

A GUIDE TO IMPROVING ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE FOR LEADERS AND MANAGERS IN HEALTH CARE

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ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST



Halland Solutions

People & Organisational Development

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FOR LEADERS AND MANAGERS
IN HEALTH CARE**

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INTRODUCTION

The healthcare sector and I have a long history together. I began my career as a nurse and practised clinically for several years in the acute sector before moving into the field of development. Throughout my time as an Organisational Development specialist I have worked with hundreds of leaders, managers and clinicians from many different sectors in healthcare, and find the same issues recurring time and again. They affect providers and commissioners alike in the private and public sectors, whatever the size of the organisation – small and large hospitals, GP practices, medium-sized nursing homes, community settings, Primary Care Trusts and emerging Commissioning Support Units.

Staff are frequently unhappy and lack motivation in their work. Communication between management and staff is often strained. Complaints are frequent and often handled unsatisfactorily. Staff do not feel listened to. Senior management appears remote and may only become aware of a problem after it has turned into a full-blown disaster. And the people who stand to suffer most as a consequence are those we serve – the patients.

That's why I've written this booklet.

In the following pages you'll find the essential guidance that managers and leaders within the healthcare sector can use to improve organisational performance, based on developing a culture of open and honest communication throughout their organisations.

This is based on the same results-focused approach I share with my clients. You won't find any convoluted jargon – just practical strategies that you can start to use straight away to improve your staff's motivation and performance, and thus the standard of patient care that they are committed to deliver.

Welcome to Halland Solutions!

Barbara Bradbury

WHAT ARE THE VALUES OF YOUR ORGANISATION?

The performance of an organisation and its staff is linked to its culture and values. However, these values are of little consequence if the actual culture is at odds with them. For example, the stated values of an organisation may include a respect for honesty and integrity but the culture may be one of recrimination and bullying. What is seen and felt by staff is what is actually believed, not what can be read in a document.

Furthermore, the leaders of an organisation must be completely clear about their values and culture. If the leadership is less than clear about them, their values will not and cannot become embedded throughout the organisation.

In order to maximise the performance of staff and the organisation in which they work, it is essential that people can function in a culture of openness and honesty, developed through trust and a genuine respect for others.

An organisation's culture and values need to be articulated, understood by staff at all levels and modelled from the top down. How leaders and managers conduct themselves will have a trickle-down effect throughout their organisation and determine how the workforce conducts itself in the workplace. It is therefore not enough for the leadership team to make a list of the organisation's values and have them widely available in written format, framed on walls, cited on the organisation's intranet and sent out to everyone via email. Senior leaders and managers must be seen to

act on these values and apply them consistently to everything they do.

This is absolutely essential if the many departments that make up an organisation are to function and co-operate in a unified way. In the absence of clearly articulated values, managers establish locally-driven cultures within their own departments, which may run contrary to the values of the organisation. As a result, staff can receive mixed messages, leaving them unsure of how to properly conduct themselves. This can lead to dissatisfaction, demotivation and uncertainty. When people feel undervalued, this may be accompanied by a drop in their standards of performance.

When all employees are working towards a common goal, with strong clear values which

are modelled by the most senior leaders and managers and which can be witnessed throughout all levels in an organisation, they will function most effectively. For any organisation where this has yet to happen, it may be time to go back to first principles.

It is important for a leadership team to periodically revisit what they really want for their organisation. In what style do they want it led? How do they want it to be managed? What are the things that are most important to them, as leaders? These values and goals then need to be communicated effectively to all who work in their organisation. Senior leaders and managers have to live their values every day to ensure that they are embedded throughout their organisation, thus inspiring others to do the same.

All too frequently, those at the top are disconnected from what really goes on lower down in their organisations. This is understandable, with the pressures faced by all who are working in the health sector – having to do more and more with fewer resources. As a result, senior managers often only hear what they are told by their staff (which might just be what the staff want them to hear) and thus make important decisions based on incomplete or inaccurate information. And that can result in serious problems being brought to their attention only after something has gone badly wrong. For staff to raise issues with managers before a crisis arrives, they must feel safe and supported in their actions.

Whilst the pressure on senior leaders and managers may be severe, it cannot be an

excuse for a disconnection between them and those they lead. No one wants to have a major incident within their organisation. Even worse, no one wants to find out about a major incident after it has already become public knowledge. If leaders and managers are aware of what is really going on in their organisation at grass roots level, risks can be greatly minimised. It is therefore imperative that leaders and managers are visible to their colleagues, listen to and observe first hand the everyday events around them and act when they observe behaviour which is less than satisfactory.

A culture of open, respectful communication is essential for any organisation if it is to foster an environment of safety and trust for its staff. People at all levels need to feel able to be

open and honest at all times in their dealings with colleagues, without fear of recrimination, bullying or judgement. This requires all staff to have shared values and rules of behaviour, which need to be adhered to. If these rules of engagement are breached, staff need to be confident that this will be managed appropriately and equitably.

