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**PROFILING TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP'S ROLE IN
MODELLING THE EFFECT OF SAFETY CLIMATE ON
NURSES' SAFETY PERFORMANCE**

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Abstract:

This study examines the role of transformational leadership in improving employee safety through elements of motivation, guidance, enforcement, and support for employees, as well as enforcement and monitoring. Transformational leadership serves as a key factor influencing employee safety behaviour and performance. By providing inspiration, guidance, and positive role models, transformational leaders can strengthen safety practices in the workplace and ensure employees constantly adhere to established safety procedures. The study also emphasizes the significance of support to workers through ongoing training, adequate rest, and recognition of their efforts, all of which contribute to improved workplace safety. In addition, effective safety policy enforcement and monitoring through awareness campaigns also play an essential role in ensuring employee compliance. The results of this study reveal that transformational leadership increases employee motivation and strengthens the enforcement of safety policies, ultimately leading to increased employee safety as a whole.

Keywords:

Transformational Leadership, Employee Safety, Motivation, Enforcement, Employee Support

Introduction

Safety in the healthcare sector is essential, particularly in public teaching hospitals, where protecting lives is a primary concern. As frontline caregivers, nurses play a crucial role in

ensuring patient and personal safety. According to Wang and Dewing (2020), nursing leadership significantly influences patient safety by empowering the workplace, fostering strong leader-nurse relationships, and promoting a safe environment. However, despite implementing a "safety climate" in these hospitals, incidents involving nurse injuries still occur. A study by Garus-Pakowska et al. (2022) reported that 51.4% of nurses suffered injuries from sharp instruments in the previous year, raising questions about the effectiveness of current safety measures and the role of leadership in reinforcing this safety climate.

This study focuses on the role of transformational leadership in shaping the impact of safety climate on the safety performance of nurses in public teaching hospitals. Transformational leadership refers to a style that inspires, motivates, and transforms employee behavior to achieve goals beyond standard expectations. Wider and Wei Teoh's (2022) study in Malaysia discovered that transformational leadership positively influenced employee performance. Nevertheless, in the nursing field, weaknesses in this leadership style have been identified as a significant factor hindering optimal safety performance, even with a longstanding safety climate in place.

Two key issues underscore this study. First, there is a lack of effective leadership among leaders in public teaching hospitals. Ystaas et al. (2023) reported that nurses felt their managers' transformational leadership behaviours fell short of excellence. While the safety climate has been implemented, the absence of strong transformational leadership has prevented nurses from reaching optimal safety performance levels. Second, inconsistent leadership support weakens safety efforts, leading to confusion in safety practices. Moreover, poor leadership also results in underreporting errors and fosters a blame culture, reducing the effectiveness of safety practices for nurses (Farokhzadian et al., 2018; Ystaas et al., 2023).

The study has two main objectives: To explore the transformational leadership qualities that shape the relationship between safety climate and nurses' safety performance and to understand how transformational leadership influences the effectiveness of safety climate practices from the perspectives of nurses and leaders.

From a community perspective, this study seeks to enhance nurse safety and well-being, which directly impacts patient care quality and benefits society as a whole. Mihdawi et al. (2020) concluded that a positive work environment and nurse participation in safety initiatives are strongly related to better patient safety outcomes. From an industry viewpoint, particularly in healthcare, this study can serve as a reference for evaluating and improving leadership training programs, creating a more competent workforce to ensure healthcare safety.

From a scientific perspective, this study contributes to understanding how transformational leadership can model the impact of a safety climate on nurse safety performance, adding to the literature on human resource management and workplace safety. By focusing on nurses in public teaching hospitals, this study's findings could apply to similar healthcare settings with complex leadership and safety challenges.

This article provides an overview of the study by outlining its background, problem statement, study objectives, and importance to various stakeholders. Consequently, it discusses the methodology, findings, and conclusions, aiming to offer a comprehensive perspective on the role of transformational leadership in strengthening safety practices among nurses.

