

Research article

CLINICAL PROCESS IMPROVEMENT PROJECT IN MEDICAL CENTERS

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Abstract

The study has designed a project for an improvement program on leadership for project implementation focusing on the use of Leader-Member exchange. The study discussed project leadership, leadership styles, and characteristics of great leadership. The leader-member exchange was also expunged adequately while making cases for job satisfaction, commitment, and employee work attitude. Productivity in leader-member exchanges was also discussed while the strengths and weaknesses of the LMX were also looked at. Recommendations were made for changes in the organization based on inputs from the literatures examined. \

Keywords: Leadership; Medical Centers; Exploratory Research; Clinical Process; Productivity; Organization; Human Resources



Introduction

The Joint Accreditation Healthcare Commission (JAHCO) has challenged all hospitals in the United States to radically transform the health care system and related policy environment in order to close the differences between what is good quality care and what actually exists in practice.” In order to meet this challenge, hospitals must examine, evaluate, and redesign their clinical processes to meet the set standard of the JAHCO and other regulatory standards.

The failure of a Six Sigma embarked upon by the quality management department of the hospital. The Black belt champion and the project leader were taken off the team and a new team named the “Organizational Clinical Effectiveness Group (OCEG)” was set up to embark on the Clinical process improvement project. As a result, it has been indicated that the areas of assessment for the project are patient flow, work flow, care delivery options, clinical documentation, timeliness of options, post-discharge care, regulatory requirement interpretation, admission and intake, coordination of service process, materials data availability, physician satisfaction, care continuum, quality improvement, utilization management, access to care, time between triages, medical errors and patient satisfaction. The gap in the organization apart from the leadership style in place revolves around role conflict, role ambiguity, and job satisfaction for employees.

Methodology

This is an exploratory research with the objective of designing an improvement program on leadership for project implementation which focuses on the use of the Leader-Member exchange. Information was gathered mainly through secondary data with the use of both traditional and computer-based leadership and health care literature. Also, information for this research was obtained from the analysis of historical and current issues, trends, and insight to the managed care in United States.

Literature Review

What is Leadership?

Leadership is the process whereby one individual influences other group members toward the attainment of defined group or organizational goals and a leader is an individual within a group or an organization who wields the most influence over others. From the definition, it can be deduced that leadership involves non-coercive influence, influence is goal directed, and leadership requires followers.



Baghai and Quigley (2012) noted that leadership is about productivity, people, and purpose which they refer to as collective leadership. Their definition posits that leadership that results in a cohesive group of people working together effectively toward a common goal or purpose. Similarly, it has been asserted that a leader has to implement a personal agenda, and the organizational agenda. Since the process of leadership cannot be differentiated from the individual leader, a leader must be equipped with character, charisma, a switching mindset, and technical know-how (Lee & Liu, 2011).

Lee and Liu (2011) added that transformation is about leaders and followers intending to pursue real changes actively. Leadership is not about maintaining the status quo; it is about initiating change in an organization instead. Yang, Huang, and Wu (2011) in a study of the association of leadership style and project success posited that some project managers develop particular leadership behaviors in an attempt to improve the performance of a project and that since the benefits of leadership behavior can be rather intangible, this has slowed or prevented the implementation of leadership theories.

Buchanan (2012) added that the new leader must be adaptive, emotionally intelligent, charismatic, authentic, level five (5), mindful, narcissistic, no-excuse, servant, storytelling, strengths-based, and tribal. While some of the attributes can be questioned, the features of being adaptive, charismatic, authentic, and emotionally intelligent stood out from the group. From a project management standpoint, a project manager that intends to be successful must have the features pointed out.

Greenberg and Baron (2008) analyzed leadership from the trait approach perception which uses the great person theory that leaders possess special traits that set them apart from others, and that these traits are responsible for their assuming positions of power and authority. They added that leaders with the traits are characterized by their focus on morality, multiple domains of intelligence, flexibility, and motivation.

Leadership Styles

Looking at leadership, there are numerous styles and theories that have been researched over the years starting with the great man theory, moving to the trait theories, then to behavioral leadership theories, participatory leadership, contingency, situational leadership, transactional leadership and transformational leadership theories. There are no agreements on what styles are the best when we discuss project leadership; it is also safe to say an integration of all leadership styles is the best practice.



