Detection of training needs for soft skills in the nursing leadership - working group dipole

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Ανίχνευση εκπαιδευτικών αναγκών ήπιων δεξιοτήτων στο δίπολο νοσηλευτικής ηγεσίας - ομάδας εργασίας

Abstract at the end of the article

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Introduction: The modern healthcare work environment is characterized by complexity and the ideal characteristics of the leader nurse balance between scientific knowledge and soft skills. The most effective way to develop soft skills is through active participation in training programs, designed with the method of experiential learning that have resulted from the detection educational needs.
Objective: to explore the perceptions and attitudes of head nurses in public hospitals about continuing education with the aim of identifying training needs for soft skills.
Material and Method: The study sample consisted of senior executives, at the level of the head of the nursing department, of public hospitals in Attica. The survey was conducted in January 2020 through the "focus group interview" qualitative research method. The data analysis was performed with a thematic analysis of three transitional stages: open coding, axial coding and selective coding, in which the interpretations were recorded in memorandums and diagrams.
Results: Nurses who realize that education is an investment are a modern human resource, fully aware that with continuing education and training they will be a strong social capital worthy and equivalent to that of other countries, which should enjoy honorable mention and social recognition in the field of healthcare. The main problems in the workplace focus on communication, cooperation, conflict administration, emotional stress, the effects of the authoritarian leadership model, as well as the syndrome of moral harassment. All of these malfunctions can be prevented and addressed by designing and conducting soft skills training programs.
Conclusions: Nurses, as healthcare scientists, must develop a culture of continuing learning and with their attitude and vision pave the way for the reshaping of the therapeutic reality and set the foundations for professional well-being in healthcare environments.

Keywords: educational needs detection, soft skills, nursing leadership

Table 1 : *Open coding - Microanalysis of answers to Question 6*

What are the most important problems / difficulties you face in your workplace?	
Authoritarian leadership model	"The difficulty of communicating with the Director of the Nursing Service"
	"A recognition from your Director. A kind word costs nothing"
	"A lot of "bowling" with the Nursing Service"
	"The Nursing Administration ignores you, the "principality" makes decisions; once the decision is made, it is an order"
	"Theater of the absurd. The superiors force you to do things, they make you feel incompetent."
	"The most important thing is the psychological pressure from the Nursing Service. I do not want them to impose something on me that they do not know and that bothers me: *"I and the directors of the departments decide. I want you to have this done by tomorrow. Just find a solution."*
	"Our administration has us "enslaved". We are controlled by them, we are "multi-tools", so many different roles to think about. It is a tragic situation, it is inconceivable bullying.
Difficulty in communication	"You communicate with a few people, you usually have difficulty in understanding and communicating"
	"… Conflict administration mainly inter-professionally and difficulty in communication, mainly in the medical industry."
	"The difficulty of communicating with the Director of the Nursing Service"
Work stress	"The psychological pressure"
	"We get stressed… Too much pressure, too much bureaucracy… I tolerate all this pressure. I'm under a lot of pressure."
	"Mental and physical fatigue. Our administration does not support me. "I have a 'responsible' role for everything."
	"I am all around the place, my body, my mind…"
	"We should probably do some work on the various diseases the Hospital has. This work stress... "Serious diseases, real diseases: autoimmune diseases, cancers, musculoskeletal diseases and cardiological problems; psychiatric diseases are usually hidden."

Introduction

Nurses make up the largest percentage of human resources in the healthcare sector and it is imperative to provide high-quality healthcare. A prerequisite is the high level of undergraduate studies of nurses and their lifelong professional education.[1] The approach to continuing education of nurses must meet their needs and the design of training programs must be based on the results of the detection of educational needs.[2]

Healthcare organizations are governed by the complexity of the way they operate. The leadership model that is applied and the development of soft skills of the members of an organization, in order to achieve the establishment of good communication and cooperation, is crucial for the smooth operation of this complex and often chaotic phenomenon. The utilization of philosophy, social sciences, sociology and psychology as well as the humanitarian studies are reservoirs of value systems that can be used in the design of educational programs to achieve this goal.[3] In the field of healthcare, the phenomenon of asymmetric development of skills is presented with the balance favoring the continuing acquisition of scientific and technological skills. Even the medical profession does not show much interest in developing soft skills such as leadership, the ability to properly communicate, negotiate, form a team and resolve conflicts. The design of

