Discourse on the Transformational Leader Metanarrative or Finding the Right Person for the Job

Anita C. Reinhardt, PhD, RN

Changes in healthcare today have called for leadership styles that place a heavy demand on organizations. Shifts in markets and reimbursement strategies call for new leaders with vision that can guide healthcare organizations to change. In a postmodern era, organizations see the transformational leader as a valuable asset in changing times. This article addresses the foundations of the transformational leader metanarrative and, through a postmodern discourse, deconstructs the concept. The article presents a review of postmodern thought in relation to the metanarrative of leadership and applications to nursing administration. **Key words:** *discourse*, *nursing leaders*, *postmodern*, *transactional leader*, *transformational leader*

HEALTH CARE ORGANIZATIONS are in a state of turmoil.[1-5] As questions of reimbursement and raised costs escalate, leadership and leadership style are a major issue for health care organizations.[6] The type of leader needed in health care today, with the diversity of problems facing organizations, is a very important topic. The transformational leader is heralded as the savior of organizations and seen as the salvation of nursing departments.[7-9] Sterling qualities of the transformational leader include creating a shared vision, performing as a role model, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation with creativity and innovation, and individual mentoring. Less than stellar charac-

teristics levied against transformational leader are egocentrism, theatricality, narcissism, and controlling behavior.

Society has shifted direction from a modern perspective in many areas to a postmodern view in which a relative focus is valued.[10] While a return back to modernism may be forecast, the postmodern philosophy has left a mark on management of health care organizations, especially nursing.[10-14] Within health care organizations, the leadership metanarrative of the transformational leader has been used to support changes in health care. Is this the best person for the job or do other organizational perspectives need to be addressed?

This article uses a postmodern discourse to deconstruct the metanarrative of the transformational leader and present views of leadership that may be helpful to nursing organizations. As a point of comparison, this article also considers the differences in constructs between the transactional leader and the transformational leader. The article concludes with implications for nursing leadership.

Corresponding author: Anita C. Reinhardt, PhD, RN, 8044 Ellison Loop NW, Olympia, WA 98502 (e-mail: reinhaan@oshu.edu).

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADER METANARRATIVE

Burns[15] described the construct of the transformational leader in his book *Leadership*. His description was based on work in Max Weber's review of leadership styles that include the charismatic/hero leader, the bureaucratic leader, and the traditional leader.[16] In the metanarrative, Burns renamed the charismatic leader as the transformational leader because the nature of that form of leadership is to change or transform.[17-19] By renaming and mixing the constructs, some confusion may result. The charismatic leader defined by Weber was a highly esteemed person and had gifts of exemplary qualities. The transformational leader construct includes those qualities of the charismatic leader but also demonstrates skills in intellectual stimulation, inspirational leadership, and individual consideration.[17,20] The process of transformational leadership "subsumes both the charismatic and visionary leadership"[20(p130)] and, for the purpose of this discussion, the terms will be used synonymously.

Transactional leader

The bureaucratic leader was renamed the transactional leader in keeping with the style of leadership that maintains the organization through transactions with employees or followers to keep the status quo.[15,17] Weber's traditional leader was incorporated, to some degree, into the transactional leader identified by Burns although Burns viewed the autocratic/traditional or feudal leader/authority as amoral and therefore, not a true leader.[15-17] Bass[21] describes the transactional and transformational leadership constructs as a continuum. Bass goes on to state that most leaders are a combination of the 2 types but in varying amounts.[17] The transactional leader follows the cost-benefit and economic exchange in order to meet subordinates' current material and psychological needs, in return for contracted services performed by the subordinate.[17,20] The transactional leader can assist the subordinate in gaining confidence and motivation by clarifying what performance is required and how to meet expectations. The transformational leader then induces additional effort by sharply increasing the subordinate's confidence and by elevating the value of outcomes for the subordinate.[11,19] The transformational leader goes further and seeks to arouse and satisfy the higher order needs and engage the full person of the follower in alignment with Maslow's hierarchy of needs.[16]

Burns[15] equates the transactional leader to the corporate manager. The leader who maintains order, gets the job done, directs activities, rewards performance, penalizes nonperformance, and ensures the subordinates have the needed skills for the task.[17,19,20] A manager is concerned with completing the contract, meeting the defined goals within the established limits, and the worker-management relationship. The transactional arrangement works to reward completed performance and uses the exception and contingent reward approach as the conceptualization of management.[17,19,20] While seen as the members of the organization that will keep things from changing, organizations need the strong transactional manager as much as transformational leaders.

