

# Developing a positive organisational culture using a management development strategy

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## Abstract

*This paper evaluates a management development program, which was piloted at Albury Base Hospital during 2001 for nurse managers. The program uses quantitative assessments of participants using a lifestyle inventory tool and enables managers to identify opportunities and strategies to assist them to become more effective managers. The program also helps identify management "blind spots" and increased awareness of the effect of management's behaviour on team efficiency. The program was evaluated as being relevant to managers from any health discipline and was a means by which workplace culture and behaviour could be improved.*

## Nursing culture and the environment

It is evident that nurses are a resilient professional group because they have survived many changes in health care delivery. However, the change process in the workplace has resulted in conflict and stressful situations as many nurses move into management from clinical expert positions without the appropriate development or support to provide them with the required skills to manage and lead people.

A significant contributing factor that influences the culture within an organisation is the way management introduces change. Managers need to be aware of how they may be promoting a negative culture through their management style, and how with assistance they can develop personal management strategies that can lead to long term improvements in the work environment.

It appears for most health facilities there has been an increase in patient acuity and decreased length of stay and nursing hours per patient day as well as resource constraints and significant vacancy levels (Williams, 2001). All these factors impact on the ability of the nurse to provide good quality patient care. The traditional style of nursing management, which has evolved, has contributed significantly to the current workplace environment conflict situations and may also be contributing to why there is difficulty in the recruitment and retention of nurses.

Management behaviour and styles have also been identified as barriers to employees having a positive work experience (Young & Dyer, 2001). As a result of poor workplace experiences, employees have classified managers as suffering from the "toxic boss syndrome" (Fitzpatrick, 2000) and displaying behaviour that is now known as "horizontal violence". Hockley (2000), Francis & Cook (2000), Selby (2000), Hastie (2001) and Carr (2001) provide evidence that such a culture is prevalent in the nursing profession's workplace.

Porter-O'Grady (2000) states that we work in tough times and "tough times call for caring leaders". Managers need to reflect on their behaviour in the workplace and develop strategies to assist with self-growth and self-awareness if improvement in workplace culture is to occur.

This management development program looks at the cognitive style of respondents in relation to the assessment of attitudes, behaviour and reactions by an individual's manager, peers and employees. The individual is provided with constructive feedback in relation to their self and their relationship with others (manager, peers and employees) following a 360-degree assessment process. The results are utilised by the individual participating in the program to improve their effectiveness as a manager in the workplace. The process is confidential, anonymous and reliability-tested.

## **The management development program at Albury Base Hospital**

The program consists of a one-day intensive workshop, facilitated by a consultant, accredited by Human Synergistics. Human Synergistics, an Internationally accredited organisation, certifies consultants to use their scientifically validated diagnostic tools to assist with the development of managers, individuals, groups and cultures within organisations. In this instance the certified consultant is the author.

The workshop is arranged after each participant has undergone the 360-degree pre-workshop evaluation process using the life style inventory self and others assessment process (LSI 1 and 2). This process is attended 4 weeks prior to the workshop.

The life style inventory assessment tool evaluates the effectiveness of people and systems in place in the workplace. The accredited consultant uses the results of the in-depth evaluation process to develop an integrated approach to organisational and individual problem diagnosis and assists in the development of strategies to improve an organisation's or workplace's culture. The workshop's objectives include the following (Williams, 2001).

- Establish an understanding of how management behaviour influences organisational culture.
- Identify opportunities for individual managers to further develop and change to improve workplace culture.
- Assist participants understand how they can become a more effective manager.
- Provide opportunities for managers to develop strategies that will improve recognised counter productive workplace behaviour.
- Increase awareness in managers of the affect their behaviour has on team efficiency.
- Establish "root causes" of problems and assists with developing strategies to improve things.
- Establish group networks and team building for participants.
- Allow managers to have an annual follow up evaluation to identify if the strategies they have implemented have improved workplace culture.

The workshop educates participants on all aspects of the life styles inventory elements, so that each participant has an understanding of the process and where an ideal manager should be functioning.