Table 2 : *Open coding - Microanalysis of Question 11*

What skills do you think need to be acquired more broadly, both by you and your team to improve workplace well-being?	
Communication Cooperation	"Good communication brings serenity." "…the ability to communicate is always important." "Communication skills and collaboration." "Good cooperation and communication." "… communication, cooperation, fun at work, greeting others warmly…" "Communication, cooperation." "…we have managed to have cooperation and solidarity, to seek for the best every single day."
Conflict administration	"…so, conflicts will not arise. If we can have meetings, we will be able to discuss how to do something and resolve disagreements in consultation with the doctors. Let us all express our opinion." "Because of the pressure we have, we are led to conflicts." "…better relationships, to solve our problems, not to keep them inside us."
Empowerment Claim	"I think we should all become more dynamic. To demand things more dynamically. We are trapped… we have not been able to claim them… "

specific training programs and their implementation at an organizational level can help control this situation.[4]

More than a decade ago, scientists with vision for the future proposed training programs to shape the leader nurse of the future, describing their leadership skills so that they could respond to the chaos of healthcare systems. They defined the development of soft skills of nurses as a necessary condition, in order to adequately cope with the new challenges and opportunities.[5] In the academic field, a large number of undergraduate professors at US universities consider soft skills significant and incorporate them into their teaching, preparing students for a successful presence in the workplace.[6] There has been a scientific dialogue during the last two decades on the most appropriate way of utilizing soft skills in the curricula of university faculties. Sometimes, soft skills, such as emotional intelligence, were taught in a superficial, vague and ultimately ineffective way.[7] The aim is to teach soft skills comprehensively, even with the application of special learning models,[8] in order to enable the integration of emotional intelligence skills in the clinical practice of nurses and in their work culture.[7]

Experiential learning is particularly effective in teaching soft skills as learning is carried out through reflection on experience, but also on personal development and increase of social consciousness.[9] There is a remarkable spread of reflection in global nursing education and aims to develop self-awareness as a characteristic of strategic leadership. Consequently, it will inspire the individual and organizational development and the positive change in society.[10] Experiential learning, when it utilizes Art in its didactic forms, offers a liberating channel to the learner, strengthens them and creates a human potential that dares to express their thought. The creative ability of Art leads to the discovery of new soft skills. The health worker becomes able, by transforming daily practice, to co-create in the wider improvement of the working conditions, to influence the social events and to compose a new therapeutic culture. [11]

Objective

The objective of this study was to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of the head nurses of public hospitals about continuing education with the aim of detecting training needs for soft skills.
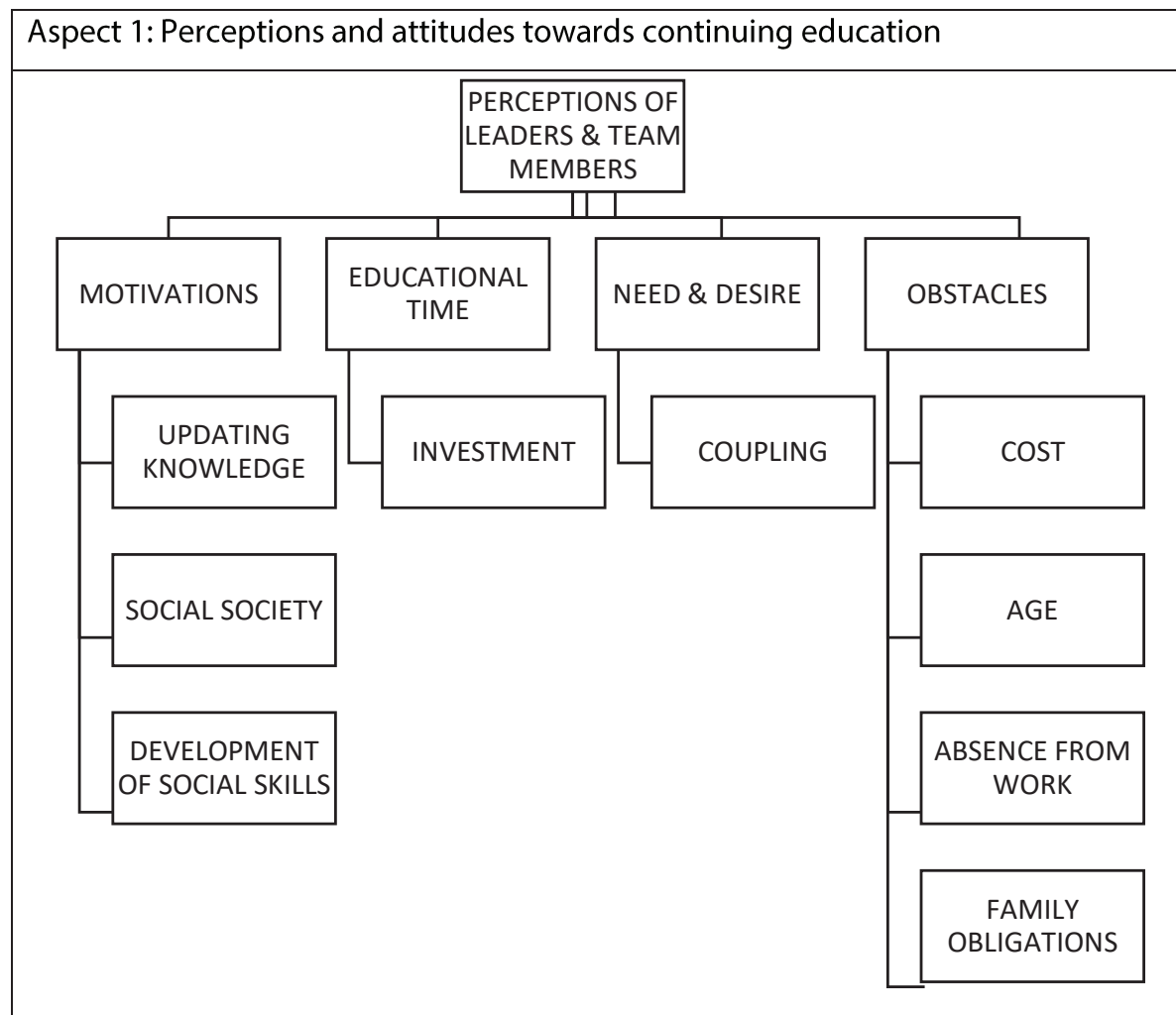
Material and Method

