



Leading with integrity: a qualitative research study

Leading with
integrity

Lorna Storr

James Cook University Hospital, Middlesbrough, UK

415

Keywords Ethics, Leadership, Change management, Health services

Abstract This research paper gives an account of a study into the relationship between leadership and integrity. There is a critical analysis of the current literature for effective, successful and ethical leadership particularly, integrity. The purpose and aim of this paper is to build on the current notions of leadership within the literature, debate contemporary approaches, focussing specifically on practices within the UK National Health Service in the early 21st century. This leads to a discussion of the literature on ethical leadership theory, which includes public service values, ethical relationships and leading with integrity. A small study was undertaken consisting of 18 interviews with leaders and managers within a District General Hospital. Using the Repertory Grid technique and analysis 15 themes emerged from the constructs elicited, which were compared to the literature for leadership and integrity and other studies. As well as finding areas of overlap, a number of additional constructs were elicited which suggested that effective leadership correlates with integrity and the presence of integrity will improve organisational effectiveness. The study identified that perceptions of leadership character and behaviour are used to judge the effectiveness and integrity of a leader. However, the ethical implications and consequences of leaders' scope of power and influence such as policy and strategy are somewhat neglected and lacking in debate. The findings suggest that leaders are not judged according to the ethical nature of decision making, and leading and managing complex change but that the importance of integrity and ethical leadership correlated with higher levels of hierarchical status and that it is assumed by virtue of status and success that leaders lead with integrity. Finally, the findings of this study seem to suggest that nurse leadership capability is developing as a consequence of recent national investment.

Introduction

Britain's public services face unprecedented challenges and there is a recognised scarcity of leadership and management capability for the 21st century. There are deficiencies particularly in those possessing personal ethics and values (Perren, 2002, pp. 7, 18-21; Performance and Innovation Unit, 2000; Quirk, 1997; SanFacon, 2002, p. 49). Unwittingly, the leader imposing personal ambitions, which are incongruous with the needs of the organisation, can ruin organisational structures and processes (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999; McKendall, 1993; SanFacon, 2002, p. 50).

Furthermore, the NHS modernisation agenda demands transformational change with service improvements therefore, the nature of the relationship between the leader and follower requires trust and commitment in order to endure this process of transformation. The dynamics of such change can evoke undesirable (and intolerable) confusion for the follower making them vulnerable and eager to accept the leaders (perceived concrete) agenda (Department of health, 2002b, p. 9; Ferlie *et al.*, 1996, p. 9; Greenhall, 2000; Kouzes and Posner, 1987, p. 5; McKendall, 1993; Porter O'Grady, 1993; Rosenbach and Taylor, 1998, pp. 48, 95, 225; Secretary of State for Health, 2002a, pp. 37-42, 2002b).

This study uses a qualitative technique known as Repertory Grid analysis, which elicits, through interview discussion associated constructs from a selection of leaders



within a District General Hospital (Kelly, 1955). Emerging themes from these interviews are compared to existing leadership and integrity literature and research.

Background to the study

Parry and Proctor-Thomas (2002) argue that ethically led organisations are more effective with positive outcomes such as strengthened organisational culture, lower levels of staff turnover and increased employee effort. However, Becker (1998) and Petrick and Quinn (2001) suggest that integrity within organisations has been neglected largely due to insufficient leadership accountability for its moral capability and outcomes.

A review of the literature suggests there is a growing interest in leadership ethics particularly within government and public sector services. The impetus for this agenda seems to be precipitated by unscrupulous conduct presented as scandals, sleaze and betrayals, which are frequently reported (Department of health, 2000b; Ford, 2001; Fox, 1995; Kouzes and Posner, 1993, pp. 37-44; Lawton, 1998; Miller, 1996). Consequently, there are increasing levels of cynicism, suspicion and public disenchantment.

Becker (1998) and Parry and Proctor-Thomas (2002) state that the concept of integrity is underdeveloped, vague and ill defined, and often used interchangeably with words such as conscientiousness and honesty. In spite of this, integrity tests do exist but have provoked controversy and been criticised for their construct validity (Parry and Proctor-Thomas, 2002; Petrick and Quinn, 2001; Northouse, 2001, pp. 273-5).

It is within this context that this study critically explores the perceptions of a number of senior professionals employed within a UK public service to test out whether leaders with integrity are perceived as better leaders so as to add to the available research evidence and inform practice.

The ethical nature of leadership

Leadership is not a person or a position . . . it is a complex, paradoxical and moral relationship between people, which can cause harm between some groups, accompanied by benefits to others . . . and is based on trust, obligation, commitment, emotion and a shared vision of the good – no one can be a leader without willing followers (Ciulla, 1998, p. xv; Miller, 1996; Rosenbach and Taylor, 1998, pp. 2-4).

From a limited analysis of the literature it would seem that there is no definitive, robust and conclusive definition of leadership (Alimo-Metcalfe and Lawler, 2001; Kets de Vries, 1994 as cited by Grint, 1997, p. 250), however, there appears to be two common denominators (Northouse, 2001, pp. 2-5):

- (1) it is a process of getting things done through others based on an interactive relationship – what it is
- (2) mutual goals are achieved by influence and emotions – how it is exercised

It would also seem that the essence of leadership appears to be a process, act or influence. Opportunities therefore, exist for morally unappealing behaviours such as coercion and manipulation by which the needs and opinions of followers can be discounted or ignored. However, it could be argued that perhaps it is assumed that morally acceptable behaviour is an innate quality of the leader by virtue of their status. This is perhaps a naive view, which attracts the risk of exploitation and abuse.

In an attempt to protect followers and organisations from this, a moral component to defining leadership that is some form of “moral and ethical code of conduct (and accountability)” is required (Ciulla, 1998, pp. 12-5; Northouse, 2001, p. 148).

Taking up this theme, it is apposite to distinguish between the terms ethics and morals as these are frequently used interchangeably (Parker, 1998, p. 274):

Ethics: what people should do

As a set of principles, often defined as a code that acts as a guide to conduct. This set of principles provides a framework for acting (Lawton, 1998, p. 16; Parker, 1998, p. 1).

Morals: what people actually do

As concerned with action, with how a person lives up to the demands of what is perceived to be right action. Thus, an individual may be aware of ethical principles and still act immorally (Lawton, 1998, p. 16; Parker, 1998, p. 1).

