

TAKING UP THE CHALLENGE: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF NOVICE NURSE LEADERS

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Abstract

Despite the critical role of nurse leaders in healthcare systems, there is limited research on the transition experiences of novice nurse leaders. Most studies focus on experienced nurse leadership, leaving a gap in understanding the unique challenges, learning processes, and support needs of those newly stepping into leadership roles. Nurse leaders play a fundamental role in influencing change and driving improvement, both to enhance patient outcomes and experiences and to create and sustain positive environments for staff. This study aimed to explore and describe the experience of novice nurse leaders as they transitioned to a new role and responsibilities. A purposive sample of 10 novice nurse leaders were interviewed. Using Van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenological method, rigor was established through the application of verification and validation. Thematic analysis was applied to systematically code and categorize sixty-nine (69) significant statements, from which key themes emerged. The challenges and adjustments faced by novice nurse leaders as they transition into leadership roles often lead to Feeling Overwhelmed, highlighting their initial struggles with managing responsibilities, navigating expectations, and adapting to roles. The themes under this include: Transitioning Roles, Leadership Balancing Responsibilities, From Theory to Practice Training's Real Impact, and Sense of Fulfillment Leadership's Highs and Lows. Novice nurse leaders demonstrate remarkable perseverance and adaptability, which is evident in the emergent theme Thriving Through Challenges. This captures their ability to navigate complex situations and develop effective strategies for success, with related themes such as: Bolstering Resilience, Collaborating with Healthcare Team, Valuing Motivation, Remaining Calm, Prioritizing Tasks, Communication at the Core Connection and Resolution, and Resilience and Adaptability. The journey of novice nurse leaders reveals their desire to inspire and uplift others, as the valuable insights they wanted to share with fellow nurse leaders and the nursing profession in general comprised Fostering Transformational Growth with clustered themes including: Empowerment through Education and Mentorship and Embracing Leadership Roles. These findings highlight the need for targeted leadership development programs and mentorship initiatives to better support novice nurse leaders, ultimately enhancing leadership effectiveness and improving patient care outcomes.

Keywords: *Social Science, Novice Nurse Leaders, Hermeneutic-Phenomenology, Digos City*

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Introduction

Leadership can make a difference in the workplace. It plays an essential role in the work dynamic between the leader and its followers. In clinical management settings, effective leadership behaviors can lead to better patient care, increased job satisfaction, and improved nurse retention. However,

nurse leaders face significant challenges, including balancing administrative responsibilities, ensuring staff well-being, and maintaining high-quality patient care within resource constraints. Despite the crucial role of nurse leadership, there is limited research on the transition experiences of novice nurse leaders,

particularly in hospitals in Digos City.

Globally, the challenges in nursing leadership and management have been widely studied. Research from Sweden (Lillsjö et al., 2023) identified key issues such as inadequate support, limited resources, and difficulties in teamwork and regulations. Similarly, studies in Norway (Storaker et al., 2022) and Finland (Sulosaari et al., 2022) highlighted concerns including ethical conflicts, staff shortages, and unequal access to education. These studies indicate that nursing leadership struggles are prevalent worldwide.

In the context of the Philippines, ineffective leadership has been linked to increased nurse-reported adverse events such as verbal mistreatment and medication errors (Lambrague, 2020). Additionally, staff shortages significantly impact nurse performance and work environments (Dela Merced et al., 2023). Locally, limited studies have examined the challenges of nurse leadership in Digos City hospitals, where inadequate nurse-to-patient ratios, financial constraints, and insufficient government support pose additional difficulties (Acta Medica Philippina, 2020).

This study aims to explore the leadership challenges faced by novice nurse leaders in hospitals in Digos City and their impact on staff performance and patient care. Specifically, it seeks to identify the difficulties novice nurse leaders encounter, examine their coping mechanisms, and highlight insights that can inform future leadership development programs. By addressing these objectives, the study fills a critical research gap by providing empirical evidence on the leadership transition experiences of novice nurse leaders. The findings will contribute to the development of structured training programs, mentorship initiatives, and policy recommendations that can strengthen nurse leadership and enhance patient care outcomes.