Study sample

The study sample consisted of fifteen senior executives, at the level of the head of the nursing department of public hospitals in Attica, considered as Key Informants. The survey was conducted in January 2020.

Methodology

The training needs assessment was conducted through

Table 3: *Axial coding – Aspect 1*

Aspect 1: Perceptions and attitudes towards continuing education

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                    PERCEPTIONS OF
                    LEADERS & TEAM
                       MEMBERS
       ┌───────────────┬────┴────┬───────────────────┐
  MOTIVATIONS    EDUCATIONAL   NEED &          OBSTACLES
                    TIME        DESIRE
       │               │          │                   │
   UPDATING        INVESTMENT   COUPLING            COST
  KNOWLEDGE
       │                                              │
   SOCIAL                                            AGE
   SOCIETY
       │                                              │
 DEVELOPMENT                                    ABSENCE FROM
 OF SOCIAL SKILLS                                   WORK
                                                     │
                                                   FAMILY
                                                 OBLIGATIONS
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the qualitative research method: " Focus Group Interview", which is an organized collective interview and interaction of a number of people researching a focused topic. It is suitable for preliminary investigations, in order to develop action plans.

The discussion was coordinated and recorded by experts in educational planning and implementation of research educational programs. The detection process was part of a semi-structured, but at the same time, open and free discussion. The duties of each member of the research team,[12] according to the requirements of the focus group, are defined as follows:
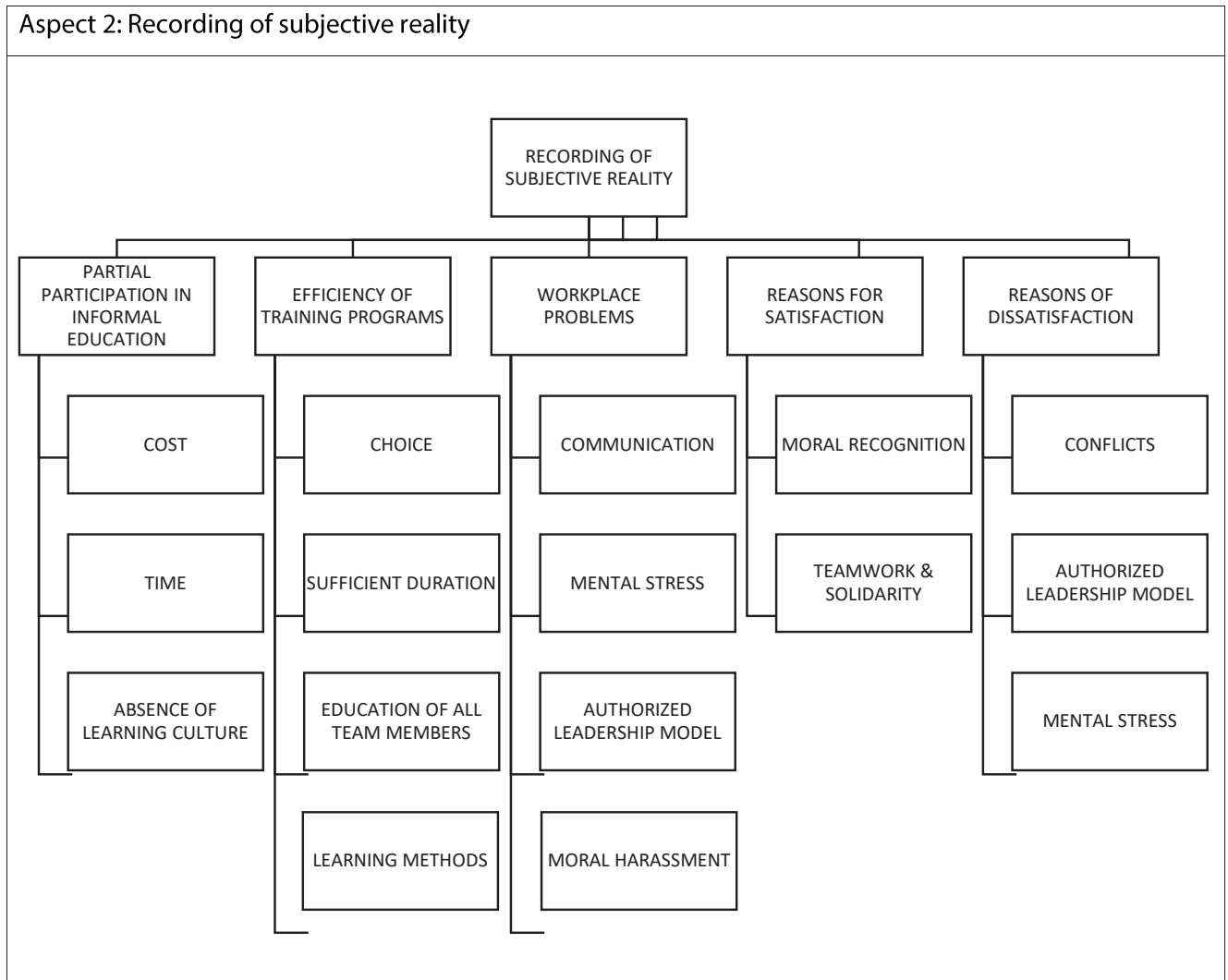
Coordinator
- Asks questions for discussion
- Coordinates, but does not express any personal opinion

- Brings the discussion back to the main topics, in case the participants deviate or ramble
- Maintains a gentle and friendly attitude without a critical mood
- Relieves tensions
- Cultivates a team atmosphere encouraging all members to express themselves by smoothly distributing the available time
- Summarizes views and conclusions and sums up

Critical friend
- A critical friend is the "second look" of the process
- He/she assesses, in order to avoid subjective mutual confirmation, which leads to the avoidance of the error of the research process
- He/she is a "tool" of research reliability

Table 4: *Axial coding – Aspect 2*

Aspect 2: Recording of subjective reality

RECORDING OF SUBJECTIVE REALITY

- PARTIAL PARTICIPATION IN INFORMAL EDUCATION
  - COST
  - TIME
  - ABSENCE OF LEARNING CULTURE
- EFFICIENCY OF TRAINING PROGRAMS
  - CHOICE
  - SUFFICIENT DURATION
  - EDUCATION OF ALL TEAM MEMBERS
  - LEARNING METHODS
- WORKPLACE PROBLEMS
  - COMMUNICATION
  - MENTAL STRESS
  - AUTHORIZED LEADERSHIP MODEL
  - MORAL HARASSMENT
- REASONS FOR SATISFACTION
  - MORAL RECOGNITION
  - TEAMWORK & SOLIDARITY
- REASONS OF DISSATISFACTION
  - CONFLICTS
  - AUTHORIZED LEADERSHIP MODEL
  - MENTAL STRESS