Thus, these terms can be differentiated by: the cognitive – having an awareness of guiding principles and the behavioural – that is one’s conduct. Buckley *et al.* (2001, as cited by Ford, 2001) enriches these by advocating the explicit inclusion of shared value systems as a focus which seeks to guide, channel, shape and direct the behaviour of individuals (in organisations) in a productive manner.

To this end, the ethical and moral nature of leadership can be understood by character and behaviour (agents and actions) both of which are coloured by ones value and belief systems (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999; Lawton, 1998, p. 44).

...Ethics is central to leadership because of the nature of the process of influence, the need to engage followers to accomplish mutual goals, and the impact leaders have on establishing the organisation’s values (Northouse, 2001, p. 255).

From the literature, effective and successful leadership is a combination of high levels of task-orientated and relationship centred activity (Rosenbach and Taylor, 1998, pp. 61-2). It is considered to be an intimate relationship based on emotions that can be socially constituted (and manipulated) (Solomon, 1996; Ciulla, 1998, pp. 11-3). This scope of influence highlights the centrality of ethics, values and morals. This is particularly evident with transformational leaders who can enable followers to excel beyond expectations by unifying their values and beliefs and raising their followers up through various stages of morality and need (Ciulla, 1998, pp. 15-6).

Integrity of character within this transforming relationship between the follower and leader is therefore essential and is often found to be associated with successful leadership (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1996; Bass, 1990, pp. 75, 69; Bennis, 1989, p. 117; Calman, 1998; DePree, 1992, p. 10; Jarrold, 1998; Kouzes and Posner, 1987, pp. 16, 301; Rosenbach and Taylor, 1998, p. 225; Simons, 1999).

Furthermore the transformational leader can enable a sharing of values and beliefs and higher levels of . . . morality and consciousness (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999; Ciulla, 1998, p. 15; Kouzes and Posner, 1987, p. 118; Northouse, 2001, pp. 131-5; Winston, 1996). Arguably, this assumes the follower recognises the need to improve their morality. Whilst this can be beneficial, it could create some degree of emotional disequilibria as the follower begins to appreciate (and abandon) previously held seemingly satisfactory principles.

If leaders are to succeed, then trust is an imperative and requires integrity (Lawton, 1998, p. 47; Quirk, 1997; Simons, 1999). Followers will abdicate self-interest for

self-actualisation and commitment to achieving designated outcomes that will benefit the group and so converting purpose into action – personal needs are denied and exchanged for meeting the needs of the collective (Ford, 2000; Grint, 2000; Rosenbach and Taylor, 1998, p. 3). Additionally, this suggests there is also an issue of vulnerability for the leader who in order to achieve needs to trust in the abilities of followers, take risks and allow followers to do their best (DePree, 1992, pp. 220-1; SanFacon, 2002, p. 50).

Transformational change

Behind the benefits of change there is also the desire to wield power and control which can be generated through the consequential dynamics of confusion, uncertainty and ambiguity (Bass, 1990, pp. 238-9; McKendall, 1993). It could be argued therefore that leadership demands an ethical code of conduct as “leaders rule us, run things and wield power” (Lawton, 1998, p. 108; Sheehy, as cited by Rosenbach and Taylor, 1998, pp. 10-11). Followers choosing to participate in the relational process of transformational change can be potentially vulnerable to such threats as the abuse of power, failure and loss (Bast, 1995; Rosenbach and Taylor, 1998, pp. 54, 70-1; SanFacon, 2002, pp. 33, 50).

To this end the nature of the leader and follower relationship is vulnerable to the corrupting influences of the abuse of power and the chaos associated with change (Ciulla, 1998, p. 53). However, whilst the nature of ethical leadership may be complex, involved and multifaceted; the virtues of this can help to protect both the follower and the organisation from such detrimental effects (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999; Northouse, 2001, p. 249; Parker, 1998, p. 253; Trevino *et al.*, 1999, p. 129).

Table I provides a summary of the ethical nature of leadership.

Ethical issues in the public services

Current literature suggests a growing interest in leadership ethics particularly within government and public sector services. The impetus for this agenda seems to be concerned with a declining confidence and rising cynicism in government conduct; raised public expectations and increasing levels of accountability (Ciulla, 1998, p. xvi; DePree, 1992, pp. 125-7; Department of health, 2002a, pp. 37-42; Ford, 2001; Fox, 1995; Kouzes and Posner, 1993, pp. 33, 36-41; Lawton, 1998, pp. 1-5, 58-63; Miller, 1996; Perren, 2002; Rosenbach and Taylor, 1998, pp. 123-7; Trevino *et al.*, 1999, p. 131).

Bennis and Nanus (1985) suggest this is not a decline in the “work ethic”, but due to poor leadership. Leaders are failing to exercise the necessary (ethical) competence in order to lead successfully in the 21st century (Department of health, 2002a, pp. 86-7, 2002b, p. 14; NHS Executive, 2000; Rosenbach and Taylor, 1998, p. 5; Winterton *et al.*, 2000, p. 11). Some of the causes range from the elusive, complex and paradoxical nature of leadership, and leading in the 21st century to insufficient education and training programmes particularly in relation to applied ethics (Ciulla, 1998, p. 11; Fox, 1995; Northouse, 2001, pp. 265-7; Performance and Innovation Unit, 2000; Preston, 1996; Rosenbach and Taylor, 1998, p. 1).

Unscrupulous conduct presented as scandals, sleaze and betrayals are frequently reported (Department of health, 2000b; Ford, 2001; Fox, 1995; Kouzes and Posner, 1993, pp. 37-44; Lawton, 1998; Miller, 1996). These high profile cases can erode leadership

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| Ethical and moral person – who they are – character | | |
| <i>Principles</i> | | |
| Ethical values | Model Values | End Values |
| “old fashioned character tests” – sobriety, chastity, abstinence, kindness, altruism, tolerance | Honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, reliability, reciprocity, accountability, dignity, respect | Order (security) Liberty, equality, justice, community |
| – maintains stability and the ‘status quo’ | – important to transactional leaders | –essential for transforming leadership |
| <i>Behaviours – moral conduct</i> | | |
| Do the right thing | | |
| Concern for people | | |
| Being open | | |
| Personal morality | | |
| <i>Decision making – processes</i> | | |
| Hold to values | | |
| Objective/fair | | |
| Concern for society | | |
| Follow ethical decision rules | | |
| Moral Leadership – what they do – conduct | | |
| Role modelling through visible action | | |
| ‘demonstrable’ ethics and values | | |
| (influencing/inspiring i.e. transformational | | |
| Rewards and discipline- desirable and undesirable | | |
| conduct (motivation) i.e. transactional | | |
| Communicating about ethics and values- informing | | |
| others of acceptable/unacceptable principles | | |
| (influencing and persuasion), i.e. transformational | | |
| Source: Adapted from Bass and Steidlmeier (1999), Ciulla (1998, p. x), Northouse (2001, p. 250) and Trevino <i>et al.</i> (1999, p. 131) | | |

