

Human Resource Practices for Getting the Best out of Your Employees

Mrs. Preethi Pradhan, Mr. R.D.Tulasiraj



Introduction:

Hospitals form a part of the service industry. One of the most distinguishing characteristics about hospitals is that the quality of the service delivered is directly proportional to the quality of the employees.

The quality of the service delivered is ultimately measured by the customers. In healthcare, quality is highly subjective and there is a significant emotional factor involved. For a hospital to build and maintain the reputation of providing quality service, it is therefore crucial that its employees offer their best for every single customer, all the time.

This article provides an overview of the challenges and implications thereof currently faced by the human resource in the eye hospital. It then provides an overview of the human resource practices, in order to get the best out of the employees.

The human resources in an eye hospital

The human resources in the eye hospital can be divided into the following broad categories:

- Ophthalmologists who are the hinge around which eye hospitals function. They can further be classified into three broad strata. The specialists, the general ophthalmologists, and the post graduates. They need to be viewed differently as each one of them have different functions.
- The ophthalmic assistants who are broadly categorized as hospital based and field based. In hospitals they work in the outpatient, inpatient, and also in the operation theatre. They are a very important component as they are the primary interface with the patients.
- Administrative group: This comprises of broadly, the hospital administration group, as well as the support team.

- Community support: For an eye hospital to function properly, it requires co-operation and support from sponsors and well wishers of the hospital in the community, as well as those who are willing to volunteer their time for the service of the hospital.

Issues facing the human resources

When we look at each of these categories, each group has a different set of needs and therefore poses different challenges.

Ophthalmologists:

Almost 70 percent of the ophthalmologists are located and have strong preference for serving the urban area. In terms of specialists there is increased competition for this highly skilled scarce workforce. The attrition rate is high among this cadre due to advancements in infrastructure (equipments) and in procedures (surgical skills). Postgraduate students and fellows are often primarily concerned with the perfection of their clinical skills.

Ophthalmic Assistants:

In the case of ophthalmic assistants (OAs), skilled OAs for eye care is not easy to find. There are no general training programmes for this cadre, in the general education stream. There are plenty of opportunities today for the skilled nursing staff both within and outside India. Moreover, the number currently available is far below the actual recommended requirement of 5 ophthalmic assistants per ophthalmologist. There is currently a total lack of continuous education programmes for this group, in terms of conferences, seminars, workshops being organized, or journals available, especially in regional languages. Hence, the onus of keeping them consistently updated, lies on the ophthalmologists they work with. In general, the career opportunities for high school graduates are increasing, due to both greater government focus on their upliftment, as well as increasing opportunities in the private sector.

Administration:

In a hospital the role and contribution of the Ophthalmologist is very clear to all. This is not the case as far as role of administration is concerned. The role of administration in patient care is ambiguous. It is an evolving role and is still to be appreciated by all. Hence even though their role is vital, if it is not well understood and appreciated by all, their progress is hampered. The healthcare industry is rapidly expanding, hence, opportunities are immense for this group. Healthcare organizations can benefit from the ever expanding range of information technology solutions provided. There is someone who can pro-actively search for the right solution and encourage its use within the organization.

Challenges for Human Resources:

There is increasing employment opportunities in the job market. This has made it hard for the healthcare industry to compete with the jobs available and pay comparable remuneration.

Employees today do not plan to be with a single organization for their lifetime. Today, length of service does not imply employee loyalty. Quality of service denotes the sign of a loyal employee. It is therefore important for the organization to train employees quickly and efficiently. There also needs to be a mechanism in place to ensure continuous upgradation of staff as well as to provide career advancement opportunities.

The career opportunities for generalists from graduation upwards have increased, especially with the outsourcing business coming to India. This increased opportunity has been accompanied with an increase in compensation and benefits. Organizations are willing to pay a lot for staff who possess certain skills—generally revolving around communication.

There is also a shift in preference of age group of the candidate. Earlier experienced people, with years of experience behind them were valued. Currently, fresh young candidates without experience are also valued, for they are thought to be more mouldable.

The major implications for the eye hospital can be summed up as, retention, as well as the need to focus on capacity building of employees. In a service sector it becomes all the more important to focus on continuous knowledge building. Talented employees are available to a company for shorter tenure, instead of lifetime employment. Organisations then have to come

up with mechanisms for utilising them to the maximum. This necessitates shorter and more intensive training programmes.

HR Practices for getting the best out of your employee

The HUMAN resources set the tone for any organization. Even though the employees are considered as the biggest expenditure, they are also the most important asset. The environment the patients experience, will be a direct result of the culture the organization has developed for and with their employees. The HR practices for getting the most out of employees are detailed below. It also addresses the twin issues of retention and capacity building.

Selection

The first point to understand is that retention begins with selection. It is important for organizations to understand that they determine the kind of employees who work for them. Hence a lot of attention has to be paid at the selection stage, as those who are hired makes our organisation.

Hiring just anyone to fill the vacancy due to urgently is ineffective, inefficient and will cost the organization time, money and poor service in the long run. The employees the organization chooses to hire become the organization and therefore, they build or break organization's reputation. Hiring standards must be established and used consistently throughout by the organization. This needs to be communicated to all persons making hiring decisions. A very good strategy, is to check references from at least two previous employers of the potential employee. Staff who will work with the potential employee should also be involved in the interviewing process.

Sharing & operationalising the vision for your organization

For people to feel like they belong to the organization and for them to feel that they contribute to its larger purpose, it is important to share the organization's vision. The vision gives a picture of what the organization's long-term success will look like. It is a 'yardstick' by which to measure achievement of strategic decisions. It usually tends to be something exciting and uplifting to set the organizational long-term sights on, a truly shared goal involving all members of the organization. If each employee understands how his/her role contributes to the vision and goal, then such shared vision creates teamwork and ownership.

