

Leadership within Occupational Therapy

Katherine North– Creighton University

BACKGROUND

- Occupational therapist leadership titles include:
 - Manager, Coordinator, Team Leader, Professional Practice Leader, or Director.
- Compared to other professions within health care, such as nursing, occupational therapists hold fewer leadership positions
- The Centennial Vision 2025 is composed of 5 pillars, one of which is “leaders.”
 - Leaders: Occupational therapy is influential in changing policies, environments, and complex systems.

The focus of this CAT is to explore the common characteristics of occupational therapists who hold leadership positions. Leadership opportunities allow for occupational therapists to advocate for our profession and allow for personal and professional growth and development. It is our responsibility, as occupational therapists, to be fully prepared to take on informal and formal leadership responsibilities when opportunities present themselves. By doing so we will not only advance our own skills we will also advance the profession as a whole.

METHODS

Focus question surrounding occupational therapist’s role within leadership was developed and modified. A literature search using key words on the following databases was completed. Studies that met the below inclusion criteria were reviewed. Critical appraised topic was created.

Databases Searches:

- CINAHL, Medline Complete, Cochrane Library, Jaysearch

Keywords:

- Occupational therapist; leadership; management; health care; leader; manager; administration; occupational therapy; clinical manager; transitioning

Inclusion:

- Leadership within health care
- Occupational therapists as leaders
- Written in English
- Published in a peer reviewed journal
- 2010 and newer

Exclusion:

- Leadership outside of healthcare ex: academia
- Any profession other than occupational therapists
- Not written in English
- Not published in a peer reviewed journal
- Dissertations or theses Older than 2010

RESULTS

- I study was a nonexperimental survey
- III studies were semi-structured interviews

Results:

Occupational therapists identified the items listed below as supports and challenges when transitioning into a leadership role:

- Supports: Intrinsic motivation, supportive mentors, utilizing the unique occupational therapist’s perspective
- Challenges: Relationship dynamics with team members, systemic environment, and steep learning curve
- Motivating factors in becoming a leader include:
 - Desire to influence therapy, need for a change, and career growth/development
- Skills needed for occupational therapists interested in becoming a leader:
 - Personable, confident, competent, creditable, visionary

Limitation:

- Decreased generalizability due to:
 - Low response rate with surveys, and small sample size with interviews
 - Retrospective data collection may have skewed participants ability to correctly recall

BOTTOM LINE FOR OT

- As an occupational therapist we often have the opportunity to hold formal and informal leadership roles and therefore it is essential to be aware of traits and supports necessary for occupational therapists to be successful leaders.
- Occupational therapists have a unique lens due to our diverse skill sets that aid in the ability to become successful leaders within healthcare.
- Academic programs should prepare students for leadership roles by including leadership studies within their curriculum
- Occupational therapists interested in holding formal leadership positions should seek out mentorship, take on responsibilities as a clinician during projects, have a diverse understanding of healthcare, and seek additional courses/training centered around leadership
- Further research needed to:
 - Determine if education (a masters vs. a doctorate) impacts occupational therapists’ ability, desire, and success as leaders
 - Interview employees and staff of occupational therapy leaders to determine their perspective

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FOCUSED QUESTION

What are key characteristics of occupational therapists who hold leadership positions within health care?