Table I.
The ethical nature of leadership

credibility and trust whilst creating suspicion and disillusionment (Ciulla, 1998, p. 174; Kouzes and Posner, 1993, pp. 37-44; Northouse, 2001, pp. 264-5; Rosenbach and Taylor, 1998, pp. 125-7). Ciulla (1998, p. 1) goes on to state that we live in a world where leaders are often disappointing with ethical shortcomings. It could be argued that this is due to an increased availability of information about the private (and public) life of leaders, which paradoxically could provoke an increased desire for highly ethical leaders. Kouzes and Posner (1993, p. 33) state there is a growing sense among employees that management is not competent to handle these tough challenges, that they are not quite telling the truth, and that they are motivated more by greed and self interest than by concern for the customer, the employees, or the country.

Ford (2001) argues that the growing interest in ethics and morality as a response to a deteriorating image and reputation associated with well-publicised abuses and business disasters may also provide a competitive advantage. If a service, business or individual attracts a reputation for good ethical and moral standards, then this may influence consumer, customer or public confidence (support and spending). Additionally, a recent surge in the publication of codes of ethics and demonstrable ethical and moral conduct particularly within the health service may also be an attempt to protect the public service ethos characterised by honesty, integrity, probity, impartiality and accountability (Ford, 2001; Lawton, 1998, pp. 3, 44-65; Trevino *et al.*, 1999, p. 143).

Having high principles for behaviour can also evoke “moral symmetry” and “synergy” i.e. harmonious groups with highly motivated members (Cole, 1996, p. 130; SanFacon, 2002, p. 60). Mullins (1996, pp. 170-1) states that organisational effectiveness is optimised not by members acting as individuals but as collaborative members of a work group. Reasons for this could be attributed to the synergetic effect of the team (Mullins, 1996, p. 287). Essentially, this means that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Solomon (1996) believes there is an intimate relationship between motivations i.e. desires (which creates energy and emotions) and ethics. There seems to be a bonding between emotions, ethics and leadership. If one of the essential ingredients of leadership is the ability to inspire and encourage commitment to organisational goals then it could be argued that feelings are evoked in order to achieve success (Lord Bridges as cited by Hunt and O’Toole, 1998, p. 175). However, this has the potential to become corrupt and socially manipulative, although Ciulla (1998, p. x) would argue that some degree of manipulation is necessary in order to induce effective behaviour change (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999; Bast, 1995; Conger, 1990; Hunt and O’Toole, 1998, p. 175; Solomon, 1996). The author would therefore argue that ethically sensitive leadership (what leaders should do) does not necessarily equate with moral leadership i.e. what leaders actually do. In spite of “knowing (and being responsible for) what is high principled behaviour”, there is a danger that this can be (deliberately) ignored for one’s personal gain by exploiting the emotions and affections of others (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999; Conger, 1990; Kouzes and Posner, 1992; Solomon, 1996).

Ethical relationships – trust and credibility

Northouse (2001, pp. 254-6) and Bennis and Nanus (1985) suggest that one of the responsible tasks for a leader is to enhance the ethics and morality of followers conduct. They purport that leaders can engender socially acceptable behaviour by their own examples and commitment. However, this could imply a somewhat paternalistic

style “command and control” i.e. transactional leadership whereby followers (or subordinates) are told what to do therefore usurping individual responsibility (SanFacon, 2002, p. 46). Block (1996, p. 43) describes how individuals have the knowledge and the answers within themselves and that adults do not have to be taught how to behave (although the author would challenge this based on witnessing unintelligent adult behaviour amongst professionals).

Kouzes and Posner (1987, pp. 8, 47) describe how when “modelling the way”, in doing so, leaders must behave in a way which gains the respect and trust of others. Considerable integrity is required in order to ensure consistency and congruency between one’s values, beliefs and behaviour. These writers go on to say how credibility also earns the trust and confidence of followers. Being honest and truthful (trustworthy) are considered to be the most important ingredients to being believed which in turn is the greatest attribute to credibility (Kouzes and Posner, 1993, pp. 24-5; Quirk, 1997; SanFacon, 2002, p. 45; Simons, 1999). The essential ingredients to credibility are:

Truth + honesty → integrity + technical competence → trust → believable
→ credibility → reputation → strengthened leadership → effectiveness

(Kouzes and Posner, 1993, pp. 24-5; SanFacon, 2002, pp. 45-6).

Leading with integrity

Integrity in all things precedes all else. The open demonstration of integrity is essential; followers must be wholeheartedly convinced of their leaders’ integrity...Leaders with integrity inspire *confidence* in others...it is the most *critical factor* in building a committed team....Because leaders with integrity can be *trusted* to do what they say they are going to do (Astin and Astin, 2001; DePree, 1992, p. 10; Northouse, 2001, p. 20).

Increasingly, current research and literature from many notable leadership scholars purport both the need for leaders and organisations to demonstrate integrity capability and capacity (competence) (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1998, 2001a, b; Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2000, 2001; Bass, 1990, p. 69; Donabedian, 1989; Drucker, 1999, pp. 155-6; Goleman *et al.*, 2002, pp. 218-9; HFMA, 1996; Kouzes and Posner, 1993, pp. 12, 34; Lawton, 1998, p. 47; Northouse, 2001, pp. 17-18, 20; Perren, 2002; Performance and Innovation Unit, 2000; Rosenbach and Taylor, 1998, p. 225; Winterton *et al.*, 2000, pp. 97-101).

Becker (1998) provides four key areas, which demonstrate the value of integrity in the workplace. They are:

- (1) a predictor of job performance;
- (2) a determinant of counter productive behaviours;
- (3) a central determinant of trust; and
- (4) a central trait of effective leaders and organisational success.