Observer - Recorder

- Maintains a neutral attitude
- Accurately and faithfully records all the views expressed
- Asks for clarifications when needed
- Summarizes, recapitulates and requests for verification and validation of what was recorded
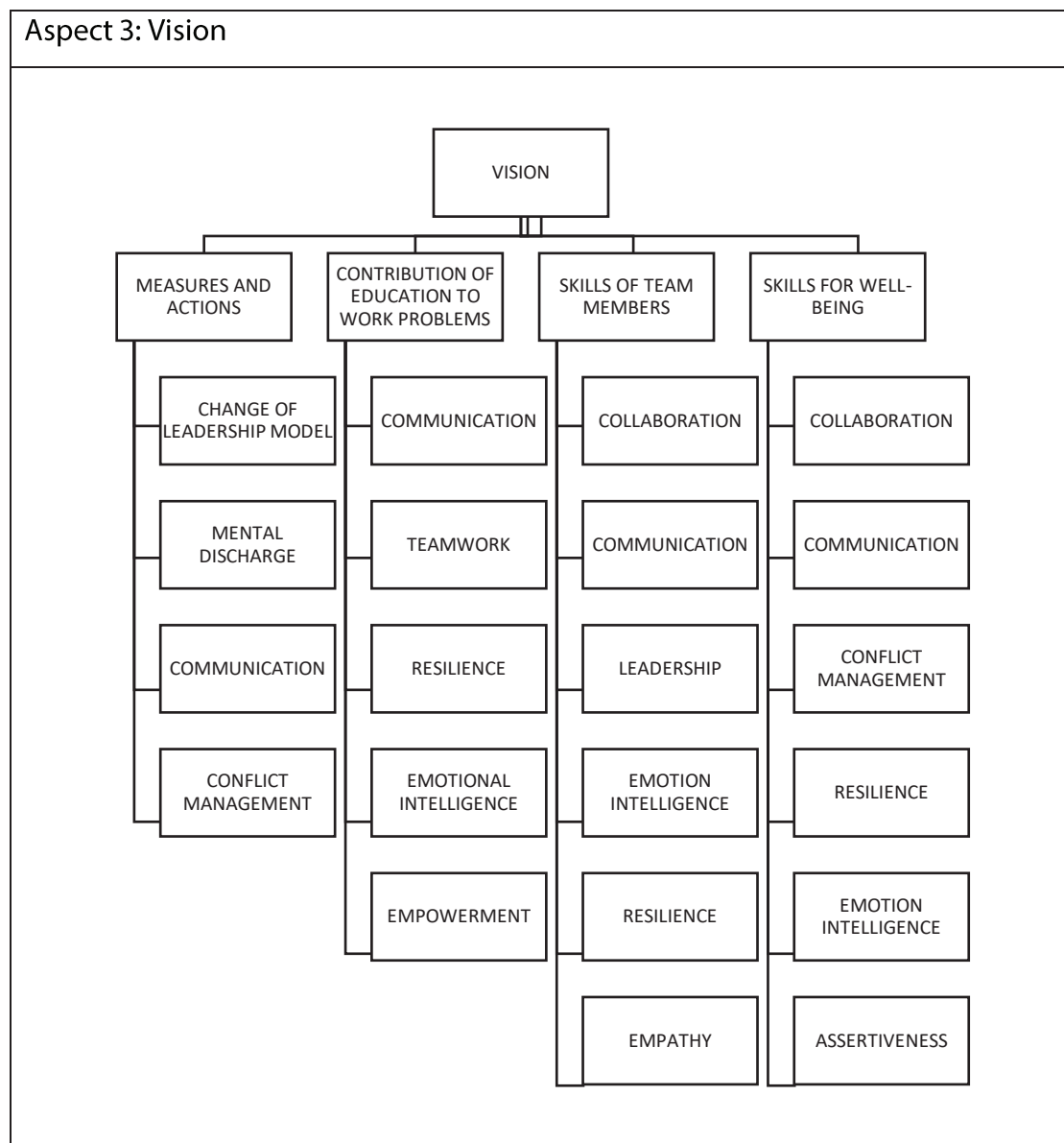
Process and features of group interview

The participants voluntarily choose their seats in the interview room. An appropriate atmosphere of friendliness, intimacy, encouragement of free expression and absence of critical mood was created and there was assurance that the discussion was not related to any form of evaluation.

The questions and topics were presented in writing on slides so that they were visible to everyone; everyone's opinion was heard in turn and all views were recorded without any exceptions.

