Internal Communications and the Effect on Employee Engagement
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Problem: Communication gaps can be devastating for any business in today’s competitive and fast-paced environment. In the hospital setting, it can literally be a matter of life or death. According to the Joint Commission (2010), there is a prevalent culture of poor communication among health professionals resulting in significant medical errors and employee turnover.

Evidence: A recent study from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (2011) demonstrated a link between high performance work practices (HPWP) and their impact on quality outcomes and patient safety. Common HPWPs included formal methods for internal communications practices, shared governance and prevalent employee recognition. Engaging staff, especially in the area of communications, accounted for differences in organizational performance and success in quality and safety outcomes.

Strategy: The purpose of this project was to develop and evaluate the effect of three evidence-based internal communication practices on employee engagement for pediatric hospital in Louisville, KY. This was first known systematic investigation of communication strategies in a hospital setting.

Practice Change: The evidence based practices include: Interactive Employee Forums, Wednesday Weekly and a Communication Portal page. After one year of this practice change, the following questions were asked and evaluated:

- Will internal communication practices have a significant impact on this hospital employee engagement?
- As compared to peer institutions within Norton Healthcare, will this pediatric hospital have a greater increase in mean engagement scores, as a result of these practices?

Evaluation: A comparison of engagement scores was done prior to and after implementation of interventions. The Employee Engagement survey was administered during April 2010 (157 hospital units) and repeated in July 2011 (161 hospital units). Two process indicators were also evaluated: Employee Forum attendance and a Weekly Wednesday assessment.

Results:
Will practices have significant impact on this hospital employee engagement?
p=.825 and p=.704 (not significant, however some ceiling effect)

As compared to peer institutions within Norton Healthcare, will this pediatric hospital have a greater increase in mean engagement scores as a result of these practices?
The pediatric hospital did increase percentage of engaged by 3%, the highest improvement of all five hospitals within the system.
**Process Indicator Results:** Interactive Employee Forums have doubled the attendance at forums and 82% of participants could correctly identify the Wednesday Weekly and 63% were able to recall one item in recent newsletter.

**Recommendations:** The need for communication satisfaction tool for hospitals, future work for measuring communication satisfaction and a tool to evaluate internal communications practices in the healthcare setting.

**Lessons Learned:** Possible ceiling effect for mean engagement scores, limited evidence-based internal communication practices in the literature and need method to directly measure communication satisfaction with communication practices post-intervention.

**Bibliography:**