It would therefore seem that integrity of character not only represents a trait associated with exemplary leadership but also successful organisation outcomes (Bass, 1990; Becker, 1998; Bennis, 1989; Lawton, 1998, p. 47; Parry and Proctor-Thomas, 2002;

Petrick and Quinn, 2001; Simons, 1999). Parry and Proctor-Thomas (2002) argue that ethically led organisations are also more effective due to:

- strengthened organisational culture;
- lower levels of staff turnover; and
- increased employee effort.

...the impact of leader integrity and ethical leadership on organisational effectiveness has been frequently noted and supported in past literature (Parry and Proctor-Thomas, 2002).

These writers go onto compare the positive outcomes of high levels of integrity (within an organisation i.e. capacity) to one with lower levels. However, Becker (1998) and Petrick and Quinn (2001) suggest that integrity within organisations has been neglected largely due to insufficient leadership accountability for its moral capability and outcomes. They extend this by identifying recent precipitating factors:

- (1) rising workplace violence and global terrorism as impulsive responses to settling business moral conflicts;
- (2) polarized stagnation of corporate decision processes in collective settings due to inability to compromise or resolve unsettled value conflicts;
- (3) the prevalence of wasted, idle and scarce resources that reduce effective global cooperation and competition;
- (4) disparity of leader employee perceptions of organisational ethics and the relative lack of coordinated formal processes to embed ethics in strategic decision making; and
- (5) neglected research which empirically demonstrates that leaders with behavioural complexity skill produce better organisational performance.

Becker (1998) and Parry and Proctor-Thomas (2002) explain this by suggesting that the concept of integrity is underdeveloped, vague and ill defined. A consequence of integrity being inadequately understood is that it is often used interchangeably with words such as conscientiousness and honesty. The following definitions taken from Becker (1998) illustrate this.

- (1) "Integrity means that a person's behaviour is consistent with espoused values and that a person is honest and trustworthy."
- (2) "Integrity is the reputation for truthfulness and honesty of the trusted person."

The author would argue that despite more recent measures to correct this as reflected in national directives which make explicit the need to promulgate leadership with integrity, unless organisations are challenged to be accountable these initiatives may prove to be futile (NHS Executive, 2000; Northouse, 2001, p. 274; Perren, 2002; Petrick and Quinn, 2001; Performance and Innovation Unit, 2000; Winterton *et al.*, 2000, pp. 97-101).

You need to prove yourself everyday, and one inconsistency in behaviour in relation to espoused values can demolish years of hard work (Alimo-Metcalf, 1996).

So what are the distinguishing features of a leader with integrity – what makes them different and how would these be measured? Much of the literature associates this with

“transformational leadership” and links this to four key factors (Bass, 1998, as cited by Parry and Proctor-Thomas, 2002):

- (1) charisma/idealised influence;
- (2) inspirational motivation;
- (3) intellectual stimulation; and
- (4) individual consideration.

Whilst there is evidence to suggest that transformational leadership is more effective, productive, innovative and satisfying to followers (than is transactional), paradoxically, Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) and Conger (1990) highlight concerns that transformational leadership is also capable of becoming unethical. It could be argued that the motivational effects of charisma can prove to be deceiving, deluding and harmful – “. . . transformational leaders could be virtuous or villainous . . . (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999). Ciulla (1998, p. 173-4) suggests that such leaders are vulnerable to practices described as “impression management” (the regulation of information about a vision, the organisation and the self) (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999), which include exaggeration, coercion, flattery and empty promises.

Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) whilst acknowledging “evil” leaders can bring about good things, they develop and enhance these behaviours stating that potentially transformational leadership can “manipulate followers along a primrose path on which they lose more than they gain” and encourages followers to go beyond their own self-interests for the good of the organisation and even emotionally engages followers irrationally in pursuits of evil ends contrary to the followers’ best interests.

If transformational leadership is culpable to unethical behaviour then why the recent promotion and interest in its adoption? Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) and Parry and Proctor-Thomas (2002) reassuringly suggest that transformational leadership actually has two distinctions:

- (1) authentic transformational leadership (ethical), and
- (2) pseudo-transformational leadership (unethical).

Pseudo transformational leaders are capable of incongruous behaviour that is inconsistent and unreliable. “Publicly..they could act as if they were truly transformational although privately they were more concerned about themselves. . .and that inauthenticity in transformational leaders could result in destructive outcomes” (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999). This is not an either or but a co-existence, a sophisticated kaleidoscope of behaviours.

What makes the deciding difference is that authentic transformational leaders are more concerned with the welfare of the community than oneself, in that the well being of others and the common good overrides and is more important than one’s own. To this end, Parry and Proctor-Thomas (2002) state that by definition, authentic transformational leaders are ethical and pseudo-transformational leaders lack integrity.

Research design and methodology

A qualitative study was undertaken, using the repertory grid technique (RGT) to glean individuals’ ideas concerning leadership and integrity (Kelly, 1955, as cited in

Easterby-Smith, 1980). This methodology is used to interview and obtain views, attitudes and perceptions, which are termed “personal constructs” (Rae, 1991, p. 49).

This qualitative style of enquiry intends to gain an “authentic understanding of people’s experiences. . . and perceptions” (Seale and Silverman, 1997). Greenhalgh and Taylor (1997, p. 740, as cited in Barker, 1999, pp. 55-6) suggest a qualitative study that is one which “seeks deeper truth” and sets out to understand or interpret phenomena by the meanings people give to them.

Qualitative research methodologies unlike quantitative methods are best able to take account of the nature of human perceptions, thoughts and ideas, which recognise the complex and dynamic quality of the interpersonal world (Hoepfl, 1997; Reed, 1989). Given the ethical, perceptual, interpersonal and relational nature of leadership and integrity the author would suggest that a qualitative approach to this study is highly appropriate in order to yield relevant insights (Craig and Gustafson, 1998; Easterby-Smith, 1980; Northouse, 2001, pp. 254-5; Parry and Proctor-Thomas, 2002; Rae, 1991, pp. 49-51; Simons, 1999).

Sample

A purposive sample of 18 “leaders” were selected from within an acute hospital Trust setting within the north of England. These were subdivided into three groups of six taken from three different levels of leadership and managerial responsibility:

- (1) executive and non-executive;
- (2) senior manager; and
- (3) supervisor.

