

Embodied Leadership and Management Experiences in Nursing Education: A Phenomenological Inquiry in Preparedness for Deanship Succession

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Abstract—The purpose of this study was to explore and investigate the leadership and management experiences of the participants in handling leadership and managerial roles within the academic environment for deanship succession. Additionally, the study aimed to inquire into the participants' essential qualities, skills, and competencies that contributed to their sense of preparedness for assuming leadership, managerial roles, and responsibilities in the nursing academe. This study utilized a descriptive qualitative phenomenology research design, analyzed using the thematic analysis process outlined by Braun and Clarke. The study was conducted in a school of nursing at a college or university in the Caraga Region. Findings: The thirteen transcripts yielded two hundred seventy-five (275) significant statements, forty-eight codes, thirteen (13) sub-themes, and five (5) key themes. The key themes are: 1. Perspective on Leadership Readiness; 2. Viewpoints on Essential Leadership Qualities; 3. Outlooks on Leadership Skills; 4. Perception of Competency as a Leader in Academe; 5. Attribution in Assuming Leadership Role in Nursing Academe. Based on the findings of the study, it was implied that transition into leadership roles brought significant challenges due to a lack of leadership experience before assuming the position, particularly in strategic thinking and planning, as well as monitoring and evaluation. Participants faced difficulties in balancing administrative duties and academic responsibilities during their transition period, unmeasured leadership competency, stepped into leadership roles immediately because no one else was available to replace them, and expressed an intention to step down from their roles due to the demanding nature of the responsibilities and early burnout.

Keywords: Deanship: Embodied: Leadership: Preparedness: Succession

I. INTRODUCTION

In nursing education, effective leadership is crucial for shaping the learning environment, fostering innovation, and preparing academic leaders to meet evolving challenges. Leadership in nursing education is vital for achieving excellence in learning, as it offers a clear and motivating vision for the nursing program that aligns with the institution's broader mission and operational goals set by colleges and universities (1). The transition to deanship in nursing education is a complex and multifaceted process that requires administrative and academic competence, embodied leadership where personal values, skills, and professional competencies shape leadership behaviors (2). Effective deanship succession planning is essential for sustaining institutional excellence and advancing nursing education; however, preparedness for this transition

remains a significant challenge (3). A bibliometric analysis spanning 2000 to 2023 highlights a growing body of research dedicated to these topics, reflecting their critical importance in the face of a global nursing shortage and the impending retirement of seasoned nurse leaders. There is a shift toward transformational and adaptive leadership models, where mentoring and coaching play pivotal roles in leadership succession (4).

Despite recognizing leadership succession planning as a priority, many nursing institutions lack structured programs to cultivate future deans (5). Challenges include inadequate mentorship, resistance to change, the complexity of administrative roles, and burnout, which often discourage potential successors (6). This gap typically leads to a reactive rather than proactive approach to leadership transitions, potentially compromising organizational stability and the quality of nursing education. While some colleges and universities may have a succession plan, it often applies institution-wide and may not be specific to the nursing program.

Many academic organizations recognize the value of having trained employees available for promotion into managerial and leadership positions left vacant by those who depart or are promoted to other jobs (7). Most academic nursing leaders enter their roles without formal leadership training, prior executive experience, or explicit knowledge of the ambiguities of their new role or its obligations (8). Additionally, data show that twenty percent of nursing deans are considering leaving the leadership profession amid unprecedented stress (9). The transition from one leader to another may be chaotic, and essential administrative functions may be temporarily compromised. While existing research studies have explored various leadership competencies and succession planning strategies, there is limited empirical evidence on how embodied leadership influences preparedness for deanship succession in nursing education. Most studies emphasize traditional leadership models and administrative competencies but overlook the role of self-awareness, professional identity, and emotional intelligence in leadership transitions (10).

Additionally, there is a scarcity of phenomenological inquiries that explore the lived experiences of nursing leaders transitioning into deanship positions. Thus, there is a need for phenomenological inquiries that delve into the lived experiences of nursing leaders as they transition into deanship

roles. Such studies could illuminate how personal qualities, values, emotional intelligence, skills, and professional competencies inform leadership practices during this critical career progression. Given the prevailing trends, issues, and gaps within the nursing academic landscape, this study is proposed to explore and investigate the participants' leadership and management experiences in handling leadership and managerial roles in the educational environment for deanship succession.

