

Problem solving and decision making in the workplace.

Problem: Short staffing and heavy workloads at Y care home.

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Introduction

It is not an unusual occurrence that there are challenges at the workplace. As Trommater (2016) puts across, no matter the size of the business or type of industry, each workplace is prone to challenges and it is through finding a solution for the challenges that makes a difference between organizations setting apart the ones that fail from those that are successful. Solving challenges is part of every employees job description be it at the management or the entry level position. This is the main reason behind the need for employees and their leaders to possess problem solving and decision making skills as they will always come in handy at the workplace. Problem solving entails understanding the challenge and then striving to find an effective solution to the issue (Indeed, 2021). In this report, problem solving techniques are applied to identify and solve key challenges encountered by health and social care workers in their line of work at Y care home.

Context

I have been working as a care assistant for about five years now and it was not until two years ago that I got to work at a home that I have always admired. Ever since I was a student this has always been where I aimed at in my career due to the good services that they have been known to offer. Being a care home for the elderly, services offered are tailored such that the elderly get to at least lead a normal life. At Y care home (not the real name) we are focused on offering our clients physical, emotional and psychological aid just to ensure that the needs of the clients are met. Physical aid we offer includes moving around, help with personal hygiene such as washing, bathing and cleaning after them, feeding and taking medication as well as any other assistance that they may require. Emotional aid is all about ensuring that they do not feel lonely or left out in any way be availing activities that they may all engage in and building rapport that ensures they are comfortable enough to spell out what they would want done for them. We ensure their psychological needs are met by ensuring their spiritual and social

requirements are met. As a care assistant I take part in all of these duties which are normalcy in my day to day activities.

The challenge: short staffing and heavy workloads at Y care home.

Unfilled jobs are increasing month after month across England. Researchers have discovered that from April's 6% there has been a four per cent increment of vacancies by September of 2021 in England (Burns, 2021). This is an issue we are experiencing at the care homes as carers quit while others get greener pastures. Looking back I can say that the rate of staff turnover has tremendously increased during the pandemic period compared to any other time at the care home I work. Dempster and Kumar (2021) predict that there may be up to 12% of workers in the care setting leaving their jobs as a result of the government directive for the mandatory vaccination for the care workers which majority of them are not in agreement with. Care companies have reported that there are main factors that have contributed to this such as burnout due to the pandemic phase, changes on immigration rules due to the Brexit, mandatory vaccinations to carers in the care homes and also as the economy picks up there are higher pays in other sectors. At Y care home this is a challenge that has caused heavy workloads with such a small taskforce, which has been exacerbated with the fact that the healthcare sector was required to continue working even during the pandemic.

Scope of short staffing and heavy workloads at Y care home.

Skills for Care reports that in the UK the adult social care segment is currently experiencing a vacancy rate of 8.2% the highest ever recorded (Dempster and Kumar, 2021). Majority of care homes in England are experiencing this challenge and especially those that deal with the elderly. Looking at the fact that there is a lot of heavy lifting when it comes to caring for the elderly and already the staff are few, those left behind are almost always overwhelmed which drive them to seek other alternatives. With an ageing population there will be a need for 627,000 more care workers by the year 2030.

It is quite unfortunate that care work has been notoriously undervalued as it ranks among the lowest paying occupations in the UK with majority of the carers earning only

or below the actual living wage (Dempster and Kumar, 2021). Unpaid working hours has become increasingly common as working condition are becoming inadequate and stressful to care givers. All these are factors that discourage workers from serving in this sector. In a report ordered by House of Commons (2021) it was discovered that there were other factors such as discrimination of workers and lack of psychological support to the carers that lead to the need to seek other alternatives as well as decrease in the productivity of those that remain.

Discussion

Impact of short staffing and heavy workloads at Y care home

As a result of having very few workers care homes are being forced to limit services being offered to clients and only very essential needs are met leading to presence of unmet needs. This is in addition to having individuals who are in need of care services but are not being admitted to the care homes as the homes are not in a position to meet all their requirements. Heavy workloads have been linked to reduced patient safety, increased dissatisfaction of patients and complaints due to poor services received (House of Commons, 2021). With patients dissatisfied this leads to decreased business for the care homes as they are receiving less clients and even to an extent they do not receive these clients. The resultant effect is no jobs as the care homes can no longer meet their financial obligations.

Having few carers take on all the workload including that which was meant for their colleagues who have quit, the remaining carers get to a point where they are stressed at their workplaces. Chronic work stress has proven to be the cause of serious conditions in healthcare workers such as cardiovascular diseases and disorders, anxiety, depression, addiction and even hypertension. Staff who are burnt out have a heightened probability of making errors, are more prone to low engagement, compassion fatigue and cynicism.