The questions asked to the leader nurses were divided into three categories/aspects, as follows: a) perceptions: 2,3,4,9, b) recording of subjective reality: 1, 5, 6, 12, 13 and c) insight: 7, 8, 10, 11

They were analytically defined as follows:

1. What is your experience with continuing education?

2. What motivates you to attend an educational program?

3. What do you think about the phrase "my training programs deprive me of my personal and family life"?

Table 5: *Axial coding - Aspect 3*

Aspect 3: Vision

VISION
- MEASURES AND ACTIONS
  - CHANGE OF LEADERSHIP MODEL
  - MENTAL DISCHARGE
  - COMMUNICATION
  - CONFLICT MANAGEMENT
- CONTRIBUTION OF EDUCATION TO WORK PROBLEMS
  - COMMUNICATION
  - TEAMWORK
  - RESILIENCE
  - EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE
  - EMPOWERMENT
- SKILLS OF TEAM MEMBERS
  - COLLABORATION
  - COMMUNICATION
  - LEADERSHIP
  - EMOTION INTELLIGENCE
  - RESILIENCE
  - EMPATHY
- SKILLS FOR WELL-BEING
  - COLLABORATION
  - COMMUNICATION
  - CONFLICT MANAGEMENT
  - RESILIENCE
  - EMOTION INTELLIGENCE
  - ASSERTIVENESS

4. Is training a "need" or a "desire"?

5. What is your experience of the effectiveness of training programs? If possible, give an example.

6. What are the most important problems / difficulties you face in your workplace?

7. What measures and actions would you suggest?

8. How do you think your education/training and that of your subordinates could help in dealing with these problems / difficulties?

9. What are your subordinates' perceptions of continuing education?

10. What skills do you think your subordinates need to develop in order to perform better in their job?

11. What skills do you think need to be acquired more broadly, both by you and your team to improve workplace well-being?

12. What has satisfied you the most in your workplace in the last 12 months?

13. What has displeased you the most in your workplace in the last 12 months?

Research Ethics

Participants received full written information on the purpose of the investigation and how to ensure the confidentiality of their personal data, followed by written consent. A special permit was obtained from the Director of the Research Laboratory of Economics, Administration, Health Policy and Social Protection of the Department of Business Administration of the University of West Attica for the conduct of the field research and the analysis and synthesis of the data, as the research study is part of the research activities of the said laboratory.

Results

Analysis of quality data

Thematic analysis[13,14] was the method of qualitative research in order to analyze the data. The processing - coding of the data consists of the following three stages of transition, in which the interpretations are recorded in memos and diagrams:

1. Open coding. It is a microscopic analysis performed row by row and follows the conceptualization and definition of categories with properties and dimensions.

2. Axial coding. At this stage the categories are organized and concentrated on axes by subtraction methods.

3. Selective coding. The process is completed and a coherent theoretical scheme is created.

In the first phase of open coding, the sections were shredded and mapped into codes. In the second phase, the microanalysis of selected parts of the text took place row by row and the transition from codes to topics. In the third phase, the qualitative data of the answers to the research questions were recorded in explanatory memoranda. The codification of microanalysis is provided in the questions referred to a) the most important problems in the workplace, table 1 and b) the skills that are considered necessary to be developed in order to detect the needs, table 2, so that, with the appropriate training programs, well-being in the workplace can be built.

(Table 1, Table 2)

At the stage of axial coding, the codes of the three aspects of the questions answered by the participants were organized into three diagrams and are presented in Tables 3, 4 and 5.

(Table 3, 4, 5)

The inclusive results obtained from the selective coding are defined as follows:

Aspect: Perceptions of continuing education

It is evident that nurses have not yet acquired a culture of continuing learning at a universal level, although they practice a constantly evolving Science. A necessary condition for the nursing profession is continuing training, just as it is the case in the medical field as well and the healthcare organizations should make it necessary to follow the educational programs conducted by all the nurses. Half of the number of participants has the attitude that once they have completed their undergraduate studies, their learning obligations have been completed and whatever will be needed in the future will be acquired in practice. In fact, however, this mentality leads to practices of the past, where nurses worked in apprenticeships and without having completed university-level studies. In addition, the conclusion is redefined, that permanence in the public labor sector gives a sense of security, but at the same time inactivity or a slow pace of scientific development.

Aspect: Recording of subjective reality

The motives to participate in training programs are the updating of knowledge and social interaction, while the need to develop social skills begins to be realized. 21st century nurses, in addition to continuing specialized education in their field, must be trained and develop transversal skills, as defined by social needs in the wider work field, given that the focal point of nurses' work is the patients, who are in a special state of emergency, since they are ill.

Nurses who understand that education is an investment are a modern human resource. They are fully aware of the fact that with continuing education and training they will be a strong social capital, which is both remarkable and equivalent to that of other countries, which deserves honorable mention and social recognition in the healthcare sector. Modern nurses recognize the importance of continuing education and interpret it as both a necessity and a desire. They have been nurtured by their academic schools with a learning culture and they meet more and more of their colleagues with similar learning attitudes. Training is considered effective when it is a choice of participants, when it has sufficient duration and engagement and when experiential learning methods are used.

Aspect: Insight

The main problems in the workplace focus on communication, cooperation, emotional stress, the effects of the authoritarian leadership model, as well as the syndrome of moral harassment. All these malfunctions can be prevented and addressed by designing and conducting special training programs. Education that has as its object effective ways of communication, where the individual can, on the one hand, accurately express their opinion, condition and vision and, on the other hand, apply active listening and empathy, creates favorable conditions for people, in the context of teamwork, so that they can communicate and this harmonized situation leads to cooperation.

In the field of psychological stress, training can have excellent corrective effects by developing the skill of mental resilience and the recognition and management of work stress. In addition, in cases of poor management, the training compares the development of leadership skills, the models applied as well as the ways of asserting, managing conflicts and negotiating.

The training will help participants recognize the mobbing syndrome, prevent it from happening to either themselves or their colleagues, and be able to protect themselves in their work environment. Professional well-being is now a commonplace in the global labor market and education is the most effective way to achieve this goal.

Discussion

A research study of 60 pre- and post-training nurses in communication skills in a two-day eight-hour workshop concluded that communication skills training is an effective and inexpensive way to reduce nurses' burnout. It was suggested that the results should be taken into account by the administrations, as the quality of the provided healthcare services will be improved.[15] In the present study, no reference was made by the head nurses to burnout syndrome, which impressed the researchers, in contrast to communication skills, which were unanimously a universal need.

Including leading nursing executives, a research study was conducted, which highlighted the need to develop communication skills with patients and doctors and the implementation of teamwork. Moderate percentages were occupied by leadership skills, mental resilience and empathy. The participants considered the balance in work and family life important, as well as the prevention of burnout syndrome.[16] Compared to the present study,

it seems that there was a greater need to change the leadership model, to communicate, to cooperate, to manage conflicts and to deal with the phenomenon of moral harassment. No mention was made to burnout syndrome, while family responsibilities were cited as an obstacle to continuing education.

For a similar research purpose in the present study, the results demonstrated the need to improve leadership skills, communication and member participation in decision-making.[17] The present study highlighted the need to study the models of leadership, communication and cooperation, despite the desire of participants in decision-making and this is justified, as in our country the nursing departments mainly apply the authoritarian model of administration and the education of previous decades had not been embedded in collaborative learning and thus, teamwork and collaboration are absent from the reality of a large number of nurses in the public sector.

In order to design an in-service training program for the development of soft skills, a research study was conducted, whose results converge with those of the present. The research method was conducted by interviewing leaders of various specialties, doctors, nurses and administrators, in healthcare organizations in the USA. Training in social skills, such as communication, conflict administration, active listening and collaboration was considered very important for effective leadership.[18] The evaluation of a six-month training program with a "solution-focused" program to develop communication skills in nurses showed positive changes in nursing practice as nurses' feelings of inadequacy and emotional stress were reduced.[19] Similar results to the two aforementioned studies on the urgent need to develop communication skills emerged from the testimonies of the participants in the present study.

The results of a qualitative research on the development of emotional intelligence had a positive effect on improving the professional well-being and reducing the work stress of community nurses.[20] A study that investigated the correlation between psychological empowerment and job satisfaction of nurses yielded positive results. It concluded that leading nursing executives should have the knowledge and skills to encourage workgroups and ensure empowerment and job satisfaction.[21] The present study highlighted the need to develop emotional intelligence, mental resilience and empower nurses, in order to set the foundations for professional well-being in healthcare environments.

Limitations of the study - Suggestions for future research

Although the study reached important conclusions about the educational need to develop soft skills, it would be very important to be supported by individual interviews with the participants. The focus group is a reliable and short-term method of quality research, but it might influence participants and the sequence of socially conventional views, due to the interaction in group dynamics. The result of this social contract is that innovative and pioneering thoughts and opinions bear the risk of cover-up.

In the future, it will be very important to organize a mixed quantitative and qualitative research study that will initially examine the skills of nurses through questionnaires. The trainees will then attend a specially designed training program, based on experiential learning, in order to achieve maximum efficiency. Quantitative re-examination of skills will follow, but it should be enriched with personal semi -structured interviews. This research path will make it possible to study learning difficulties and to explore the need to develop new skills, which will now correspond to the personality of empowered nurses.