Table II provides a summary

| M/F | Professional background | Executive/Non-executive/NA |
|-----|--|----------------------------|
| M | Personnel ^a | NA |
| M | Nursing (General) ^a | NA |
| M | Nursing (General) ^a | NA |
| M | Domestic ^a | NA |
| M | Finance ^a | NA |
| F | Nursing (General) ^a | NA |
| M | Nursing (General) ^b | NA |
| F | Speech and Language therapy ^b | NA |
| M | Nursing (Mental health) ^b | NA |
| F | Nursing (Community) ^b | NA |
| M | Nursing (Learning disability) ^b | NA |
| F | Nursing (Mental health) ^b | NA |
| F | Nursing (All Areas) ^c | Executive |
| M | Chief executive ^c | Executive |
| M | Finance ^c | Executive |
| F | Personnel/Training ^c | Non-executive |
| M | Chairman ^c | Non-executive |
| F | Voluntary services ^c | Non-executive |

Table II.
Summary of demography
of sample leaders and
managers interviewed

Notes: ^aLevel 1; ^bLevel 2; ^cLevel 3

Findings and discussion

The constructs elicited from the interviews were grouped in order to establish if any patterns were emerging. These were then clustered into 15 higher-order themes as shown in Figure 1.

Theme 12 – leadership style and teamwork has the greatest number of constructs i.e. 132 (16 percent) and theme 4 – beliefs, character, principles and values has the second highest number of constructs i.e. 109 (13 percent). Finally, theme 15 – visionary and future direction has only 11 constructs (1 percent). No constructs for this theme were elicited from level one, which is the only theme not to contain, constructs from all three levels.

By observation and as indicated by the marked difference between the number of constructs for levels one and two, when recording the data with the interviewees, level two participants were able to articulate their constructs more readily. This could account for this being the group to elicit the largest number of constructs given that all the interviews were kept to a standard of one hour. One explanation for this could be that with the exception of one member, all of those from level 2 were from a nursing background. Therefore, the author would propose that their enhanced ability to describe their constructs of leadership may be a consequence of the recent national investment in developing nurse leadership capability (Department of health, 2000a, pp. 86-7; Mullally, 2001; Sofarelli and Brown, 1998). Perhaps, therefore, nurses are becoming more aware and conversant with leadership styles and skills?

Transformation does not just happen. It requires effective leadership. Good leadership is central to the delivery of the NHS Plan and strong *nursing leadership* is crucial if there is to be an effective nursing contribution (Mullally, 2001).

Leadership style, team working (theme 12) and effective communication (theme 8) were the dominant themes for level one. Whilst interviewing these participants it was apparent that they were addressing the questions as followers in spite of their role as a leader. Those from levels two and three emphasised leadership from either a peer/line manager or public figure perspective. It would seem that level one were more concerned with the needs and expectations of followers (which included themselves) and that these should be satisfied by their leaders (superiors) compared to levels two and three who were able to describe their perceptions of competent and effective leadership and how this manifests itself. Therefore, the difference seems to be between need and provision – giving and receiving. This suggests there may be a dynamic of dependency (for level one interviewees), which is symptomatic of a “power distance” and a manifestation of the nature of a hierarchical structure (Hofstede 1980, as cited in Bass, 1990, p. 252).

Level two participants were more concerned with emotional intelligence, intelligence, knowledge, self-awareness and thinking (theme 9); leadership style and team working (theme 12); and respect, trust and role modelling (theme 14). Again, their most dominant theme was leadership style and team working. Areas which refer to the ethical and moral nature of leadership, begin to feature such as trust.

Level three participants emphasised the constructs associated with beliefs, character, principles and values. So as the level of status within the hierarchical structure raises so does the perceived need and importance of areas associated with ethical leadership.

