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The role of the organizational internal environment in the establishment of change management in nursing and midwifery schools

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to explain manager perspectives on change management at nursing and midwifery schools in Tehran. This study was conducted using a qualitative approach; a descriptive exploratory method was applied with triangulation. Snowball sampling was used for selection of participants who were managers at different levels. The inclusion criterion was at least one year of work experience. In this research, no variable was measured. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews in which a guide and field notes were used. Data was considered saturated with the repetition of codes according to the guidance of conventional content analysis. This trustworthiness was achieved by a prolonged field experience, member check, peer check and sharing the content with two experts in qualitative research. Ten participants (seven females and three males) between 38 and 54 were interviewed. Two had Master’s degree and eight held a PhD in nursing. Only three were at high managerial level at their school. After the interviews, 124 conceptual codes, 15 subgroups and 3 core concepts were extracted. Ultimately, the concept of change management was postulated as the purpose of this study. Its influencing factors were identified. The study has implications for use in the faculties of nursing and midwifery, as a model according to organizational culture.

Keywords: Change management; Change; Nursing schools;

1. Introduction

Change is defined as the inconspicuous transformation of the activities and general structure of a system (Zomorodian, 2007). Applying change is necessary for organizational improvement. The targeted application of knowledge and skills in making programmed change is inevitable. As an educational environment, a nursing and midwifery school needs to be dynamic. These schools are not exceptions and need to have the characteristics of

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educational organizations in respect to change. As well informed persons, academics can cooperate in change management and improve the level of organization by establishing an appropriate model (Zerwek & Claborn, 2008). When comparing management in educational organizations with other organizations, issues such as the social importance, public sensitivity, complexity of duties, closeness of relationships, professional training and difficulty in evaluation become obvious, revealing similarities between the management of all organizations at the administrative level, as well as differences in technical and structural levels (Alagheband, 2008). By applying the appropriate educational management, leading to a proper model of change in the educational environment, a favorable situation is created, having the properties of self-respect and respect to others, paying attention to the feelings and welfare of individuals, involving a feeling of adherence to the educational environment, trusting one another, contributing to educational decision making, sharing relevant information, and paying attention to the suggestions of academics (Alagheband, 2008).

The basis of change is dynamism. Making changes in an educational organization requires a dynamic educational system which depends on the dynamic behavior of its participants. When reforming an educational system, differences with educational systems of different countries should be considered (Shirazi, 1994). Acquaintance with ethnic characteristics and cultural as well as ethical differences in educational environments can lead to the adoption of appropriate models of change management, resulting in organizational improvement. Such acquaintance leads to the normalization of models in the educational environment, such as nursing and midwifery schools, and creates favorable conditions for education and learning. Finally, in order to choose the appropriate model of change management in an organization, it is necessary to explain the current situation of change, as planning for change requires attention to the current situation, and its beliefs and ethics.

The findings of this study reveal the existing perspectives on change management in major nursing and midwifery schools and can be used as the basis for finding an appropriate solution and model for applying change management, so as to achieve constant organizational improvement and the elimination of obstacles. The final users are the academics, staff and students of these schools. The prerequisite of such a study is to explain the current perspectives on applying change management of administrators in the schools. The present study was therefore designed and performed to explain these perspectives.

2. Literature review

Twenty five years ago, the new concept of organizational change was introduced to the literature of the management discipline. This new concept denoted the gradual improvement of the activities of an organization by rapid or slow change. Developing the function of an organization depends on improving the function of its staff. In any organization, change is always accompanied by rapid and extensive transformation of three aspects, namely human resources, organizational workspace, and equipment as the facilities of the organization (Kordrostami & Aghakhani, 2006).

Efficient organizations need to improve and develop their operational programs, and rapid changes in the environment make internal changes inevitable. Organizational improvement and development was first proposed after World War II. The basis for the formation of these concepts was the ideology of universal preparation. This ideology introduced a broad definition to the concept of improvement and transformation in the form of a social theory, and stabilized and guaranteed its theorization. According to Warren Bennis (1967), organizational improvement resulting from change is a multifunctional solution for revolutionizing the commitments, approaches, ethics, and scientific structures by which organizations adjust themselves to modern technological events and changing markets. He mentioned that such improvements can be as a guideline and human resources management should face complicated situations and adjust to them. Kurt Lewin (1948) made great attempts at establishing organizational improvement studies in that his ideas and viewpoints initiated the formation of many fundamental theories. Lippitt, Watson and Westley (1958) developed the first practical model of change theory, then, Kolb and Frohman (1958) introduced a combined conceptual model of organizational improvement (Taslimi, 2008). In order
to guide and manage inevitable change, you have to know the definition of change management, because it can help managers to reach their expected results.

