



10 Competitive Advantages of managing the workload in a Safe and HRM oriented way

This publication is addressed to healthcare managers aiming at improving the performances of the staff by reorientating the focus on human resources development and safety at work. We are operating in a constantly changing global environment, facing sustained challenges including high costs and low margins. In these conditions of fierce competition the competitive advantage of an institution often rests with its people. We will see how highly skilled caregivers can provide a competitive edge and influence both growth and good performances.

Today caregivers are considered as a group at risk due to continual stress they are confronted with. The Take Care Project, funded within the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission, will raise the competence level of caregiver professional groups by developing a new professional profile endowed with innovative skills that will allow them to face the main difficulties affecting this sector, as understaffing, high stress factors and high accident rates. Take Care will develop innovative training material in the three selected fields: Management, Health and Safety, Soft Skill. These three themes correspond to the main difficulties these professionals encounter, as stressed also by the managers involved in the field research. The innovative training modules will be ICT based, an e-handbook describing innovative management tools will be downloadable in all partners' languages; health, safety regulations and soft skill training adapted to the needs of the target group will be available as an online training.

The present Decalogue of Competitive advantages stresses the positive and tangible results deriving from developing the competences of caregivers in Management, Health and Safety and Soft Skills.



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Decalogue of Advantages

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Improved satisfaction of caregivers



Health institutions and hospitals always struggle to find the right balance between low staff motivation and high demands from the patients. Motivation decreases also because of generalised frustration due to the incapacity to reach stated goals. These facts, coupled with low remuneration and routine working approaches decrease staff motivation.

Caregivers that do not find their work interesting or do not feel they are contributing to the mission of the institution will not be engaged. Everyone needs something to working toward. Stagnation is unfulfilling. Caregivers probably have more potential than their current level of functionality. Encouraging them to fulfill that potential will increase engagement and satisfaction. A proper training can build a motivated and committed team of caregivers that's loyal to the belonging institution. Actually, investing in their training helps to make them feel valued. In return they tend to be more motivated. Increased job satisfaction, lower rates of absenteeism and reduced labour turnover are some of the advantages deriving from this approach.



Stabilized employment



Healthcare institutions denounce a lack of staff, due to high staff turnover. In the current economic climate, it is important to maintain the most talented personnel. Employers often raise concerns that trained caregivers may leave for new positions within other institutions, which acts as a disincentive for providing training. However, providing training actually lowers the risk of workers leaving. By offering training to caregivers, managers can build a sense of worth, increase morale and staff retention levels. At the same time, they create a pool of qualified replacements for employees who leave. One of the benefits of the proper development of the staff is that caregivers feel that the institution cares about their future. Regular trainings and a program to help employees continue their education helps build efficiency and confidence. Instilling a sense of pride into employees can help decrease employee turnover. A staff that stays together for a long period of time learns to work together more efficiently. When the staff of caregivers has extensive experience working together, the institution has an advantage over other companies that may need to regularly replace employees.



Increased Competition and Reputation



For healthcare institutions fully achieving goals is often hard due to low preparation and motivation levels of the staff.

Continuous training helps caregivers to do their jobs more efficiently and to shift to new ideas more quickly. That increases organisational productivity, which gives the hospital, the nursing home, the hospice or the rest home an advantage over the competition. A more productive staff satisfies doctors' and patients' needs faster, performance errors are reduced as times decrease and the staff is better equipped to adjust to changing needs.

Additional skills can mean faster and often smarter ways of working, and thus increased productivity and innovation. Training also ensures to have quality people on hand when the institution expands. When caregivers know what to do, they can improve the performance levels of the institution, and thus increase its reputation.



Better management



Health institutions and hospitals stress difficulties in strategic management, often due to lack of human resources and of time needed to optimize services.

Management training provides an essential ingredient to improving institutional performance and therefore institutional success. It is a very cost effective method to encourage refreshed motivation and improved decision making, with a more efficient use of time.

Improved staff management and therefore higher levels of employee motivation lead to increased performance. For caregivers to be satisfied, they must feel like they are part of something bigger than just what their individual work tasks are. Including them in goal setting increases engagement and satisfaction.

