

## Nursing Professional Excellence: A Grounded Theory Approach

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**Abstract: Introduction:** Professional excellence has drawn the attention of many managers as a new approach in the nursing profession. Excellence creates a range of voluntary and selected behaviors that are not a part of formal nursing duties, but are practiced by some nurses and effectively improve their duties and professional roles. The dynamic nature of the nursing profession and the need for professional effectiveness has revealed the ever-increasing need for the organization of a competent generation of nurses. This research aimed to explain the process of developing professional excellence in nurses, assisted by the "Grounded Theory." Factors affecting the formation of such behaviors were also explored. **Methods:** This qualitative study was carried out on the basis of the "Grounded Theory" of Corbin & Strauss copy in 2008. Participants in this study included nurses from different ranks, except for first participants who were selected based on assigned indicators. Others were selected by the "Snowball Sampling Method." Data were collected through the semi-structure interview of 15 participants. **Results:** From 1,450 primary codes, 32 primary categories, eight subcategories, and three themes were derived in the frame of a conceptual model, with the conceptual themes consisting of professional behavior, strategic professional insight, and the establishment of professional talents management. The core variable and the basic social psychological process in this study was the professional extra role behavior, and the theory offered is the nursing professional excellence. **Conclusion:** Self-direction, the ability to lead others, and the management of duties and responsibilities relevant to nursing sociability are some effective factors in the Nursing Professional Excellence process. Professional excellence results from the combination of a favorable, supportive environment and the individual perspective approach.

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### 1. Introduction

Today is considered to be the age of the organization, and the administrators of these organizations are individuals. These individuals can create movement, growth, and excellence for themselves and the organizations because they control the greatest source of power, which is thinking. The lack of an informed, self-motivated cooperation between employees and the organization prevents the organization from achieving its highest level of effectiveness. This is of great importance because in informed, self-motivated cooperation with the organization, individuals use their efforts, energy, and insight along with their personal capabilities to create value for themselves and their jobs. Today, what is most obvious in new management literature is that organizations need employees who are willing to work

beyond their formal professional commitments (Morrison and Philip, 1999).

Ignoring positive behavior beyond their role, which has been observed in some employees, is not acceptable in appraising their performance since organizations have become aware of the necessity of informed, voluntary participation to achieve professional and organizational objectives (Kakhaki and Qoli Pour, 2007). In fact, the presence of excellent employees and organizational excellence complement each other and are, in a sense, each other's prerequisites (Drucker, 2001). But how to initiate the course to excellence depends on many factors requiring the presence of excellence-seeking individuals, and a culture willing to try innovative approaches. To achieve an excellent culture, we need well-informed, inspired human resources. This

motivation and awareness, when combined with self-belief, will lead to brilliant outcomes. Professional excellence is achieved through wise, well-directed, and solid leadership, social commitments, interactions, and focusing on patients. Excellence is gained in complementary cycle sequences while managing the processes, value, and quality- creating actions, making use of the experiences of superior individuals, managing data, and producing knowledge (Liebowitz, 2008). Training alone is not enough to achieve employee excellence. Training a self-made, superior individual is the first and most significant step toward an excellent organization. This is because it is the excellent individual who can create the culture, system, management, and ultimately the excellent product. Therefore, it is essential for the superior course to be planned and determined in an orderly manner (Williams and Anderson, 1999). One of the patterns and standards that assist the directors in this regard is the Professional Excellence Model.

In this study, the researcher intends to explain and theorize about the Professional Excellence process in nurses and offer a conceptual model by using the Grounded Theory Approach. The nursing profession's move toward excellence is a start to form the required constructs to access high-quality outcomes in patient care, consequently advancing medical and hygienic organizations (Polit and Beck, 2009). We need top-notch nurses and well-thought-out and efficient organization to advance the nursing profession (Collings, 2009). Lack of a suitable and effective system to advance the nursing profession to meet today's needs will result in inadequate and inefficient services (Kakhaki, 2007). The purpose of this study was to explain the process for achieving nursing excellence, assisted by Grounded Theory approach.

## 2. Material and Methods

The method used was the Grounded Theory. Except for the first participant who was selected based on assigned indicators, other subjects were selected by the "Snowball Sampling Method" from among qualified nurses from different managerial, educational, and medical ranks. Participants were not limited by sex or age.

The semi-structural interview method was used to collect the data. Following necessary coordination with the participants, and with their written approval, an interview was conducted in the participants' place of choice at the University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences, "Shahid Motahari," "Moheb," "Hashemi Nejad," and "Imam Komeini" Hospitals, Children's Medical Centre, "Shahid Akbar Abadi," and the Headquarters of "Ministry of Health and Medical Education." Interviews were conducted in a friendly, quiet

atmosphere to boost agreement between the interviewer and interviewee. Prior to the start of the interview participants were told the purpose of the study and the reason behind their selection for participation in the research. The researcher explained the advantages of this study for the participants and the nursing community as well as how participants could see final results. Then, considering the purpose of the study and its topic as well as the adopted approach of the study, the researcher posed several possible questions based on the instructions of the interview. Therefore, the questions asked were related to the experiences of the participants and in relation to the topic in question.