Today, organizations increasingly face a dynamic and changing environment and are forced to adjust themselves to environmental factors such as workforce, technology, recession, competition, social activities, world politics etc. By applying programmed changes they try to upgrade their employees who, at the end, promote the organization and its ability to adjust to changes of environment (Parsayan & Arabi, 2009). To adopt an appropriate change strategy and model, it is necessary to understand the organization and its components. Therefore, the concept of change management is introduced in order to gradually make the necessary changes after getting acquainted with the relevant effective factors within the organization. Direct or indirect interference affects the systematic change of an organization (Hiatt & Creasey, 2003), (Kordrostami & Aghakhani, 2006).

3. Purpose

Acquaintance with ethnic characteristics and cultural, as well as ethical, differences of the educational environment leads to adopting the appropriate models of change management, ending in organizational improvement. Such acquaintance leads to a normalization of models in educational environments such as nursing and midwifery schools, and creates a favorable condition for education and learning. Finally, for achieving an appropriate model of change management in the organization, it is necessary to explain the current situation of change, as planning and programming require attention to the current situation, beliefs and ethics of the society.

4. Methods

4.1. Design

In conducting the present study, a descriptive exploratory approach was applied, using triangulation. In a descriptive exploratory study, the details of existing variables are gathered and used to explain and evaluate the current situation and activities. The perspectives, opinions and realities are the variables of this study, which were gathered through questionnaires or interviews (LoBiondo–Wood & Haber, 2006). The triangulation method is also used (LoBiondo–Wood & Haber, 2006; Strubert & Carpenter, 2007).

4.2. Participants

The administrators of major nursing and midwifery faculties of medical universities in Tehran, affiliated with the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, participated. The inclusion criterion was at least one year of experience as low, middle or high manager in a nursing and midwifery faculty.

4.3. Ethical considerations

For individual interviews with the administrators, participants were visited individually, and the necessary explanations regarding the study and their cooperation were presented. Appointments for interview at their workplace were made. During the interview sessions, and after introducing and explaining the goals of the research, emphasizing the confidentiality of the data and obtaining their written informed consent, individual interviews were performed. During the interview, the purpose, method of interviewing, and the withdrawal right of the participants to discontinue their cooperation at any time during the study were explained and the fundamentals of confidentiality and informed consent for interviewing and recording the discussions were strictly followed. In general, all ethical considerations were strictly followed.
4.4. Data Collection and analysis

In semi-structured interviews, administrators were asked for their perspectives on change. A guide and field notes were used during the interviews. The recorded interviews were carefully listened to several times and transcribed completely. The transcriptions were typed and their accuracy was checked again with the recorded interviews. From this phase on, the transcriptions served as the data source for analysis in the study. Conventional content analysis of the interviews was performed to derive the perspectives and beliefs of the participants. Conceptual units were first distinguished and, then the relevant codes were extracted and categorized according to their similarities and finally the main concepts were determined.

In addition to the sessions of the research team, two other professors of nursing, experienced in qualitative research, and two PhD graduates of nursing reviewed the whole process with constant contact by email. They helped to adjust the process of interviewing and data analysis. By considering their viewpoints, necessary changes and adjustments were made in interviews and some codes, concepts and subcategories were deleted or added.

The validity and durability of the study were based on the four key factors of acceptability, similarity, verifiability and transmissibility. Acceptability means that the transcription of the interviews was acceptable to the participants. In this study, the informed involvement of the participants, the member as well as peer checks of data, and constant revisions in the process and analysis of interviews and data codification were taken into account. Moreover, the content of the interviews, the extracted codes and subdivisions were discussed with a few participants and the PhD graduates and their viewpoints were also considered. A combined method was used for data collection (individual interviews as well as field notes and common locations, namely nursing and midwifery schools). In selecting the participants, there was an attempt to consider a variety of groups, i.e. managers from different managerial levels (low, middle and high), with different work experiences and responsibilities (Strubert & Carpenter).

