

EVALUATION OF A TEAM-BUILDING RETREAT TO PROMOTE NURSING FACULTY COHESION AND JOB SATISFACTION

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With the growing global shortage of nursing faculty, there is increased need to develop and evaluate strategies to promote nursing faculty job satisfaction. Using quantitative and qualitative research methods, a team-building faculty retreat including challenge course activities was evaluated to determine its effects on group cohesion and job satisfaction. Mean Job in General scores for the sample ($n = 29$) at the start of the study were comparable with national norms for employees with graduate degrees. There were statistically significant increases in Job in General scores and group cohesion scores from pretest to posttest on the day of the retreat. However, the positive changes were not maintained at the end of the semester when follow-up data were gathered. Content analysis of the retreat day reflections revealed the following themes: getting to know each other better, seeing commonalities and differences, spending time together, developing trust, and working as a group. Several themes were identified in the end of the semester reflections: getting to know each other, feeling closer as a group, setting a friendlier tone for the semester, and that the retreat was a positive experience. Based on these findings, we recommend the use of a faculty retreat with challenge course activities to promote nursing faculty cohesion and job satisfaction. However, follow-up activities are recommended to maintain positive results over time. (Index words: Team-building; Job satisfaction; Group cohesion; Nursing faculty; Challenge course) *J Prof Nurs* 27:174–178, 2011. © 2011 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

AS THE SHORTAGE of nursing faculty continues to grow in the United States ([American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2008](#)) and globally ([Gui, Barriball, & While, 2008a, 2008b](#)) schools of nursing are increasingly concerned about retaining their current faculty, preventing burnout, and promoting faculty well-being. To meet the demand to educate more new nurses, many schools of nursing have added multiple sites and increased their use of distance education. Often, this has resulted in greater use of e-mail for faculty communication and committee meetings being conducted through video conferencing. With fewer face-to-face interactions and extremely busy schedules in multiple locations and agencies, the sense of community and cohesion among faculty may decline.

As schools of nursing increase enrollment and grow rapidly, it becomes more difficult for faculty to get to know one another.

In professional nursing programs, it is essential to have a well-sequenced curriculum and a cohesive team of faculty to ensure successful student progression toward program objectives. This requires teamwork. Faculty can accomplish more working together as a team than they can as isolated individuals. In addition, team members are an important source of support for each other in meeting the demands of the job. High-quality relationships at work not only help individuals flourish but also improve organizational functioning ([Dutton & Heapy, 2003](#)).

To meet this need, we designed a day-long team-building retreat for the school of nursing faculty using challenge course activities. Challenge course activities are “an experiential adventure program which offers groups and individuals the opportunity to participate in a series of activities involving mental, physical, and emotional risk taking” ([Rohnke, Wall, Tait, & Rogers, 2003](#), p. 3). Research supports the effectiveness of challenge course

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activities in promoting team-building and group cohesion (Gillis & Speelman, 2008). Faculty members participated in a series of on the ground challenge activities, also known as initiatives, aimed at getting to know one another, developing trust, and group problem-solving. The design of the retreat was guided by a positive psychology framework that focuses on the interrelatedness of positive subjective experiences, positive individual traits, and positive institutions (Peterson, 2006). Within this framework, job satisfaction and group cohesion are viewed as positive outcomes resulting from a positive intervention, a faculty team-building retreat.

In a meta-analysis of research, Gormley (2003) reviewed six studies investigating factors associated with nursing faculty job satisfaction including professional autonomy, leader expectation, organizational climate, role conflict and ambiguity, leader behavior of dean or chair, and organizational characteristics. Among these studies, the instrument most frequently used to measure job satisfaction was the Job Descriptive Index (JDI), which was selected for use in the present study.

A recent review of research related to job satisfaction among nursing faculty by Gui et al. (2008a, 2008b) was global in scope and included studies from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, mainland China, Taiwan, Israel, and Turkey. They concluded that components of job satisfaction among nursing faculty are similar despite cultural differences and include coworkers, the work itself, work conditions and hours, remuneration, professional growth and promotion, and supervision. They also found that the JDI was the most frequently used instrument used to measure nursing faculty job satisfaction.

In the present study, job satisfaction is defined as “the feelings a worker has about his or her job or job experiences in relation to previous experiences, current expectations, or available alternatives” (Balzer et al., 2000, p. 7). Group cohesion is defined as the bond, or sense of connection, group members have toward each other and toward the group as a whole (Van Anandel, Erdman, Karsdorp, Appels, & Trijsburg, 2003). Group cohesion is an outcome of team-building activities and is associated with positive feelings toward coworkers, which are an aspect of job satisfaction. In a descriptive, correlational study of Canadian nursing educators' workplace empowerment, burnout, and job satisfaction, Sarmiento, Laschinger, and Iwasiw (2004) concluded that informal power, which can be derived from teams, was an

important factor in job satisfaction. Although there is a growing body of research about factors associated with nursing faculty job satisfaction, research that evaluates an intervention aimed at enhancing job satisfaction or group cohesion among nursing faculty is lacking.

Methodology

A mixed-method evaluation study was conducted to examine both qualitative and quantitative data regarding outcomes of the retreat. A one-group pretest, posttest design with follow-up was used. Content analysis was used to identify themes in the qualitative data. The university institutional review board approved the study. When the group arrived the morning of the retreat, the study was explained, confidentiality was assured, and informed consent was obtained. Faculty could elect to participate in the retreat without participating in the study.

Preintervention data were gathered using a brief demographic questionnaire, the JDI (Balzer et al., 2000), and the Group Cohesion Questionnaire (GCQ) (Van Anandel et al., 2003). The JDI is a widely used measure of job satisfaction consisting of six independently scored subscales (see Table 1). Internal consistency reliability alpha coefficient values for the six subscales range from .86 to .92. The GCQ measures the bond of a group member with the group as a whole and the bond of a group member with other group members yielding a single cohesion score. The internal consistency reliability coefficient alpha values for the two subscales are .88 and .79, respectively.

At the end of the retreat day, data were gathered using the JDI, the GCQ, and an open-ended questionnaire asking for reflections on the retreat experience. Follow-up data were gathered at a faculty meeting at the end of the semester to determine more lasting outcomes of the retreat. End-of-semester data were gathered using the JDI, the GCQ, and an open-ended questionnaire eliciting reflections on the effects of the retreat during the semester.

The intervention consisted of a day-long faculty retreat that took place in the beautiful, relaxed setting of a nature conservancy owned by the university. It was facilitated by two certified challenge course instructors from the Department of Recreation, Parks, and Tourism at the university. Interdisciplinary collaboration on this research project made these resources available to the nursing faculty at no charge.

We first engaged in activities that involved getting to know each other's names and learning more about one

Table 1. Scales in the JDI and Dimensions of Job Satisfaction Measured

Scales	Dimension Measured
Work on Present Job	Satisfaction with the work itself
Pay	Employee's attitude toward his or her pay
Opportunities for Promotion	Satisfaction with the promotion policy and the administration of the policy
Supervision	Satisfaction with supervisor/s
People on Your Present Job	Satisfaction with coworkers
Job in General	Overall evaluation of how employee feels about his or her job

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