To properly conduct the interview, changes were made to subsequent interview instructions. Each interview lasted between 90 and 100 minutes. All interviews were recorded and analyzed on the same day. Sampling continued until it reached the saturation level in the present study. Analysis of the data was carried out using the Corbin and Strauss, 2008 copy.

In the first stage, analysis of data for concepts, to derive the concepts from the data, the researcher divided the data into manageable parts. Then she examined these pieces for ideas, and in the third stage labeled the ideas with concepts. Following the formation of concepts and initial categories, the researcher compared two or more categories and classified them. After each interview while preparing its text, the researcher reviewed the text of the interview a few times. Upon deriving the primary codes, the ones that referred to the same concept and meaning were placed together to form a conceptual class.

As the research progressed, the researcher attempted to reveal the dimensions and characteristics of each class or concept. With the classification of the initial open codes based on their similarities and differences, primary categories and subcategories were gradually formed. Following the classification and categorization of different codes, these categories were further subdivided according to their characteristics and dimensions as well as the conceptual relation between them and were placed in more abstract categories. This ultimately led to 32 initial categories out of the total categories.

Together with the analysis of data for concepts and the intended abstract categories, data analysis was also carried out for the background. While studying, the researcher discovered some factors that constituted the dominant background of participants' access to professional excellence. Together with the analysis of data for concepts, the researcher concentrated on the conditions with which the participants were faced. In other words, the researcher looked for conditions leading to the formation of situations or events that

participants would attempt to manage. Based on the outcomes of the study, existing background factors for professional excellence of the participants included the way they were raised and the existence of a systematic insight and talent management among the senior directors in their work, and activity environment.

In the third stage of the data analysis, the process was shown by the appraisal of the conditions and situations and the advancements toward the goal. In this stage, the researcher started to discover the participants' strategies and behavior and simultaneously used the far and near method of comparison. The researcher also took notes throughout the study and recorded whatever idea occurred to her and thought about it. Also, she thought about the trend of the probable processes existing in the data, and illustrated each probable process, which could be a sign of the final process, at each stage, as an assumptive graph. At this stage, the researcher consulted with professors and advisors. Ultimately, she discovered the exchanges and actions of the participants in relation to background conditions and situations and placed them in their respective sub-categories. Illustrating the diagrams and graphs in this stage was very useful for the researcher to finally discover the strategies of the participants to respond to the conditions and achieve her own goals. The professional extra role behavior plays the central role in the collective categories and the essential theme. Professional extra role behaviors are those that extend beyond the expectations of the actual role to achieve individual and professional satisfaction (Podsakoff and Mackenzie, 2000).

Integration of categories is the final step of analysis for a researcher who intends to make theories. The researcher tried to merge the classes with each other by writing the line of the story, illustrating the diagrams and reviewing the memos. In this stage, theorizing, writing the connective propositions. Using inductive reasoning, and considering the views of the masters of the group were constantly utilized. Since qualitative researchers must have a clear definition of the correctness and reliability of the outcomes of qualitative studies, and attempt to create proper and related indices, the researcher in the present study tried to make better connections with the participants and increase the time and number of interviews to boost the current and final outcomes of the study. She also gave the initial codes and final outcomes of the study (particularly in the process of open coding) to participants and considered their suggestions in analyzing the data, which increased the acceptability of the outcomes of the research (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

The researcher thoroughly explained the background for transferring the obtained outcomes and the statement of the course and processes of doing the study and the ways to access the outcomes. The researcher also made a few interviews available to the person or persons familiar with the qualitative research (advisor and the consultants) so the background for the acceptance of the findings would be provided in case they had access to similar codes (Carpenter and Streubert, 2006). By sharing the outcomes with a few of the participants who were familiar with qualitative research, the researcher created greater credibility for the findings of the study (Rolfe, 2006).

### 3. Results

All in all, the outcomes of the study resulted in three themes or final themes. The main themes are professional extra role behaviors, professional strategic insight, and the establishment of the management of professional talents. One of the signs of professional excellence in the participants was the presence of extra role behaviors influenced by many factors. Extra role behaviors refer to those carried out by individuals in addition to their formal expected duties (Van dyne and Cummings, 1998). Smith, Organ, and Near (1983), believed that self-motivated behavior was important for the acquisition of interests. To him, altruism, job awareness, courtesy and loyalty are considered the extra role behaviors later referred to as organizational citizenship behavior (Graham, 1991).

