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Retention from an organisational development perspective

University Hospitals Bristol NHS Foundation Trust

Organisation

University Hospitals Bristol NHS Foundation Trust (UH Bristol) employs over 9,000 staff. It provides general acute hospital services to a population of around 350,000 people and covers central and south Bristol and parts of north Somerset.

What was the aim/problem?

In 2015, UH Bristol focused on staff retention from an organisational development (OD) perspective. It recognised that the leadership and culture of an organisation is critical in determining whether staff decide to remain with an employer.

To understand the reasons why staff were leaving, and to gain an appreciation of what contributes to positive staff experience, the trust undertook analysis of workforce data collected through the NHS Staff Survey 2015 and the Staff Friends and Family Test, alongside staff focus groups and engagement workshops. Analysis revealed four key areas for improvement across the organisation, namely:

- improving staff experience of appraisals
- the development of leadership behaviours to align with organisational values
- tackling issues with bullying and harassment
- developing a consistent trust-wide approach to staff recognition.

What was the solution?

On identifying areas for improvement, the OD team engaged with staff from the outset in the design of suitable interventions. Each division already had in place robust plans on improving staff experience. As such, the OD team sought to develop an organisation-wide approach to further support local divisional plans.

1. Appraisals

Feedback from staff indicated that process issues were impacting on the ability of line managers to have meaningful conversations with employees about their success in meeting objectives and development needs for the future.

At the time, UH Bristol used a paper-based appraisal system and the policy underpinning the process was deemed to be in need of revision. In consultation with staff, the trust designed a new e-appraisal process, supported by an updated appraisal policy. E-learning and face-to-face training was developed to support the transition. This work has transformed the way appraisals are undertaken and, in the future, appraisals will also be linked to the leadership behaviours in the form of 360-degree feedback.

2. Leadership behaviours

It was recognised that there was an inconsistency in how the established trust values were reflected in leadership behaviours. To address this, UH Bristol used the diagnostic tool and guidance contained within [NHS Improvement's Culture and Leadership programme](#), alongside a set of engagement workshops with over 100 leaders to design a new set of leadership behaviours.

To raise the profile of the leadership behaviours and secure buy-in from across the organisation, the chief executive played a vital role in communications associated with the launch in August 2017. Sessions were conducted with those in key management positions with responsibility for championing the leadership behaviours across the trust.

3. Tackling bullying and harassment

The OD team commenced work to further tackle issues of bullying and harassment, engaging with staff side partners and divisional HR business partners to investigate the issue in the context of the new leadership behaviours and aligned to the national Freedom to Speak Up programme. This has helped UH Bristol in promoting a culture where colleagues are able to learn from mistakes and implement improvements, in line with the trust's behaviours and values. While still at an early stage, the trust has developed and launched a new dignity at work policy and further work is planned to help embed this across the organisation.

4. Recognition

The final strand of the trust's OD work to improve retention outcomes focused on establishing a more structured and consistent approach to recognition. While UH Bristol had delivered a trust-wide awards event for several years, there was a feeling that this was not applied equitably.

Efforts were made to develop more localised and formal initiatives to recognise the achievements of all staff. These were supported by the roll out of a recognition

framework, developed in partnership with divisional leads, to promote the importance of saying thank you and valuing the efforts of the workforce in a consistent way, reflective of organisational values and behaviours.

What were the challenges?

In implementing the new e-appraisal system, certain challenges had to be overcome to ensure that all staff had access to IT facilities and could request support if they were unfamiliar with how to use the technology. Working closely with staff representatives throughout the process ensured that such issues could be raised at an early stage and subsequently overcome. While initial implementation was successful, there have been issues which have resulted in a resistance from staff in using the system and these are currently being worked through.

Perhaps the most sensitive phase of UH Bristol's recent round of OD interventions, was the work designed to tackle issues of bullying and harassment. Engagement with staff side and HR divisional partners was critical to the OD team in investigating the issue. In addition, placing it in the context of the new leadership behaviours and existing trust values made staff feel more comfortable about having open and honest conversations.

In developing a structured approach to recognition, the OD team listened to feedback from staff who indicated that recognition initiatives should be designed to reflect the fact that individuals like to be recognised in diverse ways.

What were the results?

Analysis of the 2017 NHS Staff Survey results shows that the trust's staff engagement score has increased over the past four years. Overall staff engagement stands at 3.85 and is ahead of the NHS national average for acute trusts.

There has been an increase in the scores in some key areas including:

- the percentage of staff reporting good communication between senior management and staff
- the quality of appraisals
- the percentage of staff able to contribute towards improvement at work.

Early analysis of turnover rates for permanent staff indicate a reduction in turnover from 13.3 per cent in September 2016 to 12.8 per cent in September 2017.

Furthermore, there are positive indicators that the leadership behaviours are providing a useful framework for promoting constructive ways of working and a reference point with which to challenge negative behaviours. This has created a solid

base for the launch of UH Bristol's dignity at work policy and efforts to improve recognition across the workforce.

What were the learning points?

The OD team at UH Bristol identified numerous factors which worked well in the design and implementation of their recent interventions to address retention of the workforce. Below are the top tips the trust would give to others interested in progressing work of a similar nature.

- Look at your data and what it is telling you and target your interventions accordingly.
- Engage with staff from the outset, listen to concerns, take on board feedback and make changes to plans to reflect this.
- Do not be put off when you come up against barriers – work with employees and staff side colleagues to co-design solutions to overcoming these.
- Values need to be reinforced by positive leadership behaviours. Behaviours create the culture of an organisation.
- Have strong partnership working in your trust so interventions feel real for staff at a local level.
- Do not be afraid to have difficult conversations. Use evidence to justify your position and reinforce the message that it is in everyone's interest to retain a talented workforce.

Next steps and sustainability

The interventions outlined are part of a broader programme of work focusing on organisational culture and are being further developed and reviewed year on year in order to measure impact through the NHS Staff Survey.

In the future, the leadership behaviours will be linked to the new e-appraisal system. This will ensure there is a common thread running throughout the objective setting process and that staff are able to continually reflect on how, as individuals, they are able to contribute towards living the values, behaviours, and shaping the culture of the organisation.

Want to know more?

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University Hospitals Bristol NHS Foundation Trust documents

- [Appraisal policy](#)
- [Dignity at work policy](#)
- [Recognition framework](#)