Transformational leader

The transformational leader is distinct from the transactional manager.[15] While the manager is more concerned with resource management, the transformational leader is interested in the individual with a transcendental purpose to develop and inspire.[22] A visionary, the transformational leader can excite the organization to change. The leader can manipulate the culture in the organization to allow for shifts of focus and new viewpoints.[18] As a political leader, the transformational leader may use his or her authority and power to radically reshape the social and physical environment, even through

coercive methods. By reshaping and destroying the old way of life, they make way for the new.[19,21] The transformational leader serves change, while the manager or transactional leader serves stability.

For Burns,[15] the transformational leader is the leader with vision. This leader type is key to "inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and motivations . . . of both the leaders and the followers."[15] Bennis and Nanus characterize the transformational leader by the 4 *I*s: idealized influence (role model), inspirational motivation (team spirit, motivation, and providing meaning as well as challenge), intellectual stimulation (creativity and innovation), and individual consideration (mentoring). The identified relationship between the transformational leader and the follower is of interactivity to the same purpose.[23]

The key elements of the transformational leader are those recognized in the majority of the related literature.[15,23,24] First, the leader is a communicator. The transformational leader can share his or her vision with followers in such a way to focus the attention and effort so that all are directed to work toward the desired outcome. The leader demonstrates an awareness of beliefs, values, attitudes, and emotions that motivate transformation.[24,25] Second, the transformational leader is intelligent, rational, and a careful problem-solver. He or she is competent and has the skills to get the job done.[24,25] They can provide the intellectual stimulation that feeds followers. Third, the transformational leader is inspiring. He or she expresses important purpose in simple ways while using symbols to focus effort and communicate high expectations. The leader instills pride, gains respect, and garners trust, while showing commitment and passion to the project by demonstrating intensity and persistence. The leader understands collaboration.[21,24] Fourth, but the most significant, the transformational leader gives personal attention. He or she coaches, mentors, advice, and treats people as individuals. The follower becomes special and unique, which brings authenticity to a relationship.[17,24]

POSTMODERN CRITIQUE

Postmodernism is a critique of modernism. Arnold Toynbee first coined the term "post modern" in 1939 as he proposed the idea that the modern era had ended sometime between 1850 and 1875.[26] *Postmodernism* is a "loss of faith in the dreams of modernism."[27] Modernism, based in the Enlightenment, gave optimism to sociology and the hope that the methodology of science could lead the human sciences to a meaningful understanding of people. Postmodernism is the reaction to those dashed hopes. The modern/postmodern debate was launched in the 1960s in the United States and gained impetus in the 1970s and 1980s from the arts and social science.[28]

In a new vocabulary, whom some see as a language game, the postmodern critique identifies dimensions of experience that were lost in the modernist vision.[29] The meanings evolve and change in the postmodern language. By its very premise, everything is challengeable. Question all assumptions. The intent of the postmodern approach is to bring to light the dimensions of our reality that have been obscured by forgetting or denying, such as political dynamics behind publications or reification of technology, which then became recognized as truth.[28,30,31]

The focus of the critique is in opposition to the presuppositions of modern philosophy and most typically, foundationalism, essentialism, and realism.[32] The presuppositions that are critiqued by Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida are "as old as metaphysics itself."[33] Kincheloe and McLaren posit that postmodern theory has been called "an umbrella term that includes antifoundationalist writing in philosophy and the social sciences."[31] The postmodern perspective comments on the binary oppositions that privilege one set of terms over another, thereby marginalizing the alternative. It rejects the view of knowledge as accurate representations and truth as correspondence to reality.[33] It "interrogates" the modern system by identifying areas of contradiction,

ambiguity, and opposition that create power and control to marginalize sections of society and privilege other sections.[28]

Derrida, as a central philosopher in the postmodern critique, challenged assumptions about language.[28,34] Counter to usual assumptions that thoughts and realities are a priori to language and language is the vehicle for communicating ideas and reality, Derrida asserted that language precedes knowledge and that word meaning is constantly changing.[28] Meanings are negotiated. His method of searching out meanings of language to find the contradictions is through deconstruction. By close study of the text, deconstruction will highlight hidden hierarchies, oppositions, inconsistencies, and contradictions. Through deconstruction, the text is "demystified" and internal, arbitrary hierarchies are revealed.[28] Ignoring the central discussion, the deconstruction can look at the "margins" and find the omitted, erased, or withheld.

