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Will Brown Jr.
Walden University

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Exploring the Impact of Shared Leadership Styles and Nonprofit Performance

Will Brown, Jr., PhD

Problem

General

Nonprofit organization (NPO) boards of directors, executive directors, and board chairs under the shared leadership approach are losing funding support for important social and economic programs aimed at serving the needs of the society (Dizhang & Swanson, 2013; Morgen Stahl, 2013; Smith, 2015).

Specific

There is limited understanding of how NPO leaders in shared leadership situations are affected by the leadership styles of matched and unmatched leader style that impacts nonprofit organization funding performance.

Purpose

This mini-ethnographic case study design, a blended qualitative approach, was used to explore the effect of leadership styles in shared leadership situations and the impact of matched and unmatched leader styles on NPO funding performance.

Significance

Understanding NPO shared leadership provides an authentic foundation for decision-making involving hiring, which might associate with decisions regarding leadership styles that produce a more positive organizational culture that facilitates improved funding performance.

Social Change Implications

Ultimately, shared leadership benefits the social needs by enhancing the services to the beneficiaries who receive NPO programs.

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Dr. **Karla Phlypo**, Committee Member
Dr. **Barbara Turner**, University Research Reviewer

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework was used for the study that incorporated **organizational theory, shared leadership theory, path goal theory, transformational theory, leader member exchange, and fund development theory.**

Relevant Scholarship

Anheier's (2000) organizational theory about NPOs suggests that limitations regarding NPOs has formed due to the way NPOs conduct organizational affairs, which Anheier argues primarily involves the use of incorrect assumptions concerning how nonprofits perform their activities.

Rowe (2014) postulated leadership performance differences concerning leader style necessary for NPOs and leadership styles necessary for private sector organizations are negligible.

Still, Grandy (2013) argued that despite any insignificant differences between private sector leadership and nonprofit sector leadership, to understand the transferability of leadership theories as applied to the private sector and the relevance to leadership styles performance within NPOs, more empirical data is required.

Although Lo, Mohamed, Ramayah, and Wang (2015) articulated research that combined, for example, the review of leadership styles such as transformational and leader member-exchange (LMX) and the effect of organizational effectiveness is limited, Redmon (2014) found that shared leadership can produce positive results in NPO situations that involves the need for complex problem resolution.

Javidan, Bullough, and Dibble (2016) observed that organizations fair better in shared leadership situations where leadership styles are complementary; while Shaefer (2015) discovered shared leadership provides NPOs a checks and balance process that helps to guard against NPO failure.

Research Question

How are NPO leaders in shared leadership situations affected by the leadership styles of matched and unmatched leader style that impacts NPO funding performance?

Participants

Using purposeful sampling, the sample population was **approached as a single case study.** The participants represented **5 community partner NPOs** in the New York City area with **20 or fewer employees** and **average annual funding of \$600,000** or more during the **previous 3 years.** **Units of analysis participants included:**

- **5 executive directors,**
- **1 assistant executive director,**
- **1 board chair,** and
- **2 board of directors' members**

Procedures

Community partner NPOs were contacted by phone and email. All **units of analysis** participant interviews were face-to-face. Sources for the data collection included interview responses, direct observation, field notes, literature review, journaling, document review analysis, and member checking.

Transparency processes were employed throughout the study such as content validity that involved the use of consistent interview questions for each participant.

Sensemaking was used during participant interviews to ensure values and descriptions were not interpreted differently between the researcher and participant.

Crystallization and methodological triangulation were used.

Analysis

Analysis was performed using a blended design of mini ethnographic and case study as described by Fusch, Fusch, and Ness (2017).

Findings

Shared leadership promotes a culture of positive social change through building honesty and integrity, which in turn can help nonprofit organizational leaders improve funding programs and stakeholder interest.

Findings revealed leadership styles that are complementary are more likely to produce change as opposed to leadership styles representing inconsistency amongst leadership styles.

Interpretation

The results build on existing nonprofit sector research and scholarship involving organizational theory, leadership theory, fund development theory, and shared leadership theory and advanced the understanding of shared leadership situations involving matched and unmatched leader styles and how leader styles impact NPO performance.

Within the context of the conceptual framework, the findings demonstrated complexities regarding the way NPOs conduct business involving assumptions and external environments. However, the analysis of the data revealed no surprising themes.

Limitations

Transferability is a potential limitation involving extremely small samples; and thus, for this study.

To mitigate this limitation, purposeful sampling was used to gather rich and in-depth data regarding the participants.

Recommendations

Future research could explore the topic of complementary shared leadership styles.

Recommendations for practice include having prominent discourse regarding nonprofit leadership, and creation of nonprofit practices that improve sophistication regarding donor strategies.

For example, a primary recommendation is that NPOs could benefit from an **established balance of power, authority, and responsibility** for operations leadership and policy governance.

Further recommendation is that NPOs might consider supporting a **philosophy and perspective that aligns NPO leadership responsibility with donor interest and mission program.**