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Leadership Development in the Nursing Student

Jessica Shaw, Nursing

Sponsor: Carolyn Hames

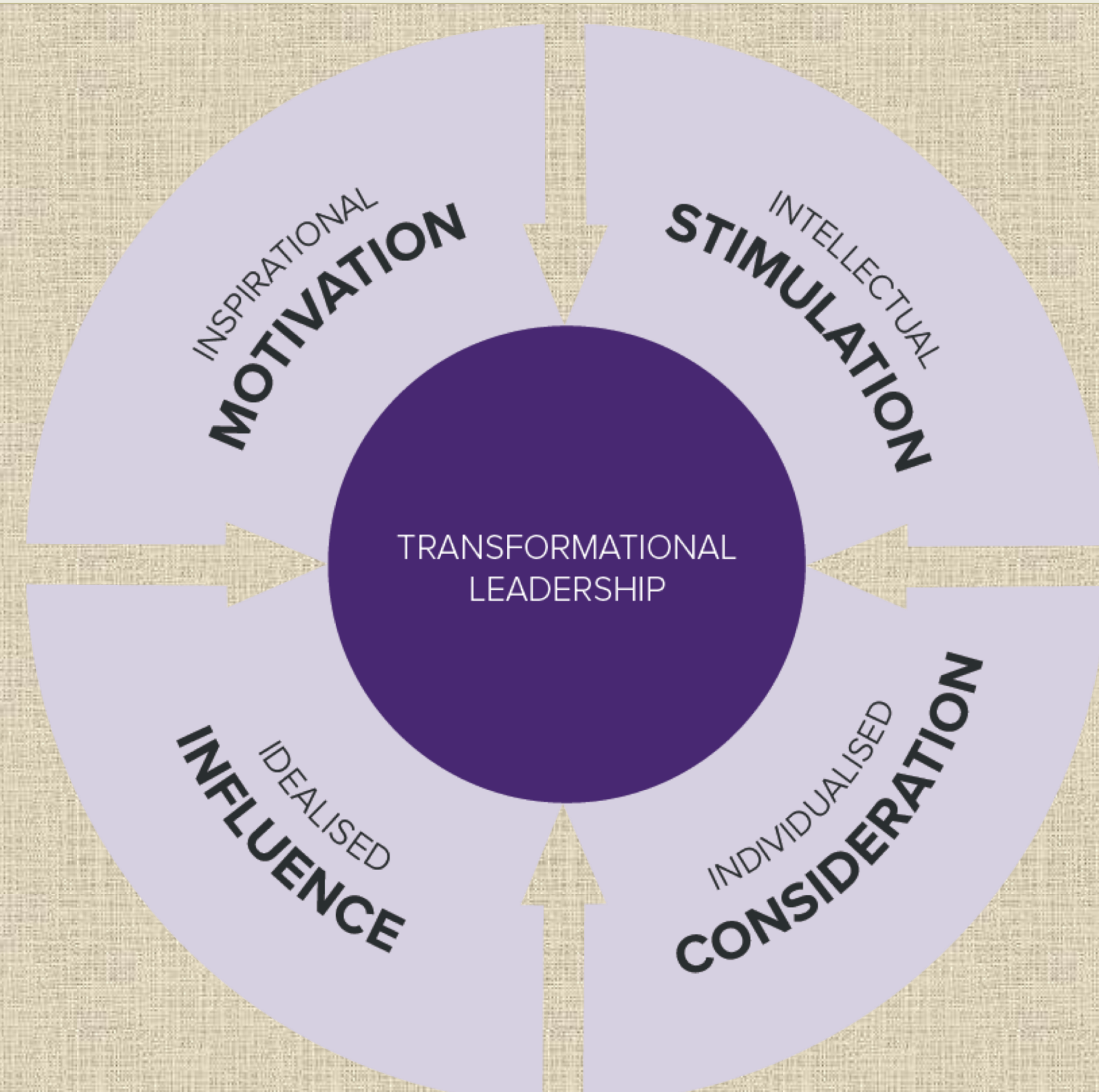
Introduction

Throughout my clinical courses, 'leadership' has been consistently highlighted by my instructors as an area necessitating improvement. Leadership is a quintessential element in the hospital setting because each nurse is responsible for managing their own patient assignment. A nurse's ability to properly prioritize care and advocate for patients has a direct impact on the patients' health outcomes. Most nursing curriculums only offer a leadership course in the final semester of the undergraduate career. I wanted to learn more about leadership and orient myself in various leadership roles to increase my confidence and make strides toward providing the best possible care to my future patients.