Binary oppositions in Western society are seen as attempts to construct a hierarchy of values "which attempt not only to guarantee truth, but also serves to exclude and devalue allegedly inferior terms or positions."[28] The goal of deconstruction is to unmask or bring to light the hidden hierarchies, show their arbitrariness, and delegitimate them without replacing or resolving them.[28] Deconstruction directed through discourse, finds the use of language that excludes and seeks out why the exclusion is in place.

In his approach through discourse to the postmodern critique, Foucault questioned the assumptions related to how and who made rules of classification, order, grand theories, systems, and vital truths. He saw no unity in history, no sense of progress, no unity of subject as nothing is without discontinuities. Local knowledge interrupts grand theories. Foucault saw the relationship between power and knowledge as it exists in institutions. No power comes without knowledge and no knowledge comes without power considerations. The power that comes with knowledge influences "politics, economics, culture and other external influences."[28] His discourse in this area brought to light the hegemony that governed individual attempts for power and how various disciplines compete for subject matter control. In health care, an example is the "ownership" of the patient and the "diagnosis"—the physician, the nurse, or the patient themselves. Which discipline or entity controls the power of diagnostic ability and treatment control? Foucault questioned who had the power and the results of the power. He looked at which groups were on the margin and, at the local level, who maintained the power position. He was not as interested in society at large but in local groups and "identity" politics.[28]

Lyotard focused the postmodern critique on the "metanarrative" or the grand truths that are universally accepted. He defined the *postmodern* "as incredulity toward metanarratives."[28] Metanarratives act as foundational stories that try to legitimate discourses and lock society in restrictive systems of thought. Bloland asserts that "the erosion of belief in metanarratives fits with the Derridian and Foucaultian notions that language is not a path to truth nor a means for describing reality, but simply a series of discourses socially created in varying contexts, none of which have superior truth claims."[28] Like Foucault, Lyotard was concerned with power and language. He was interested in the creation of legitimacy. He saw discourses as language games and recognized the linkage to power. Lyotard was also interested in the changes in science and technology as affected by the postmodern society. He looked at the changes related to university and college systems and the implications for differences in education and education practice. He saw science as just another metanarrative with no more legitimacy than any other metanarrative. He also viewed science as judged by its effectiveness and efficiency, which turned science into technology. This perspective brought science into the common arena. It is without privilege and regarded as any other discourse. Within a political milieu, science is in a power struggle to control meaning based

on demonstrated merits. Lyotard expressed an extreme of relativism in the postmodern critique by the use of this view.[28]

Reactions to the postmodern critique vary. Some believe a reactionary reversal of the Enlightenment, with efforts to undo everything seen as progress is necessary. Others view the expanding consciousness where all things are possible and solutions are "out of the box."[10,14,28,35-40] With a look at leadership in the postmodern organization, what is found in the metanarrative on the transformational leader?

DECONSTRUCTION OF THE METANARRATIVE

The modernist theories found in leadership asserts that society needs leaders or leadership and forms of leadership have been forthcoming. If a leader is required in society, the totalitarian leadership construction comes to mind but a subtler perspective is leadership in capitalism and socialization of bureaucrats.[10] As follows, the metanarrative surrounding the transformational leader is profoundly modern because of its emphasis on a paternalistic, sharing vision that focuses subordinates to work for the good of the organization.[15,21,41] Burns characterizes the transformational leader as moral with liberty, justice, and equality principles who works for the benefit of everyone.[15]

The modern position supports the hegemonic status quo. A deconstruction would question this position. The postmodern critique questions the need for leaders at all.[42] It questions the reality of the need for a central vision as the position immediately centralizes a focus and creates margins for exclusion. Those not aligned with the transformational leader are in the excluded portion of society and disenfranchised as well as disempowered. The division created, the organization imbues a segregated organization and society. Although the theory about transformational leaders[11,15] supports a transfer of the leadership style across hierarchical levels, oth-

ers have found different results in studies.[43] Landrum et al advocate transformational teams instead of a single leader. While still important in affecting change, charismatic leaders are not the universal remedy for organizations. In many cases "team-led strategic change will be better oriented to future business needs in rapidly changing and complex environments."[44] A group approach to problem solutions suggests a postmodern perspective to leadership.

