

Reclaiming Engagement: Staff-Led Innovation That Transformed PACU Culture

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Abstract Background Information: Our PACU unit faced declining engagement scores and a rise in reported concerns about incivility, bullying, and workplace violence. Leadership recognized that traditional top-down communication was no longer sufficient to address morale, trust, and psychological safety within the team.

Objectives of Project: The project aimed to:

- Reverse declining engagement trends across all measured domains.
- Strengthen psychological safety and trust between staff and leadership.
- Encourage staff participation in decision-making and shared accountability for unit culture.
- Develop a replicable model to improve morale, retention, and team collaboration in perioperative settings.

Process of Implementation: Two complementary, staff-led initiatives were launched:

1. Reverse Questions – A communication shift that empowered nurses to lead the conversation by asking reflective questions of leadership, such as:
 - a. “What does accountability look like to you?”
 - b. “What does trust in a leader mean to you?”
 - c. “How would you like to improve the unit?”

This role reversal encouraged transparency, fostered open dialogue, and gave staff a voice in shaping unit culture.

2. Gamified Unit Challenges (“Level Up Engagement”) – Monthly challenges rewarded staff for positive engagement behaviors such as peer recognition, submitting improvement ideas, cross-team collaboration, and wellness participation. Points earned translated into perks chosen by winners, creating healthy competition and intrinsic motivation for participation.

Statement of Successful Practice: The impact was significant. In the April 2025 Glint Survey, overall engagement improved by 13% (from 48% to 61%). All 17 engagement measures either improved or held steady, with no declines. Key gains included:

- Leadership Confidence: +21%
- Care: +16%
- Respect: +14%
- Belonging: +13%
- Intent to Stay: +13%

The initiatives not only improved engagement scores but also built trust, strengthened collaboration, and fostered a sustainable, staff-driven culture of accountability.

Implications for Advancing the Practice of Perianesthesia Nursing: This project demonstrates that engagement is most powerful when it is staff-driven. By empowering

nurses to lead dialogue and gamifying positive behaviors, we created a scalable, evidence-informed model for culture transformation. The approach can be replicated in other perioperative and perianesthesia settings to reduce burnout, improve retention, and elevate staff satisfaction - ultimately improving patient care outcomes through a more engaged and resilient nursing team.