Unfortunately (and all too frequently), staff in the healthcare sector feel that there is simply no point in attempting to communicate with their managers on matters of importance, as their input will be discounted. However, leaders and managers need to be constantly alert to the state of their organisation. They need to have their finger on the pulse and be 100% certain that the information they are getting is accurate, and not just what the staff think they

want to hear. For communication between leaders, managers and staff to be open and honest, managers must demonstrate to staff that they will listen and act appropriately and consistently. Also, that they will not discount what staff say or come down hard on colleagues when they report that things are not completely satisfactory. This way managers can be assured of receiving the information they actually need rather than holding an unrealistic view that “everything’s fine”.

It is pointless having honourable values if they are not the reality – that is to say, that no one is acting in accordance with them. It can be extremely useful to have a third party come in to conduct a detailed analysis of an organisation’s values and culture. They will accomplish this by literally observing how

people talk to each other. They will establish things such as how staff communicate between themselves; how aggression is dealt with; how assertive the workforce is encouraged to be; whether people are honest and open with each other; how conflict is handled and how whistle-blowers are dealt with.

By going through this process at key levels of the organisation, the external consultant can create a picture of staff attitudes and behaviours. Based on their findings, they will be able to help develop a detailed plan of action to open up new channels of communication and bring staff values back into alignment with those of progressive management.

DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS THROUGHOUT YOUR ORGANISATION

People frequently communicate with each other unconsciously in patterns, which may be positive or negative. Negative patterns can be very powerful. People are often unaware of the impact of their negative behaviour, through a lack of personal insight. For example, a manager who constantly puts down a member of staff may not realise the effect they are having on their subordinate, however surprising this may seem.

Patterns can be broken, but in order for this to happen they have first to be recognised, acknowledged and understood. One model of

communication which is especially effective in understanding negative communication patterns is Transactional Analysis. The model can be used to help people understand exactly what goes on in their conversations, from a psychological standpoint. The purpose of this is to identify the patterns of behaviour that impede good communication. Once these have been revealed, they can be replaced with more effective patterns.

One of the most common communication problems arises from colleagues who command others, instead of dealing with them as equals. This has the effect of making the person being spoken to feel belittled and resentful, whilst their overbearing colleague may have no awareness of the impact of their behaviour.

About 7% of what we communicate comes from our words. The rest is made up of more subtle elements, such as our tone and body language – the “music and dance”. Although one may not use particularly aggressive or domineering language, it is easy to create that impression through one’s non-verbal communication. Furthermore, if someone does not have the skills to deal assertively with a colleague they find domineering, the implications can be far reaching in terms of stress-related illness, lack of motivation and even resignation.

By its nature, the health sector is hierarchical. There are directors and managers, senior and junior clinicians, qualified and unqualified staff, as well as perceptions of inter-professional hierarchy. Junior doctors do not find it easy to

question the actions or behaviour of Medical Consultant colleagues. Health Care Assistants can find it difficult to be assertive to their manager. If a legitimate challenge by a junior colleague is responded to with aggression, stressful situations can quickly arise with, potentially, a knock-on effect on patient care.

Staff can be taught how to handle conflict and difficult conversations. Whether this is at boardroom level, within a senior management team, between departments, or just two individuals, communication can be strengthened throughout an organisation. This might be done through interventions such as team or individual coaching; board/team development; leadership programmes designed for clinical and managerial staff, and bespoke training sessions.

A fully engaged workforce, able to communicate skilfully with colleagues and patients, will be confident in outlook, well motivated and effective.

EMBRACING THE INFINITE VARIETY OF HUMAN PERSONALITIES

It is important for all managers and leaders to understand themselves and to value the differences between their staff members, if their sum is to be greater than their individual parts. Human beings are infinitely diverse creatures, with a huge variety of personality traits. If we are to build effective teams we need to make the variety work to our advantage.

One of the most effective tools to do this is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI). This psychometric questionnaire is designed to help people understand their preferences on a number of dimensions. Through understanding that other people may have very different

preferences to our own, we can start to really value the differences that others bring to our world. By exploring the different personality types within a group, we can start building up a clear picture of how each person communicates and how their strengths can best be utilised.

If someone does not contribute to a discussion during a meeting this can be due to a variety of reasons. For example, they may be uncomfortable speaking in public or genuinely have nothing to add to the conversation. They may feel intimidated by the company they are in. There again, they may simply prefer to reflect before speaking and need time for that reflection. Whilst some people are comfortable working out solutions through open dialogue, others can find this stressful and limiting to their creativity. If meetings move at a pace

that leaves the reflective person unable to contribute, the organisation may well miss out on some valuable insights.