Methods

This study explored the lived experiences of novice nurse leaders using hermeneutical phenomenology, a research design that interprets the meanings behind vivid descriptions of lived experiences (Henriksson, Friesen, & Saevi, 2012).

This approach captures the complexities of human experiences, acknowledges the researcher's role in interpretation, and reveals themes that may not emerge through other methods (Gyollai, 2019; Wilson, 2014).

The study was conducted in Digos City. The selection of these two hospitals in Digos City was based on their patient capacity, accessibility, and diverse patient demographics. These factors ensured a more representative sample for the study, enhancing the reliability of the findings. The participants were gathered from two (2) private hospitals in the locale. Site 1 was a level 1 hospital with a capacity of 35 beds and was founded on 2022. It provides a wide range health service such as laboratory, X- ray, surgical operations, CT scan and ultrasound, and emergency medical attention. Site 2 was a 100-bed capacity, level 2 hospital founded on 1984. It usually offers a variety of health services, including general medical consultations, diagnostic imaging (such as X- rays and ultrasounds), laboratory tests, minor and major surgical procedures, CT scan, intensive care unit, neonatal intensive care unit, pediatric intensive care unit and some specialty services depending on their capabilities. Both hospitals almost have the same services and have nurse leaders that are within the inclusion criteria set for this study

The participants for the study were novice nurse leaders from hospitals in Digos City. A purposive sampling method was used to carefully select participants based on specific inclusion criteria. To qualify for the study, participants needed to hold key leadership positions such as chief nurse, supervisor, or head nurse, with at least less than a year of experience in their current roles. This criterion was established to ensure that participants had recent exposure to leadership responsibilities and could provide valuable insights based on their lived experiences. A total of ten (10) participants who met these qualifications underwent the interview process. The selection of novice nurse leaders with one year of experience or less in their respective leadership roles was intentional.

The data collection process for this phenomenological study followed ethical and systematic steps. The researcher obtained

permissions and informed consent from hospital administrators and participants, prepared a validated Interview Guide Protocol (IGP), and secured necessary approvals. Open-ended questions captured participants' lived experiences, with interviews scheduled and recorded for accuracy. Transcribed data were verified through member checking to ensure authenticity, and participants were encouraged to address concerns. The interview data were carefully examined using thematic analysis,

allowing the researcher to identify recurring patterns and key insights from the participants' responses. By organizing and categorizing these themes, the study aimed to capture meaningful experiences and provide a clear understanding of the challenges and perspectives shared by novice nurse leaders. The researcher expressed gratitude and emphasized confidentiality, ensuring trust and adherence to ethical standards throughout the study.