For comparability, there was an attempt to combine data collection methods (Strubert trubertarability, there was an attempt to combine dataability, all the activities, including different phases and the quality of collected data, were carefully recorded (Strubert trubertarability, there was an attempt to combine dataability, all the activities, including different phases as discussed with four external managers with the same positions as the participants in the research (Strubert trubertarability, t

5. Findings

Ten participants (7 females and 3 males) between 38 and 54 were interviewed, two held an MSc. and eight a PhD of Nursing, all in different managerial positions (4 in low, 3 in middle and 3 in high level positions). They also had between six to thirty two years of work experience, and some experience with change management committees in their workplace. The transcripts were analyzed using the latent content analysis method (Polit oGraneheim ralundman,ndman,ial positions (4 in low, 3 in middle and 3 in high level positions). They also had between six to thirty two years of work clearly explain the themes. 124 extracted conceptual codes were subcategorized under 15 main concepts included in 3 themes: changing process, internal organizational environment and external organizational environment. In order to clarify the themes, the perspectives of the participants on each theme are presented.

5.1. Changing process:

The participants of the study generally believed that there should be a clearly defined process for a change. This process includes recognition, assessment, programming, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and feedback. The following are the perspectives of the participants in this regard:
“...It is important that change happens in the appropriate time and through an appropriate process; and this is what should be planned and assessed. Otherwise, change will happen anyway...”

(Middle managerial level, 7 years of managerial experience)

“...Evaluation is the prerequisite for change. For making changes and reforming something evaluation is a must...”

“...We should consider the nature of change. It is a process and, in each phase, different groups are involved. In one phase, the faculty members are involved while, in the other, the staff, or, in another phase, both. Anyway, the assessments determine what should be done...”

(Middle managerial level, 5 years of managerial experience)

5.2. Internal organizational environment

This theme were divided into three categories of managerial, organizational and individual factors. Each category included subcategories. Regarding the managerial factor, the participants especially emphasized the role and characteristics of the manager in the implementation of change management. Here are few examples:

“...If a manager believes in innovations and change, he will welcome the idea...”

(Low managerial level, 8 years of managerial experience)

“...The support and confidence of the superior manager makes the change a success...”

(Low managerial level, 8 years of managerial experience)

“...Change happens in those organizations that are led by development-oriented managers...”

(Low managerial level, 26 years of managerial experience)

Regarding internal organizational factors, the perspectives concentrated on organizational environment, resistance, training, relations and perceptions. During the interviews, the participants talked about the importance of perceptions regarding change in the change management process as follows:

“...We have not changed the attitudes, opinions and outlooks, yet we want to change the structures and systems and things their infrastructures is not still ready for change...”

(Low managerial level, 8 years of managerial experience)

“...Changing needs wisdom, optimism and risk. One must have felt the necessity of change by all means...”

(Low managerial level, 1 year of managerial experience)
“...No one can force a professor to teach according to suggestions. A professor should believe in and be optimistic toward the new methods of teaching...”

(High managerial level, 20 years of managerial experience)

5.3. External organizational environment

The participants generally believed that the level of centralization in the nursing and midwifery schools could be a restrictive factor in adopting management models. A few perspectives are presented below:

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

(Low managerial level, 2 years of managerial experience)

“...Another existing obstacle is the central organization or higher managerial level itself, from which our nursing and midwifery schools receive orders. Faculties get orders from the university and the university receives orders from the ministry, which means that the faculty cannot decide by itself...”

(Middle managerial level, 4 years of managerial experience)

Regarding the directives, the participants said:

“...Apparently, these directives create change. Neither I nor others believe in these directives as they are short-term or formal and superficial. These changes are not easily internalized. Many years should pass and they should be proved and adopted by others. Then it becomes normal. When normalized and although proved, they still are not changes. It is an instruction for changing a procedure...”

(Low managerial level, 8 years of managerial experience)

“...I do not consider the implementation of directives as a change... Managers and faculty administrators should have independence in decision-making so that they can provide the faculties with the facilities they need. In my opinion, change cannot be adopted without system decentralization and the issue of independence.”