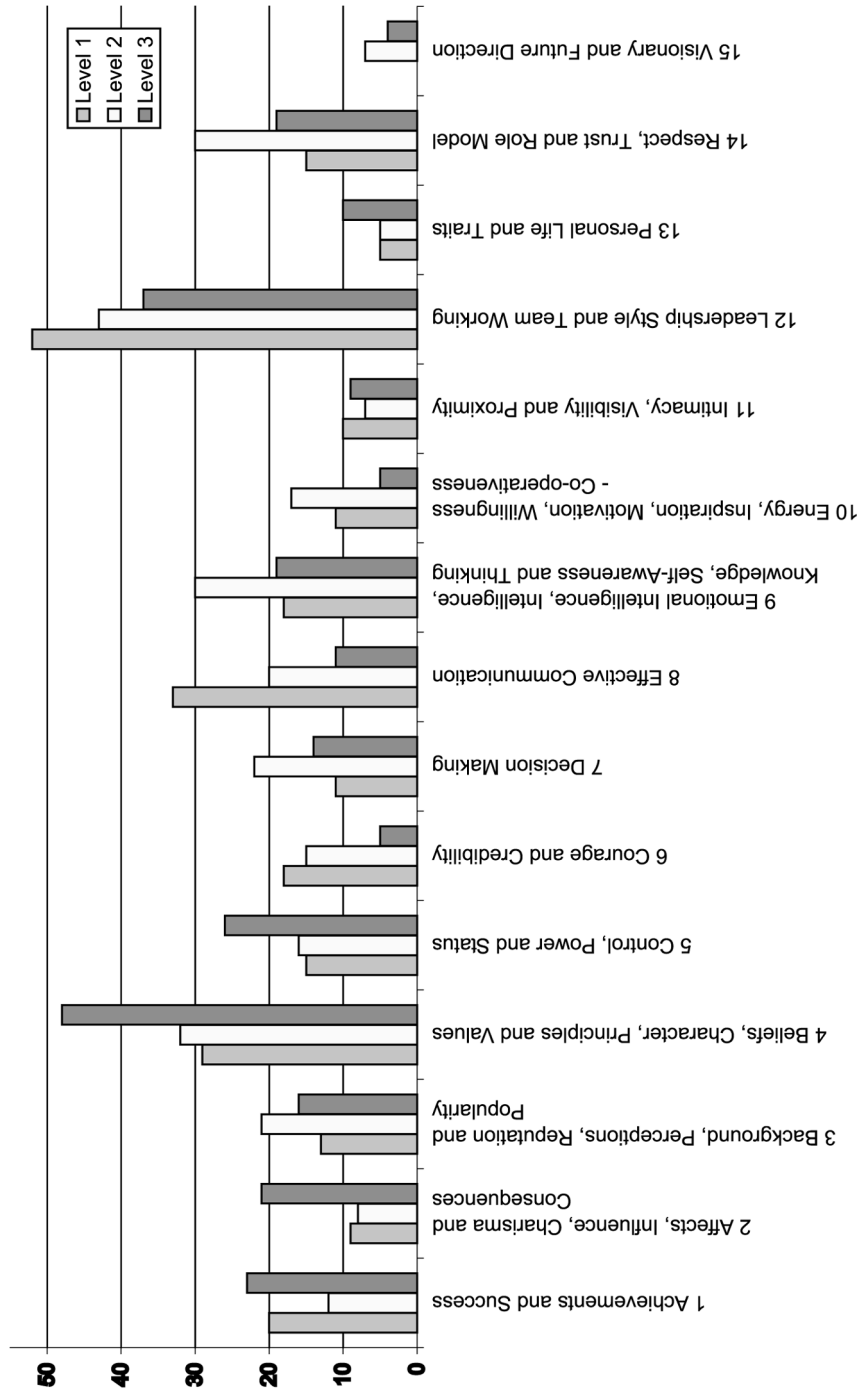


Figure 1.
Number of constructs for
each level within each
theme

To this end, leadership style and ethical and moral dimensions to leadership were the themes which elicited the greatest number of constructs across all three levels.

Comparing construct themes of leadership and integrity with the literature

It would seem that there are similarities in the themes identified with the literature and other studies and are described in Table III.

The importance of ethical and moral dimensions to effective leadership as detailed in this study supports Parry and Proctor-Thomas (2002) who state that there is a positive correlation between perceived integrity and leadership effectiveness.

Leadership style and team working (as described within the constructs of this study) seem to correlate with Kouzes and Posner's five characteristics of successful leadership. The interviewees elicited constructs which described a style that encouraged collaboration, co-operation, would build teams and empower others. Their style is able to gain the trust and respect of others and "they have considerable integrity since they are clear of their values and act in a manner consistent with them" (Kouzes and Posner (1987, p. 8).

Parry and Proctor-Thomas (2002) state that it is known that transformational leadership has a positive effect on organisational effectiveness and that effective leadership correlates with integrity. The findings of this study seem to support their proposition that the presence of integrity will improve organisational effectiveness.

From the findings in this study, the interviewees did not align decision making to the ethical and moral components of their constructs. For example in spite of having to make difficult decisions, was consideration given to "not doing the wrong thing" and "doing the right thing"? (Parry and Proctor-Thomas, 2002). This challenged the author's assumptions given the issues and interest in public sector service ethical leadership and management. However, Becker (1998) and Parry and Proctor-Thomas (2002) state that leadership with integrity is not necessarily only doing "ethical" things but also about presenting oneself positively and being active and proactive.

Leadership accessibility, approachability and social distance as described by Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe (2001) correlated with the theme of "intimacy, visibility and proximity". From this study, the interviewees associated effective leadership with those who were "close, nearby and involved" compared to those who were "distant, elusive and remote". It was considered to be important that followers had regular contact with an approachable leader and were able to behave and express themselves freely.

The author would question as to why level one interviewees did not elicit any constructs for the theme of "visionary and future direction"? Were they not concerned about where the organisation or department was going? From the literature, this theme is a persistent quality and characteristic associated with effective leadership and yet this particular group did not describe it. One explanation could be that due to their level in the hierarchy coupled with a potential power distance, their main concerns were being kept informed (or told i.e. effective communication), achievements and productivity, how they are treated (leadership style) and values. This suggests, the scope of their constructs was based on the here and now and not necessarily the long term future. However, they do reflect both task and relationship centred leadership as described by Bass (1990, p. 38).

In this study as well as similarities, the author also recognised additional groups of "Reputation, Popularity and Personal Life". Effective leaders with integrity had a

Table III.
Comparing construct themes of leadership and integrity with the literature and other studies

| Theme from current study | Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe (2001) | Lawton (1998, p. 47) | Bass (1990) | Kouzes and Posner (1987, p. 8) |
|--------------------------|--|-----------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| Achievements and success | | | Achievement and success p. 147 | Encouraging the heart |
| Affects Influence | Inspirational | | Charismatic, charismatic p. 184 | |
| Charisma | Communicator | | | |
| Consequences | Charismatic | | | |
| Background | | | Traits of leadership pp. 59-68 | |
| Perceptions | | | | |
| Reputation | | | | |
| Popularity | | | | |
| Beliefs, values | Integrity | Integrity | Values p. 165 | Modelling the way |
| Character principles | Genuine concern | Selflessness | Integrity and conviction p. 69 | |
| | | Loyalty | Status, esteem p. 166, Power p. 252 | Enabling others to act |
| Control Power | | | | |
| Status | | | | |
| Courage | | | Task competence p. 97 | Modelling the way |
| Credibility | | | | Challenging the process |
| Decision-making | Decisive | | Directive p. 436 | Challenging the Process |
| Effective communication | | | Competence in communicating p. 111 | Modelling the way |
| Emotional | Encourages critical thinking | Objectivity | Intelligence pp. 97, 64 | Challenging the process |
| Intelligence | Intellectual | Exercising initiative | Insight p. 66 | |
| Intelligence | Versatility | | Judgement and decision p. 65 | |
| Knowledge | | | | |
| Self awareness | | | | |
| Thinking | | | | |

(continued)

| Theme from current study | Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe (2001) | Lawton (1998, p. 47) | Bass (1990) | Kouzes and Posner (1987, p. 8) |
|-----------------------------------|--|----------------------|--|---|
| Energy | | | | |
| Inspiration | | | | |
| Motivation | | | Motivation and task orientation p. 147 | Encouraging the heart |
| Willingness | | | Inspirational p. 184 | |
| Intimacy | Accessible | | Social Distance p. 499 | |
| Visibility | Approachable | | | |
| Proximity | Social Distance | | | |
| Leadership style and team working | | | | |
| Personal life and Traits | | | Roles and functions of the leader p. 383 | Enabling others to act Modelling the way |
| Respect | | | Traits pp. 59-68 | |
| Trust | Transparency | | Authenticity and Trust p. 116 | Modelling the way |
| Role Model | | | Popularity and respect p. 175 | |
| Visionary | Clarifies the purpose and direction | | Imagination and vision p. 103 | Inspiring a shared vision |
| Future Direction | Unites through a shared vision | | | |

Table III.

reputation and recognition for firstly behaving with integrity and secondly for their work (and its success). The behaviour associated with integrity was often aligned to their personal life and not to the style of their leadership. It was assumed that effective leaders by virtue of their reputation (for success) and acceptable conduct within their private lives are inevitably led with integrity.