Literature Review

Transformational leadership has received significant attention in organizational management due to its potential to motivate, inspire, and transform employees and organizations toward achieving higher performance. In the context of hospitals, especially public university teaching hospitals, the role of transformational leadership becomes increasingly critical. This is attributable to the fact that transformational leadership can positively affect hospital staff, especially from the point of view of job satisfaction (Hussain & Khayat, 2021). Furthermore, it can also increase the productivity and quality of healthcare services in the hospital (Hussain & Khayat, 2021). However, teaching hospitals serve as places for patient treatment and training centres for future health professionals. Therefore, ensuring a safe and effective environment is essential, not only for patients but also for staff such as nurses. This study focuses on how transformational leadership can influence the safety climate and, subsequently, nurses' safety performance. This literature review will explore the main concepts in transformational leadership, safety climate, and the relationship between these two concepts in determining the safety performance of nurses.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a concept that refers to a leader's ability to inspire and change individuals or work groups to achieve higher goals. This concept was introduced by James MacGregor Burns in 1978 and later refined by Bernard Bass in 1985. According to Gaston (2021), James MacGregor Burns developed original transformational leadership, refined by Bernard Bass, who emphasized several components in improving the performance of employees and organizations. Transformational leadership comprises four main components: charisma or ideal influence, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Charisma, or ideal influence, refers to the leader's ability to be an example that followers respect and follow. Leaders with high charisma will inspire respect and trust among employees, increasing their commitment to the organization's goals. Navon et al. (2023) also stated that subordinate leaders with high charisma can create a sense of trust and respect from employees to the leader since the charismatic nature of the leader can flow to the followers. Inspiration refers to the leader's ability to inspire and provide their followers with a clear vision of the future. Thus, inspirational leaders will be able to motivate employees to achieve higher performance by giving them greater and meaningful purpose. Alvi (2023) also explained that inspirational leaders are critical in motivating employees to improve their efficiency and work performance.

Intellectual stimulation is a component that involves encouraging leaders and employees to think critically and creatively when solving problems. Safaruddin et al. (2023) also stated that intellectual stimulation affects employee growth positively and encourages employees to be more creative in solving work-related problems. Transformational leaders will push employees to find new and better solutions and encourage them to innovate. Meanwhile, individual consideration refers to the leader's attention to employees' personal and professional needs. Based on Khalil and Sahibzadah (2021), individual consideration by leaders can increase job satisfaction by understanding the needs of employees in the organization. As such, transformational leaders will provide individual guidance and support to employees, assisting them in reaching their maximum potential.

In the hospital context, studies indicate that transformational leadership can improve safety performance by raising employee awareness and commitment to safety practices. F. Ugwu et al. (2020) added that transformational leadership behaviour in the healthcare sector environment could help improve employee compliance with safe work behaviors, which can achieve safety performance in hospitals. Leaders who practice this transformational style can direct staff to follow safety procedures and inspire them to understand the importance of safety in every aspect of their work. In situations where work pressure is high, such as in hospitals, transformational leadership is critical to ensure that employees, especially nurses, remain focused and disciplined in performing their duties safely.

Safety Climate in the Health Sector

Safety climate is an essential dimension of organizational culture that refers to the perception and attitude of employees towards safety in the workplace. This concept was first introduced by Zohar in 1980 as a form of organizational norm emphasizing safety's importance. Safety climate involves employees' perceptions of how safety is prioritized in the organization, the extent to which safety practices are implemented, and how supportive management is of employee safety. Razali, Zin, et al. (2022) stated that 67% of employees in manufacturing firms have a positive perception of the safety climate, which indirectly contributes to their positive perception of safety.

In the health sector, the safety climate is critical as it directly impacts the safety of workers and patients. Nurses, as a group of health professionals who are often exposed to various risks, such as infections, physical injuries, and work stress, are highly dependent on a strong safety climate to perform their duties effectively. Lou (2022) also suggested that a strong safety climate in hospitals makes nurses' behavior more positive at work and helps to reduce the risk of infection, physical injury and work stress for nurses in hospitals. Studies have proven that a positive safety climate can reduce injury incidents and increase adherence to safety procedures among nurses. This is attributable to the fact that a safety climate can increase compliance with safety procedures among nurses and reduce the incidence of injuries to nurses while performing their duties in the hospital (Jayalath et al., 2021). In contrast, the poor safety climate in hospitals has significantly increased worker injuries, especially in operating rooms (Memarbashi et al., 2021). This emphasizes the need for individuals and organizations to strengthen the safety climate to improve safety performance in hospitals (Memarbashi et al., 2021).

Studies conducted in hospitals assert that a good safety climate depends on implementing strict safety procedures and the employees' perception of management's commitment to safety. Razali, Mat Zin, et al. (2022) stated that employee perception of safety management commitment, safety concept, risk and management commitment to safety in the organization determines a good safety climate. When employees believe that safety is a priority in the organization and that management is committed to providing a safe work environment, they will be more likely to follow safety procedures and implement their tasks more carefully. Therefore, the safety climate results from the management's policies and procedures and the employees' perceptions and attitudes towards safety in the workplace.

The Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Safety Climate

Transformational leadership and safety climate are two interrelated concepts in determining employee safety performance. Transformational leadership, focusing on individual motivation, inspiration, and attention, can create a stronger safety climate in organizations. This is strongly

evidenced by Fischer (2023), who stated that Safety-Specific Transformational Leadership (SSTFL) has positively impacted the safety climate and outcomes in organizations. Leaders who use a transformational approach are often viewed as an important influence in forming a strong safety culture.

The literature suggests that leaders who practice a transformational style are more likely to emphasize the importance of safety in every aspect of the organization's operations. Based on a study by Draghici et al., (2022), transformational safety leadership has positively influenced employee perceptions of the safety climate and played a key role in improving employee behavior related to safe working practices. They will ensure that safety is perceived as a regulatory requirement and a core value in the organizational culture. In the healthcare sector, transformational leadership behaviors are critical in helping to increase employee compliance with safe work behaviors and reduce employee work stress in the workplace (F. Ugwu et al., 2020). This is achieved through clear communication of the importance of safety, employee involvement in safety-related decision-making, and rewarding employees who demonstrate a commitment to safety.

However, there is still a gap in the literature regarding how exactly transformational leadership affects the safety climate in hospitals, especially in the context of public university teaching hospitals. According to the study by Fischer (2023), the effectiveness and influence of SSTFL in healthcare on climate and safety results still cannot be concluded, even though it has been introduced in the healthcare system for a long time. Existing studies tend to examine the relationship between leadership and safety climate in general without examining the specific mechanisms through which transformational leadership can shape safety climate in complex environments such as hospitals. Therefore, there is a need for further research that is more focused on understanding how transformational leaders can shape employees' perceptions and attitudes towards safety and how this, in turn, affects their safety performance.

Safety Performance Among Nurses

Safety performance refers to the ability of employees to perform their duties safely, comply with safety procedures, and reduce the risk of injury or incident in the workplace. In the hospital context, nurses' safety performance is critical since they are on the front line in providing health care and are exposed to various occupational risks. Furthermore, safety performance among nurses is essential to prevent work accidents at the hospital (Syahidah & Saridewi, 2022).

Nurses often face unique safety challenges, such as exposure to infectious diseases, high workloads, and emotional stress. Therefore, their safety performance highly depends on their ability to identify and manage these risks. A good safety climate and effective leadership can help nurses perform their duties more safely. According to Mrayyan et al. (2023), nurse leadership positively affects nurses' perception of a positive safety climate, encouraging nurses to work safely.

Studies indicate that nurses who work in an environment where safety is prioritized and supported by management tend to exhibit better safety performance. Nurses who work in a safe environment and get support from management to perform work safely will demonstrate better safety performance (Malinowska-Lipień et al., 2021). Moreover, they are more likely to follow safety procedures, report incidents, and take proactive measures to reduce risk. Conversely, in an environment where safety is not a priority, nurses may feel less motivated to follow safety

procedures, leading to an increased risk of injury or incident. The level of safety enforcement for nurses positively affects their compliance with occupational safety measures (Yıldız et al., 2020).

The relationship between transformational leadership and nurses' safety performance is an area that needs special attention since transformational leadership is positively related to the organization of the nursing unit, improving quality in patient safety (Mistry et al., 2020). Therefore, strong transformational leadership can help improve safety performance by inspiring nurses to take greater responsibility for their safety and patient safety.

Research Gaps

Although numerous studies have examined the relationship between leadership and safety climate, some important gaps in the literature still require further research. First, there is a lack of research specifically focusing on the role of transformational leadership in influencing safety climate and performance in the context of public university teaching hospitals. Most studies examine transformational leadership in a general context without examining its implications in a complex setting such as a teaching hospital.

Second, the causal relationship between transformational leadership and specific safety outcomes, such as reduced injury incidents among nurses, has not yet been explored in depth. The available studies tend to investigate the correlation between these two variables. However, a more focused study is needed to understand the mechanism of causation.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to deeply understand the role of transformational leadership in influencing the safety climate and safety performance of nurses in a public university teaching hospital. A qualitative approach was chosen as it provides flexibility and the ability to explore complex phenomena in an information-rich context. Qualitative process assessments that involve a complex systems perspective can help assess change over time in a complex social environment (McGill et al., 2020). Through this method, five participants were interviewed in-depth to obtain their views and experiences on issues related to leadership and safety. The research design used in this study is Basic Qualitative Inquiry, which is suitable for achieving the study's objective: to identify the factors of transformational leadership and analyze their effects on climate and safety performance.