Research conducted by Young & Dyer (2001) identifies that health managers need to function in the achievement, self-actualising, humanistic-encouraging and higher inter-personal skill quadrants of the life styles circumplex. The circumplex is a diagrammatic measure of an individual's LSI assessment results compared against the average and ideal management population. Most managers are assessed as predominantly functioning in aggressive and defensive or passive and defensive management styles. Such negative styles result in ineffective management and cultures developing that are no longer acceptable in the workplace that is striving to be recognised as a learning organisations. Such organisations do not have good approaches to problem solving nor do they involve employees in the decision making process. Coaching, personal development, leadership or team buildings programs are nonexistent. These qualities are considered the norm in the ideal work environment, where employees as a matter of routine are supported and encouraged to be creative and develop new innovative ideas (Young & Dyer, 2001).

Participants receive a comprehensive in-depth stylus report that analyses the assessment tool responses from the individual managers and others, and identifies the manager's strength and opportunities for improvement. The report provides honest personally challenging feedback about an individual's management style and behaviour in the workplace as perceived by others. The stylus report (a private document that the participant and consultant are only privy to), is used to develop a personal management development plan for the manager in consultation with their direct manager and with follow up from the consultant in a management coach role.

## **The pilot program**

Five nurse managers from Albury Base Hospital were selected to participate in the pilot program, which was conducted in August 2001. Each participant attended the workshop following completion of a 360 degree LSI 1 and 2 assessment in July 2001. The evaluation process included completion of the behaviour questionnaire by the participant, the participant's direct manager, a peer and three employees who directly report to the manager.

The workshop consisted of a detailed presentation of the elements of management styles and management development games to assist participants to gain an understanding of all the elements and the function style achievements needed to develop as an ideal manager. This is done to prepare participants for the receipt of their individual stylus report and to assist with formalising a personal management development plan.

## **Pilot program evaluation**

The participants evaluated the program 4 weeks after participating in the pilot with the following comments.

- Unrecognised counter-productive behaviour of the participants was highlighted so each could work on to improve the culture within their departments.
- Positive changes in management style were observed in some of the participant's behaviour since attending the workshop. These changes consisted of involvement of employees in the decision making process, development of a consistent approach when dealing with employees and workplace issues and improvements in comments made by employees in regard to dissemination of information.
- Some participants stated that it is no use attending the program if you have no intention of making changes in your management style and approach with employees. You need to want to improve the workplace situation.
- Each individual developed a personal management plan for his or her own development over the next 12-month period.
- The program was reported by some of the participants as providing the individual with good insight into their management style and how they can influence the behaviour of others.
- It was recommended by the participants that this program be made available to all managers.
- Participants recognised it was better to have been educated on the elements prior to receiving the in-depth stylus reports as it assisted with their being able to understand their results.
- It was also identified by participants that you need to have a significant level of personal strength to go through this program, as it is both personally confronting and very relevant to assist you deal with the workplace issues.

## **Evaluation of the pilot program through formal external review**

Formal presentation of the overall program to a group of senior accredited consultants was also used to evaluate the program. From this process it was identified that:

- it would be more appropriate for a consultant not to be involved in the direct management of any of the participants in a program
- the pilot group was too small and the consultant could not access comparative data on group feedback against the wider nurse management professional benchmarks in these circumstances
- the executives of an organisation need to understand the program and process if they are to help develop managers
- the program could be utilised for all management groups in any setting.

The pilot program met the objectives that were established at the outset and has been evaluated as a valuable management development strategy that would complement any existing management development programs.

## Future of the program

The program has been offered to nurse managers at Albury Base Hospital during 2002, following individual hospital executive participation in the process. The program was offered to all interested nurse managers within the Greater Murray Area Health Service during 2002. It is currently being considered for incorporation into the wider Area health service management development Program. To date eighteen people have participated in the workshops.

## Conclusion

The management development program has been identified as a valuable management development process that can be used to improve the culture that has developed within the nursing profession. The program is structured to assist with the development of long-term strategies that over time will improve the culture in the workplace and assist with recruitment and retention of nurses.

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