Finally, given the pace, complexity, scale and ramifications of public sector change; this did not feature in the groups. Perhaps the prevalence of change in today's society and world of work has become an innate occurrence whereby its leadership and management are so familiar that it is an unselfconscious process and competence? (Hardingham, 2000).

Conclusion

Whilst it is recognised that these results are not generalisable to a larger population, there are numerous ways in which the findings support and further develop pre-existing literature and research.

The findings of this study seem to endorse some of the findings and writings of Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe (2001), Bass (1990) and Parry and Proctor-Thomas (2002). It would seem therefore, that effective leadership correlates with integrity and the presence of integrity will improve organisational effectiveness.

The study identified that perceptions of leadership character and behaviour are used to judge the effectiveness and integrity of a leader. This supports the work of Preston (1996) who states that there seems to be a strong indication that personalities and personal behaviour of individuals is the main focus for applied and professional ethics. As a result, the ethical implications and consequences of leaders scope of power and influence such as policy and strategy are somewhat neglected and lacking in debate.

The findings suggest that leadership style was common to all groups when determining effective leadership and integrity and that leaders are not judged according to the ethical nature of decision making, and leading and managing complex change.

The study identified that the importance of integrity and ethical leadership correlated with higher levels of hierarchical status and is assumed by virtue of status and success that leaders lead with integrity.

Finally, the findings of this study seem to suggest that nurse leadership capability is developing as a consequence of recent national investment.

Recommendations

The findings of this study suggest there is scope to clarify, define and develop the concept of integrity alongside the ethical and moral components and competencies of leadership (Becker, 1998; Parry and Proctor-Thomas, 2002). This could then inform the creation of a "moral and ethical code of conduct and accountability" for leaders and organisations (Ciulla, 1998, pp. 12-5; Northouse, 2001, p. 148). This may therefore, encourage moral and ethical judgements and considerations be applied to decision making processes particularly when formulating policy and strategy (Ford, 2001).

Further research is warranted in order to develop a theoretically robust measure of integrity and consideration given to introducing this within existing performance

management systems such as the appraisal process and 360 degree feedback (Becker, 1998; Parry and Proctor-Thomas, 2002; British Psychological Society [BPS], 2002)

Finally there is an opportunity to develop ethical leadership programmes in order to enhance capability and capacity whilst introducing ethical leadership into existing programmes particularly across the public sector.

References

- Alimo-Metcalf, B. (1996), "Leaders or managers?", *Nursing Management*, Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 22-4.
- Alimo-Metcalf, B. (1998), *Effective Leadership*, The Local Government Management Board, London.
- Alimo-Metcalf, B. and Alban-Metcalf (2000), "Heaven can wait", *Health Service Journal*, October.
- Alimo-Metcalf, B. (2001a), "Why leadership development is so crucial", Presentation, University of Warwick, Scarman House.
- Alimo-Metcalf, B. (2001b), "Transforming leadership through HR", paper presented at the AHHRM National Conference, York.
- Alimo-Metcalf, B. and Alban-Metcalf (2001), "The development of a new transformational leadership questionnaire", *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 74, pp. 1-27.
- Alimo-Metcalf, B. and Lawler, J. (2001), "Leadership development in British companies at the beginning of the 21st century lessons for the NHS?", *Journal of Management in Medicine*, Vol. 15 No. 5, pp. 387-404.
- Astin, A. and Astin, H. (2001), "Principles of transformational leadership", *AAHE Bulletin*, January.
- Barker, L. (1999), "A project to investigate male and female constructs of effective leadership in a group of senior managers from within hospice and specialist palliative care units in England", Dissertation submitted as part of the MA in Management and Leadership in Health and Social Care, Nuffield Institute for Health and Social Care, Leeds.
- Bass, B.M. (1990), *Bass and Stogdills Handbook of Leadership*, 3rd ed., The Free Press, New York, NY.
- Bass, M.B. and Steidlmeier, P. (1999), "Ethics, character and transformational leadership behaviour", *Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 181-217.
- Bast, M.R. (1995), "The ethics of charismatic leadership", available at: www.soe.waikato.ac.nz (accessed May 2002).
- Becker, T.E. (1998), "Integrity in organisations: beyond honesty and conscientiousness", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 23 No. 1, pp. 154-61.
- Bennis, W. (1989), *Why Leaders Can't Lead*, Jossey Bass, San Francisco, CA.
- Bennis, W. and Nanus, B. (1985), *Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge*, Harper Row, New York, NY available at: www.triangle.org/leadership/lead-charge.html (accessed May 2002).
- Block, P. (1996), *Stewardship: Choosing Service Over Self-Interest*, Berrett-Koehler, San Francisco, CA.
- British Psychological Society (2001-2002), *360 Degree Feedback: Best Practice Guidelines*, available at: www.BPS.org.uk (accessed February 2002).
- Calman, K. (1998), "Lessons from Whitehall", *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 317 No. 7174, pp. 1718-20.

- Ciulla, J.B. (1998), *Ethics: The Heart of Leadership*, Praeger, Westport, CT.
- Cole, G.A. (1996), *Management Theory and Practice*, 5th ed., Letts Educational, London.
- Conger, J.A. (1990), "The dark side of leadership", *Organisational Dynamics*, Vol. 19 No. 2, pp. 44-55.
- Craig, S.B. and Gustafson, S.B. (1998), "Perceived leader integrity scale: an instrument for assessing employee perceptions of leader integrity", *Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 127-45.
- Department of Health (2000a), *The NHS Plan: Plan for Investment: Plan for Reform*, DOH, London.
- Department of Health (2000b), *The National Plan for The New NHS: The New NHS: The Need for Change*, DOH, London.
- Department Of Health (2002a), *Delivering the NHS Plan: Next Steps on Investment Next Steps on Reform*, DOH, London.
- Department Of Health (2002b), *HR in the NHS Plan: More Staff Working Differently*, DOH, London.
- DePree, M. (1992), *Leadership Jazz*, Dell Publishing, New York, NY.
- Donabedian, A. (1989), "Institutional and professional responsibilities in quality assurance", *Quality Assurance in Health Care*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 3-11.
- Drucker, P. (1999), *The Practice of Management*, Butterworth-Heinman, Oxford.
- Easterby-Smith, M. (1980), "How to use repertory grids", *Journal of Industrial Training*, Vol. 4 No. 2, pp. 2-32.
- Ferlie, E., Ashburner, L., Fitzgerald, L. and Pettigrew, A. (1996), *The New Public Management in Action*, Oxford University Press, London.
- Ford, J. (2000), "New directions in health and social care leadership and management", paper presented at the ICAM Conference.
- Ford, J. (2001), "A Critique of the Contribution of Ethical Theory to HRM, MPhil/PhD in Critical Management Cohort 7", Nuffield Institute for Health.
- Fox, J. (1995), "Ethics: an emerging management issue", *British Journal of Health Care Management*, Vol. 1 No. 2, pp. 93-7.
- Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R. and McKee, A. (2002), *Primal Leadership: Realising The Power of Emotional Intelligence*, Harvard Business School Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Greenhall, E.M. (2000), "Leading the transformation of public services", available at: www.publicnet/fe000523.htm (accessed May 2002).
- Grint, K. (Ed.) (1997), *Leadership, Classical, Contemporary and Critical Approaches*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY.
- Grint, K. (2000), *Effective Leadership in Delivering Public Services – Literature Review On Leadership*, Performance and Innovation Unit of the Cabinet Office, London.
- Hardingham, A. (2000), *Psychology for Trainers*, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, London.
- HFMA (1996), *Control Assurance and Risk Management: The Implications for NHS Management*, HFMA, London.
- Hoepfl, M.C. (1997), "Choosing qualitative research: a primer for technology education researchers", *Journal of Technology Education*, Vol. 9 No. 1, available at: <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JTE/v9n1/hoepfl.html> (accessed May 2002).

