The influence of workplace culture on nurses’ learning experiences: a systematic review protocol of qualitative evidence

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Review question/objective

The purpose of this review is to critically appraise and synthesize the best available evidence to understand the quality, value and type of learning the nurse experiences within the workplace environment. In particular, the review will explore the relationship between workplace culture and the influence this can have on a nurse’s learning experience within that clinical environment.

Background

An optimal workplace environment is a pre-requisite for nurses to experience valuable and relevant learning in the workplace. This learning is valuable as it informs the nurse’s scope and progression of practice and is also linked with the regulatory requirements related to the nurse as a professional committed to the practice of evidence-based health care. Therefore, nurses need to learn in the workplace to provide informed and continuously improved levels of patient care.

For the purposes of this review, the terms environment, culture and climate are interchangeable. Workplace culture refers to the collective structures, systems and resultant behaviors evident in a work environment. Strong, innovative and adaptive organizations are characterized by workplaces with
healthy, learning, vibrant cultures.\textsuperscript{1} Ross-Walker, Rogers-Clarke and Pearce observe the following in relation to workplace culture:

\textit{When considering culture and climate within the nursing context, culture can be described as the shared social knowledge and understandings of a group that determine the accepted interactions and behaviors of a group.\textsuperscript{1}}

The significance of workplace climate is highlighted by Snow:\textsuperscript{2}

\textit{Climate is one of the most powerful, yet overlooked, factors when determining the performance of a particular work team. In fact, it has been demonstrated that climate accounts for up to 30\% of the variance in performance on a particular unit.}\textsuperscript{2}

Extrapolating from Snow’s statement above, understanding, defining, improving and maintaining a healthy work environment is an essential component for work performance, evidence-based practice and safe patient outcomes. Why then is it necessary to understand nurse’s learning experiences as part of this? It is proposed that there is a link between culture and patient outcomes and that workplace learning is the link. Further, a healthy culture is necessary for good patient outcomes and therefore also for learning. Clearly, pursuing a learning culture is necessary for effective learning experiences for nurses.

The relationship between work culture and health performance outcomes remains contentious. Mannion’s\textsuperscript{3} report entitled ‘Measuring and Assessing Organizational Culture in the NHS’ stated that ‘the study provides evidence of the importance of culture management and assessment in the delivery of high performing health services’.\textsuperscript{3} Yet it also went on to warn that due to the complexity of culture within modern healthcare systems and organizational life, there was much to understand in relation to organizational culture.\textsuperscript{3} Mannion also highlighted that future research was necessary to further understand this important area.\textsuperscript{3} The report was clear that both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were important, and in particular detailed ethnographic and discourse analytic approaches.\textsuperscript{3}

Parmelli et al.’s systematic review published in 2011 could not identify a convincing link in the relationship between organizational culture and health care performance.\textsuperscript{4} The issue therefore remains unresolved, yet continues to be relevant as supported by Nosrati et al.’s current systematic review protocol entitled: ‘The role of organizational and cultural factors in the implementation of system-wide interventions in acute hospitals to improve patient outcomes: protocol for a systematic literature review’.\textsuperscript{5}
Given the literature is conflicted with regards to the relationship between workplace culture and health performance (or patient outcomes)\(^3,4,5\), it will be useful to explore a different set of relationships: those of the nurse’s learning experiences and the context of a workplace culture. Understanding what happens at the unit-based and individual level where learning takes place and care is provided is the key to understanding both workplace learning and organizational culture, and may set the scene for further understanding of workplace culture and patient or health performance outcomes in the future.

A preliminary search for existing systematic reviews on this topic identified reviews that addressed the link between both leadership\(^6\) and nursing workloads\(^3\) and workplace culture, but were silent on the relationship between learning and the influence of workplace culture.

In essence, there is a body of evidence and literature addressing learning and workplace culture,\(^7,8,9,10,11,12\) however this has not been systemically appraised to enable application in the clinical context and recommendations for evidence-based support of nurse’s learning experiences within the workplace. This systematic review seeks to understand the quality of nurse’s learning experiences in relation to workplace culture.