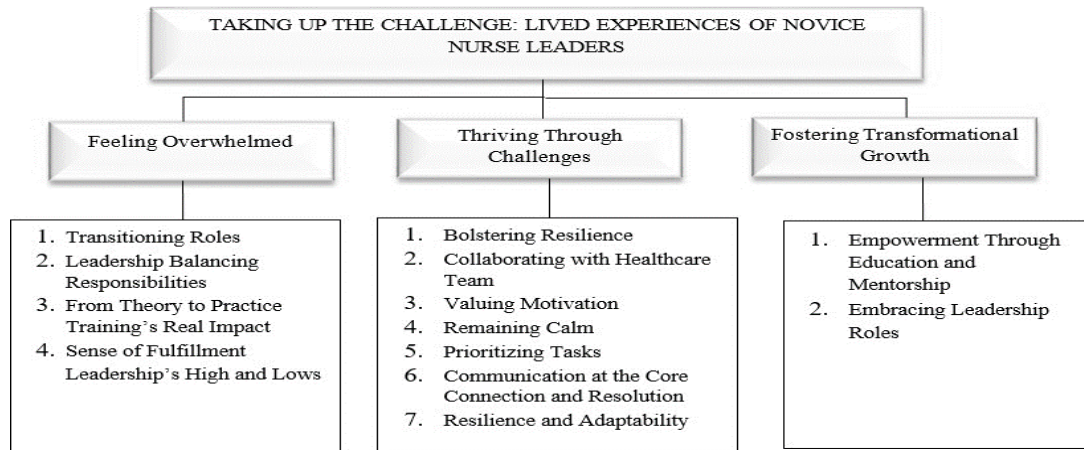
Results and Discussion

Table 1: Profile of Participants

| Participant | Sex | Months in Service | Study Group |
|-------------|-----|-------------------|-------------|
| P 1 | F | 8 | IDI |
| P 2 | F | 11 | IDI |
| P 3 | F | 11 | IDI |
| P 4 | F | 8 | IDI |
| P 5 | M | 8 | IDI |
| P 6 | F | 7 | IDI |
| P 7 | F | 6 | IDI |
| P 8 | F | 6 | IDI |
| P 9 | M | 6 | IDI |
| P 10 | M | 10 | IDI |

A total of 10 novice nurse leaders from two private hospitals in Digos City participated in this study, selected through purposive sampling. All had less than one year of leadership experience. Six participants were female. The participants held roles such as nurse supervisors and nurse heads, providing valuable insights into the challenges and strategies of novice nurse leaders in diverse hospital settings.

In-depth interviews were conducted with ten nurse leaders selected through purposive sampling to address the primary research questions of this study: 1. "What are the experiences of novice nurse leaders?", 2. "How do participants cope with the challenges of their experiences?", 3. "What insights can participants share to fellow novice nurse leaders and the nursing profession in general?" Data collected from the interviews were meticulously transcribed and analyzed using Van Manen's method of phenomenological analysis. This process systematically identified, coded, and categorized statements based on shared characteristics. Significant statements were further interpreted to capture their essential meanings, providing a rich understanding of the participants' experiences. This method allowed for a detailed analysis of the nuances within the data, ensuring that the most relevant aspects of the participants' experiences were thoroughly explored. By carefully examining these statements, the researcher was able to uncover the deeper meanings behind the lived experiences of novice nurse leaders.



Emergent Theme 1: Feeling Overwhelmed

The emergent theme, "Feeling Overwhelmed" describes the developmental process novice nurse leaders undergo as they transition from feeling overwhelmed by the demands of their new leadership role to becoming confident, empowered, and effective leaders. This theme is highly relevant to the field of nursing, where many nurses are stepping into leadership roles early in their careers, often with little prior leadership experience.

The transition into a leadership role can be an intimidating experience for novice nurse leaders, often marked by feelings of hesitation and uncertainty as they adapt to new responsibilities and expectations. This significant shift in identity and role within the healthcare context presents a complex journey, characterized by various challenges and supported by specific mechanisms (Kauffman & Aucoin, 2021; Weiss, 2023).

Cluster Theme 1.1 Transitioning Roles

The theme "Transitioning Roles" captures the shift that nurses undergo when they move from a frontline clinical role to a leadership position. This transition involves adapting to new responsibilities such as managing teams, making high-level decisions, and balancing administrative duties with patient care. Nurses who are promoted to leadership roles often face challenges in adjusting to their new authority, managing relationships with former peers, and developing skills in delegation, conflict resolution, and strategic decision-making. This cluster was expressed by the participants through these statements:

"It's been challenging on my part in terms of how to deal with my staff." (P3; line 15)

"It was a bit complicated and challenging." (P4; line 24)

"It's very difficult because it's the most challenging part." (P5; line 32- 33)

A significant challenge for novice nurse leaders is managing interpersonal relationships within their teams. Building a collaborative environment relies heavily on effective communication, an area where novice leaders often encounter difficulties. Studies suggest that employing open-ended communication techniques can improve interactions between novice and experienced nurses, supporting the development of critical thinking and clinical judgment in new leaders (Chao et al., 2021). Furthermore, having strong mentoring relationships plays a vital role in boosting novice nurses' confidence and social integration, which are essential for successful leadership (Gazaway et al., 2019). Given the complexity of relational dynamics in healthcare teams, novice leaders must also work on establishing their credibility and authority while navigating these interactions (Harris & Weaver, 2014).