In this example, it would be important for the person chairing the meeting to encourage everyone to contribute before closing down the discussion. However, the chairperson may not do this if they are unaware of the differences in how people prefer to communicate. By creating the conditions for people to contribute in a meeting, they will give of their best and will feel that their contribution is genuinely valued. As a result, they will feel happier in their jobs, more motivated and prepared to work hard towards the success of their organisation. Furthermore, potentially valuable contributions to the organisation will not be overlooked.

Another powerful tool to help individuals gain insight into their behaviours is 360⁰ Feedback. Through the use of a questionnaire, this technique provides a measure of self-perception on competencies and feedback on how others perceive one against the same competencies. This information highlights any incongruity between an individual's perceptions of self and others' perceptions of them. For example, a manager might think of him/herself as having a coaching style of leadership, whilst feedback from colleagues might demonstrate that they come across as directive.

This sort of feedback is useful for several reasons. First of all, people often tend to undervalue themselves, and finding out that their peers' opinions of them is higher than

their own provides great validation and is a powerful confidence booster. It can also help each person to realise that they have talents that they'd never explored or developed before, as well as identifying blind spots that could do with improvement. Facilitating 360° Feedback requires a degree of skill and many 360° Feedback tools require administration by a licensed facilitator to ensure that feedback is delivered in an expert and appropriate manner.

DEVELOPING YOUR LEADERSHIP SKILLS

In the health service, senior staff have to be both leaders and managers, and handle the challenge of the different skill sets accordingly. Wearing the 'leader' hat, an individual needs to set the strategy and direction, making sure that these are understood by their staff. Leaders need to instil followership through the development of a highly motivated workforce. When wearing the 'manager' hat, the same individual needs to make sure that their strategy comes to fruition and that the required tasks are actually delivered appropriately, to the required standards and within the expected timeframe.

Leadership is about stepping back and looking at the big picture, identifying the potential

within teams and helping individuals to develop and fulfil their potential. Management must focus on getting the job done.

It is not uncommon to hear that a newly promoted manager/leader has moved into their new role with little formal knowledge and support. This can lead to inconsistencies in the way that their staff are managed. A frequently reported issue in the healthcare system concerns performance appraisal – that it is not managed consistently or done well. Although many organisations have performance management systems in place, it is often the case that such systems are not applied rigorously. As a result, inconsistencies emerge in the way staff are treated, leading to resentment and dissatisfaction.

Fostering a workforce with the confidence to bring inconsistencies to the attention of leaders and managers – safe in the knowledge that they will receive a fair hearing and not be victimised – can only strengthen an organisation. Furthermore, investment in leadership and management programmes, at all levels, greatly enhances the contribution which can then be expected from each member of staff.

HOW TO HOLD ON TO YOUR BEST STAFF

Organisations will always struggle to maintain an effective workforce if there is a pattern of capable staff leaving to take new jobs, whilst leaving behind less able colleagues. To stay successful in the long term, it is essential that an organisation is able to attract and retain top performers, through early identification of talent and investment in staff development.

Staff need to be supported in their development through investment in programmes such as individual, team or group coaching and supervision, action learning sets, leadership/management development and bespoke training sessions. By creating personal development plans and conducting regular

reviews with staff throughout the year, an organisation's entire workforce can be upskilled, becoming more professional and enjoying stronger morale as a consequence.

Through staff development, an organisation will benefit from a much more motivated workforce, which is likely to remain loyal and stay for the longer term. Staff members will view their employer as one who is genuinely interested in them and their careers.

Investment is required to get the best out of people!

CONCLUSION

This booklet may have raised issues about the way that leadership, management and staff development operates in your organisation. Improvement is an on-going process, which requires appropriate interventions to be identified and positive action to be taken.

To find out more about the pathways to staff development and improvement, please visit:

www.hallandsolutions.com

At Halland Solutions we offer bespoke consultancy, coaching, training and supervision to managers and clinicians working within healthcare. We are aware of the challenges facing the sector and will conduct a detailed analysis of your organisation to determine

where it is right now, where you want it to be, and what you need to do to get it there. Rather than prescribing off-the-shelf solutions, we will work with you to generate the ideas and solutions which can then become intrinsic to your corporate ethos. You and your staff will be empowered to create your own culture of open communication, to end conflict in the workplace and to achieve the highest standards of patient care.

You could be surprised at how many issues can be covered at an introductory meeting!



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This booklet, from Organisational Development specialist Barbara Bradbury, shows how unrecognised issues can prevent an organisation from achieving peak performance. Investing in staff development can aid staff to fulfil their potential and perform at their highest level of capability. Topics include:

- Establishing your organisation's values and acting on them
- How to embrace your team's differences in order to realise their full potential
- Developing leadership skills
- Ensuring your best staff stay with you for the long term

These are all powerful techniques, capable of delivering extraordinary results. Not least of these is the creation of an open communication culture – your best guarantee against becoming the next high profile corporate casualty.

