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Change Management Challenges in Nursing and Midwifery Schools: A qualitative study of managerial experiences

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to explain the situation and perspectives of managers regarding change in nursing and midwifery faculties. This study was conducted according to a qualitative approach; in fact, a descriptive exploratory approach was applied with triangulation. Snow ball sampling was used in this study. The subjects were faculty members of the nursing schools in Tehran, and the inclusion criteria included at least 1 year of experience as a faculty member. In the qualitative phase, no variables were measured. Data were gathered by semi-structured interviews in which a guide and field notes were used. Data were considered to be saturated after observing the repetition of codes. Qualitative conventional content analysis was used for data analysis. Trustworthiness was achieved by prolonged field experience, member check, peer check and sharing the content with two experts in qualitative research. Ten participants (7 females and 3 males) between the ages of 38 and 54 were interviewed. Two of them had Master's degrees, and eight had PhD degrees in nursing; only three of them were in high-level management of their faculties. After the interviews, conceptual codes were extracted, and a few suggested themes were classified, including challenges in change management, such as field of concentration in management, managers' characteristics and attitudes toward change. Accordingly, the concept of change management was postulated as the purpose of this study; furthermore, its influencing factors were identified. The implication of the study is that it may be used in nursing and midwifery faculties as a model for organizational culture. Imposing change in an educational organization without having a proper model of change management will facilitate the achievement of the desired change outcome.

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1. Introduction

“Nothing is stable except change itself” (Ellis & Hartley, 2008). The greatest problem every organization faces today is change and transformation, which makes change management one of the most important issues of management (Carnall, 2001; Masoudi et al., 2012). On the other hand, adoption of change and realization of transformation are the most important factors in the survival and further development of a person or an organization because an organization is a subsystem of a social system and of the large-scale global system. While the whole system is in the process of change and development, the subsystems have no choice but to adapt and adjust themselves to the transformation of the larger system (Sohrabi, 2009). Therefore, today, managers face the fundamental issue of organizational improvement and constantly deal with the issue of change (Robbins, 2007).

In fact, the interests of an organization somehow lead to the fundamental reconsideration of issues within itself, which will affect its values, presumptions and attitudes in such a way that it can adjust and coordinate itself to rapid change. The term organizational improvement refers to the improvement and development of potential within an organization to the extent that it reaches and maintains its optimum level of function. Organizational improvement is a constant process of problem solving, which requires cooperation among its members and experts of behavioral sciences. According to the principles of organizational improvement, there is always room for further improvement and development even for organizations functioning at their optimum level (Drucker, 1999).

Taking into account that the adoption of change is a necessity for organizational improvement

and that it means transformation of the activities and structure of a system (Carnall, 2001), employing objective knowledge and skills in making planned changes is unavoidable. As nursing and midwifery schools are scientific environments and the faculty members are knowledgeable and well informed, faculty members can cooperate in being exemplary models of change managers and lead their organizations towards the achievement of their goals (Zerwekh & Claborn, 2009).

In fact, organizational improvement is a process brought about through planned change. Planned change includes all aspects of an organization, namely the structure of the organization and its management processes as well as its programming and communications. The purpose of planned change is the realization of effective change in the organization as a whole or in parts of it, and/or in its temporary subsystems, such as committees, etc. Moreover, following planned change, an educational organization transforms into a learning organization, and its academic members promote the organization through learning.

Managers can be called the agents of change, as they are responsible for creating an optimal physical and intellectual environment for their employees who strive to reach their personal and organizational goals by employing their capabilities in a harmonious situation. Managers should create change by controlling, affecting and providing facilities. Any change, limited or comprehensive, has to be accurately planned and established through a process to be predictable. Therefore, to make changes in an educational organization, such as a nursing and midwifery school, there has to be a model that enables the manager to lead the planned change (Baly, 1994).

Change management is essential for making changes. Effective change management should be based on a profound understanding of an organization's nature as a system, interactions within its structure, and processes of activities and culture (Shokati A, 2012). The basis of change is to make the educational system dynamic, which itself requires the behavioral dynamism of its participants. It should be noted that differences in the educational systems of various countries at different periods of time impose different types of change (Shirazi, 1994).

Change is a permanent, dynamic and systematic process requiring knowledge, participation and cooperation. In fact, the change process does not have a beginning or end and is not linear; it has a rotational mode. Paying attention to the viewpoints of beneficiaries and those people who are most affected by change is especially important. Because change is an act of making them feel self-confident, respected

and honored for their human dignity, their resistance toward change will be minimized. Therefore, the conscious participation of the employees, students and scholars of an organization in different phases of change is essential. Accordingly, change management in organizations, in general, and faculties, in particular, seems necessary to promote the learning environment and transform the organization into an improved source of scientific advancement, innovation and skills. The establishment of planned change involves all aspects of an organization, and it is realized by revision, learning and promotion.

