Implementing an effective STP streamlining partnership in the North East

The North East (NE) streamlining programme, through exceptional partnership working between provider organisations, trade unions and other stakeholders, has now evolved into a future-focused streamlining programme board. Working alongside the developing integrated care system (ICS) throughout the NE and North Cumbria to align streamlining and to ensure there is representation of the ICS on the programme board.

The case for change

A formal regional governance structure was put in place to address, overcome and eliminate (real or perceived) barriers to progress. As a devolved responsibility from the region’s HR Director’s network, the programme board collectively agrees the programme’s objectives, strategy and programme plan. There is a clear escalation process both to and from the Board, including to national partners as appropriate.

The programme board

From its inception, streamlining in the NE has actively involved key partners. A programme board was created from HR directors, NHS Employers, Health Education England (HEE), Electronic Staff Record (ESR) and a regional trade union member (who is also joint chair of the region’s Social Partnership Forum (SPF) sub group). Two of the board members are also the same SPF’s joint management chairs - this ensures that each agenda is perfectly streamlined. While the board has no statutory powers, its members are influential in their own field and driven to achieve as a collective. The NE has developed a genuinely supportive, honest, multi-professional partnership network.

Process and governance

Importantly, one of the major reasons for the initial and continued success of the programme was the emphasis from day one on ensuring full and effective partnership working with trade unions and other stakeholders. There were no sides (management or staff side) to be taken in discussions – a partnership approach was agreed right from the beginning.

The programme board meets monthly and the agenda can be demanding, yet over the few short years that the group has worked together, it has developed a better understanding of how each component part works - and in the knowledge that stakeholders are all accessing information and making decisions based on the same knowledge. This has benefitted members far beyond streamlining, as it evidences the parameters under which the organisations are working, including the limitations of our individual influence.
Challenging misunderstanding

The purpose of streamlining is often misunderstood, therefore in order to address some of the initial concerns, the programme manager was invited to attend regional and local trade union meetings, ensuring that there was a clear understanding of the purpose of the work. Utilising links with the NE SPF, there is liaison with regional trade union members at the meetings to discuss progress, blockages or to request assistance - streamlining is a standing agenda item. This helped to effectively bust myths around the programme and staff received the same messages regarding streamlining from both their employer and trade union.

The outcome

Through effective partnership working, knowledge of and buy-in to streamlining has increased as a result of trade union partners’ ability to influence its success. For example, influencing staff to complete their training compliance rates, allowing it to be transferable to any other organisations. Within streamlining partner organisations HRDs also cascade information regarding streamlining and implementation at a local level as part of existing joint partnership arrangements. This all assisted in an understanding of each partners role in the process.

Top tips

- Utilise existing national and regional network links, including the regional SPF’s.
- Consider a formal streamlining governance structure – including SPF trade union chair membership and influential HRDs.
- Refer to the NHS Employers resource hub – don’t start from scratch!
- Regular communication and involvement in key events.
- Address real or perceived myths at the earliest stage.
- Evidence impact, success and challenges.
- Evidence savings and efficiencies – proving clear return on investment criteria.
- Have a flexible approach and acknowledge different perspectives.
- Mind your NHS language!

Contact

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Sarah Kilner, NE streamlining programme manager