Cluster Theme 1.2 Leadership Balancing Responsibilities

Leadership Balancing Responsibilities the theme that depicts the complexities novice nurse leaders face in managing multiple, often competing, and responsibilities. These include navigating team dynamics, meeting administrative expectations, ensuring high-quality patient care, and fostering their personal and professional development. This cluster was expressed by the participants through these statements:

"How to balance between your staff and the management's decisions, like where you position yourself." (P3; line 39-40)

"Is when I have to correct a staff member, especially if they're hard-headed or close-minded." (P4; line 129-130)

"The most challenging part of being a nurse leader is managing your team." (P7; line 150-151)

"Balancing of a competing demand of a patient care and staff satisfaction and organizational goals" (P10; line 179-180)

A major challenge for novice nurse leaders is their insufficient preparation for leadership roles. While they may be skilled clinicians, they often lack readiness for the managerial demands of leadership. Studies suggest that transitioning from expert bedside nurses to novice managers creates a gap in their leadership confidence and skills (Vasset et al., 2022). Additionally, novice nurse leaders face difficulties in time management and juggling various patient needs, which further complicates their ability to effectively manage their teams (Hezaveh et al., 2013). Labrague et al. (2021) assert that cultivating authentic leadership within healthcare organizations is crucial for motivating nurses to assume leadership roles.

Cluster Theme 1.3 From Theory to Practice Training's Real Impact

From Theory to Practice Training's Real Impact aptly captures the gap between theoretical knowledge gained during nursing education and its application in real-world healthcare settings. While nursing education provides foundational knowledge, it often does not fully prepare individuals for the complexities of leadership, such as team management, decision-making under pressure, and navigating healthcare dynamics. The experiences of the novice nurses were highly evident in these statements:

"It gave me more knowledge on how to deal with people, especially when you're in a position and you have to consider a lot of things—not only from the management's side but also you have to consider your staff." (P1; line 187-189)

"My experiences really molded me, especially with the challenges I faced when I was still a staff nurse." (P2; line 196-197)

"It's really about how knowledgeable you are in your field." (P3; line 200-201)

One of the key advantages of leadership training programs is the improvement of self-reported leadership and management skills among nurse managers. Aqtash et al. assert that these educational programs enhance the quality of nursing leadership, which is crucial for effective succession planning and fostering better practice environments (Aqtash et al., 2022). This view is supported by Bush et al., who stress the significance of graduate programs, such as the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP), in preparing nurses to navigate complex healthcare settings and collaborate across professions (Bush et al., 2021). By promoting a deeper understanding of leadership theories and practices, these programs equip nurses to advocate for policy changes and enhance patient care outcomes.

Cluster Theme 1.4 Sense of Fulfillment Leadership's High and Lows

The theme captures the complex nature of leadership experiences, marked by both fulfilling and challenging moments. It reflects the emotional and professional journey that leaders face as they balance the positive aspects of leadership with the difficulties inherent in the role. The "highs" refer to the rewarding moments,

such as the sense of accomplishment when achieving goals, influencing positive change, and contributing to team and organizational success. These moments often reinforce the motivation to lead and provide a sense of purpose. In contrast, the "lows" highlight the challenges leaders encounter, such as making tough decisions, managing conflicting demands, and dealing with setbacks or resistance. These struggles can lead to stress, burnout, or doubt, especially when leaders face interpersonal conflicts or overwhelming expectations. This cluster was expressed by the participants thru these statements:

"Most enjoyable part is when you see them growing—that's what makes it rewarding. But the least enjoyable part is when you see them hesitant to grow in their careers." (P2; line 263-264)

"I enjoy most about the job is the advantage of the schedules, the least enjoyable for me is that, as the head nurse, everything falls on you." (P3; line 266-267, 271-272)

"Time schedule flexible, for me least enjoyable is having to implement those new rules." (P4; line 271-273)

"I might enjoy the impact influence of shaping the health care policies, improving patient outcomes, positive impacting the lives of staff, mentoring and development." (P10; line 321-324)

Leadership satisfaction is strongly influenced by the quality of communication and support from experienced colleagues. Research suggests that open communication, which encourages novice nurses to share their concerns and ideas, plays a key role in building their confidence and critical thinking abilities (Chao et al., 2021). This type of supportive atmosphere is essential, helping novice leaders to manage their roles effectively while feeling empowered and valued (Bawafaa et al., 2015). Furthermore, studies highlight that transformational leadership promotes a positive work environment, leading to greater intrinsic job satisfaction among nurses (Reshidi, 2023).