(Higher managerial level, 20 years of managerial experience)

6. Discussion

In this part of the study, the perspectives of nursing and midwifery school directors on adopting change management in the faculties were analyzed. The results showed that the perspectives on adopting change were generally positive. Change is a dynamic and transformational process that means changing from one state to another. It can be external and related to technologies, customers, rivals, market structure or socioeconomic situation or it can adjust the
organization to the changes in the environment in the form of strategies, approaches and procedures (Akbari & Soltani, 2007). Change management means keeping the staff and the organization prepared for continuous learning and development. In fact, change management thinks of the future (CMLC, 2010). The nursing and midwifery school directors pointed out many factors that should be taken into account when adopting change management, one of which was to have a view to the continuity of change in the educational organization. A planned, step-by-step process is necessary for making any change. To realize adopting change management, it is necessary to assess and become acquainted with the organization to identify the cases to be changed, then, to plan and implement change in the identified cases and, finally, to monitor, evaluate and provide feedback about the changes made. A systematic approach for making changes can secure the step-by-step process and provides the opportunity to be flexible during the process of change. Bianco and Schermerhorn (2006) stated that the managers of organizations in the process of change need to have self-regulatory equipment to control the change process according to assessments. Regarding the role of managers in adopting change management model, Andrews and his colleagues (2008) surveyed the experiences of educational organization managers in change management in a qualitative study. The results revealed the importance of both organizational and individual culture, and manager skills and knowledge of change management which affect the adoption of a change strategy and could bring forth positive or negative results in the change process. As seen in the studies of Andrews and his colleagues (2008), and the findings of the present study, the characteristics of a manager have great effects on risk-taking and the initiation of change, and can transform a person into a pioneer for change. Saka (2002), pointed out the role of the manager of an organization and added that the majority of managers are only problem solvers and cannot consider long-term goals in their activities, so that staff copy such characteristics and do not trust change. In the present study, the participants also emphasized the importance of risk-taking and the pioneering characteristics of the manager and their role in adoption of change. From the perspective of the nursing and midwifery school directors, centralized management in the higher education system is the main obstacle to establishing a model for change management. Centralization deprives the manager of their decision-making ability and results in superficial decision-making according to superior organization which is time and energy consuming. In this regard, Stroh (2004) pointed out the importance of change strategies adopted by the organization and indicated that the type of strategy used in managing staff guide to concept of management of internal and external communication. According to Stroh’s study, to deal with environmental change, organizations need to have effective communications management in order to bring new attitudes to change. Based on applying structural change, such attitude has special goals that are thoroughly controlled by change management and reduces the resistance while encouraging innovations and facilitating the change process. He also pointed out the importance of independence at work which relates to the decentralization of the universities. Randall and Procter (2002) also explained that forced changes cannot improve an organization or motivate individuals because they have not developed an insight for change; they apply change as a result of centralization in management and received orders. They also pointed out that for developing the organization, it is necessary to give a semi-centralized decision making authority. In the present study, the majority of the participants depicted the centralization in management of universities and faculties as an obstacle to adopting change management and added that certain levels of decentralization would be necessary in order to make decisions about establishing a model of change management and setting up free relations both inside and outside the organization.

7. Limitations

Despite the mechanisms we applied to enhance the rigor of this study, some limitations may be inherent. The sample size was small and the context confined to a particular geographic location. However, the study offers some valuable insights from nursing faculty administrators into establishing change management. The findings of this study may be transferable to other nursing faculties.
8. Conclusion

Everybody understands the importance of positive change and everyone understands it because it’s true. Successful organizations are those which incorporate change and reform in their organizational framework. Organizations are based on need satisfaction and as the needs of humans are continuously changing or moving to a new need, the requisite for change management is seen more than ever. Today, the concepts of organizational development, reform and improvement are the most important subjects for human societies, especially in developing countries, and they are inherently managerial rather than economic and political (Kordrostami & Aghakhani, 2006). However, in order to adopt the appropriate strategy and model of change for an organization, it is necessary to understand its structure and components. For this purpose, the concept of change management was developed to apply the necessary organizational changes to different phases of the process, following the identification of effective factors in change. This reveals the necessity of having sufficient knowledge and information for managers to utilize it at work. Based on the findings of this study, we recommend conducting special studies in educational organizations for establishing change management and presenting managers with administrative solutions in order to assess and acquaint their organizations and, according to their authority, implement the appropriate change model while taking into account the effective factors mentioned in this study.

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