Apart from the central and most important reason (i.e. improved patient outcomes) there are other compelling reasons to understand the influence of workplace culture on nurses learning experiences. Ross-Walker et al.\(^1\) note the link between meaningful work, nursing workforce retention and workplace culture, an important consideration in the context of a global shortage of nurses:\(^1\)

Laschinger, Shamian & Wilk\(^33\) linked climate and environmental factors with meaningful work, competence, autonomy and job satisfaction, related to job satisfaction and retention. These results suggested that enhancing perceptions of empowerment (values and beliefs) can have positive effects on nurse’s perceptions of quality of patient care and consequently job satisfaction and retention.\(^1\)

Therefore, recognizing and understanding the complexity of relationships and factors in the environment is necessary to promulgate a healthy work culture within the workplace. Henderson\(^7\) noted the urgency of this by highlighting ‘Organizations, by their very nature, do not readily encourage new learning. Staff largely rely on established systems to perform their jobs with minimal resistance and stress’.\(^7\)

Additionally, Newman, Papadopoulos and Melionwu\(^13\) noted in their project on implementing evidence-based practice into the healthcare organization that ‘The results of the project correspond with findings from other studies of change into the organization of nursing practice, which suggests that structural organizational factors will be key determinants of the successful implementation of changes’.\(^13\)
Therefore, in addressing a relationship between culture and health performance it appears there is a missing link, and this link is the learning that needs to take place. Importantly, learning is also a crucial component of evidence-based nursing practice. Culture and structures that support learning will by necessity support evidence-based practice. Importantly, a healthy workplace culture and learning environment are necessary components for evidence-based practice.

Hence, for nurses to provide contemporary, relevant, evidence-based care it is essential that they are supported in their learning and particularly during their workplace learning. As new nursing and related evidence and skills emerge, nurses need to engage with this knowledge, synthesize it and apply it to practice. Moreover, in order to retain this new knowledge and skills and build the capacity in nursing staff, it is desirable to have nursing staff committed to lifelong learning. In order to have nurses with an active approach to their lifelong learning it is necessary to have a concomitant healthy learning culture.10

The aim of this qualitative systematic review is to facilitate an increased understanding of nurse’s learning experiences. Therefore, the literature appraisal will include study designs that are broadly interpretive such as phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, action research and feminist research. Additionally, although the primary goal of this literature appraisal is not to critique workplace cultures, if a clear understanding of nurse’s learning experiences in the workplace is established, a call for change in workplace culture may be a future possibility.

An original systematic review is proposed and preliminary searches of the JBI Library, Cochrane Library, PubMed and CINAHL have indicated that there is currently no other systematic review either underway or published on this topic.

Keywords
Nursing; nurse; clinician; health; learning; nurse education; in-service training; staff development; service culture; workplace culture; workplace; organization culture; ethos; corporate; environment; Qualitative; perception

Inclusion criteria
Types of participants
This review will consider studies that include nurses working in a Western acute healthcare facility. The nurses will include registered nurses, either divisions one and two, (or their international equivalents). All undergraduate nursing students will be excluded; however, post-graduate or post- registration nurses will be included. The rationale for this is that post-registration and graduate nurses have a level of competence and skill to enable them to learn and perform to a competent level in a range of environments, while nursing students have not yet reached this level of performance or competence, and are at a different level of learning.
**Types of phenomena of interest**

This review will consider studies that investigate nurse’s experiences of learning within a workplace environment within Western culture and acute healthcare contexts.

**Context**

This review will consider studies that include nurses working in an acute healthcare facility within a Western culture.

**Types of studies**

This review will consider studies that focus on qualitative data including, but not limited to, designs such as phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, action research and feminist research. In the absence of research studies, other text such as opinion papers and reports will be considered. The textual component of the review will consider expert opinion, discussion papers, position papers and other text.

