Followers and the co-construction of leadership

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Funded by:

The Queens Nursing Institute Scotland (QNIS)
The study: Leadership in Community Nursing

Aim: To identify how leadership is perceived and experienced by community nurses and to examine the interaction between recent policy and leadership development in community nursing.

Methods: qualitative interviews & focus groups

Data analysis: qualitative, generating themes reflecting patterns and processes (Charmaz 2006, Bryman & Burgess 1994), NVivo 8

Sample:
- Community nurses in 3 Health Board areas in Scotland (urban, semi urban/ semi rural, remote)
- 31 individual interviews
- 3 focus groups
- N=39 participants

Ethics: approved by Local Research Ethics Committees (Multi-site).
# Overall qualification distribution across sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Qualification</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District Community Nurse (DN)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Staff Nurse (CSN)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Visitor (HV)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Nurses (SN)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery Nurses (NN)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care Assistant (HCA)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acute Care Manager for Community Sector</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Nursing Director (AND)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Nursing (ND)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Gender distribution: 3 males, 36 female participants
### Band distribution of participants across sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bands*</th>
<th>Health Board 1</th>
<th>Health Board 2</th>
<th>Health Board 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Band 2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band 4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band 5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band 6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band 7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band 8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive level</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Bands refer to qualification levels of the workforce, for example, Band 5 is a Community Staff Nurse while Band 8 is Lead Nurse level.
### Years of experience of working in community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean years</th>
<th>Range (years)</th>
<th>No of respondents with &gt;10 years’ experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years in current community position (n=37)*</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>1 to 26</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years qualified as a nurse (n=35)**</td>
<td>25.85</td>
<td>5 to 38</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of experience in community nursing (n=33)**</td>
<td>15.37</td>
<td>2.5 to 30</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Exclusion of NDs   ** Exclusion of NNs and HCAs  *** Exclusion of NDs, NNs and HCAs
Following the leader?!
Followership & Followers

“The power of leaders is a consequence of the actions of followers rather than a cause of it.”

(Grint, 2005:38)

“Our tendency to credit successful events to leaders obscures the significant contributions of followers.”

(Yukl, 2010:252)
Findings

‘Following’ is a process and presented as a major theme of leadership.

Dimension of following:

1. Socially co-constructing leaders
2. Doing following
3. Standing by
4. Resisting following

These dimensions illuminate the processes by which followers co-constructed leadership.
Finding: Socially co-constructing leaders

I: Can you recognise a leader?

District Nurse 3.4: “Not initially. I would think it was something that you would – you would have to be working with someone for a while before you would recognise I think that your team was running well. [ ] When I started in here, I thought, this team works really well. [ ] But then of course when you’re in for a wee while, you start to think to yourself, hmm, you know, she doesn’t really listen to anyone else’s opinion or, hang on, she definitely has her way of doing things and things like that.

So when you kind of come in – but then again, you can come out the other side of that and think, well actually although maybe you think she doesn’t listen to other people’s opinions, she does take on board what’s going on round about her and things are – things do change from what’s going on”.

- ‘Following’ is an active process which is based on the perception of leaders by followers and is influencing followers’ behavior towards leaders.
Finding: Socially co-constructing leaders

Leaders were aware that they were being judged:

Team Leader 1.2: “But to actually be a good leader, I think you’ve got to try and inspire people to follow you and take – follow your lead and not just because it’s policies and it’s protocols, it’s because they actually think: ‘yeah, this is really great idea, this’ll work really.’”
Finding: Doing following

District Nurse 2.4: “Well, somebody who’s competent and you can trust and you know that they’re talking sense (LAUGHS). Cos I will not follow a numpty (LAUGHS).”

Later...

“So – we try – well, I try and support her in that and say: well, I can do this meeting or come with you, you know, just to – for familiarization because – [ ] It all takes time, doesn’t it?” (DN 2.4).
Finding: Standing by

District Nurse 1.4: “I’m quite a - I am definitely a – like a follower rather than a leader. I’ll do any amount of work but I just need somebody there doing that kinda organising to get me into it. [ ] It’s just not my nature to kinda push myself forward.”

- Kellerman (2008) describes passive followers as ‘bystanders’ who observe but do not participate and are disengaged from leaders.

- Disengagement is problematic ➔ no constructive feedback for leaders or co-workers
Finding: Resisting following

Team Leader 1.1: “Well, when I came to the job, I thought being a sort of manager, I could ask folk, tell folk, suggest to folk that they do things they were doing but it doesn’t happen. People just don’t do things.”

- The experiences of power asymmetries are a two-way process and the notion that leaders hold all the power is counterintuitive (Bratton et al 2005).

- Resistance might follow if the change suggested is not in line with the values and beliefs of nurses suggest a self-interest of followers!
Key points

- Following is a complex process which is based on followers socially co-constructed views on leaders.
- Following (or not following) is an active decision by followers.
- Leadership and followership are interdependent concepts.
- Successful leadership is the result of a co-constructed process between leaders and followers.
- Future leadership research has to pay attention to followership and how followers do following.
...and finally

Thank you for your attention!

Any questions?