

Transitioning from Traditional Leadership to Inclusive Leadership in Nursing

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Leadership in nursing has long been a healthcare foundation, helping teams navigate challenging environments and influencing patient care outcomes. Traditionally, nursing leadership has emphasized a hierarchical, task-oriented approach, where authority and decision-making often reside with senior-level individuals. However, healthcare organizations' evolving needs and diverse nursing teams have created a shift toward an inclusive leadership model. Shortly after implementing the Affordable Care Act, a report from the Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Initiative on the Future of Nursing, at the Institute of Medicine (2011) included calls to create a more diverse, inclusive workplace environment to match the changing patient population and healthcare system's needs. Inclusive leadership values collaboration, openness, and respect for diverse perspectives and shows promising results in improving team cohesiveness, reducing turnover, and enhancing patient outcomes (Northouse, 2019). This article explores the impact of transitioning from traditional to inclusive leadership in nursing and provides strategies for effectively implementing this leadership style.

Traditional nursing leadership often emphasizes control, authority, and adherence to established rules and regulations (Fernandopulle, 2021). Under conventional leadership principles, leaders are usually more directive and authoritative, making essential decisions for the team. They also focus on achieving task efficiency and upholding standards (Fernandopulle, 2021). Although this approach

provides structure, it can hinder opportunities for the nursing team to contribute ideas, reducing innovation and employee engagement.

In contrast, inclusive leadership is a relatively new concept built on collaboration, empathy, and recognition of each individual's unique contributions (Northouse, 2019). Inclusive leaders possess the traits and skills that help establish followers' sense of belonging while upholding their uniqueness among peers as they contribute to overall group processes and results (Randel et al., 2018). This style encourages nurses to feel a sense of belongingness and uniqueness while significantly improving their psychological safety (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006) and creativity (Carmeli et al., 2010). Inclusive leadership aligns with modern industry demands for cultural sensitivity, adaptability, and commitment to diversity and inclusion. The American Nurses Association's (2024) Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Commitment Statement echoes the characteristics of an inclusive leader, stating:

Collectively, we thrive with a diverse team of employees, valuing the sum of individual differences, life experiences, and knowledge that our employees invest into their work.

We desire to create and celebrate a diverse and inclusive workforce representative of the people we serve. (para. 1)

Research has demonstrated several benefits of inclusive leadership in nursing, such as reduced turnover intention, increased employee engagement, and

improved patient outcomes. As the nursing workforce seeks to increase its diversity, there is an emphasis on the need for inclusive leadership. This leadership style influences the reduction of turnover intentions through fair treatment, opportunities for self-development, meaningful communication, and increasing belonging, self-efficacy, and self-identity (Zeng et al., 2023). Inclusive leadership is a leadership style that relies on relationships. These relationships between an inclusive leader and a nurse affect a nurse's feelings of work engagement (George & Massey, 2020). A leader's behavior drives nurses' motivation and satisfaction, encouraging them to engage more in work-related initiatives (Abdelaziz et al., 2023). Having a more engaged nursing workforce, reducing turnover rates, and creating an inclusive workplace leads to improved organizational and patient outcomes, as studies show a direct link between these factors. While the benefits are rewarding, they do not negate that healthcare organizations may experience challenges transitioning to this leadership style. Organizations must approach the transition to inclusive leadership through strategic implementation.

Healthcare organizations should prioritize strategies for implementing inclusive leadership in nursing. These organizations should invest in targeted training and development programs to equip nurses with enhanced skills needed for inclusive leadership. As workplace diversity increases, organizations should focus on implementing leadership training incorporating inclusivity practices, fostering an environment that maximizes diverse talents and promotes organizational success

(Breevaart & Bakker, 2018; Marcelin et al., 2019). This training should include a focus on developing cultural competency to increase awareness of cultural differences (Jongen et al., 2018) and equip leaders with the tools to communicate inclusively. Mentorship programs can further support leaders by providing insights and personalized feedback on inclusive practices (Jongen et al., 2018).

Moreover, to promote inclusive leadership, organizational policies and culture must shift. This might require revising recruitment, promotion, and evaluation policies to promote a transparent, fair culture and supportive work atmosphere (Kalev et al., 2006). By regularly reviewing policies, leaders can ensure they promote inclusivity rather than perpetuate bias (Kossek & Michel, 2011).

By aligning their policies with inclusivity principles, healthcare organizations can create an environment that encourages inclusive leadership and enhances psychological safety for employees.

The transition from traditional leadership to inclusive leadership in nursing is essential to meet the complexities and diversity of today's healthcare environment. By promoting an inclusive leadership style, organizations can boost nurse engagement, decrease turnover rates, and enhance patient care through a collaborative, supportive, and culturally aware atmosphere. Although there are obstacles in this shift, implementing strategies such as training, mentorship, and policy changes can facilitate the successful adoption of inclusive leadership practices. As healthcare systems increas-

ingly focus on diversity and inclusion, the significance of inclusive leadership will grow in fostering sustainable, resilient, and efficient nursing teams. Ultimately, inclusivity is everyone's responsibility.

Please consider attending ANA-Ohio's 2025 second-quarter continuing education offering to learn more about inclusive leadership. The presenters will discuss *Transitioning from Traditional Leadership to Inclusive Leadership in Nursing*. ■

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