Emergent Theme 2: Thriving Through Challenges

The theme "Thriving through Challenges" encapsulates the journey of novice nurse leaders as they adjust to their evolving roles within the healthcare landscape. The intensity of their responsibilities, coupled with the fast-paced changes in the environment, highlights their unwavering commitment and tenacity to excel in their positions.

Cluster Theme 2.1: Bolstering Resilience

Bolstering Resilience reflects how novice nurse leaders navigate their leadership journey by drawing strength from their accomplishments. These successes, whether minor or significant, act as milestones that bolster their resilience and keep them motivated. Participants shared that celebrating these achievements helps them stay confident and committed, empowering them to tackle the challenges of leadership with renewed determination. This cluster was expressed by the participants through these statements:

"When we started, we don't have a working shift nurse with the time... I'm proud that the hospital tribe with my management and leadership even with that situation." (P1; line 463-466)

"I was able to go back and work as a nurse... Now I became a supervisor." (P6; line 531-532)

"Becoming the head nurse in the ward where I work... Leveling up into a head nurse role" (P7; line 533-535)

Mentorship emerges as a cornerstone in the professional growth of novice nurses, fostering both competence and inspiration. Gazaway et al. (2019) emphasize that a supportive work environment enriched with multiple mentors significantly enhances patient care skills among novice clinical nurse leaders. This collaborative setting provides the encouragement and guidance essential for growth. Similarly, Kiviniitty (2023) highlights the pivotal role of experienced nurses in mentoring newer colleagues, bridging the gap between knowledge and

practice. The mentorship process becomes a vessel for passing on expertise and fostering leadership qualities. Busby et al. (2022) further underscore this relationship, finding that effective mentoring not only equips novice nurse faculty with the skills to navigate their roles but also nurtures their leadership potential.

Cluster Theme 2.2: Collaborating with Healthcare Team

Collaborating with Healthcare Team captures the essence of how novice nurse leaders grow into their roles by embracing flexibility and fostering meaningful connections. As they step into leadership, they refine critical skills like communication and delegation while learning to balance relationships and responsibilities. Their journey is not just about managing tasks but also about building trust, navigating challenges with strategic thinking, and finding their voice as leaders. This cluster was expressed by the participants through these statements:

“Need to cooperate...I kept thinking about how I could be a more effective leader.... You have to be open-minded... Dealing with people” (P2; line 575-580)

“Accepting that not everything you want will be approved or achieved... Dealing with colleagues and doctors... Building good relationships with them, as well as with your staff.” (P3; line 590-592, 597-601)

“Managing my time and balancing my role as a leader while still maintaining good relationships with my former colleagues, who are now my staff.” (P4; line 604-605)

“With my colleagues... With the scheduling itself.” (P6; line 615-620)

Adapting to leadership as a novice nurse involves developing competencies through mentorship, structured onboarding, and transformational leadership, which foster skill growth and confidence (Kauffman & Aucoin, 2021; Kalbarczyk, 2022). Transformational leadership improves job satisfaction and creates positive work environments (Kiwunuka et al., 2020). Effective leadership also requires navigating ethical dilemmas, building resilience, and engaging in ongoing professional development (Harris & Weaver, 2014). Experiential learning and emotional intelligence are crucial for success, while supportive organizational culture and lifelong learning ensure adaptability (Swinton, 2023).