Conclusions - Suggestions

The nursing administrations in the country should use the soft skills as a channel to filter the leadership model they apply and through their transformational leadership attitude to empower the nurses, treating them as remarkable and important executives of the healthcare organization. At the organizational level, it is very important that organizational learning prevails and that employees consider it their responsibility to attend training programs. Nurses, as healthcare scientists, have to develop a culture of continuing learning and, along with the scientific skills, they should develop soft skills, which are now a necessary qualification for the 21st century employees. The leader nurses must, with their attitude and vision, pave the way for the reshaping of the therapeutic reality and set the foundations for professional well-being in healthcare environments.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Ανίχνευση εκπαιδευτικών αναγκών ήπιων δεξιοτήτων στο δίπολο νοσηλευτικής ηγεσίας - ομάδας εργασίας

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Εισαγωγή: Το σύγχρονο υγειονομικό εργασιακό περιβάλλον χαρακτηρίζεται από πολυπλοκότητα και τα ιδανικά χαρακτηριστικά του ηγέτη νοσηλευτή ισορροπούν ανάμεσα στις επιστημονικές γνώσεις και τις ήπιες δεξιότητες. Ο πιο αποτελεσματικός τρόπος ανάπτυξης των ήπιων δεξιοτήτων είναι μέσω της ενεργητικής συμμετοχής σε επιμορφωτικά προγράμματα, σχεδιασμένα με τη μέθοδο της βιωματικής μάθησης που αποτελούν απόρροια ανίχνευσης εκπαιδευτικών αναγκών. **Σκοπός:** Η διερεύνηση των αντιλήψεων και των στάσεων προϊστάμενων νοσηλευτών δημοσίων νοσοκομείων για τη συνεχιζόμενη εκπαίδευση με στόχο την ανίχνευση των εκπαιδευτικών αναγκών όσον αφορά τις ήπιες δεξιότητες. **Υλικό και Μέθοδος:** Το δείγμα μελέτης αποτέλεσαν ανώτερα στελέχη, σε επίπεδο προϊστάμενου νοσηλευτικού τμήματος, δημοσίων νοσοκομείων της Αττικής. Η διενέργεια της έρευνας πραγματοποιήθηκε τον Ιανουάριο του 2020 μέσω της μεθόδου ποιοτικής έρευνας «ομάδα εστιασμένης συνέντευξης». Η ανάλυση των δεδομένων διενεργήθηκε με θεματική ανάλυση τριών σταδίων μετάβασης: της ανοικτής κωδικοποίησης, της κατ' άξονα κωδικοποίησης και επιλεκτικής κωδικοποίησης, στα οποία οι ερμηνείες καταγράφηκαν σε υπομνήματα και διαγράμματα. **Αποτελέσματα:** Οι νοσηλευτές που αντιλαμβάνονται ότι η εκπαίδευση είναι επένδυση αποτελούν ένα σύγχρονο ανθρώπινο δυναμικό, που έχει πλήρη επίγνωση ότι με τη συνεχή εκπαίδευση και επιμόρφωση θα αποτελέσουν ένα ισχυρό κοινωνικό κεφάλαιο αξιόλογο και αντίστοιχο άλλων χωρών που απολαμβάνουν εύφημο μνεία και κοινωνική καταξίωση στον τομέα της υγείας. Τα κυριότερα προβλήματα στον εργασιακό χώρο εστιάζονται στην επικοινωνία, στη συνεργασία, στη διαχείριση συγκρούσεων, στην ψυχική φόρτιση, στις επιπτώσεις του αυταρχικού μοντέλου ηγεσίας καθώς και στο σύνδρομο της ηθικής παρενόχλησης. Όλες αυτές οι δυσλειτουργίες μπορούν να προληφθούν και να αντιμετωπιστούν με το σχεδιασμό και τη διενέργεια ειδικών επιμορφωτικών προγραμμάτων ανάπτυξης ήπιων

δεξιοτήτων. **Συμπεράσματα:** Οι νοσηλευτές ως επιστήμονες υγείας οφείλουν να αναπτύσσουν κουλτούρα συνεχιζό-μενης μάθησης και να χαράζουν με τη στάση και το όραμά τους τον δρόμο για την αναδιαμόρφωση της θεραπευτικής πραγματικότητας και τη θεμελίωση της εργασιακής ευημερίας στα υγειονομικά περιβάλλοντα.

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