Encouraging one another, avoiding micromanagement, giving positive feedback and ensuring criticism is constructive are all ways to keep the environment a place where caregivers can do more than survive – they can thrive!



Reinforced know how



Hospitals and health institutions often complain a lack of certified caregivers. But the possibility for them to improve competencies passes through the possibility to receive updated and quality training. Raising qualifications of the staff through updated professional and social skills is crucial, and it also leads to improved relationships between doctor/nurse and patient, for better mutual integration and communication.

Caregivers need the opportunities for developing their skills in areas like leadership, team management, problem solving, decision-making, project management, personal productivity skills, stress management and creativity. New opportunities are all around us. The key to identifying them is having the training and experience necessary to know what opportunity is worth investigating. Spending time to develop caregivers, make them begin to gain experience in identifying opportunities for the institution. Rather than looking out for the hospital's future, a proper developmental program can create an entire staff of people that are bringing in new ideas on a regular basis.



Reduced absenteeism



Professional burnout represents one of the main problems that hospitals, nursing and rest homes and hospices face. Stress and sickness increase absenteeism, causing extra problems to management.

Unchecked stress may then lead to lateness, absenteeism, employee turnover, increased accidents, errors and mistakes, as well as workplace violence.

Providing caregivers with ad hoc management and soft skills generates a more relaxed, productive and energetic workplace. Moreover, this increases employees' concentration, commitment, health and positive attitude in a calmer and more efficient work place.

Evidence indicates that the trained worker is, on average 23 per cent higher in productivity, than an untrained worker. Furthermore, it has been found that increasing the number of training days per employee by 1 per cent will increase productivity by 3 per cent.



Higher margins/ lower costs



Nowadays finances represent a huge problem, due to inadequate capital and a lack of appropriate human resource skills, but training can reduce the frequency of adverse events, thus producing financial effects.

Actually training helps institutions minimise waste and increase profit margins. Research shows that when organisations invest in training and development there are several steps to an improved business, and particularly the fact that a motivated workforce increases productivity and reduces waste.

Profit margins are improved through greater efficiency, and training existing caregivers can also help to fill the gaps in an organisation. In these difficult economic times, training can help to redeploy staff to different areas and up-skill employees. Staff development plans also attract the best staff to an institution.



Improved satisfaction of patients



In most businesses it is the caregivers who are face to face with patients most of the time. This is true even at ambulatory healthcare sites. Employees through their client engagement can find out the needs of the clients are and meet these needs through superior service.

By improving soft skills, caregivers learn to interact better with patients and thus customer satisfaction can be enhanced. They will be also able to provide information to patients in a better way, including legal issues.

Employee engagement is one key way to delight the client or customer and to gauge customer satisfaction.



Qualified staff from abroad



Healthcare institutions are faced with enormous challenges when it comes to hiring new caregivers. Recruiting staff means to be able to assess the achievement potentials of the applicants. This applies particularly to skilled workers from abroad. The European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)¹ is a European instrument for this purpose, which can be used beyond national boundaries. The learning outcome approach of the ECVET recommendation offers companies a clearer view about what applicants are already able to accomplish, as it describes competences based on work situations that can be linked to real tasks. The European Qualifications Framework (EQF)² functions as a translation device making qualifications more readable, making it easier to interpret the qualifications of foreign applicants. Among the benefits are greater readability of qualifications acquired abroad and easier progression between levels.

¹ http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/lifelong_learning/c11107_en.htm

² http://ec.europa.eu/eqf/home_en.htm



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Improved Health & Safety conditions



Organising the instruction and training of the staff as regards working practices that comply with health and safety regulations, as well as promoting a conscious approach to risk management among caregivers is crucial for managers.

When all staff is motivated and empowered to work safely and to protect their long-term health, not only simply by avoiding accidents but also protecting their lives and health, business performances are strengthened and the financial losses minimised.

An effective planning system for health and safety requires organisations to establish and operate a health and safety management system which: controls risks; reacts to changing demands; sustains a positive health and safety culture. If controls fail, workers will be in danger and there will be accidents which will cause dramatic problems.



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