Cluster Theme 2.3: Valuing Motivation

Valuing Motivation highlights the essential role of leadership in energizing teams and fostering a culture of excellence. Great leaders act as catalysts for growth, creating environments where team members feel empowered and motivated to reach their highest potential. Motivation within teams thrives on a sense of purpose, shared goals, and the recognition of both individual efforts and collective achievements. Leaders who exhibit enthusiasm, model positive behaviors, and offer meaningful feedback not only inspire their teams but also lay the foundation for sustained success. This cluster was expressed by the participants through these statements:

“Motivate them by showing them how I work... I talk to them about it and correct them.” (P3; line 721-723)

“Motivate my team through positive feedback.” (P5; line 734)

“I motivate them through small gestures... Saying thank you.” (P7; line 744)

“Members I empower them to become the best version of themselves... To feel confident.” (P9; line 756-759)

Studies suggest that an inspiring leadership style is closely linked to higher team satisfaction and reduced workplace challenges. Alrashidi (2023) notes that nurse managers who adopt motivational leadership practices can cultivate intrinsic motivation within their teams, leading to better performance and job satisfaction. This is especially crucial for novice leaders, who may experience challenges with confidence and authority. By embracing

an inspiring leadership approach, they can foster an environment that encourages team members to give their best and fully engage in their work.

Cluster Theme 2.4: Remaining Calm

Remaining Calm embodies the ability of novice nurse leaders to maintain composure and focus in high-pressure situations. This theme emphasizes the importance of self-awareness, emotional resilience, and effective teamwork in navigating the complexities of healthcare environments. For these leaders, managing stress is not just about endurance but about fostering a sense of stability and assurance for their teams. It involves transforming challenges into learning opportunities, creating a culture of support, and leading by example to instill confidence and calm in those around them. This cluster was expressed by the participants through these statements:

“Just leave it behind.... Really need to manage well.” (P2; line 787-791) “Keep calm... Not to hesitate.” (P3; line 794-802)

“I do deep breathing techniques... Need to feel calm.” (P9; line 829-830)

“I time managements and we have to prioritize tasks... Meditating to reduce stress and anxiety, talk to someone.” (P10; line 845-850)

These experiences highlight that effective stress management for novice nurse leaders requires a commitment to ongoing self-care and personal resilience. It's not just about managing immediate stressors but about fostering long-term balance and mental well-being. Through these practices, novice leaders' model emotional strength and composure, essential traits for navigating the complexities of leadership in healthcare. Their commitment to self-care reflects an understanding that, in order to lead effectively and support their teams, they must first take care of themselves.

Cluster Theme 2.5: Prioritizing Tasks

Prioritizing Tasks encapsulates the intricate responsibility novice nurse leader's bear in harmonizing leadership duties with the compassion essential to patient care. These emerging leaders must skillfully guide their teams while remaining deeply attuned to the needs of both their staff and patients. Their role is not only about managing operations but also about fostering a culture where professional excellence and empathetic care coexist seamlessly. This cluster was expressed by the participants through these statements:

“Delivering a higher level of basic care.... We focus on delivering the care that patients truly need.” (P5; line 910-912)

“To take time for my nursing and leadership responsibilities... I schedule my time for leadership.” (P7; line 923-927)

“Proper uhm delegation of tasks... Delegate specific tasks at the same time it is all about prioritizing things.” (P9; line 935-937)

“Prioritization and I identify the key priorities to determine the most important tasks... Time management techniques.” (P10; line 940-943)

Caring leadership is increasingly recognized as a cornerstone of effective nursing management, as it promotes empathy, trust, and collaboration within teams. Zhang et al. (2022) identify individualized consideration, a key element of transformational leadership, as a defining trait of caring leaders. This approach enables leaders to prioritize the well-being of their team members and patients, fostering an environment of support and excellence. Similarly, Labrague et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of authentic leadership in cultivating a healthy workplace where safety and teamwork thrive, which essential for novice nurse leaders is adapting to the demands of their roles.