2. Material and Methods

In this qualitative study, the triangulation method was applied. Accordingly, the details of variables were collected and used for the description and assessment of specific situations and activities. Outlooks, viewpoints and facts were the variables collected by interviews or questionnaires (LoBiondo – Wood & Haber, 2006). The triangulation method was applied as described previously (Strubert & Carpenter, 2007), and determine the final phrases and indicators of the change management model, the methodological approach was also utilized (LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 2006; Sheikholeslami et al., 2012). The population of this study included faculty members and staff of Type 1 Nursing and Midwifery schools affiliated with the Ministry of Health and Medical Education in Tehran, and the sample population was selected according to the snow ball method of sampling.

Inclusion criteria for faculty members were at least 1 year of experience as a faculty member and being in low, middle or high managerial positions in nursing and midwifery faculties, and for employees, at least two years of work experience in the faculties. In phase I, data were gathered from faculty members and employees through semi-structured interviews and focus groups with the subjects. During the interviews and meetings, interview guides and field notes were used. Then, content analyses of the interviews were performed to pinpoint the views and outlooks of the participants.

Managers were visited one-by-one, the necessary explanations regarding the study and their cooperation were presented and an appointment made for a follow-up interview in their workplace. In addition, after coordinating with the faculty administration and the employees regarding the appropriate times, a group interview with the employees was carried out. Moreover, during the interview sessions and after introducing and explaining the goals of the research, emphasizing the confidentiality of the data and obtaining their informed consent, the researcher held audio recorded

group or individual interviews. Then, the recorded interviews were listened to several times, and the data were transcribed completely. The transcribed data were typed, and their accuracy checked again with the recorded data, enabling the researcher to organise the results.

After this phase, the transcribed data served as the data source for the analysis in the present study. Conventional content analysis was used to analyse the data. At the beginning of content analysis, the conceptual units were distinguished, and then the relevant codes were extracted and categorised according to their similarities. The subcategories were identified with data saturation, and, finally, the main concepts were determined. This process is still being reviewed, and the codes are being revised. In addition to the sessions with the supervisors, researchers shared the study with 2 other persons with PhD degrees in nursing, a professor experienced in qualitative research and 2 PhD graduates in nursing, and the researchers have been in constant contact with all of them by email. The researchers drew upon their viewpoints in interviews and data analysis. Accordingly, necessary changes and adjustments were made in interviews, and some codes, divisions and subdivisions were omitted or added.

The validity and reliability of the study have been based on 4 key factors: credibility, dependability, conformability and transferability. Credibility means that the transcription of the interviews is acceptable to the participants. In this study, the continuous involvement of the subject matter, the gathered data, the modifications suggested by the supervisor regarding the process and the analysis of interviews and extracted data were all taken into account. Moreover, the content of the interviews, the extracted codes and subdivisions were discussed with a few participants and 2 PhD nursing graduates, and their viewpoints were also taken into account.

Several methods were combined and applied in data gathering (individual interviews, group interviews and field notes), and two types of locations were also used (nursing and midwifery schools). In selecting the samples, there has been an attempt to consider a variety of groups, i.e., managers from different managerial levels (lower, middle and higher) and employees with different positions, responsibilities and work experiences (Strubert & Carpenter, 2007; Boswell & Cannon, 2007; Adib Haj Baqeri et al., 2007). To achieve consistency, there was an attempt to combine data gathering methods (Strubert & Carpenter, 2007; Boswell & Cannon, 2007). For verifiability, all of the activities, including different phases of activities and the quality of

gathered data, were carefully recorded (Strubert & Carpenter, 2007). And finally, to achieve transmissibility of the research findings, there was an attempt to discuss the obtained information with 4 persons who had the same positions as the participants in the research (Strubert & Carpenter, 2007).

3. Results

Ten participants (7 females and 3 males) between the ages of 38 and 54 were interviewed. 8 had PhD degrees in nursing, and 2 had MS degrees in nursing. Participants held lower, 3 held middle and 3 held higher levels of managerial positions. 7 participants in the study had also participated in change management committees.

The text of the interviews was analysed by the Qualitative Content Analysis method (Polit & Beck, 2006), (Graneheim & Landman, 2004), and their conceptual codes were extracted and classified under the main headings and divided into categories explaining the main concepts of the headings. To explain the main concepts clearly, the expressions used by the participants are presented, which confirm the selection of the main headings. The resulting three main concepts related to the challenges of change management include the centralization level of management, which is classified under *external environment*, the role and characteristics of the manager, classified under *managerial factors*, and attitude, which is classified under *organizational factors*.

Centralization level of management:

The participants of the present research generally believed that the centralization level of the management in nursing and midwifery schools could be a restrictive factor in adopting change management models. For instance, a participant said in an interview:

“Changes occur in educational organizations. As our educational system is centralized, changes depend on the decisions of the higher managerial levels, and if an educational organization intends to adopt innovative changes, it is restricted by the centralized system.” (Lower managerial level, 2 years of managerial experience).