**Search strategy**

The search strategy aims to find both published and unpublished studies. A three-step search strategy will be utilized in this review. An initial limited search of MEDLINE and CINAHL will be undertaken followed by analysis of the text words contained in the title and abstract, and of the index terms used to describe an article. A second search using all identified keywords and index terms will then be undertaken across all included databases. Thirdly, the reference list of all identified reports and articles will be searched for additional studies. Studies published in the English language will be considered for inclusion in this review.

Studies published from 1980-2013 will be considered for inclusion in this review. Peter Senge’s seminal work, ‘The Fifth Discipline’, published in 1990, heralded the articulation of the impact culture has within organizations. Further, it marked the introduction of the concept of the ‘learning organization’:

> organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.  

Thus, the purpose of this time period is to include the literature preceding the introduction of this concept and integrate it with later literature related to nurse’s experiences of learning in the workplace.
**Initial search terms will include:**

Nursing OR specialties OR nursing staff OR nurses OR nurse or clinician or health

AND

Learning OR nurse education OR education OR in-service OR in-service training OR staff development OR continuing and education OR professional and development OR post-graduate and learning

AND

Service culture OR workplace culture OR workplace OR work culture OR organization culture OR organization ethos OR corporate culture OR service environment OR organization environment or workplace environment OR work environment OR corporate environment OR organization climate OR corporate climate OR healthy and work and environment OR support

AND

Qualitative OR qualitative and experience OR lived experience OR perception OR perceived OR understanding OR ethnography OR phenomenology OR feminist and research OR critical and research OR action and research OR systematic review

**The databases to be searched include:**

PubMed

CINAHL

Scopus

ERIC

Embase

The search for unpublished studies will include:

MedNar

ProQuest theses and dissertations

**Assessment of methodological quality**

Qualitative papers selected for retrieval will be assessed by two independent reviewers for methodological validity prior to inclusion in the review using standardized critical appraisal instruments from the Joanna Briggs Institute Qualitative Assessment and Review Instrument (JBI-QARI) (Appendix I). Any disagreements that arise between the reviewers will be resolved through discussion, or with a third reviewer.

Textual papers selected for retrieval will be assessed by two independent reviewers for authenticity prior to inclusion in the review using standardized critical appraisal instruments from the Joanna Briggs Institute Narrative, Opinion and Text Assessment and Review Instrument (JBI-NOTARI) (Appendix I).
Any disagreements that arise between the reviewers will be resolved through discussion, or with a third reviewer.

**Data collection**

Qualitative data will be extracted from papers included in the review using the standardized data extraction tool from JBI-QARI (Appendix II). The data extracted will include specific details about the interventions, populations, study methods and outcomes of significance to the review question and specific objectives.

Textual data will be extracted from papers included in the review using the standardized data extraction tool from JBI-NOTARI (Appendix II). The data extracted will include specific details about the interventions, populations, study methods and outcomes of significance to the review question and specific objectives.

**Data synthesis**

Qualitative research findings will, where possible be pooled using JBI-QARI. This will involve the aggregation or synthesis of findings to generate a set of statements that represent that aggregation, through assembling the findings rated according to their quality, and categorizing these findings on the basis of similarity in meaning. These categories are then subjected to a meta-synthesis in order to produce a single comprehensive set of synthesized findings that can be used as a basis for evidence-based practice. Where textual pooling is not possible the findings will be presented in narrative form.

Textual papers will, where possible be pooled using JBI-NOTARI. This will involve the aggregation or synthesis of conclusions to generate a set of statements that represent that aggregation, through assembling and categorizing these conclusions on the basis of similarity in meaning. These categories are then subjected to a meta-synthesis in order to produce a single comprehensive set of synthesized findings that can be used as a basis for evidence-based practice. Where textual pooling is not possible the conclusions will be presented in narrative form.

**Conflicts of interest**

None to declare.