Chuang, Judge, and Liaw (2011) defined transformational leaders as people who are pushing employees to develop innovative ideas, behaving in admirable ways that engender identification and loyalty from followers, presenting a compelling and inspiring vision to followers, recognizing the growth needs of each follower, and listening to and coaching each follower. While examinations about the effects of transformational leadership on individual or organizational outcomes are fruitful, there has been less focus on whether these effects are bounded because of its lack of moderators.

Issues such as negative affectivity which can impact employee job satisfaction, employee performance which can always affect customer satisfaction and retention, and employee amplification of positive emotions are not discussed at length. Parelcha, Spangler, and Yammarino (2011) in their study of transformational leadership and nurturant task leadership styles positively predict that both styles will result in subordinate performance.

Gastil (1994) discussed the dynamics of democratic leadership which encompasses discussion, debate, and sharing of ideas and encouragement of people to feel good about their involvement. This style of project leadership resounds around distributing responsibility, team empowerment, aiding deliberation, distribution of leadership, and its workability in a democratic setting.

Transactional leadership theories are all founded on the idea that leader-follower relations are based on a series of exchanges or implicit bargains between leaders and followers (Den Hartog, Van Muijen & Koopman, 1997). The general notion is that, when the job and the environment of the follower fail to provide the necessary motivation, direction and satisfaction, the leader, through his or her behavior, will be effective by compensating for the deficiencies. A variant of this theory is the leader-member exchange type.

An unpopular leadership style in project management is the authoritarian style. Authoritarians use threats and punishments to motivate workers, create an organizational climate based on fear and distrust, make most decisions themselves, and ignore subordinates' ideas (Smither, 1991). They disregard information that comes from the workers, choosing instead to rely on their own judgments of situations.

Characteristics of Great Leadership

For this section of the reviewed literature, the characteristics of great leadership will be motivation, collaboration, and flexibility.

Leadership is the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the (groups) of which they are members (Schaffer, 2008). Leadership motivation is the



desire to influence others, especially towards the attainment of shared goals. Without being able to motivate followers, it is unlikely that managers or supervisors (leaders of the organization) can be successful (Schaffer, 2008). Rahm (2012) added that motivation requires consistency, encouragement, competitiveness, cajoling, humor and, ability to push people all rounded as a factor.

Collaboration is a synergistic work environment wherein multiple parties must work together toward the enhancement of management practices and processes. Van Vactor (2012) discussed collaborative leadership using the healthcare sector for his explanation. He asserted that leadership exists within relationships that are present throughout an organization through encouraging a collaborative environment that promotes an ongoing integration of ideas and interdependency among multiple stakeholders throughout an organization.

Flexibility is a major characteristic of good leadership. Flexibility refers to the ability of the leaders to recognize what actions are required in a given situation and then to act accordingly (Greenberg & Baron, 2008). Most effective leaders are not prone to behave in the same ways all the time, but to be adaptive, matching their style to the needs of followers and the demands of the situation they face as evidence as shown.

Leader Member Exchange Leadership Style

The leader-member exchange (LMX) which focuses on increasing organizational success by creating positive relations between the leader and subordinate is a popular leadership style in the health care administration. As a result of the nature and volume of the project, every member of the project must show some sign of loyalty, relationship exchanges, termed contribution and affect towards the objectives of the project: success. LMX leadership theory's main focus is to diagnose this relationship so a higher quality can be developed in this relationship, enabling improved performance (Dae-Seok & Stewart, 2007).

Leader-member exchange theory describes the quality of relationships between leaders and their followers. According to this theory, certain subordinates are chosen because of competence and skill, extent to which they can be trusted (especially when not being watched by the supervisor), and motivation to assume greater responsibility within the unit are given preferential treatment by the leader (Farahbod, Azadehdel, Rezaei-Dizgah & Nezhadi-Jirdehi, 2012).

Gandolfo (2006) added that the type of relationship that develops between the leader and follower has been shown to affect an employee's level of organizational commitment, job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and



employee performance. The leader can gain power by being a member of his or her manager's inner circle, which the leader can then share with subordinates.