Cluster Theme 2.6 Communication at the Core Connection and Resolution

Clear, open communication is crucial for establishing trust, managing conflicts, and promoting collaboration among team members. For novice nurse leaders, it is vital to bridge gaps between staff, patients, and management, ensuring that issues are addressed promptly and that team members feel supported. Effective communication not only improves day-to-day operations but also positively influences patient care outcomes by minimizing misunderstandings and errors. This cluster was expressed through these statements:

"We usually communicate through online, messenger, monthly meetings." (P1; line 328-332)

"We have group chats (GCs) and high-tech tools now" (P3; line 348- 349)

"We tend to communicate through messaging, but when we're at the hospital, it's always better to talk face-to-face." (P4; line 362-362)

"We have our gc or the group chat." (P6; line 387-388)

"Through personal conversations or in our group chat (GC)." (P8; line 412-414)

The use of digital communication tools in healthcare provides significant benefits, particularly in enhancing interprofessional collaboration (IPC). Researchers emphasize that IPC is crucial for improving care coordination and minimizing service duplication, which directly contributes to better patient outcomes. Ansa et al. (2020) highlight that effective communication within teams fosters role clarity and job satisfaction, thereby creating a more cohesive and productive work environment. Furthermore, Wise et al. (2020) assert that messaging apps streamline the rapid exchange of information, enabling teams to respond efficiently to patient needs and emergencies, a critical factor in high-pressure settings like emergency departments.

Cluster Theme 2.7 Resilience and Adaptability

Resilience and Adaptability highlights the importance of maintaining a strong and flexible leadership approach in navigating challenges. These qualities help address the diverse personalities within the team and the varying needs of patients. Resilient leaders embrace feedback and adjust strategies, ensuring effective communication and fostering strong relationships. This adaptability enhances team cohesion and drives personal and professional growth, creating supportive, high-performing work environments. This cluster was expressed through these statements:

"You really need a strong personality... you're also dealing with different people, especially in the hospital with your patients." (P1; line 954-956)

"You can't force people to do things... you have to level with them— don't be so distant in your role." (P2; line 965-972)

"You really need to understand your staff... be flexible and patient, and also have the knowledge to address their concerns properly." (P3; line 981-983)

"Not everything you say will always be right, and of course, we have to accept negative feedback from our staff and adjust to it." (P4; line 991- 993)

"Whatever challenges that you experience, it will help you to become a better person." (P6; line 1002-1003)

"Be open for feedback... it will contribute a lot to your team." (P7; line 1008-1010)

An inclusive and approachable leadership style significantly contributes to a resilient and adaptable workforce. When leaders are flexible and open to feedback, they foster psychological safety, enhance employee engagement, and promote team collaboration. This approach enables leaders to adapt to the emotional and professional needs of their team, cultivating an environment where diverse perspectives are valued. Research highlights that inclusive leadership, which encourages open communication and feedback, leads to better team outcomes, including increased innovation and work engagement (Wang et al., 2019; Fang et al., 2019). Additionally, Renzi (2020) emphasizes that transformational leadership, which integrates democratic values and

remains grounded in authenticity, helps leaders build resilience by maintaining strong principles while adapting to challenges, ultimately improving both individual and team performance.

Emergent Theme 3: Fostering Transformational Growth

Fostering Transformational Growth emphasizes the journey of novice nurse leaders as they reflect on the knowledge and understanding gained through their early experiences in nursing leadership and management. This theme captures their ability to build resilience, adapt to diverse personalities, and maintain composure while navigating challenges such as managing team dynamics, fostering a culture of respect, and ensuring quality patient care.

Cluster Theme 3.1 Empowerment Through Education and Mentorship

Empowerment through Education and Mentorship underscores the value of continuous learning and guidance in developing effective leadership. Pursuing further education, such as advanced degrees and attending seminars, equips nurses with the latest knowledge and skills. Mentorship is essential in supporting the growth of emerging leaders, fostering collaboration, and providing the direction needed for professional development. This cluster details their suggestions to empower the education and mentorship:

"We need to show them that this is not the way leadership really works in life... demonstrate that we can still be flexible... leadership can be easy too." (P2; line 1051-1059)

"Training really helps... trainings guide you... you'll be educated at the same time." (P3; line 1063-1066)