It is important to get rid of “we/they” thinking. Employees need to understand how their work affects others and vice versa. Leadership needs to help them “connect the dots”. Each employee must be valued and recognized for the work they do. For this, communication in different forms is extremely important. This could be done through employee newsletters, or thank you notes. Meetings also provide employees with a forum to get an update of activities, as well as to share their suggestions and participate in decision making. Leadership Rounding, where the leadership “tours” the departments, helps the employees share what they are doing with the leadership. It also allows the leadership to see firsthand, how the different employees are contributing in their individual workplace.

Job description

A clear and accurate job description must be developed for each position in the organization. This job description should be shared with the new employee upon or even before they are hired. Each new employee needs to understand that these are the competencies upon which they will be evaluated periodically. It is very important to have a judicious use of Human Resources. The employees should be used for what they are best skilled in. If tasks can be delegated to a lower level, they should be done so. Job enlargement opportunities should be provided, depending upon the employees’ capabilities. Career development opportunities should also be provided. This will clarify of what the work is, will make each one feel they are needed by the organisation and this also has very implications on retention.

Orientation

Every employee requires three levels of orientation: one to the organisation and its history, the second to the different employees and the different departments that make up the organization and the third to the work that the employee will be doing. During orientation, it should be ensured that the employee is well trained in each aspect of his/her job. Preferably each employee must be assigned a mentor. The new employee should be tested on specific skills/task they are required to perform before releasing them from orientation. Each new employee should be reviewed after 3 months of working in their new job and evaluated for their performance.

Feedback and appraisal

Each employee should receive feedback regarding their performance on an ongoing basis, not just

at appraisal time. Employees also need to receive constructive criticism at the time an incident occurs – it is much more effective! Employees also need to hear that they are doing a good job when they are doing a good job! Be sure that the feedback is for the right reasons. If the manager is working appropriately with the employees, the performance appraisal should not be a surprise. It is important to set aside time to have a meaningful conversation with the employee – preferable an hour. The performance appraisal conversation should take place in a private place. Even good feedback or compliments can be difficult for some people to hear. It is very important how the feedback is presented. It should not be judgmental or blaming (i.e. “You shouldn’t have done this!” vs. “This situation might have gone better if you had handled it this way”). Coaching is the most effective way of providing feedback, so that the employee gains a clear idea on what change needs to be made. It is better to use “I” messages when presenting feedback. For example, *I feel that you can do better. I am upset that you ...*. After the feedback is presented, allow the other person to express their reaction to the feedback.

If there are areas in which the employer needs significant improvement, an action plan should be developed with the employee. In developing the plan, set measurable goals and expected dates for attainment or completion of the same.

In goal setting, the individual employee goals need to be in alignment with the departmental goals and the overall organisational goals. Goal setting should be an annual exercise one undertakes with the employees. The goals should be clear and measurable. Focus on the most important goals. Build measures to have clearly defined targets. Translate goals into action. Engage employees and execute the plan. This is very important for employees to feel they are constantly developing and learning.

Managing the effectiveness of your work force

In an organization with good HR practices in places, employees should be able to answer these key questions:

1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?
2. Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?
3. At work, do I have the opportunity to do my best every day?

4. In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for doing good work?
5. Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
6. Is there someone at work who encourages my development?
7. At work, do my opinions seem to count?
8. Does the mission/purpose of my company make me feel my job is important?
9. Are my co-workers committed to doing quality work?
10. Do I have a best friend at work?
11. In the last six months, has someone at work talked to me about my progress?
12. This last year, have I had opportunities at work to learn and grow?

Building capacity of the employees:

This can be done in several ways and should occur at several levels in the organisation. At the organisation level, one must be clear of the philosophy of business, or the theory of business that they provide. This necessitates an understanding of the external contexts, as well as the values and culture, the organisation wishes to propagate. Visioning and goal setting are exercises that the organisation must engage in order to have an organisational North Star.

The next level is at the departmental level where one requires a strategy plan to be in place which is aligned to the organisational goals. Benchmarking allows to compare the performance of the department in relation to the best parameters available, rather than only comparing against itself.

In terms of individual development, there are different avenues available for the employee. They

include exposure visits to other organisations which could be in the similar field or in other fields, depending on what one is trying to get exposure on. Training conducted both within the organisation or externally are a good way of developing. The other is engaging in research activities and publishing the results. Reading of journal articles and conducting journal clubs within the hospital will also facilitate this. Continuing medical education programmes can also serve this purpose.

Building a high retention workplace

In order to build high retention, it is important to first check the management attitude towards staff. It might be necessary to move toward flexibility and away from rigid systems and attitudes. High quality can be maintained by good coaching, teaching, and mentoring. It is important to ask many questions to the employees and be 100% interested in their answers. One should strive to stop restructuring the organization too often. Doctors' attitudes affect everyone else. Hence as a group, they need to be aware of this to allow for proper functioning of the hospital. One needs to consider the generation gap, in what people find motivating and tailor the benefits accordingly. The managers and supervisors need to be made accountable for retention. Get new hires off to a great start. Develop special retention plans for the top performers (5% to 10%) and most importantly don't overlook the value of habitual kindness.

Conclusion

In a service industry like healthcare, customer care cannot be delivered without the medium of good employees. Hence, providing good patient care requires competent employees delivering care in a caring compassionate manner. Being employee centric is as critical as being patient centric. Service excellence is the only distinguishing factor between service providers. This can only be provided through people excellence.