The healthcare sector in the UK is facing many challenges where there is need but they cannot meet the need to ensure the welfare of their citizens. The NHS which is in

charge of the care system had long been facing a staffing crisis way before the pandemic resulting from weak policies, prolonged limited funding, fragmented responsibilities as well as poor taskforce planning (Weinberg, 2021). This is to prove that the shortage in staff and heavy workloads is a menace to all stakeholders involved.

Analysis

This section analyzes the challenge of short staffing and heavy workloads on the carers at Y care home. Various analysis tools are applied such as the PESTLE, SWOT and fishbone analysis techniques to look into the matter in order to get to viable solutions that the care home can apply to reduce or all together eliminate the issue.

SWOT analysis

It is by undertaking a SWOT analysis that the internal weaknesses and strengths, plus the external threats and opportunities of an organization's environment are assessed. The internal assessment identifies capabilities, resources, competitive advantages, reputational factors and core competencies. An external assessment looks at the industry and the general environment to identify opportunities and threats that an organization is exposed to (Sammut-Bonnici and Galea, 2015).

Below is a SWOT analysis carried out on the Y care home. This analysis will be applied in decision making for the care home that will bring a solution to the challenge being faced.

Strengths	Weaknesses
✓ Being in existence for more than a decade ✓ Ability to attract and hire experts in the care field ✓ Good reputation of the services ✓ Superior geographic location ✓ Spacious home ✓ Serene environment	✓ Gaps in service areas ✓ High turnover ✓ Reduced number of services offered ✓ Decreased number of clients ✓ High cost of running the home ✓ Imbalance in the ratio of staff to clients

✓ Inclusion of clients in their care plan	✓ Lack of a well-structured campaign ✓ Discrimination of the staff
Opportunities ✓ An ageing population ✓ Increased government funding ✓ Strong government policies ✓ Creating a well targeted market campaign ✓ Collaborations with health facilities ✓ Developing support systems for the staff.	Threats ✓ Higher pay of staff in other sectors ✓ Poor mental health of the staff ✓ Loss of high talents ✓ Competition from home care services ✓ Mandatory directive for vaccination of all staff in care homes.

PESTLE analysis

This is a technique for assessing key factors such as political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental which impact an establishment from the outside (Weeks, 2020). This technique is employed to assess external factors that impact decision making at Y care home. Being that the goal is to solve the issue on short staffing and heavy workloads, the macro environment which encompasses the PESTLE need to be considered and their current effect on the home.

Political

Positive

Recognition of the importance of care homes in the country hence policies are put in place to ensure they are still in business.

Increased funding from the government for the sake of paying carers.

Negative

Government directive on mandatory vaccination of carers which most carers do not agree with.

Economical

Positive

A recovering economy where people are now accessing money that they can inject in care homes for their loved ones.

There are elderly members of the community who are well-off and able to pay for their care at the home making it is possible to pay carers.

Negative

Increased costs of running a care home.

Lack of enough funds to pay carers.

Social

Positive

Acceptance of care homes and carers to the community.

Increased need for carers as the population ages.

Negative

Discrimination of carers by some residents at the homes as well their families.

Technological

Positive

Availability of new technologies that boost the work output at the care home and eases the work of the staff.

High rate of absorption of the technologies by carers.

Negative

Expensive costs of acquiring the technologies.

Environmental

Positive

Y care home has been working towards renewable energy by installing solar panels.

Effective waste management at Y care home which makes the carers work easier.

Negative

Extreme working conditions that do not support the carers' well-being at the home.

Legal

Positive

Availability of laws that safeguard the carers such as the equality act and employment act that are meant to ensure carers are not discriminated against.

