The Influence of Emotional Intelligence on Nursing Students' Conflict Management Styles

Thesis

Submitted for partial fulfillment of the requirements of
the Master Degree in Nursing Sciences
(Nursing administration)

By

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ABSTRACT

Despite the increasing understanding of the role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in managing conflict, little research has been done on the relationship between EI competencies of registered nurses and their conflict-handling skills. The aim of this work was to study the influence of EI on nursing students' conflict management styles. It was carried out at the Faculty of Nursing at Ain-Shams University using a cross-sectional analytical design on all first (162) and fourth (163) year students. The data collection tool consisted of a self-administered questionnaire for personal data with two standardized scales to measure EI (BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory - Short [BarOn EQ-i: S]) and Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI). The fieldwork lasted from November 2012 to March 2013. The revealed that only 6.8% of the students had total effective function EI. The accommodating was the most used among conflict resolution strategies (51.7%), and the collaborating was the least (5.8%). The only factor influencing students' EI is the higher level of father education. The frequency of internet use is positively related to competing and collaborating strategies. The use of conflict resolution strategies is not significantly related to students' EI. In conclusion, nursing students have low levels of Emotional Intelligence (EI), and mostly use the accommodating conflict resolution strategy. Therefore, there is an urgent need to improve nursing students' EI through inclusion nursing schools curricula, and training courses. Training in selecting and applying the most appropriate conflict resolution strategy is recommended. Further research is proposed to evaluate the effect of training in EI and its impact on the use of appropriate conflict resolution strategies.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Conflict Resolution Strategies, Nursing students

INTRODUCTION

As human beings interact in organizations, differing values and situations create tension. When conflict is recognized, acknowledged, and managed in a proper manner, personal and organizational benefits will result. Conflict in an organizational context can be normal and healthy, lack of tension is ultimately dull and stagnant and unlikely to foster creativity and growth ***(Silverthorne, 2005)***.

Traditionally people often regard conflict as a negative, harmful phenomenon, rather than as a natural and pervasive phenomenon in their experiences ***(Boonsathorn, 2007)***. Even though some managers see conflict as something that should be avoided at all costs, others see conflict as presenting exciting possibilities if managed in a positive, constructive fashion. Today's effective manager seeks not to avoid but to manage conflict within the organization ***(Berstene, 2010)***.

Conflict formation in daily activities is a complex issue. Therefore, successful conflict resolution requires many complex skills and techniques. Successful conflict resolution can only be achieved by listening to and meeting the needs of

all parties so that each party is substantially satisfied with the outcome. Conflict management may be seen as a systematic mechanism for handling different situations. Moreover, the understanding of conflict and its resolution can help people improve their relationships, including nursing departments in medical facilities and Universities, as educational organizations, that occurs between different groups within its jurisdiction as between student-student, student-instructor, student authority ***(Lussier, 2006; Adebayo, 2009)***.

There are many determinants of conflict formation, including intellectual intelligence, EI (EI), personality, attitude, communal trust, and value judgment. However, the determinants can have complex interrelationships, which affect and induce conflict. Conflict arises between people or groups, due to their differences in attitudes, beliefs, values or needs ***(Hoban, 2005)***.

In past decades, the traditional qualities associated with leadership, such as intelligence, toughness, determination, and vision, appeared to be sufficient to be considered successful. In 1983, Howard Gardner had challenged the idea and proposed the multiple intelligence theory that consists of seven categories in order to accurately define the concepts of

intelligence and to succeed in the field. Two of them are intrapersonal intelligence, the ability to understand oneself and act on the basis of self-knowledge, and interpersonal intelligence, the ability to work cooperatively and communicate with other people effectively ***(Hsi-An and Ely, 2010)***. Today, they are now often referred to in association with EI, which is the ability to comprehend, perceive and manage the feelings, emotions and motivation of one's self and of others ***(Goleman, 1998)***.

Some people can handle conflict in a tactful and sensible way ***(Iain, 2005)***. Bar-On hypothesizes that these individuals are, in general, more successful in meeting environmental demands and pressures, which often is an indication of one's potential to succeed in life. Some scholars apply the concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI) quotient or emotional quotient (EQ) to quantify people's ability to manage emotion ***(Bar-On, 1997; Geher, 2004)***.

According to Bar-On, EI has two parts: the intrapersonal or the understanding and management of emotion within oneself; and the interpersonal or the empathy for the others and the maintenance of interpersonal relationships. This personality trait requires the awareness of how others feel (i.e., empathy),

the identification with one's social group and cooperation with others (i.e., social responsibility) and the establishment of mutually satisfying relationships with others ***(Leung, 2010)***. The concept of EI involves the management of emotion within oneself. It also emphasizes the importance of recognizing one's interdependence with other people ***(Bao-Yi and Chun-Chi, 2012)***.

According to past research, there are significant relationships between EI and subordinates' styles of handling conflict with supervisors. Subordinates who have supervisors with high EI will use the integrating style (both parties find a creative solution to satisfy both parties' concerns) and the compromising style (both parties win some and lose some, in an attempt to reach a consensus) of conflict management ***(Yu et al., 2006)***.

Nursing is a profession affected by stress and conflict. Factors which contribute to this include a lack of appreciation and fairness, inadequate pay, increased workloads with more critical patients, and poor relations with coworkers ***(McNeese-Smith and Nazarey, 2001)***. Understanding how to handle stress and conflict is of paramount importance. Stress and conflict cannot be totally eliminated, but learning essential EI skills can

be helpful ***(Goleman, 1998)***. Conflict is often avoided by nurses in a health care setting but its existence is very evident ***(Valentine, 2001)***. Nurse's emotions must be handled effectively and appropriate conflict skills must be developed or health care institutions will face the challenge of rectifying the problems which result ***(Moss, 2002)***.

The choice of conflict management strategies depends on the complex relationships of the determinants of the conflict and other factors related to human and inherent structural variables. The emotional aspects of a situation and the mode of stress management not only induce the conflict, but also affect the conflict management strategy deployed and the manner in which it is deployed. Moreover, the identification of the determinants of conflict can demonstrate the importance of EI. After the verification of conflict formation and the effect of EI, conflict management strategies can be developed according to the scale and type of conflict situation in different situation ***(Leung, 2010)***.

Significance of the study

Studying at the university is a critical period of life, particularly in a discipline such as nursing which requires a lot