"More training is needed... focus is on making sure everyone is well- rounded." (P4; line 1071-1072)

"Focus more on collaboration, coaching, and mentoring... guide them in their professional growth." (P5; line 1078-1079)

"Be generous to share whatever skills that you have learned... these young nurses will be able to learn from you." (P6; line 1085-1088)

"Attend seminars that offer leadership development programs... developing their communication skills." (P7; line 1089-1090)

"If you truly love your profession... stay committed and not get easily discouraged." (P8; line 1091-1093)

Mentorship, in particular, is crucial in supporting new leaders. Ficara et al. (2021) note that mentorship helps ease the transition from clinical roles to leadership, improving leadership capabilities. Hedenstrom et al. (2022) also emphasize the value of structured mentoring programs in bridging the gap between inexperience and competence. Leadership training not only enhances nurses' practical knowledge but also boosts their self-confidence. Paterson et al. (2014) found that participation in leadership development programs increases nurses' self-assessment of their abilities, preparing them for future leadership roles. Similarly, Bognar et al. (2021) highlight that formal leadership training, including mentoring, improves leadership characteristics and professional behavior, helping nurse leaders excel in their roles and positively impact patient care outcomes.

Cluster Theme 3.2 Embracing Leadership Roles

Embracing Leadership Roles focuses on the significance of leadership that is rooted in authenticity, integrity, and transparency. Leaders who are true to their values and lead by example create a culture of trust and respect within the team. This approach encourages open communication, allowing team members to feel valued and understood. This cluster was expressed through these statements:

"When everyone works together, nothing is impossible, and the work becomes easier." (P3; line 1172-1174)

"Sometimes, they are scared to explore their skills. I encourage them to explore and try new things. It's not just about experience but having a good attitude." (P4; line 1178-1181)

"It's not about seniority... Nursing isn't about who's senior or junior, it's about respecting one another." (P5; line 1189-1190)

"My chief nurse was able to recognize my work, and after that, they gave me the trust, and I was able to lead my team." (P6; line 1197- 1199)

Education and mentorship play crucial roles in developing these leadership qualities. Kim et al. (2022) emphasizes that openness and active listening in leadership cultivate a supportive work environment, which enhances employee engagement and overall organizational performance. By engaging in inclusive communication—sharing their vision and inviting feedback—leaders create a sense of belonging and trust within the team, which is fundamental to organizational success (Kim et al., 2022; Agusta, 2023). The study's findings revealed key themes such as Feeling Overwhelmed, Thriving through Challenges, and Fostering Transformational Growth. These themes highlight the crucial role of adaptation, resilience, and leadership development in shaping the overall experience of novice nurse leaders. The transition into leadership often begins with uncertainty and hesitation, but as they navigate challenges with determination, they ultimately grow into confident and effective leaders. Strengthening hospital protocols and patient management systems can support this transition by providing structured mentorship, leadership training, and emotional support mechanisms to ease the shift into leadership roles.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study aimed to understand the experiences of novice nurse leaders as they navigated the challenges of leadership and management in hospitals across Digos City. The findings highlight that entering a leadership position is a profound personal and professional journey, where key factors such as balancing multiple responsibilities, adapting to diverse team dynamics, and embracing continuous growth are crucial. Mentorship and structured training were identified as critical supports in helping these novice leaders thrive in their new roles.

This research can offer valuable insights into the early stages of novice nurse leaders' careers; it is recommended that future research also explore the ongoing development of these leaders beyond their initial year in the role. Investigating how they continue to adapt, refine their leadership styles, and address new challenges over time would provide a fuller picture of their leadership journey. This longitudinal perspective could uncover important factors that influence leadership effectiveness and resilience, which would be useful for designing long-term support programs for nurse leaders.

In conclusion, these recommendations highlight the need for a deeper exploration of the leadership journey of novice nurse leaders. By broadening the scope of research to include long-term leadership growth, using mixed research methods,

and assessing the impact of mentorship, future studies can contribute valuable insights into how best to support and nurture the next generation of nurse leaders, ultimately enhancing leadership quality and the overall healthcare environment.

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