

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE FOR LEADERS IN NURSING

INTELIGENCJA EMOCJONALNA DLA LIDERÓW PIEŁĘGNIARSTWA

Douglas Kemerer¹, Klaudia Cwiekala-Lewis²

¹ Nursing Clinical Instructor
York County School of Technology, USA

² Faculty at Health Sciences and Nursing
Phoenix University, USA

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ABSTRACT

A nurse's leader emotional intelligence (EI) is closely linked to his or her ability to therapeutically handle interpersonal conflicts. EI is based on the ability to accurately identify another person's emotions from facial expressions, body language, and speech. Communicating with respect and concern for the other person is a salient way to effectively manage a conflict. When nurse leaders lack EI, results suffer and team morale plummets. The core themes associated with EI include: gratitude, altruism, compassion, empathy, forgiveness, happiness, and mindfulness. An emotionally intelligent person is able to identify these themes and respond appropriately without great effort.

KEYWORDS: emotional intelligence, interpersonal conflicts, nursing, leaders.

STRESZCZENIE

Inteligencja emocjonalna (IE) lidera pielęgniarstwa jest ściśle związana z terapeutyczną zdolnością do rozwiązywania konfliktów interpersonalnych. IE oparta jest na zdolności do dokładnego odczytania emocji innej osoby z wyrazu jej twarzy, języka ciała i mowy. Komunikowanie się z szacunkiem i troską o drugiego człowieka jest najistotniejszym sposobem skutecznego rozwiązywania konfliktu. Gdy liderom pielęgniarstwa brakuje wiedzy z zakresu IE spada zarówno efektywność przywództwa, jak i morale zespołu. Autorzy proponują pięć podstawowych cech związanych z IE: wdzięczność, altruizm, współczucie, empatia, przebaczenie, szczęście i spostrzegawczość. Emocjonalnie inteligentny lider jest w stanie nie tylko zidentyfikować te cechy, ale także je umiejętnie wykorzystywać, by odpowiednio reagować w każdej sytuacji.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: inteligencja emocjonalna, konflikty interpersonalne, pielęgniarstwo, lider.

Introduction

Currently there are many definitions of Emotional Intelligence (EI). The authors of this paper will present EI model that is based on the trait EI model. EI trait can be understood as the ability of self-perceptions of the person's empathy, impulsivity, and assertiveness, as well as social and personal intelligence apply to response to another person and situation in a therapeutic manner [1]. Goleman [2] suggested that emotional intelligence consisted of five defining qualities: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, social awareness, and relationship management. All of the above qualities contribute to persons EI. Relatively new research shows that a person's ability to gauge a situation regarding emotions of others is a driving force for successful collaboration [3]. High EI is an indicator of being able to handle stressful situations and competitive environments [4]. A nurse leader's EI is closely linked to his or her ability to therapeutically handle interpersonal conflicts. EI has

been shown to promote connection, rapport and trust within a healthcare team [5].

Conceptualization of EI into Nursing Practice

The concept of utilizing EI to gauge the emotions of one's self and others was initially proposed in 1990 [6]. EI was applied to the management specialty in 1995 by Goleman. According to Goleman [7], EI consists of five fundamental aspects: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Although EI has been shown to effectively cultivate a therapeutic environment and improve patient outcomes, the concept of EI has primarily been utilized as a means to adequately prepare nursing students for the rigors of the nursing field [8]. The principal theory regarding EI is that emotions and intelligence are connected. This principal theory links a person's ability to feel, think, and consequently behave in an intelligent manner.

EI in the Professional Setting

A major reason for implementing EI is to prepare leaders for stressful work conditions. Leadership is an emotionally taxing endeavor [9]. According to McKenna & Webb [10], many employers are pushing for values-based initiatives and EI measures to determine placement for leadership positions. Effective collaboration is a common competency that is sought out by corporate entities. The transformational leadership style is optimal for developing therapeutic work relationships. EI is a cornerstone of the transformational leadership style [11]. An effective leader ensures that all members of a team feel valued, relevant, and safe. EI training has been shown to decrease the incidence of horizontal co-worker violence [12].

Characteristics of High EI

EI is based on the ability to accurately identify another person’s emotions from facial expressions, body language, and speech. This is essential for a nurse to possess because the correct interpretation of these signs will inform the nurse of which intervention is most likely to produce positive outcomes (Table 1). Nurse leaders who are assertive with their speech set forward clear expectations, yet maintain respect for others. Using the language that focuses on the speaker’s role or using the word “I” is an assertive tactic which shows that the comment is universal and collaborative. When attending an issue with another person who is visibly upset, the emotionally intelligent nurse leader will speak in moderate and soft tones. Communicating with respect and concern for the other person is a salient way to effectively manage a conflict. For the successful conclusion of any conflict, ending on a positive note sets the tone for effective and collaborative future relations. Spano-Szekely and colleagues [13] stated that being able to motivate teams into productive work is the hallmark of an emotionally intelligent nurse leader. Nurse leaders who behave in these ways are referred to as emotionally intelligent individuals. The nurse leader should be aware of his or her own emotional state and utilize the emotions of the team to drive operations [14].