**Acknowledgement**

As this systematic review forms partial submission for the degree award of Masters of Clinical Science, a secondary reviewer (Caroline Whitford, MSc candidate) will be utilized for critical appraisal.
References

1 Ross-Walker C., Rogers-Clark C., Pearce S., A systematic review of Registered Nurses; experiences of the influence of workplace culture and climatic factors on nursing workloads. JBI Library of Systematic Reviews. 2012;10 (49) 3080-3145

2 Snow J L., Enhancing work climate to improve performance and retain valued employees. Journal of Nursing Administration: Volume 32(7/8), July/August 2002, pp 393-397


5 Nosrati H., Clay-Williams R., Cunningham F., Hillman K., Braithwaite J., The role of organizational and cultural factors in the implementation of system-wide interventions in acute hospitals to improve patient outcomes: protocol for a systematic literature e002268. doi:10.1136/ bmjopen-2012-002268


10 Sengstock B., Moxham L., and Dwyer T., University and workplace culture: lifelong learning in nursing students. Central Queensland University, Lifelong Learning Conference, June 2006

11 Practice Guideline: Supporting Learners in the Workplace June. NURSES ASSOCIATION OF NEW BRUNSWICK, ISBN 1 895613-6 0-4 2011 (2/10)


13 Newman M., Papadopoulos I. Melfionwu R., Developing organizational systems and culture to support evidence-based practice: the experience of the Evidence-Based Ward Project., Evidence Based Nursing, 2000;3:103-104 doi:10.1136/ebn.3.4.103

Appendix I: Appraisal instruments

QARI appraisal instrument

**JBI QARI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Interpretive & Critical Research**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Unclear</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Is there congruity between the stated philosophical perspective and the research methodology?</td>
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<td>3. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the methods used to collect data?</td>
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<td>7. Is the influence of the researcher on the research, and vice-versa, addressed?</td>
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<td>8. Are participants, and their voices, adequately represented?</td>
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<td>9. Is the research ethical according to current criteria or, for recent studies, and is there evidence of ethical approval by an appropriate body?</td>
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<td>10. Do the conclusions drawn in the research report flow from the analysis, or interpretation, of the data?</td>
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Overall appraisal: □ Include □ Exclude □ Seek further info. □

Comments (Including reason for exclusion)

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doi: 10.11124/jbisrir-2013-1417
**JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Narrative, Expert opinion & text**

Reviewer: ______________________ Date: ______________________

Author: ______________________ Year: ________ Record Number: ________

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<th>No</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Is the source of the opinion clearly identified?</td>
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<td>Does the source of the opinion have standing in the field of expertise?</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Are the interests of patients/clients the central focus of the opinion?</td>
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<td>Is the opinion’s basis in logic/experience clearly argued?</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Is there reference to the extant literature/evidence and any incongruency with it logically defended?</td>
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<td>Is the opinion supported by peers?</td>
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Overall appraisal: Include ☐ Exclude ☐ Seek further info ☐

Comments (Including reason for exclusion)

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Appendix II: Data extraction instruments

QARI data extraction instrument

**JBI QARI Data Extraction Form for Interpretive & Critical Research**

Reviewer ___________________________ Date ___________________________

Author ___________________________ Year ___________________________

Journal ___________________________ Record Number __________________

**Study Description**

Methodology

Method

Phenomena of interest

Setting

Geographical

Cultural

Participants

Data analysis

Authors Conclusions

Comments

Complete Yes ☐ No ☐
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<th>Evidence</th>
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<td>Unequivocal</td>
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Extraction of findings complete

Yes [ ]

No [ ]
NOTARI data extraction instrument

**JBI Data Extraction for Narrative, Expert opinion & text**

Reviewer __________________________ Date __________________________

Author __________________________ Year ________ Record Number ________

**Study Description**

Type of Text: ________________________________________________________

Those Represented: ________________________________________________

Stated Allegiance/ Position: __________________________________________

Setting: ____________________________________________________________

Geographical: ______________________________________________________

Cultural: __________________________________________________________

Logic of Argument: _________________________________________________

Data analysis: ______________________________________________________

Authors Conclusions: ________________________________________________

Reviewers Comments: ______________________________________________

Data Extraction Complete Yes ☐ No ☐
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<th>Conclusions</th>
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