Literature Review

The term 'leadership' holds different meaning and value to each individual. Effective nursing leadership can be assessed by certain traits and characteristics that are expressed through work. The following are all characteristics of a transformational leader; the golden standard of leadership¹:

- Effective delegation
 - Democratic approach
 - Intellectual stimulator
 - Goal-oriented
 - Catalyst for positive change
 - Focus on patient safety, satisfaction, and outcomes
 - Education promotion
- Some of the most important components of leadership are self-awareness, acceptance of constructive criticism, and performance of the aforementioned leadership skills².



Method

I wanted to simulate a nurse management position that would expose me to an environment in which I could practice the characteristics of a transformational leader. The upperclassmen mentors in the buddy program and the student mentors in the URI 101 classes acted as my staff nurses to whom I delegated appropriate responsibilities. The freshmen acted as my patients. I knew that each of their needs would be unique and that no two individuals should be treated the same, yet all should be treated with respect. Education is critical in healthcare; nurses need to stay up-to-date on evidence-based practice, and they need to incorporate what they learn into patient education. This allows their clients to make the best informed decision. A manager is typically responsible for promoting education so I made sure to integrate educational aspects into both programs.

URI 101

Implementation

Knowing that continued education is of great importance, I created a lesson plan that the mentors were responsible for incorporating into their weekly lesson plans. Not only did they have to introduce the subject but they had to clarify why it was important and how it related to nursing. The topics that were covered, if used correctly, correlate to the success these individuals will have in their future career as nurses. Moreover, many of these topics are things we must educate our patients about.

Topics:

- Organization
- Goal-setting
- Prioritization
- Reflection
- Nutrition
- Positivity
- Exercise
- Stress management

Students were responsible for documenting the completion of these assignments in a daily planner.

Mentor Program

Implementation

I initiated a program that encouraged all individuals to become a more active part of the student body, and to take advantage of what the University has to offer. This would ideally enhance their educational experience at URI in addition to providing them with resume builders and personal connections. I was hoping that it would also bridge the gap between nursing classes and allow underclassmen to get extra help they may need, or find answers to their questions.

After I paired upperclassmen and freshmen one-on-one, I made it the upperclassmen's obligation to reach out to their buddy and meet with them on a weekly basis to complete one of the activities listed below.

Activities:

- Group beach day
- Go to a URI club meeting
- Attend a URI sporting event
- Meet up on the quad
- Volunteer or charity event
- Study and/or tutor session
- Share a meal together

Participant Feedback

- "I found the nursing buddy program to be a good introduction to the URI College of Nursing program. It was extremely helpful to have someone knowledgeable about classes and relevant to our major when picking out classes for second semester."
- "I enjoyed the buddy program because I met someone new. I liked that at the beginning we were all able to meet up and get to know each other, I think I wish we did more of that. If it were to run again next fall, I'd definitely do it again."
- "If this program were to run again next year I think people need to be more committed because it did not seem like a priority for most buddies. I would suggest making it more formal to keep it going!"
- "I think it's great to have an older, experienced student in the College of Nursing guide and answer questions for freshmen. I would have loved to be offered this when I was a freshman."

Discussion

- Overall I was very happy with the results; however, that is not to say everything went as planned. It was incredibly difficult to organize any group meeting with the mentor program; the attendance for beach day was poor. Some of the feedback I received from the participants stated that they wish there had been more group activities. If I were to create this project again I would try to get the organization recognized by the Student Senate so that "mandatory" group meeting would hold more value and result in a better turnout.
- Something that was more difficult than I had anticipated was delegating responsibilities to the URI 101 mentors. When I make plans to do something I want to make sure that it is done to the best of my ability. I had to learn to place trust in my peers, that they would put their best efforts forward. I supported them throughout the process and stayed in contact in case they had any questions or concerns regarding my expectations. They did a great job and showed a strong work ethic with a lot of passion.
- Another thing that I learned through my experience, and with the help of my sponsor, was to become proactive rather than reactive. This project has alerted me that I have a tendency to procrastinate with less desirable or more difficult assignments. This is something that a nurse cannot do; things must be prioritized and completed in a timely way. For example, it would be unethical to put off changing a dressing change simply because you do not enjoy doing them. This puts the patient at risk for infection and would be considered neglect. I saw myself make progress with this weakness throughout the school year, but it is something I will continue to work on.
- I became more comfortable in my role as the semester progressed, and I learned to adapt to unforeseen circumstances. I worked with the buddies in adjusting some of the activities to better suit their needs and make for a better experience. Furthermore I resolved several communication issues between buddies. These barriers taught me to stay goal-oriented and positive because there is always a solution.

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