Negative

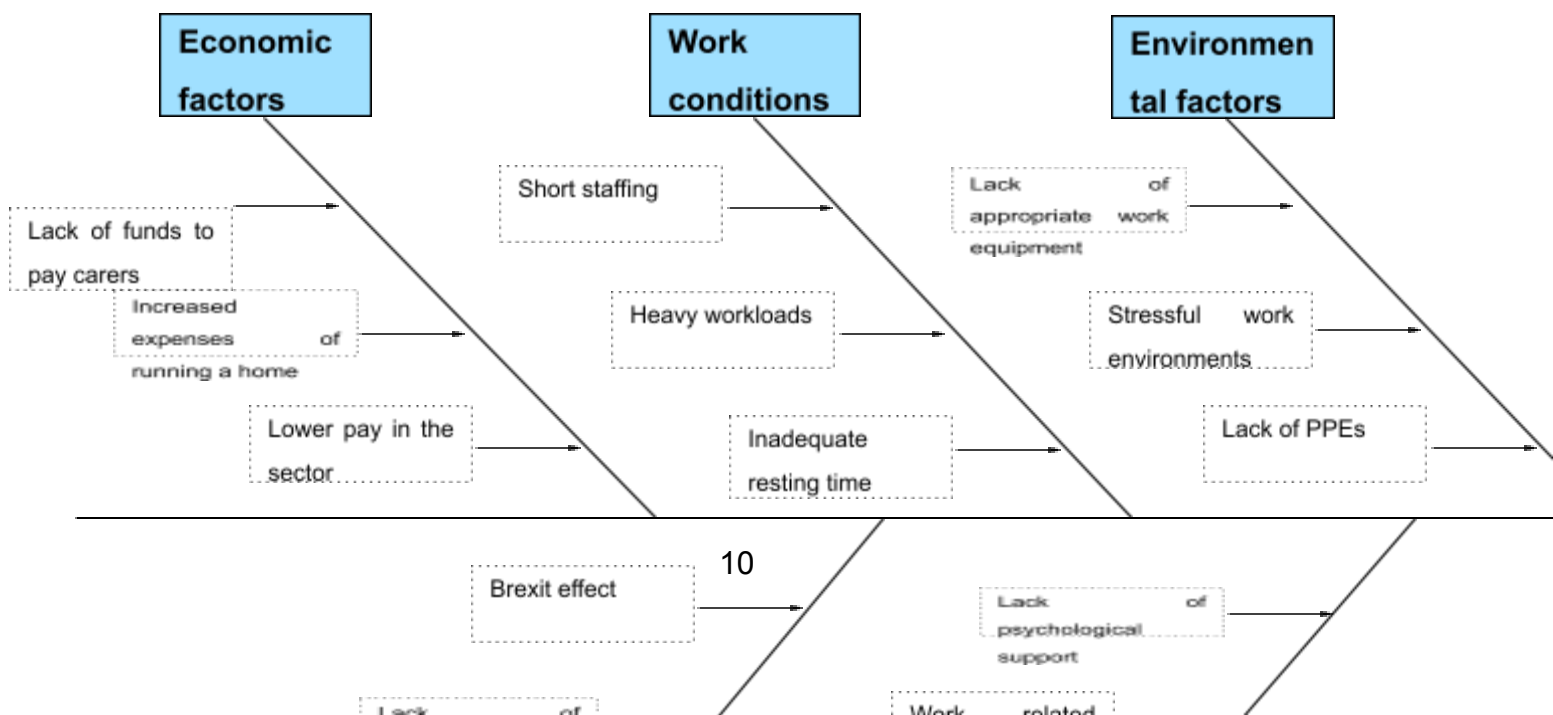
Laws on the minimum wages to be paid to the staff make it hard for the care homes especially now that business is at its lowest.

Fishbone analysis

The fishbone or Ishikawa diagram is a visual representation that helps in identify the root causes of a challenge and sorts ideas into useful categories (Paradies, 2020). The effect or the problem is often at the mouth of the diagram which is the mouth of the fish and then the contributing causes are on the smaller bones. Lewis (2019) explains that the fishbone diagram combines a mind map templet with brainstorming. This technique was created to help employees not to simply focus on the symptoms but rather the root cause of issues.

By applying this technique it has come to light that short staffing and heavy workloads at Y care home are caused by several main factors which can still be broken down further into sub sectors. One of the root cause is economic factors. This one can still be broken

down into the lack of funds to pay carers at the home which may result to them going without pay or having very little pay, the costs of running a care home are increasing as clients require that all of their needs be met while at the home and also the healthcare sector is known to have little pay. When it comes to the working conditions short staffing and heavy workloads which are caused by staff turnover are the same factors that drive the staff to seek other alternatives, this is of course made worse by the fact that with all the workload employees have very little rest time. This results to the staff at Y care home getting burnt out and they see no need of sticking to this job.



Environmental factors affecting employee turnover at Y care home include lack of PPEs and especially now with the COVID 19 pandemic, lack of appropriate working equipment that are meant to help the clients around the care home such as wheelchairs and stressful work environments to the carers. Political factors which have their roots in government policies have also been discovered to cause high employee turnover in social care. Issues such as the Brexit effect has caused shortage of employees who even though not as skilled did provide needed services in this sector. Lack or inadequate funding from the government has served a role in employee turnover and lack of interest with this sector due to the notion of low pay. Another issue from the government is the directive to have mandatory vaccines as workers in the care homes.

Psychosocial factors also have a role to play in this challenge as carers are prone to poor mental health due to the nature of their jobs where they are always surrounded by the ailing and they more than often try to shoulder their burden. Fact that carers do not feel like they are being supported in the line of work has driven most to seek where they

do feel valued and receive the support they desire not only as workers but also as humans. Stress emanating from the jobs are known to cause other challenges such as poor health, to avoid this or control what has already taken effect employees avoid this line of work and instead seek jobs that do not bring such effects.