Characteristics

Aaltio-Marjosola and Takala[45] identified another 5 characteristics seen in the transformational leader: arising in a time of crisis, resistance to the status quo, theatricality, impression management, and media influence. Like Aaltio-Marjosola and Takala, Waldman[46] also recognized the crisis or period of instability connection when related to the transformational leader. "Adaptive organizational culture will foster the emergence of leaders predisposed to showing charismatic behaviors. Charismatic behaviors will, in turn, reinforce core values of an adaptive culture while helping to change aspects of culture that become dysfunctional over time."[46] Waldman then proposed that charismatic relationships develop more when conditions in the organization are perceived as volatile.[47] Traits showing resistance to the status quo and theatricality (the ability to draw attention through drama or a "show") surface during times of uncertainty as the transformational leader moves to action.[45] The charismatic leader is aware of his or her surroundings and will use impression management and any media influence during an unstable time to support his or her objective.[45,48]

In contrast to noted positive attributes, Clements and Washbush[49] recognize a darker side of the transformational leader construct. If the darker side is not acknowledged, they assert, the influence exerted by a charismatic leader's negative actions can distort and may encourage "turning a blind eye" to the leader's behavior. It is an issue of

balance. Quite the reverse to attributes such as an institution-orientated focus, the desire to serve others, and creating effective work climates, the transformational leader can also exhibit traits like the "self-aggrandizing of personal power that seeks to use position, and often charisma, for personal gain."[49] Traits of narcissism, emotional illiteracy (which is the inability to differentiate and verbalize emotion), unwillingness to let go (when they no longer fit the demand of the job), and dysfunctional behaviors of eager followers can cause negative results in organizations. The transformational leader is instrumental in promoting social good, but given the wrong direction can also promote social disaster. Recognizing the negative outcomes related to the charismatic attributes of the transformational leader—such as bad decision-making, frustration, dysfunctional organizations, unintended consequences, wasted resources, ruined careers, organizational decline or dissolution, and many other failures—can thwart disaster.[49] Outcomes are not accidents.

Moral development

Using Kohlberg's stages of moral development, Burns categorizes leaders into 2 groups: the moral value leader and the amoral "leader."[17] The *moral leader* is one who comes from and always goes back to the fundamental needs, wants, aspirations, and values of his or her followers. For Burns, the moral leader has a relationship with his or her followers that is "distinct from mere power-holding and as the opposite of brute power."[15] The moral leader "leads to have a relationship not only of power but of mutual needs, aspirations, and higher values."[15] Burns reflects, by responding to the moral leader, "followers have adequate knowledge of alternative leaders and programs and the capacity to choose among those alternatives."[15] Further, moral leaders "take responsibility for their commitments—if they promise certain kinds of economic, social, and political change, they assume leadership in the bringing about of that change."[15] Moral leaders with a higher purpose can be transactional or transforma-

tional leaders. Amoral coercive dictators and fascists with a strong will to power are not, by the very nature of being, true leaders. Amoral leaders can be neither transformational nor transactional.[15]

Moral leadership values that are applied to the transactional and transformational leader as identified by Burns include honesty, responsibility, fairness, and honoring one's commitments and values of liberty, justice, equality, and collective well-being.[17,19,20] A transactional leader approaches followers with the purpose of exchanging work for pay and jobs for votes, while appealing to the followers' varied interests as a way to consummate an understanding. Moral values—means versus ends—focus the transactional and transformational leadership differently from amoral ones.[15] Burns creates a duality between moral and amoral leaders. However, the duality now created is deconstructed.

The postmodern deconstruction asks, 'Who decides what and who is moral?' The postmodern stance questions racism, sexism, Eurocentrism, bureaucracies, and colonialism.[31] While the modern perspective voices concern in stated moral perspectives, the question of morality is based in the white, male, privileged, and construction of Eurocentric Western Christianity. Are the standards of morality set by these privileged few? Can the marginalized offer another perspective to the moral issue and define what is moral differently? A postmodern perspective would see a relativist vision of morality with more than one way of determining what is moral. What may be moral to the white male dominant leader with a transformational intention, in reality may be seen as a method to retain control. The vision proposed as the right and true path is but another way of ensuring hegemonic control of the organization.