This study also seeks to inquire about the participants' essential qualities, skills, and competencies that contribute to their preparedness for assuming leadership, managerial roles, and responsibilities in the nursing academe, as they are an essential part and an asset to an organization's success. Insights from this research can inform policy development, leadership training programs, and mentorship initiatives that enhance succession planning in nursing academia. Furthermore, it can contribute to a more holistic approach to leadership development, ensuring that future nursing deans are administratively competent and emotionally and ethically prepared to lead institutions effectively. By exploring the lived experiences of nursing leaders, this study will provide valuable recommendations for fostering a culture of preparedness and resilience in leadership transitions, ultimately strengthening the nursing education sector (11).

II. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Nursing Education

Nursing education institutions must adopt structured leadership development and transition support programs to facilitate smooth leadership succession and ensure the effective preparation of future deans. The multifaceted challenges inherent in assuming a deanship—ranging from administrative demands and faculty oversight to policy implementation and strategic decision-making—underscore the importance of proactive training and mentorship. The findings of this study will support the establishment of a Formal Leadership Development Program designed to equip prospective deans with core competencies in governance, financial administration, institutional leadership, and academic management. Additionally, the study will inform the design and implementation of mentorship and coaching frameworks, pairing emerging leaders with experienced nursing administrators. These relationships offer critical opportunities for guidance, knowledge sharing, and the development of practical leadership strategies. Such initiatives will provide targeted support to faculty, deans, and management teams involved in leadership transitions. Additionally, the study highlights how crucial experiential learning is in getting people ready for deanship. Aspiring academic leaders should engage in administrative functions, attend leadership workshops, and participate in institutional decision-making processes to build the skills necessary for effective leadership. The study also highlights the need for continuous professional development (CPD) as a means to sustain leadership readiness. Institutions should actively support faculty in pursuing advanced leadership training, executive education, and ongoing professional learning opportunities. By incorporating these strategies,

nursing education institutions can effectively address the complexities of leadership transition, build a robust succession pipeline, and uphold the quality and continuity of nursing education programs.

Nursing Practice

To ensure a seamless transition into deanship while preserving a strong link to clinical practice, nursing education institutions must incorporate leadership development strategies that reflect the structure and demands of clinical environments. Aspiring nursing deans should be equipped with competencies in leadership, administration, and clinical decision-making to effectively bridge the gap between academia and professional nursing practice. The findings of this study provide a foundation for fostering collaborative partnerships with healthcare institutions, encouraging nursing schools to establish alliances with hospitals, clinics, and healthcare agencies. These partnerships will offer future leaders authentic leadership experiences in clinical contexts, reinforcing the academic-practice connection. The study's outcomes will also support the integration of clinical leadership training into succession planning programs. This alignment can be operationalized through the Clinical-Academic Leadership Integration Model (CALIM), a structured framework designed to synchronize clinical practice with academic leadership development. CALIM comprises three core components aimed at strengthening the integration of practical nursing experience with educational leadership growth. The first component, Experiential Leadership Rotations, places nursing faculty in clinical leadership roles to facilitate hands-on learning and enhance decision-making capabilities in real-world settings. The second, Collaborative Mentorship Programs, connects faculty with seasoned clinical leaders to develop leadership competencies and bridge the academic-practice divide. The third, Evidence-Based Leadership Training, integrates research-informed approaches and clinical insights to improve strategic and operational decision-making. By combining clinical expertise with leadership preparation, CALIM equips future nursing deans with the necessary skills to lead both academic institutions and contribute meaningfully to healthcare practice. Aligning succession programs with clinical practice ensures that future deans remain grounded in patient-centered care while fulfilling academic leadership roles. This integrative approach supports the development of nursing leaders who can effectively unify education, leadership, and practice, thereby strengthening the overall impact of the nursing profession.

Nursing Research

To ensure a successful transition into deanship while enhancing the research culture within nursing education, institutions must embed leadership development strategies that prioritize evidence-based decision-making, research advocacy, and academic scholarship. Aspiring nursing deans should be equipped with competencies in leading research initiatives, securing research funding, and fostering a scholarly environment conducive to advancing the profession. This study aims to inform the integration of research leadership training into succession planning programs. Such programs should encompass components on research management, grant

writing, ethical research conduct, and evidence-informed policy development to prepare future deans for research-driven leadership. Furthermore, the study's findings will contribute to strengthening institutional support for research development through the provision of structured mentorship, seed funding, and collaborative research opportunities. The outcomes are also expected to guide research-informed administrative practices, enabling future leaders to incorporate empirical evidence into policy formulation, curricular improvements, and strategic planning. Additionally, this research will support the cultivation of interdisciplinary and collaborative research by encouraging partnerships among academic disciplines, healthcare institutions, and research organizations. To ensure evidence-based leadership readiness, it is essential to establish validated metrics for assessing deanship competencies. This includes the development and validation of a Leadership Readiness Assessment Tool (LRAT), supported by expert evaluation and performance data. These metrics should be embedded in mentoring, coaching, and shadowing programs, incorporating 360-degree feedback mechanisms to monitor progress. Insights derived from these tools can inform curriculum design, leadership development studies, and succession planning initiatives. Ultimately, aligning deanship preparation with research priorities will better position future nursing deans to lead with a research-focused vision, foster innovation, and contribute meaningfully to the advancement of nursing science.

