

NHS UK: Success through people

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A case study about how the cliché “People are our most important asset” became a reality.

We met Peter, ED of Workforce and OD for a large NHS organisation, at the NHS HR conference in Birmingham. We were immediately impressed by his clarity of thinking, and a powerful determination to move his organisation from good to great. Peter knew that while managing the financials, processes and systems were important, he'd only be able to make progress by tapping into the potential of his people.

With over 3,000 employees spread over a large number of sites, change, communication and strategic alignment was always going to be difficult. His people were passionate about their patients. All had a view about what they could or couldn't do. They also had a view about what management were interested in (or not), and how management 'impacted' on their work.

Peter's organisation was the fortunate recipient of stable leadership over more than 15 years (an anomaly as the average tenure of a CEO in the NHS, is 22 months). It had recently earned Foundation Trust status, and was now ready to initiate a plan to be a leader in its area of expertise.

After several meetings with Peter we knew that not only was he genuinely interested in understanding employee perceptions, good or not so good, he was determined to share survey results and actually take action to make improvements. Peter understood the importance of motivating change and improvement from 'bottom-up'. He knew how important it would be for 'people' to own, decide how, and then take responsibility for improvement initiatives.

We facilitated our Workplace Audit so that employees could answer the survey on-line or by hard copy, during July, and provided a report and recommendations to SMT and the Board, late August.

In Peter's words “The results of the Workplace Audit didn't surprise us, but it did provide us with the information we needed to really understand employee perceptions about our culture and workplace. Now we can confidently, and accurately, work with the areas identified as working well, or needing improvement. It has also meant that the 'people' factors have become one of three key strategic planks to take us forward.” “We've got work to do, but already our middle managers are engaged, they see the possibilities, and internal communication is not only improving, its aligned and consistent.”

The Workplace Audit is backed by five years of application and research. It digs down into what employees really think, and uncovers the causes of culture and workplace practices rather than simply identifying symptoms. Year by year, clients consistently find the results, recommendations and action plans included in the report invaluable, but more than that, they are able to initiate dialogue and provide the catalyst for action that leads to meaningful change and ongoing performance improvement.