-
- Hunt, M. and O'Toole, B.J. (1998), *Reform, Ethics and Leadership in Public services*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, London.
- Jarrold, K. (1998), "Servants as leaders", A Report of the 4th Symposium held at the University of York.
- Kelly, G. (1955), *The Psychology of Personal Constructs*, Nostrum, New York, NY.
- Kouzes, J.M. and Posner, B.Z. (1987), *The Leadership Challenge: How to Get Extraordinary Things Done in Organisations*, Jossey Bass, San Francisco, CA.
- Kouzes, J.M. and Posner, B.Z. (1992), "Ethical leaders: an essay about being in love", *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 11, pp. 479-84.
- Kouzes, J.M. and Posner, B.Z. (1993), *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose it, Why People Demand it*, Jossey Bass, San-Francisco, CA.
- Lawton, A. (1998), *Ethical Management for the Public Services*, Open University Press, Buckingham.
- McKendall, M. (1993), "The tyranny of change: organisational development revisited", *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 12, pp. 93-104.
- Miller, P. (1996), "Strategy and the ethical management of human resources", *Human Resource Management Journal*, Vol. 6 No. 1, pp. 5-17.
- Mullally, S. (2001), "Leadership and politics", *Nursing Management*, Vol. 8 No. 4, pp. 21-7.
- Mullins, L. (1996), *Management and Organisational Behaviour*, 4th ed., Pitman, London.
- NHS Executive (2000), *Workforce and Development: Embodying Leadership in the NHS*, NHS Executive, London.
- Northouse, P.G. (2001), *Leadership Theory and Practice*, 2nd ed., Sage Publications, London.
- Parker, M. (Ed.) (1998), *Ethics and Organisations*, Sage Publications Limited, London.
- Parry, K.W. and Proctor-Thomas, S.B. (2002), "Perceived integrity of transformational leaders in organisational settings", *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 35 No. 2, pp. 75-96.
- Performance and Innovation Unit (2000), "Strengthening leadership", Cabinet Office, London, available at: www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/innovation/leadershipreport/00/content01.htm (accessed April 2002).
- Perren, L.B. (2002), *Management and Leadership Abilities: An Analysis of Texts, Testimony and Practice*, Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership, London.
- Petrick, J.A. and Quinn, J.F. (2001), "The challenge of leadership accountability for integrity capacity as a strategic asset", *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 34 Nos 3/4, pp. 331-43.
- Porter O'Grady, T. (1993), "Of mythspellers and mapmakers: 21st century managers", *Nursing Management*, Vol. 24 No. 4, pp. 52-5.
- Preston, N. (1996), "Applied and professional ethics: an instrument of social transformation?", Address to the 3rd Annual Conference of the Australian Association for Professional and Applied Ethics, available at: www.soe.waikato.ac.nz (accessed May 2002).
- Quirk, B. (1997), "Accountability to everyone: post modern pressures on public managers", *Public Administration*, Vol. 75, pp. 569-86.
- Rae, L. (1991), *How to Measure Training Effectiveness*, 2nd ed., Gower, Hampshire.
- Reed, S.M. (1989), "Management changes in the NHS: nursing and organisational theory in relation to the development of a new unit of health care", A thesis submitted to the University of Sheffield for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Management Sheffield.
- Rosenbach, W.E. and Taylor, R.L. (Eds) (1998), *Contemporary Issues in Leadership*, 4th ed., Westview Press, Oxford.

- SanFacon, G. (2002), "A conscious person's guide to the workplace – final draft", unpublished at time of project, SanFacon.
- Seale, C. and Silverman, D. (1997), "Ensuring rigour in qualitative research", *European Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 7, pp. 379-84.
- Secretary of State for Health (2002a), *Delivering the NHS Plan: Next Steps on Investment Next Steps on Reform*, The Stationary Office Limited, London.
- Secretary of State for Health (2002b), "Capacity, productivity, performance", *Speech to the RCN*, Secretary of State for Health, Harrogate.
- Simons, T.L. (1999), "Behavioural integrity as a critical ingredient for transformational leadership", *Journal of Organisational Change Management*, Vol. 12 No. 2, pp. 89-104.
- Sofarelli, D. and Brown, D. (1998), "The need for nursing leadership in uncertain times", *Journal of Nursing Management*, Vol. 6, pp. 201-7.
- Solomon, R.C. (1996), "Ethical leadership, emotions and trust: beyond charisma", available at: www.academy.umd.edu (accessed May 2002).
- Trevino, L.K., Weaver, G.R., Gibson, D.G. and Ley Toffler, B. (1999), "Managing ethics and legal compliance: what works and what hurts", *California Management Review*, Vol. 41 No. 2, Winter Reprint Series.
- Winston, M.G. (1996), "Leadership of renewal: leadership for the 21st century", *Management Development Review*, Vol. 9 No. 7, pp. 15-19.
- Winterton, J., Parker, M., Dodd, M., McCracken, M. and Henderson, I. (2000), "Future skills of managers", Research Report, Department for Education and Employment, DfEE, Nottingham.