Table 1. Clinical Outcomes of High versus Low EI

Clinical Outcomes of High versus Low EI	
High EI	Low EI
Invite positive outcomes	Increased horizontal work violence
Establish clear expectations	Lack of team engagement
Cultivate Collaboration	Team moral plummets
Effective conflict resolution	Ineffective conflict resolution
Drive productive operations	Undermining of operations

Source: author’s own analysis

Characteristics of Low EI

When nurse leaders lack EI, results suffer and team morale plummets. Lack of EI has been shown to lead toward negative professional interactions that include anxiety, biased thought processes, apathetic attitude, and disparaging automatic thinking [15]. Working in an environment where one does not feel as if he or she is being understood is frustrating. Presumption of knowing another person’s intentions is disingenuous and disrespectful. Inability to relate to others is a sign of low EI. Nurse leaders with low EI may communicate in ineffective ways. Passive communication includes inability to advocate for one’s self, avoiding conflict, and is typically utilized by those with a lower self-esteem. Aggressive communication is when a person advocate’s for himself without regard for respecting others. This may be characterized by verbal abuse, deflection of blame, and interrupting others. Passive-aggressive communication is when a person displays a passive affect, but internally feels aggressive towards others. The operative feature of the passive-aggressive leader is an undermining of the project fueled by resentment related to inability to advocate for his rights. If a sentence starts with the word “you”, it is typically regarded as an accusation or a shift of blame. The ineffective conflict resolution may take many forms. Being argumentative while trying to “win” a conversation is a losing proposition. Reacting to the other person’s emotions or getting distracted may be interpreted as disrespect. Following scripts typically makes others feel that you are not invested in the conversation and presuming that you know the other person’s intentions belittles their value.

Core Themes of EI

Authors proposed the core themes associated with EI include: gratitude, altruism, compassion, empathy, forgiveness, happiness, and mindfulness. Gratitude is the theme that involves thanking others for a service or job well done with the end result that the other person feels appreciated. Altruism is the state of being concerned more for other’s rights than one’s own. Compassion is an action taken place for one who has not earned or does not deserve it. Empathy is the ability to assume how one would imagine they may feel in a similar situation as another person. Forgiveness is the forbearance of transgression or wrongdoing. Happiness is the state of being proactively content with one’s circumstances. Mindfulness is the awareness and appreciation for one’s surroundings. All themes are connected with bidirectional arrows and can occur simultaneously, together or separate depending upon the situation and/or environment as well as other behavior (Figure 1).

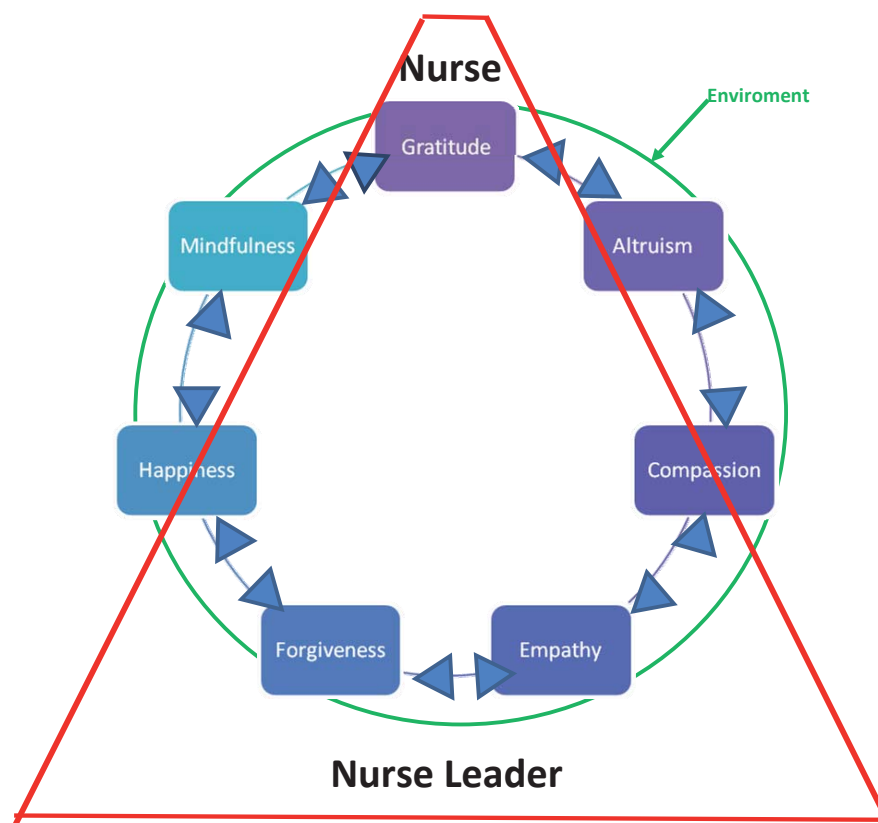


Figure 1. Core Themes of EI
Source: author's own analysis

Conclusion

EI plays a substantial role in how effective a nurse is able to perform. Self-respect and respect towards others is the keystone for high EI. Therapeutic communication is a vital facet of properly relating to others. Being assertive with communication sets forth clear expectations while demanding that respect be afforded to all parties involved. Self-awareness regarding how one is feeling at a certain time is essential for developing EI. Accurate effective forecasting, such as being able to predict how one's self will react in a future circumstance, is indicative of well EI [16]. The ability to accurately assess what emotion another person is feeling by taking visual cues of their facial expression and body position will help the emotionally intelligent leader to properly handle many conflicts in the workplace. Seven core themes associated with EI include: gratitude, altruism, compassion, empathy, forgiveness, happiness, and mindfulness. An emotionally intelligent person is able to identify these themes and respond appropriately without great effort.

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Address for correspondence:

Klaudia J. Ćwiękała-Lewis
 4035 S. Riverpoint Pkwy
 Phoenix, AZ 85040, USA
 phone: 610-297-2726
 e-mail: klaudialewis@email.arizona.edu
 Faculty at Health Sciences and Nursing
 Phoenix University, USA