Performance management hub for health and social care

Research summary report
November 2014

Summary

Background and approach to the research

The National Skills Academy for Social Care (NSASC), part of Skills of Care, and the NHS Employers Organisation (NHS E), have been commissioned by the Department of Health to produce an online hub to support line managers in health and social care in the effective performance management of frontline staff.

Advice delivered to the Secretary of State for Health in November 2013 by the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care found that, whilst there is relevant information available on managing performance, it is spread out and hard to find. The hub is intended to make performance management information easier to locate, thereby improving performance management and the quality of care.

As part of the development process, research into current views on performance management and existing sources of information and support was commissioned and then conducted during September and October 2014. The research had three strands:

- desk-based information resource mapping,
- an online survey,
- a joint stakeholder consultation workshop (health and social care).

This report summarises the findings from the research and the implications for the hub development.

Key Findings

- The term 'performance management' has pervasive negative connotations in both health and social care, almost always narrowly understood as dealing with poor performance. The hub is an opportunity to change this negative perception.

- The hub should first signpost to organisational policies and procedures where these exist, and where they do not, should encourage their establishment and introduction. The hub should not look to replace organisational policies and procedures.

- Line managers who are not HR experts, and managers working in smaller organisations that do not have a specialist HR function, are most in need of information and support around performance management.

- There are a number of factors that adversely impact on positive performance management. External factors include recruitment difficulties and financial pressures. Organisational factors include a lack of coherent strategy on performance management, overly bureaucratic processes, legal and contractual complexities, competing stakeholder rights and a general lack of support for junior line managers at the 'sharp end' of performance issues.

- On an individual level, many line managers lack confidence in their knowledge and skills, for example their understanding of legal and practical issues and their ability to give feedback and to undertake supervision and appraisal effectively.

- Dealing with poor performance is rarely clear-cut – there are almost always competing points of views and divergent agendas; knowing when and how to 'draw the line' is a major challenge for line managers.

- Line manager confidence is the key to unlocking the potential of performance management as a positive force.

- Conversations are the key to good performance management; 'soft skills' support is needed in the context of day-to-day supervision and more structured appraisal.

- Divergent sources of information are currently used by health and social care managers to support performance management – there is a distinct preference for using sources that are sector-specific and as contextualised as possible. