APRIL 2018

CASE STUDY

NORTH EAST AMBULANCE SERVICE NHS FOUNDATION TRUST
RESTRUCTURING MANAGEMENT TO ENHANCE

Organisational profile

- North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (NEAS) operates across Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, County Durham and Teesside, covering an area of around 3,230 square miles and delivering front line services from 61 stations.

- NEAS received foundation trust status in November 2011.

- It offers emergency response service for 999 calls, and a patient transport service, providing pre-planned non-emergency transport for patients in the region.

- Since 2013, NEAS has provided the NHS 111 service for the region, offering medical care and advice over the phone.

- Specialist response services are delivered through the hazardous area response team who are trained to deal with major incidents.

- It serves a population of over 2.7 million people and employs more than 2,500 staff including a number of volunteers.
Summary

In 2015 NEAS identified a number of key challenges impacting staff engagement levels. To address these issues, the trust embarked upon a journey of improvement implementing a range of initiatives to bring about positive transformation. From restructuring and making changes to management, forming new strategic partnerships, adapting channels of communication to reviewing their values and internal culture, the trust set about implementing key programmes of activity.

Key challenges

In order to fully understand the changes required, the trust felt it important to firstly identify the key challenges posing barriers to successful staff engagement.

These were identified as:

- **24/7 work pattern** - the nature of the 24/7 working patterns of staff covering services over a 168 hour week conflicted with the daytime working hours of their managers, meaning a large proportion of staff felt they didn’t have the support or guidance needed
- **geography** – teams working in the community, and not based at a dedicated site, resulted in less time for team meetings
- **mobility** – unlike hospital based employees, ambulance staff are very mobile making communication more challenging
- **increased workload** – in the last 12 years ambulance trusts in England have experienced a 65 per cent increase in activity and demand for services, with fewer resources, meaning staff have less time to become involved in staff engagement.

What the trust is doing

Vision and values

To begin its journey in delivering positive change, NEAS wanted to review and better align its mission, vision, values and corporate identity in collaboration with the views of staff, partners and key stakeholders. The aim was to improve internal culture and create something authentic that staff could fully buy into and that the trust could benchmark its success by.

With over 3000 staff comments submitted and 25 stakeholders interviewed, the organisation’s mission and vision were created.

- **Mission** – to provide safe, effective and responsive care for all.
- **Vision** - to deliver unmatched quality of care every time we touch lives, performing the highest professional standards even in the most challenging situations and with a spirit of collaboration.

The following values were created and used by NEAS to aid recruitment and to measure the performance of employees:

- Respect
- Take responsibility and be accountable
- Compassion
- Pride
- Strive for excellence and innovation
- Make a difference – day in day out.
A report on the findings was produced identifying a number of issues that needed to be addressed, these included:

- quality care and safety to be embedded further within NEAS culture with policy and procedures requiring improvement
- a higher level of focus required around employee welfare even though an increase in organisational pride was evidenced.

The information was used to help improve team-building and to encourage staff to help shape the new mission, vision and values.

It was seen as important to engage with a wide audience, giving individuals the assurance that their views were listened to and acknowledged. A crowd-sourcing social media platform was adopted to encourage discussion between employees. This enabled staff to develop and shape ideas, offering input around the mission, vision and values, and how this should be presented through the trust’s brand identity.

Supporting this engagement work is a leadership programme focusing on management development and building a compassionate culture through coaching.

Culture and communications survey

A common challenge for ambulance trusts across England is in relation to internal communications and engagement. Mark Cotton, assistant director of communications and engagement, launched a staff survey to look at the relationship between culture and communications. The survey was sent to ambulance trusts across the UK; seven were represented in the responses with more than 1,000 paramedics taking part.

Despite geographical areas of the different trusts, a number of common themes emerged. It was clear that there were three different cultures within the ambulance services, with each group of staff viewing and responding to communication in a very different and distinct way.

The three cultures identified:

- operational culture – clinical staff and paramedics
- engineering culture – control staff
- executive culture – support staff – finance, communications and HR.

NEAS is now using the intelligence to develop its approaches to engagement, tailoring new tools and methods of communication to each of the three cultural groups. CCMs and local leaders are being encouraged to deliver communications in this tailored way and a review will determine the impact of this on staff engagement over time.

Outcomes and next steps

Thanks to the numerous engagement interventions, NEAS saw its NHS Staff Survey score improved from 3.08 in 2014 to 3.39 in 2015. The format of the survey changed in 2016, so a comparison was not possible.

Key questions from the survey that have seen considerable improvement from 2014 to 2016 include:

- does your immediate manager take a positive interest in your health and wellbeing?
  - 2014 – 40 per cent
  - 2016 - 70 per cent
- my immediate manager can be counted upon to help with difficult tasks
  - 2014 - 58 per cent
  - 2016 - 73 per cent

- my immediate manager gives clear feedback on my work
  - 2014 - 42 per cent
  - 2016 - 63 per cent

- are you often or always enthusiastic about your job?
  - 2014 - 52 per cent
  - 2016 - 71 per cent

Overall, the view within the trust is that the key to staff engagement lies in the employees’ relationship with their manager, with support and strong leadership significantly impacting results.

The staff Friends and Family Test also revealed interesting outcomes around whether staff would recommend the trust as a place to work. In Q2 (June-Aug 2014) this figure was 23 per cent however in Q1 (April-June 2017) this increased to 83 per cent. Interestingly this increase coincides with the introduction of the CCM role helping the trust make direct correlations with activity and results.

**Top tips**

- Be patient – engagement, communications and culture take time to change.
- Results can be variable and fluctuate at the start of the process.
- Wait for the bigger picture to emerge before reacting.
- Involve staff in a credible way – listen to their views but also demonstrate how you have taken action and responded to opinion.
- There are always opportunities to make further improvements.
- Learn from other trusts – share experiences with other ambulance services - they may well have the answer or experience to support your challenges.
- Find the right balance between different ways of working i.e. command and control has been the typical approach taken within the trust but there are benefits to giving staff more clinical autonomy.

**Contact**

For more information on how to become involved in our work:
[www.nhsemployers.org](http://www.nhsemployers.org)
enquiries@nhsemployers.org

@nhsemployers

NHS Employers