Another participant said:

“Another existing obstacle is the central organization or higher managerial level itself from which our nursing and midwifery schools receive orders. The faculties obey orders of the university, and the university obeys orders from the ministry; this means that the faculty cannot make decisions by itself.” (Middle managerial level, 4 years of managerial experience).

Regarding the regulations, the participants said:

“Apparently, these circulars are creating change. Neither I nor others believe in these regulations, as they are short-term or formal, and we keep up appearances. Changes will not get internalised easily. Many years should pass, they should be proved and adopted by others and, then they become standard. When normalised, although proved, it still is not a change; it is not more than an instruction and is just a procedural change.” (Lower managerial level, 8 years of managerial experience).

“I do not consider the implementation of regulations as a change... Managers and responsible persons of the faculties should have independence in decision making so that they can access the facilities that the faculties require. In my opinion, change cannot be adopted without system decentralization and solving the problem of independence.” (Higher managerial level, 20 years of managerial experience).

The role and characteristics of a manager

The participants in the study specifically emphasized the role and characteristics of higher-level managers in leading change management. Some views of the participants in this regard are mentioned below:

“If the higher-level manager himself believes in adoption of changes and innovations, he/she will welcome the change management and may even apply the new ideas.” (Lower managerial level, PhD, 8 years of managerial experience).

“...if the senior manager believes in adopting change and supports it, he/she will make the change a success.” (Lower managerial level, MS, 8 years of managerial experience).

Changes in attitude

Regarding changes in attitude, the participants expressed views that can play an important role in change management. A few examples of the views are presented below:

“The attitudes, ideas, beliefs and approaches have not changed so far. We want to change the structure and system, but the infrastructures are still not ready”. (Lower managerial level, PhD, 8 years of managerial experience).

“Changing anything requires wisdom, optimism and risk-taking... People need to feel the necessity of change with their entire being.” (Lower managerial level, 1 year of managerial experience).
 “No one can urge a professor to teach according to circulars, which means that the professor should believe in and be optimistic about the new methods of teaching.” (Higher managerial level, 20 years of managerial experience).

4. Discussions

Change means transforming from one condition to another, and it is the process of transforming attitudes, views, goals and behaviors, as

well as other individual and organizational characteristics (A group of management scholars, 2000). The purpose of change management is to keep employees and the whole organization prepared for learning and constant improvement. Change management thinks of the future (Management Total site, 2009).

The results of this study showed that taking advantage of a model for change management is a complex process in which leadership; management, human resources training and provision of facilities are important factors. There are several obstacles to applying change management. The main obstacle is the centralized system of management. In 2004, Stroh, in his studies, indicated the importance of the strategy adopted for applying change in an organization. The application of a certain types of change strategy becomes very effective when it is related to the employees of an organization and results in the formation of improved internal and external communication in the management of an organization.

According to Stroh’s studies, when facing environmental changes, organizations need to communicate more effectively. In this regard, they have to take advantage of communication management in applying changes, which leads to the formation of a new attitude toward change in the organization. In structural changes, such an attitude has special goals and is fully controlled by change management, which reduces resistance, supports innovations and facilitates the process of change. Moreover, he points to the importance of freedom in decision making, which, in a way, refers to the decentralization of the faculties.

Another challenge in the adoption of a model for change management in faculties is the role and characteristics of the manager. In this regard, Andrews and his colleagues (2008), in their qualitative study, reviewed the change management experiences of managers in educational organizations. Their results emphasized the importance of the individual and organizational attitudes, skills and knowledge of managers in change management that affect the adoption of change strategy by the managers and could lead to positive or negative results. Considering the studies of Andrews and colleagues and the present study, it is evident that the risk-taking and change-initiating characteristics of a manager are especially important and can turn him/her into a pioneer that makes changes by applying change management.

Finally, the third challenge to which the present study points is the change in the attitude of managers and their subordinates who need to believe in change and become optimistic about the results.

Martin (2002), in his qualitative study, "Adjustment of employees to the changes in their organization," investigated the adaptation process employees experience during changes in their organization. He presented and examined a model of change adoption that confirmed the importance of the role of employees in the process of change. His study was designed to achieve a theoretical understanding of the adjustment of employees to the process of change in an organization.

He also wanted to determine the difference of understanding from their environment as subordinates and the level of adaptation indicators. Besides, the process of appointing change managers of an organization was determined through examining the practical values of experiential findings. In general, the final model indicated that having a positive understanding of their manager, feeling supported by him and having a positive understanding of change all bring about a better adjustment of individuals to the changes occurring in the organization where environmental factors have direct and indirect effects.

Finally, it should be acknowledged that, to adopt an appropriate model and strategy for change in an organization, a full understanding of the organization and its components is necessary. For this purpose, the concept of change management has been developed to facilitate making changes in an organization by identifying factors that affect the process of change.

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