However, in hopes of leading the "troops" forward, in military formation, the transformational leader inspires for the "right" and asserts to "higher level values."[21] Society decides the levels of morality both culturally and legally. What was moral for Alexander the Great would not be moral for Mother

Theresa. Does the duality of moral and amoral positions decide right and wrong? Can outcome determine morality? While Hitler can be seen in some lights as a transformational leader based on vision and cultural shifts, Burns classified him as amoral and therefore not transformational.[12,15,21] The perspective is important.

Marginalized

From a feminist perspective of leadership, women have been severely limited in opportunities to lead and compensation for same job and pay standards continue to be unequal.[35,50-52] The postmodern perspective recognizes the liberation role of women and minorities; the need to reskill workers; the need for education; the reaffirmation of both individual and community; entrepreneurial spirit; and the need to expose subtle bureaucratic control and surveillance mechanisms for what they are and what they do.[53] Although transformational, the charismatic leader construct does not accurately describe leadership opportunities for both sexes and all races. It was constructed in the Eurocentric, male, capitalist view to support the competitive business arena.[46,54] While the transformational leader metanarrative does not exclude races or sexes, the construct does not address inclusion either. The marginalized continue to have concerns about the glass ceiling. The challenge persists to testing visionary racial perspectives.

In a sense, the transformational leader comes from both perspectives of dominant manager to creative innovator. The postmodern organization wants the organizational system to be made of innovative, creative, and skilled individuals without a need for management. Here diversity is the key with marginalized workers being brought to center and empowered.[53]

Communication

The transformational leader is a good communicator.[24] Duality of good communication is the lack of or poor communication. What is good communication? Is it English? Is

it educated? Minorities and diverse groups are at a disadvantage when educational opportunities are evaluated. As families with higher incomes migrate from the cities to the suburbs, education dollars go with them. The diversity mix of populations is greater in inner cities where marginalized groups are concentrated. As emphasized in a postmodern critique, education and power go hand in hand. True empowerment requires educational opportunities for marginalized groups. The communication of vision is possible in group and research formats such as participatory action research.

Rational traits

The transformational leader is an intelligent, rational, competent, and careful problem solver.[24] Are these traits derived from the hegemonic power base of control? A postmodern perspective would value all perspectives and not replace a grand narrative with another narrative. Could a leader transform an organization in irrational ways? What is rational to one is not to another and often time is the only determinant of success. Impulse and "gut feelings" have guided leaders to achieve important outcomes as well as measured, "market" research. Both types of decision influences have value in a postmodern framework.

Inspiration

The transformational leader is inspiring.[24] Is inspiration a universal truth? Is it subjective, difficult to measure, and unscientific? Contradicting this trait would lead the skeptic to the ordinary and pragmatic perspective. Is the ordinary transactional manager less challenged than a transformational leader? In postmodern organizations, the leader is not only inspiring but also flexible and alert in a skeptical but not cynical way. Can inspiration be seen as fanatical or dangerous? Modern change, to be effective, often requires careful planning. Although based in inspiration, innovation can be fostered by anyone in an organization and the postmodern perspective would create avenues for it to surface.

Personal attention

The transformational leader gives personal attention to subordinates.[24] The leader is visible, interactive, and approachable. The duality of demonstrated personal involvement is the aloof, uninvolved manager. The postmodern view instead wonders why there ever was a barrier between management and subordinates and why, with all focused to a common goal, communication restrictions and separations are needed. Open management techniques work to this end. Sharing of power without abdication and seeking group-generated resolutions to problems creates the participative environment and supports a postmodern philosophy.

APPLICATION TO NURSING MANAGEMENT

In a nursing administration environment, a number of studies have shown positive results when a transformational leader implemented organizational change.[7-9,55-58] The studies have found that transformational leaders have best results in participative organizations.[59] The position of the transformational leader is most effective at upper management. However, unit-level transformational leadership positions can demonstrate positive results. Affects on job satisfaction, autonomy, empowerment, length of employment, work group effectiveness, decision making, and patient satisfaction from a transformational leader at a unit manager level are thought to facilitate performance.[9,58] This finding lends credence to Bass' assertion that a leader can be part transactional and part transformational.[17]

A transformational nursing leader can guide an educational organization (or a state regulatory board) to offer alternative educational methods such as a competency-based program that builds cooperative programs between community colleges and university settings as now being developed in the state of Oregon (Christine A. Tanner, RN, PhD, oral communication, February 10, 2003). Enlarging educational oppor-

tunities within health care can support change.