Satisfaction of both parties in the Exchange

This section of the paper focuses on the satisfaction of parties to the exchange. While the concept of LMX has been studied by many researchers, there have been few studies regarding the impact of LMX on employee job satisfaction and employee turnover.

Mardanov, Sterrett, and Baker (2007) used the LMX model and the Minnesota Job Satisfaction questionnaire to determine member satisfaction with the supervisor and member job satisfaction in the high-turnover restaurant industry while using employee affect, loyalty, contribution and, professional respect as their measures in their analysis of job satisfaction from the dyadic perception of intrinsic and extrinsic measures of job satisfaction. While their study depicted a strong bond in the exchange, the picture being painted is an incomplete one.

Ariani (2012) examined the relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) and its relationship with job satisfaction and affective organizational commitment and to test empirically whether relationship between job satisfaction and affective organizational commitment is mediated by LMX. In summary, the results of the study indicate that job satisfaction, affective organizational commitment, and LMX can become the mediating variable one-by-one.

Dockery and Steiner (1990) employed a correlational-design laboratory study to examine the initial-interaction component of the LMX. Correlation results supported the relation between the leaders-assessed LMX and the leader-assessed independent variables of liking, ability, ingratiation, and rationality while the subsequent regression results yielded only liking and ability as consistently significant predictors of LMX. They concluded that supervisors should be aware of the importance of the initial-interaction and should be encouraged to structure initial interactions with new group members accordingly.

Leaders need to be sensitive about their assessment of their employees and ensure that it is accurate and fair (Othman, Foo, & Ng, 2010). Leaders need to be cognizant that high quality exchange developed based on flawed assessment is likely to be perceived as injustice.



Work attitudes and Employee Commitment in LMX

Building on the last section on job satisfaction in the LMX model is the work attitude in the exchange. The LMX theory states that leaders develop different kinds of relationship with different subordinates within work groups and therefore they exhibit different styles of leadership.

Ansari, Hung, and Aafaqi (2007) built on the fair exchange in leadership notion by hypothesizing that the mediating impact of procedural justice climate on the relationship between the LMX and two attitudinal outcomes: organizational commitment and turnover intentions. Fairness exchange has been conceptualized as either procedural or distributive and that employee will only thrive in a positive exchange and will suffer in a negative climate.

The procedural will impact on attitudes such as commitment and management trust and the distributive will impact on pay satisfaction. Ansari, Hung, and Aafaqi (2007) also added that managers need to recognize the importance of developing high exchange quality with their subordinates, which will lead to positive climate – thus leading to favorable attitudes. In addition, the study indicates that justice climate can meaningfully influence affective and normative commitment – thus discouraging turnover intentions. In conclusion, management needs to pay attention to the quality of LMX, as today's employees look for mutual trust.

Schyns and Wolfram (2008) also in their study examined the relationship between LMX and different outcomes (job satisfaction, affective commitment, organizational self-efficacy, irritation, and performance). On the surface level, the results obtained for the relationship between LMX and outcomes appear to argue for same-source bias rather than for an actual relationship between LMX and outcomes.

Landry and Vandenberghe (2009) in their discussion of employee commitment in the LMX found affective commitment was negatively related to both types of conflicts; perceived lack of alternatives commitment was positively related to relationship conflicts; and leader–member exchange was negatively related to substantive conflicts while supervisor-based self-esteem was negatively associated with both types of conflicts.

Bhal and Ansari (2007) explore, deriving from social exchange theory, the process paths between leader-member exchange (LMX), and subordinate outcomes (satisfaction and commitment). The LMX theory was conceptualized as contribution and affect which incorporated justice perceptions through voice mechanisms and, LMX leads to distributive justice through procedural justice. While it was noted that procedural justice does not determine satisfaction directly; however, it does directly influence commitment. Additionally, on the discussion of



work attitudes, the quality of the LMX was questioned on leader empathy, ethical leadership, and relations-oriented behaviors as relevant for effective leadership.

Mahsud, Yukl, and Prussia (2009) posited that the LMX theory does not provide a clear explanation of the causal relationships between LMX and specific types of leadership behavior. Their study noted that analyses based solely on a composite score for a construct with very diverse components can mask important relationships and make interpretation of results difficult. Less reliance on vague constructs in the future will improve both theory development and empirical research on effective leadership.

