

Why does it hurt so much?

Current de-motivators in NHS staff

Article, 8th February 2007



Abstract

Without doubt staff satisfaction and morale is at an all time low, despite higher healthcare spend than at any time in history. This article seeks to explore some of the reasons for this, examining areas including change, human need, individual psychology and other factors affecting motivation. The purpose of the article is to create better understanding of the contributors to motivation and morale, so that steps can be taken to help people struggling in the current NHS environment.

Authors: Andrew Vincent, Managing Director, Medicology Ltd & Sara Watkin, Medical Director, Medicology Ltd.

Contact the author at andrew@medicology.co.uk

Article

Human motivation and morale has many underlying contributors. In fact, so many that a complex organisation such as the NHS would find it difficult to create an ideal environment in even the calmest, most stable conditions. However, it is clear that staff are currently experiencing a trough in motivation and morale, which could mistakenly be attributed to the current raft of changes and oscillating cash availability. This would mask some of the subtle but no less impacting reasons surrounding the human mind and other factors. Rather than providing answers, this article seeks only to identify the principles and in so doing, helping staff experiencing low morale to better understand why it does hurt so much.

Factors affecting morale & motivation

The following are known factors impacting to a greater or lesser on human motivation & morale:

- Direction, goals & purpose
- Goal & values congruence
- Quality and application of leadership
- Communication, both internal & external
- Whether fundamental human needs are being met
- Individual psychologies & behavioural motivators
- Actual performance results achieved
- Degree of teamwork
- Movement and other mood affecters
- Organisational factors including budget, change etc
- Hygiene factors such as salary, security etc
- Procedures & red tape

Each one of these has the potential to firmly unseat a human being in the motivation, performance and morale area but when we look at the current NHS we can see that our problem is not failure in any single area but a wide scope of factors that combine to create an enormously uncomfortable environment in which expectations are the highest they have ever been. We will look briefly at some of the factors, which will hopefully give many people a sense of what's happening and why it hurts so much.

RELEVANT COURSES

This is a complex area covered by a number of open courses.

KEEPING CLINICAL TEAMS MOTIVATED

A seminar covering this topic directly, aimed at providing practical help.

From £135 + VAT

More details at www.medicology.co.uk
(Leadership)

ENGAGING CLINICAL TEAMS IN BUSINESS ISSUES

A seminar aimed at helping managers work more effectively and productively with clinical teams. Ensure clinicians understand the business imperative.

From £185 + VAT

More details at www.medicology.co.uk
(Management)

PRACTICAL LEADERSHIP FOR A MODERN NHS

A 2-day course equipping clinicians, managers & senior nurses with all the key skills to motivate and lead teams effectively in the current environment.

From £370 + VAT

More details at www.medicology.co.uk
(Leadership)

SOLUTIONS AT A TRUST LEVEL

We achieve most working with your organisation on a bespoke basis to put these types of issues right and restore strong performance.

Call us to see what we can do.



Why does it hurt so much?

Current de-motivators in NHS staff

Article, 8th February 2007



AN EXAMINATION OF THE FACTORS AT WORK IN THE CURRENT NHS

If we commence by examining the context in which these factors are operating we see a number of influencing forces. Although there are many, the predominant ones are: considerable change & re-configuration, introduction of the private sector into mainstream healthcare delivery, job uncertainty, financial instability and a massive increase in media focus, negatively.

Direction, goals & purpose

We all like to know where we are going. There does not appear to be a clear end-goal to the current raft of changes and the changes often seem at odds with the true purpose of the NHS, which is delivery of a healthy nation. What's more, many people find themselves in the heart of an unsettling change without really understanding how it fits into the bigger picture. It all adds up to feeling directionless and uncertain, which makes anything other than menial work seem just a little more 'pointless'.

Goal & values congruence

We all have a set of core values and our motivation is linked to the match between values and the goals set. Many people joined the NHS to help people in a meaningful and intellectually driven (evidence-based) way. The current raft of changes challenge that by introducing targets that don't necessarily equal good healthcare, agendas that encourage objective achievement over doing the right thing, the private sector into a public service and more and more talk around introducing charges to a free-at-the-point-of-care service. It's no small wonder people are asking "is this what I signed up for?".

Quality and application of leadership

The modern workforce responds best to an inclusive, vision/ purpose-driven leadership style that engages, encourages and supports (transformational leadership). NHS crisis tends to hone leadership into a more transactional, authoritarian approach. Consequently, many are currently feeling left out, unimportant and simply worker bees without a say in the organisation's future.

Communication, both internal & external

Without doubt this is an important area. The current media focus is almost entirely negative, with headlines like "Dirty Hospitals", "Lazy GPs paid £1/4 million", "2/3rds of hospitals failing to meet standards" and worse. This constant bombardment goes to the heart of human emotion in the area of need (examined next) and self esteem. It is difficult to feel happy and motivated when everyone appears to be telling you that you are a failure and letting everyone down. It doesn't work with children but we seem to forget that with adults. With management at crisis point, there is no correcting factor and people are left feeling adrift and abandoned. Hurts, doesn't it?



Why does it hurt so much?

Current de-motivators in NHS staff

Article, 8th February 2007



Whether fundamental human needs are being met

We all have needs in a variety of areas. Maslow created a hierarchy but we will look at it in a more populist, practical way. Perhaps the most damaging at the present time is a lack of certainty (corresponding to Maslow's basic physiological and security needs). Safe to say, there's hardly a person who hasn't wondered about the longevity of their job, something heightened if you are going through a merger. Although some will see opportunity, the majority feel paralysed by not knowing how long they may have the ability to pay the mortgage for. Changes in contracts combined with greater use of 'ideal templates' reduce the ability of staff to deploy themselves flexibly, reducing variety and leaving them feeling less important, two more fundamental human needs. Contributing to this are feelings of a loss of autonomy, with the ever increasing demands and accountability.

The sheer weight of work in coping with change whilst trying to deliver more with less results in a breakdown in interpersonal working relationships, thus impacting on the 4th basic human need – love & connection. This is exacerbated by the increase in electronic communication over a personal approach. All human beings like to feel they are growing or developing, something challenged by an increased need to simply churn the workload and reduced availability of study leave budget, the latter also affecting how much an employee feels valued by their organisation – "if they won't even invest £250 in me...". Finally, our reward for all that we do is a selfsatisfying feeling that we have contributed, the 6th and final basic human need discussed today. It's difficult to feel that you contribute when you are bombarded by media examples of your failures.

IS THERE AN ANSWER?

We haven't even begun to cover all of the issues, let alone reach a conclusion on how to solve them. So how can we help? We can

start by telling you that it is only natural to feel the way you are under the circumstances you find yourself in. There are an enormous number of practical strategies a Trust or Organisation can take to alleviate these problems and restore a happy, motivated workforce but our belief is that most organisations don't fully understand how they got here, are struggling just to stand still and do not have the degree of understanding necessary to sort out an enormous complex challenge in the unpredictable area of human behaviour and emotions. Start by thinking this: change is almost constant, so you can rest assured that next year will be different to this. We just yet know what that means!

Medicology can help in this area. We can help you create strategies & programmes that restore job satisfaction, morale and high quality performance without breaking the budget

Provided as a free tool by MEDICOLOGY LTD, Oxford House, Stanier Way, Wyvern Business Park, Derby, DE21 6BF

TEL: 01332 821260 FAX: 01332 821262 enquiries@medicology.co.uk www.medicology.co.uk