Proposed solutions

Y care home cannot just allow the care home to get closed as a result of short staffing and heavy workloads. The management must do everything possible in their power to ensure that this challenge is tackled. Below are some suggestions of what could possibly be applied to solve the matter.

1. Creating a marketing strategy that will attract more clients in order to gain funds that will be used in the efficient running of the home as well as paying the carers. It is important that the pay be increased to be competitive with the rival sectors that are attracting the healthcare workers.
2. Ensuring the work environment suits the employees and is geared towards their wellbeing in all levels. This includes equality and availing the PPEs and equipment required by the carers to carry out their duties.

Evaluating the proposed solutions

The challenge on short staffing and heavy workloads at Y care home has been given two solutions to apply. This segment evaluates the proposed solutions if indeed they are viable to apply at Y care home. From the analysis carried out it is obvious that funding is the top issue here together with the working environment. The proposed solutions are viable to apply here as they offer a solution to the root cause of the challenge at Y care home.

PMI chart

The PMI chart is a graphical organizer used in evaluating the plusses, minuses and interesting implications in relation to a topic, idea or decision. This chart encourages critical thinking, brainstorming and decision making that help attain a balanced decision (Sukalyan, 2021). After the analysis of the pros, cons and interesting perks about the

matter, a conclusion is then reached and a decision made which was the ultimate goal. Below is a PMI chart analysis for the interventions of short staffing and heavy workloads at Y care home.

Plus (+)	Minus (-)	Interesting (I)
▪ Attracting more clients ▪ More returns ▪ Effective running of the home ▪ Good pay for carers ▪ Suitable working environment ▪ Wellbeing of employees ▪ Adopting new strategies ▪ Availability of equipment and materials for working.	▪ Financial muscle ▪ Investing time is required ▪ More human resource required.	▪ It will be a new experience exploring new ways of doing things at the care home. ▪ Giving all employees the chance to do more for the care home.

This analysis above is proof that the proposed interventions are good enough to apply in order to solve the issue on short staffing and heavy workloads as the pros have definitely outweighed the cons and also the interventions have interesting perks.

Implementation of the solutions

The solutions having been agreed upon as they have proven to be viable with the ability to solve the challenge will now need to be implemented. The management at Y care

home will be required to put across the following plans to ensure that the solutions are applied at the home and all are on board.

- ✓ Set up a timetable that will dictate when the management and the staff will have meetings.
- ✓ Creating a platform that allows everyone to participate by offering their insights.
- ✓ Specifying on the roles of all involved.
- ✓ Developing a viable marketing plan that meets the goals.
- ✓ Having in place a support system that will ensure that the wellbeing of employees are fulfilled.
- ✓ Doing an assessment of the required equipment and materials and making plans on how to access them.
- ✓ Creating a clear communication channel that ensures all stakeholders are informed throughout.

Stakeholders' communication plan

Stakeholder	Power	Message	Key interest	Communication vehicle	Frequency
Care home manager	The leader at the care home	The overall plan.	Solution to mitigate employee turnover and how to attract those that are experienced.	Emails Face to face meetings	At the beginning of the project.
Residents	Service users	Their role in the plan.	They are to refer others if possible and comply with regulations to respect all care givers.	Face to face	At the beginning of the project.
Employees	Staff at Y care home.	Their roles in the plan/project.	Roles in marketing for the care home. Support plans for their wellbeing.	Face to face Emails Weekly reports	Weekly

<i>Families and friends to the clients</i>	Clients	The strategies and adoption of new tactics.	Approaches that will affect the residents.	Emails	At the beginning and end of the project.
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Monitoring and reviewing

All projects require that they be monitored to ensure they are according to plan. The importance of monitoring is to gather accurate information on output, error levels, opinions, facts, complains and reports (Kumar et al., 2021). To ensure the plan is being implemented at Y care home and is achieving its original goals these are the issues that will be monitored. To gather this information will require that specific tactics are applied for monitoring such as observations, looking at the financial recordings, assessing returns, observing the staff turnover rate, feedback sheets, focus groups and employee surveys (Shpak, 2012). The service users, the staff and the families will all take part in assessments to give their feedback and offer the reality of how things are being run and what they do not think is good enough.

Conclusion

Challenges will always be present in life either to an individual or in a work environment setting. The ability to critically think in order to assess a problem and then brainstorming to come up with viable solutions is a skill required by every individual. An article by Latest quality (2017) puts emphasis on the need to have the ability to apply appropriate techniques throughout the problem solving process. The healthcare sector is one that is very sensitive and requires that resources are pulled together and remedies to challenges be quickly identified as it is always the wellbeing of humans at stake in the long run. The process of coming up with a solution for a challenge being faced is made simpler by having the various types of analysis techniques applied in this report.

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