

Relational Leadership Styles Superior to Task Oriented Leadership Styles

Cummings, G.G., et al., *Leadership styles and outcome patterns for the nursing workforce and work environment: A systematic review*. *Int. J. Nurs. Stud.* (2009), doi:10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2009.08.006 (In Press)

Wong, C.A. and Cummings, G.G.. 2007. *The relationship between nursing leadership and patient outcomes: A systematic review*. *Journal of Nursing Management* 15(5). 508-521.

Findings: Cummings, et al found that relational or people oriented leadership styles are superior to task oriented leadership styles for productivity and effectiveness, team work and collaboration, employee retention, job satisfaction, employee health, and the working environment. Wong and Cummings found that relational leadership styles were associated with increased patient satisfactions and fewer adverse events and complications.

However, certain task-oriented styles when integrated with relational leadership styles appear to further increase effectiveness. Few studies of mixed style effectiveness are available yet meaning that little can be said about these alternatives with confidence.

Situation: Leadership style continues to be an issue of concern to fire managers. Firefighter safety, crew productivity, and fire management team performance are thought to be linked to leadership. Leadership is also thought to affect organizational productivity and effectiveness and employee morale in day-to-day agency operations. Understanding the effects of different leadership styles can lead to improvement in these important areas.

Relevance to Fire Management: Although the reviews focused on leadership in nursing, the results can be applied to fire management with appropriate attention to differences – and similarities – between fire management and nursing situations. Leadership systematic reviews in other professional areas tend to support the conclusions of these reviews. Until leadership research is conducted in wildland fire management in sufficient quantity and with strong research designs, it will be necessary to rely on research work in other professions such as medicine, business, and the military.

The Review: The authors searched 10 electronic databases including PsychInfo, Medline, Sociological Abstracts, and Academic Search Premier. They found 18,963 studies initially. These were narrowed down to 127 leadership research reports that were peer reviewed, measured leadership by nurses, measured one or more outcomes on the nursing workforce or work environment. The scientific quality of research design, implementation, analysis, and interpretation was assessed for each study.

Productivity and effectiveness: 13 of 18 studies that assessed this leadership effect found that relational – people focused – leadership styles were associated with organizational and individual productivity and effectiveness. 6 studies found that task-oriented leadership styles were associated with reduced productivity and effectiveness.

Teamwork, reduced conflict, group cohesion, and workgroup collaboration were all greater under relational leadership styles and lower under task-oriented styles.

Working environment: Relational leadership styles were associated with increased nurses' sense of empowerment while task-focused leadership styles were associated with reduced empowerment. Under relational leadership styles organizational culture and climate were perceived as better and nurse research utilization was greater.

Health: Relational leadership styles were associated with better staff health and reduced anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and stress. Task-oriented leadership was associated with greater emotional exhaustion and poorer emotional health.

Organizational commitment: 10 studies reported that relational leadership style significantly increased organizational commitment as measured by intention to stay and actual turnover. 5 studies showed significantly lower commitment with task-oriented leadership styles.

Job Satisfaction: 24 studies found the highest job satisfaction to be associated with relational leadership styles and 10 studies also found job satisfaction was significantly lower with task-oriented leadership styles.

See the [Leadership Special Collection](#) for more reviews of leadership research results applicable to wildland fire management.