As noted above, a group or team approach to governance identified and supported by a transformational leader incorporates both modern and postmodern sentiments. Creating an open forum for discussion and planning with encouragement of marginalized sectors of the organization can allow a transformation of a hegemonicly controlled power structure. An example is shared governance or management teams.

Opening the discussion of reorganization of nursing practice to include those marginalized by both nursing administration and hospital administration requires a leader with transformational skills. Nursing needs a mentor intent on nurturing and guiding subordinates to reinvent the profession and meet current and future demands. As Wheatley posits a leader with an innovative vision, ability to communicate, and approaching leadership with a new science perspective can offer needed change.[60] Learning organizations are a postmodern haven for a transformational leader.[61,62] Health care is ripe for this kind of change and who better than a leader born from innovation to lead the change. Nursing is placed at a critical juncture to assume the transformational role and assess, plan, coordinate, implement, and evaluate a transformation.

The application of the transformational leader to nursing administration is the implementation of the right person for the right job. The ever-changing environment of health care needs leaders that are light on their feet and able to see new approaches to nursing practice. Restructuring elements of nursing practice to fit more directly into the reorganization of health care requires an "out of the box" approach. Even though the transformational leader metanarrative is grounded in modern thought, the application of innovative ideas that are a hallmark of the transformational leader, offers the organization a very postmodern approach to management. Using a moral transformational leader (one placed centrally in the health care organization such

as a nursing leader) is a modern approach to a postmodern dilemma. All practices can be questioned and, with nothing sacred, old nursing traditional care can be reviewed with an intention to find a different approach to patient care. Question everything and look for new solutions.

As the deconstruction of the transformational leader metanarrative noted, the construct has both positive and negative characteristics. A postmodern transforming (and learning) organization would do well to capitalize on the best characteristics and watch out for the worst. Support the role model, mentoring, team spirit, motivation, meaning, challenge, intellectual stimulation, creativity, innovation, and individual consideration. Watch for self-aggrandizing of personal power that seeks to use position, and often charisma, for personal gain. The moral transformational leader, or as some say, the "transcendental leader," will provide only the positive characteristics needed for subordinate growth and support.[41] Moreover, a postmodern organization will encourage those on the margins to come to center and question all assumptions. This is the place for the transformational leader.

CONCLUSION

The postmodern transition in organizational leadership is to increase diversity, get beyond the bureaucratic restrictions, open the gaze of workers, empower voices, change the discourses to include global understanding and be a master of your life instead of a prisoner to it.[53] Unfortunately, management is still privileged and workers still marginalized. Organizations spend more training money on management than on subordinates. Organiza-

tional science, management theory, and organizational behavior are discourses of control. In turbulent, uncertain, and chaotic times, when forces threaten stability, rational control is the organizational response. This is also the time of the emergence of the transformational leader.[47] "Outside the box" with a vision is where the transformational leader excels. To be successful leaders of postmodern organizations, one must be flexible and adaptable. The goal is to achieve what is needed even when that goal changes to the opposite of what was expected.[10]

Does the transformational leader metanarrative support the postmodern perspective? While the construct may purport many received principles of this perspective, in actuality, the metanarrative is decidedly modern and any contingency that alludes to a postmodern slant for a transformational leader negates the foundations of the construct. This is not to say that a postmodern organization cannot utilize components of the construct to guide the organization, but to ascribe the transformational leader, as a postmodern product is unwarranted. As health care remains the purview of a hegemonic, bureaucratic, modern structure, the transformational leader can be useful and vital to guide organizations toward needed change. The postmodern critique flows from modern perceptions. The natural development of questioning and change is evolutionary and expected. Although based in a modern framework, the transformational leader is the right person for the job to guide health care to a postmodern organization. Nursing can not only participate in the change but also assume the lead with nursing leaders that offer a transformational perspective and foster a new vision of nursing in health care especially within a postmodern orientation.

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