Professor	Servant	Coaching	"I am most comfortable leading/guiding/helping/supporting/offering guidance and it comes naturally and it is not forced and it works for me."
				"From an academic perspective, I want students to arrive on their own to a solution and I am there to guide them . I am probing and asking the questions and steering the ship.
				"Coaching leadership style is my preference when in academic because as we prepare the future health professionals and they will be the future leaders and emulate the style we are leading in our classroom to their future patients."
#3	Associate	Servant	Coaching	"I believe in giving students the tools to get

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	Clinical Professor			the answers."
				"Servant leadership style works in clinical setting best for nursing organization; however, in an academic setting coaching and guiding works the best. At a higher level of any organization, transformational leadership style becomes vital as you start to build your base on a servant."
#4	Associate Clinical Professor	Situational	Coaching	"Servant leadership works the best if we are considering from clinical perspective, but if we are considering educational settings then coaching leadership style is the best way to go."
				"In a clinical setting, I find predominantly leadership style is transformational with some transactional (at a high-level administrative side); however, from faculty lens, it is predominantly coaching with some elements of the servant and transformational."
#5	Assistant Clinical Professor	Servant	Coaching	"Servant and Coaching leadership styles are without a doubt best for both clinical and academic environments. I am providing knowledge in both settings and it is going to benefit in both environments."
				"Knowledge that I am providing to the students is going to benefit them in becoming successful professionals."
#6	Clinical Professor	Laissez-faire	Coaching	"I believe in serving communities whether when I was leading a nursing organization or whether I am teaching in a classroom setting. I am there to serve patients, students, and/or other faculty members.
				"Coaching allows me to help develop and guide students. It's like coaching students with a map."
#7	Assistant Professor	Servant	Coaching	"In an academic setting, coaching leadership style works best for me because that's how students learn best and this style allows to promote of knowledge acquisition."
				"As clinical professors, we have to write about our teaching philosophies. Me asking questions instead of answering is a safe environment; thereby, guiding the students and not handing the answer works the best in an academic environment."
#8	Assistant Clinical Professor	Servant	Coaching	"It depends on the individual, but I believe servant can beneficial for some clinical settings and not others. But I believe it is safe to say coaching/mentoring leadership style in an academic setting works the vast majority of the time."

5. Conclusion

The findings showed that among the chosen group of participants, the servant leadership style was mostly used in clinical settings while the coaching leadership style was favored for instructional settings. Regarding leadership style, the study's findings add to the body of knowledge from earlier studies that have been published in both academic and health settings. Future studies could explore at a national level as far as what leadership style educational leaders practices.

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