Nursing Administration

To facilitate a seamless transition into deanship and reinforce effective nursing administration, institutions must implement comprehensive leadership development programs that emphasize organizational management, strategic planning, financial oversight, and policy execution. Prospective nursing deans should be adequately prepared to address administrative challenges while promoting institutional advancement, faculty development, and academic excellence. This study contributes to the integration of administrative leadership training into succession planning frameworks, ensuring that future leaders acquire the necessary competencies for effective governance. Leadership preparation initiatives should encompass training in strategic planning, financial management, human resources administration, and academic policy formulation. Additionally, the findings of this study will support the enhancement of institutional governance practices and policy literacy among emerging leaders. Effective deanship requires a thorough understanding of institutional governance structures, accreditation standards, regulatory requirements, and the broader landscape of higher education policy. Moreover, this research offers critical insights into the development of financial and budgetary management capabilities, recognizing the need for skills in budgeting, resource allocation, and economic decision-making within nursing administration. Institutions are encouraged to provide targeted training in financial stewardship and resource acquisition to build fiscal leadership capacity among aspiring deans. This study also underpins the implementation of mentorship and administrative shadowing programs, which allow future deans to gain experiential knowledge by working closely with

seasoned academic leaders. Such initiatives can enhance administrative readiness and contextual understanding of nursing program operations. Additionally, the data generated will inform strategies for faculty and staff leadership development, emphasizing the dean's role in supporting professional growth, cultivating a collaborative work environment, and institutionalizing leadership succession planning. In summary, aligning deanship succession initiatives with best practices in nursing administration will equip future academic leaders to effectively manage educational operations, ensure regulatory compliance, and lead with strategic clarity and administrative competence.

III. CONCLUSION

This phenomenological investigation, conducted through the lens of embodied leadership and management, explores the challenges of deanship succession in nursing institutions. Based on the participants' actual experiences, the study identified 13 sub-themes and five main themes that together depict leadership transition as a complex and dynamic process. The results highlight the ongoing deficiency in nurse educators' formal leadership training, which frequently leads to position ambiguity, early burnout, and transitional stress. Despite these obstacles, participants showed incredible flexibility, fortitude, and dedication, demonstrating leadership as a professional duty as well as a personal development path.

The Adaptive Leadership Theory offered a critical perspective that helped participants understand their coping strategies, which included reflective practice, emotional control, mentoring, and teamwork. In the lack of formal support networks, these tactics were essential for managing interpersonal dynamics and institutional expectations. Fundamental leadership qualities like empathy, honesty, and inclusivity have been shown to be essential for both efficient administration and fostering learning environments that promote teacher growth and student achievement. The study also emphasizes how crucial time management, feedback, and ongoing education are to fostering institutional progress and strengthening leadership competency.

Deliberate planning, continuous mentoring, and institutional dedication to leadership development are ultimately necessary for the achievement of deanship succession. Nursing institutions may develop future leaders who are not only equipped to handle administrative difficulties but also have the capacity to inspire revolutionary change by investing in formal competency evaluation, structured training, and support systems. This study promotes a holistic rethinking of nursing education's leadership paths, incorporating professional development, strategic foresight, and emotional intelligence into the foundation of academic leadership succession.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research would not have been possible without the invaluable support, guidance, and encouragement of numerous individuals whose contributions have deeply shaped this academic journey. The researcher extends heartfelt gratitude to the research mentor, whose insightful guidance, expert advice,

and steadfast support were instrumental in the successful completion of this study. Sincere appreciation is also extended to the chairperson and scientific panel members, whose expertise, constructive feedback, and academic rigor greatly enhanced the quality and depth of this research. The researcher is especially grateful to the thirteen participants who generously shared their lived experiences of embodied leadership and management in nursing education, offering critical insights into preparedness for deanship succession. Profound thanks go to the researcher's family, whose love, understanding, and unwavering support—both moral and financial—served as a source of strength and inspiration throughout this endeavor. Gratitude is also offered to those who, through their prayers, encouragement, and quiet acts of kindness, reminded the researcher of the value of perseverance and purpose. Above all, deepest thanks are given to God, our Divine Provider, and to the Blessed Virgin Mary for their guidance, wisdom, and unceasing blessings, without which this journey would not have been possible.

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