Understanding Productivity in LMX

The topic of performance and productivity is relatively under-examined by scholars. Given the widely held belief that situational factors moderate leadership influences in a LMX, it does not only make sense that there is a link in performance, productivity, and LMX but can open a new lead to understanding role ambiguity, role conflict, and employee task satisfaction (Terziovski, 2006).

Dunegan, Uhl-Bien, and Duchon (2002) predicted for their study that role conflict, role ambiguity, and intrinsic task satisfaction will moderate the relationship between LMX and performance such that a stronger relationship will be found when role conflict and role ambiguity are low and intrinsic task satisfaction is high which will hinder employees from translating ability and motivation into performance.

Fogelholm and Bescherer (2006) presented framework for identifying, analyzing, and evaluating performance objectives in the process industry. In any industry performance improvement is achieved through a combination of systematic performance analysis and organizational interventions. Song (2006) also added that the value of a performance improvement intervention is highly dependent on the accuracy of the information used for its preparation.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the LMX

The strengths of the LMX theory are that the exchanges have been well documented showing that the impact of LMX quality on outcomes is established with developmental variables identified (Burns & Otte, 1999). As a descriptive theory, it notes the importance of the existence of in-groups and out-groups within an organization.

The LMX theory is unique as the only leadership theory that makes the dyadic relationship the central factor of the leadership process. LMX directs our attention to the importance of leadership communication and



relationships. Research substantiates how the practice of the LMX theory is related to positive organizational outcomes. Its weaknesses are the limited generalizability of the theory, lack of standard model of the dimensionality of the LMX, ignorance of the developmental process and, unproven measurement instruments (Burns & Otte, 1999). The LMX theory runs counter to basic human belief in fairness: It gives the appearance of discrimination against groups that don't receive the special attention.

The basic ideas and theory are not fully developed: details of compatibility of personality, interpersonal skills, how trust is developed, etc., are not presented or discussed how important they are compared to other constructs. Few empirical studies have used dyadic measures to analyze the LMX process. Measurement scales lack content validity (may lack what they intended to measure) and unclear whether they measure single or many dimensions.

Recommended Changes

Research on the leader-member exchange indicates that there is an exchange gap in the relationship in the healthcare organization. The area of recommended change will be in creating a plan or program that corrects role conflict, role ambiguity, and create job satisfaction. The need for change becomes evident when there is a gap between organization, divisions, function or individual performance objectives, and actual performance objectives, and actual performance in an organization (Plessis, Beaver & Nel, 2006)

Stone (2008) suggested that indicators such as changes in total net profit, sales per employee, labor cost, and accident rate et al. can usually identify performance deficiencies. This in turn reflects the organization's inability to phase out strategies, policies and, businesses that are no longer relevant whilst creating new activities, products, services and, strategies to sustain performance, relevance, and success.

The human resources manager will have to improve the balance between the competing demands of managing current performance, attitudes, and patterns of thinking. Human resource managers should conduct leadership training to all the employees in the organization.

The training should encompass the importance of a mentoring program, human relations, interpersonal communication, and career planning. For the success of the organizational projects, programs such as team building, group interaction, employee performance competition, two-way feedback process from leaders and members, and, re-echoing the organizational culture.



Conclusion

The paper suggests that the quality of exchange relationships affects subordinates' commitment, employee job satisfaction, performance, work attitudes, and good will. Since the LMX style is linked with employee motivation (Emanuel, 2012) (Van Vactor, 2012), turnover, commitment (Landry & Vandenberghe, 2009) (Ariani, 2012), performance (Fogelholm & Beschere, 2006), productivity (Song, 2006), and job satisfaction (Terziovski, 2006) (Mardanov, Sterrett & Baker, 2007), it is important for organizations to initiate sound developmental programs in order to attain business success.

Human resource management can contribute to change management and project success in organizations by preaching a rich set of change management principles and practices from the beginning of the hiring process. Levasseur (2010) recommended that implementation of change management should begin on Day 1, involve people affected by change in the process, two-way communication is essential, collaboration is the key, and that attendance of change meeting does not mean agreement.

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