Participants started to create values for themselves and consequently acted beyond their required professional duties to better present their services and meet their patients' needs. These behaviors consisted of improving personal capabilities, disregarding financial issues, commitment to professional values, and caring about the future of the nursing profession. Since these behaviors were beyond the duties of nurses and were performed in a special professional ground, researchers referred to them as professional extra role behavior. In addition to value creation for oneself and the nursing profession, participants were capable of managing themselves and others and could fulfill professional duties and did their best to satisfy patients. Their final goal was to offer honest services and obtain patient satisfaction and fulfill their sense of self-contentment. In fact, they possessed professional strategic insight to manage themselves and others to fulfill their professional duties. It could easily be assumed that many behaviors that are labeled professional strategic insight themes are, in fact, the same as professional extra role behaviors, such as hard-working, time management, harmonizing work and life, capability building in others, transferring the

experiences to the colleagues, adopting superior performances, outcome orientation, and effort to nursing sociability. However, such a process will not manifest in a vacuum but requires proper structure and background to form. Once participants are admitted to the nursing profession, despite their inadequate knowledge of and at times lack of interest in this profession, as they receive proper professional training and instruction the way they look at the nursing profession changes. Being spiritually inspired, they did their best to redefine and rebuild themselves.

By drawing a professional perspective for themselves and with love and compassion and reliance on supreme professional values to help fulfill the needs of those in need, they developed their capabilities. Consequently, their knowledge increased and they were respected by others and well-trusted, which, in turn, created better relationships and influenced others and led to their guidance and management. Participants, inspired by their professional perspective and attentive to the future of the nursing profession, did their best to transfer the acquired knowledge and experiences to others to provide the background for nursing profession excellence. This is because the excellent profession comes by the presence of excellence-seeking individuals. To offer better services to patients, nurses faced many challenges, and through hard work and current knowledge as well as maintaining harmony between work and life, they tried to achieve this goal. This made them a role model for the others their personal life.

#### **4. Discussions**

Participants manifested a collection of extra role behavior in a voluntary, self-motivated manner, both on a personal and a professional level. These behaviors were values created mainly for them. Value creation is an approach adopted by the individual on behalf of himself, particularly those who seek assistance, and they put the assistance-seeking individuals in the center of all their activities and processes. From their perspective, they organize characteristics to offer the best services with the best qualities according to the needs and wishes of the patients (Stevenson, 2009). In creating self-value, not self-value creating activities are omitted as much as possible and the chain of activities and professional processes are formed in such a way that they start with needs and wishes of the patients and end with their satisfaction and happiness.

The value creating characteristics of participants include the love for the nursing profession (professional commitment), the attempt to develop personal capabilities, dynamism and creativity, imagining one's future in professional life, encouraging the spiritual approach, and disregarding

money and financial issues. In fact, these characteristics have been the basis of all their actions in different personal lives and professional dimensions. This is to say that the presence of these characteristics in each of the participants helped them become determined, solid individuals with high goals and incentives among their colleagues and be an effective leader for themselves and others under different conditions.

The participants strongly believed in the profession of nursing and respected professional ethics and values and felt committed to observing them, as well as professional and humanitarian principles. They tried to develop their professional capabilities with reliance on up-to-date knowledge, dynamism, and creativity and by considering the positive outlook of the profession and a spiritual and professional approach. (Stefaniak, 2009). With a broad vision and creation of confidence and respect in others, they circulated new blood in the veins of their profession. With enthusiasm and consideration for the future of the nursing profession, they created a great force to change and evolve their profession. The participants were also willing to do voluntary tasks to provide comfort and fulfill others' needs, which explain their sacrificial and helpful behavior. Thus, the professional excellence of nurses is a combined outcome of a favorable and supportive environment as well as the personal characteristics of the individual. Based on the results of the study, what matters in the process of professional excellence of nurses and is considered the central core is the professional extra role behaviors. All participants, in fact, tried to offer their best services to the patients and gain their satisfaction, which was their utmost desire, through professional extra role behavior. In other words, the basic social psychological process in this study is the same as professional extra role behaviors. In the present study, professional extra role behaviors were considered as the core variable. This was because it was the clearest concept revealed in the data and the most abstract expression that could embrace the other classes and join them together. The other two concepts, that is, professional strategic insight and professional talents management in the organization, are put inside this theme or the main variable, which is what all participants had in common. This is such that the essence of the professional strategic insight with regard to its subcategories is a part of extra role behavior, and if talent management was not established in an organization in which the participants were members, manifestation of professional extra role behavior would not be possible. Generally speaking, the presence of three factors is essential for the achievement of professional excellence: the establishment of professional talent

management in the organization that provides the ground for the manifestation of extra role behavior and creates a special insight in relation to directing oneself and others and the professional duties and responsibilities of the individuals. The main duty of nurses is giving care and service to patients and to be in direct interaction with them. The quality of the given services is very important in hospitals and clinics. Among the most important factors that demonstrate the behavior, approaches, interactions and consequently the foresight of the nurses to offer their best quality services is the professional extra role behavior, which must be observed by the senior directors in this profession and provide the ground for their greater manifestation.

### 5. Conclusion

According to the research results, for nurses to achieve professional excellence, some factors are necessary including: extra role professional behaviors, strategic professional insight, and the establishment of the professional talents management in the organizations. Cognition of the nursing professional excellence process and its effective factors is an instrument for nurse leaders and managers to measure the adjustment of nursing profession in the excellence way and its balance development. Conducting some complementary research with the aim of exploring other dimensions of the nursing excellence and their relations with the nursing satisfaction that can be appropriate path for future studies is recommended.

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