Basic Qualitative Inquiry was preferred as it allows the researcher to obtain an in-depth and detailed view of the issue under study. Based on the study by Ngenye and Kreps (2020), qualitative inquiry can provide an in-depth understanding of health communication issues and processes. It can also provide evidence-based guidance for addressing key healthcare delivery and promotion challenges. This design allows the researcher to explore individual perceptions and experiences, which is vital to understanding how transformational leadership affects nurses in their work context. This approach is also in line with the study's objective, which is to develop a deep understanding of the relationship between transformational leadership, safety climate, and safety performance.

Data Collection

Data collection in this study is done through two main methods: in-depth interviews and observation. In-depth interviews were conducted with five nurses in a public university

teaching hospital. The interviews were designed as semi-structured, which provided flexibility for the researcher to explore essential topics in depth while ensuring that all key issues relevant to the study were discussed. Notably, interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes for each participant, and the questions asked were structured to reveal their views on transformational leadership and its impact on safety.

In addition to interviews, observation is also conducted as an additional method to collect data. This observation involves directly observing the interactions between nurses and their leaders in daily work situations. This observational method provides a richer context and allows the researcher to understand how transformational leadership is applied in actual practice in the workplace. Qualitative inquiry can provide an in-depth understanding of health communication issues and processes and provide evidence-based guidance for addressing key healthcare delivery and promotion challenges. Accordingly, this helps answer the research objectives more effectively. Moreover, qualitative methods, such as grounded theory, have provided evidence-based guidance to address key challenges in the delivery and promotion of health care in hospitals (Ngenye & Kreps, 2020).

Sampling

This study uses purposive sampling as a sample selection strategy, where five nurses are selected based on certain criteria that are relevant to this study. Selection criteria include work experience in a public university teaching hospital and being involved in daily operations that require adherence to safety procedures, as well as experience working with leaders who practice a transformational leadership style.

Purposive sampling was chosen as it allows the researcher to select participants who can provide the most meaningful and relevant information about the issue being studied. Campbell et al. (2020) stated that purposive sampling improves methodological rigor and trustworthiness of data and results, addressing four aspects of trustworthiness. A sample size of five people is considered sufficient since, in qualitative research, the depth of data is more important than quantity. Each participant provides a unique perspective, which helps the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study. The small sample size also allows the researcher to conduct a more detailed data analysis, which aligns with the Basic Qualitative Inquiry approach.

Data Analysis

This study used coding and thematic analysis to examine data from interviews and observations. Data were manually coded in Microsoft Word, following the approach suggested by Shahvaroughi et al. (2022), who noted the effectiveness of interviews in gathering detailed, context-rich information. The coding process identified the main themes from the interview transcripts, organizing data by study objectives. The thematic analysis then highlighted patterns and relationships among themes, allowing more profound insights into transformational leadership's influence on safety climate and performance.

The choice of coding and thematic analysis was ideal for this study, enabling organized, systematic data interpretation. Coding streamlined data organization, while thematic analysis helped link themes to relevant theories (Coates et al., 2021), enhancing understanding of how transformational leadership impacts workplace safety.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical protocols were strictly followed. Notably, written consent was obtained from participants, who were informed about the study's purpose, interview procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time. Furthermore, data confidentiality was ensured, and identities were encrypted. This study received approval from the university's ethics committee, adhering to strict ethical guidelines.

Data Validity and Reliability

To ensure data validity and reliability, the study employed several strategies. Data triangulation, using interviews and observations, helped confirm the consistency of findings. Member-checking allowed participants to review their interview transcripts, verifying accuracy. Additionally, the researcher reflected on personal biases to ensure objective data interpretation.

Methodological Summary

Overall, this qualitative study effectively explored transformational leadership's role in shaping safety climate and performance among nurses. A combination of interviews, observations, and rigorous data analysis provided a comprehensive view of the topic. In addition, strict ethical practices and reliability measures contribute to the study's value as a meaningful addition to existing literature.

Findings

The study's results offer insights into how transformational leadership affects the safety and performance of nurses in a university teaching hospital. Interviews with five participants revealed key themes aligned with the study's objectives, analyzed through coding and thematic analysis to identify patterns and relationships among emerging themes. Most participants acknowledged that transformational leadership is essential for workplace safety. One participant highlighted that leaders who act as role models and motivate staff encourage adherence to safety policies. Another participant noted that regular monitoring and adequate safety training from leaders enhance compliance with safety procedures. This suggests that transformational leaders, who serve as coaches and role models, can help ensure nurses work in safe conditions.

However, some participants criticized the inconsistency in enforcing safety policies. One participant observed that leaders often do not take action when procedures are violated, resulting in weak encouragement of safety compliance. Another participant highlighted that leaders prioritize work performance over safety, diminishing the perceived importance of safety. This highlights how ineffective policy enforcement by leaders can lead to a disregard for safety in the workplace. The participants also discussed challenges to implementing safety in hospitals. Two participants mentioned that high workloads and fatigue due to shift work increase the risk of injury and accidents among nurses. Another participant cited insufficient staffing as a barrier to following safety procedures, while a fourth participant noted that Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) sometimes do not align with actual working conditions, forcing nurses to compromise safety to meet job demands. Furthermore, one participant suggested that transformational leaders should recognize nurses who consistently work safely to boost motivation. Another participant supported this view, emphasizing that a firm leader who sets a good example more easily earns compliance from nurses. Combining motivation

and recognition with effective enforcement can increase safety awareness and encourage nurses to work more safely.

Overall, the study reveals that transformational leadership significantly supports workplace safety. However, policy delivery and enforcement gaps, along with work challenges like heavy workloads and fatigue, remain obstacles. The study underlines that motivation and recognition of safe practices are crucial aspects for transformational leaders to consider. Findings confirm that effective transformational leadership—which includes motivation, enforcement, and recognition—plays a key role in strengthening hospital safety culture.

Through interviews, the study identified that transformational leadership is crucial for workplace safety, as leaders who serve as role models, motivators, and enforcers encourage compliance among nurses. For instance, one participant noted that leaders who provide motivation, guidance, and effective enforcement help ensure nurses work safely. This highlights that transformational leadership promotes safety and reinforces policy compliance through decisive actions. However, some participants asserted that leaders sometimes fail to enforce safety policies adequately, resulting in a neglect of safety practices.

The study also highlights the main challenges nurses face in implementing safety measures, such as high workloads and fatigue from shift work, which increase the risk of injuries. One participant shared that a lack of manpower and the pressure to complete tasks often leads to neglected safety procedures. In this context, transformational leadership is vital to support nurses by recognizing these challenges and providing assistance to prioritize safety.

Despite the positive impact of transformational leadership, some findings were unexpected. For example, one participant noted that leadership had minimal effect in certain situations, likely due to leaders' inactivity in enforcing safety policies. Some participants also observed that leaders occasionally focus more on organizational goals than employee safety, which can lead to neglecting safety aspects. This suggests that transformational leadership needs to balance organizational objectives with employee well-being to avoid compromising safety.

In conclusion, this study confirms that transformational leadership is critical for promoting safety in the workplace, especially in complex hospital settings. Leaders who motivate, guide, and enforce safety policies can enhance adherence and reduce risks among nurses. However, for safety initiatives to succeed, it is crucial that leaders strike a balance between achieving organizational goals and prioritizing employee safety while addressing the specific challenges nurses encounter in their roles.

Conclusion

This study has provided a deep insight into the role of transformational leadership in influencing nurses' safety and work performance in a public university teaching hospital. The study results reveal that transformational leadership plays a significant role in ensuring safety in the workplace, especially through motivation, guidance, and enforcement implemented by leaders. Notably, study participants consistently emphasized that leaders who act as role models, provide motivation, and enforce safety policies can encourage higher compliance among nurses. This suggests that transformational leadership is vital in creating a strong safety culture in hospitals.

This study's findings also indicate weaknesses in the implementation of transformational leadership, especially when leaders fail to communicate and enforce security policies effectively. This weakness can lead to the neglect of safety, especially when leaders are more concerned with the achievement of organizational goals than the safety of employees. This situation poses a serious challenge as nurses often face high workloads and fatigue due to shift work, increasing the risk of injuries and accidents at work. Therefore, effective transformational leadership must include a deep understanding of these challenges and provide the necessary support to maintain employee safety.

This study significantly contributes to the field of occupational safety management and leadership, particularly in the context of the health sector. It expands the understanding of how transformational leadership can influence safety in the workplace. It emphasizes the importance of a balance between the achievement of organizational goals and employee safety. In addition, this study also highlights the significance of motivation and recognition as tools that leaders can use to increase safety awareness and ensure employees comply with safety procedures.

Overall, this study confirms that transformational leadership is key in ensuring safety in the workplace but also emphasizes that leaders need to be more sensitive to the challenges nurses face in carrying out their duties. Furthermore, the contribution of this study to the occupational safety management literature is significant as it provides guidance to hospital leaders on how a transformational approach can be applied more effectively to manage worker safety. This study also opens up space for further research, particularly in understanding how transformational leadership can be used to overcome challenges that prevent effective safety implementation in the workplace.

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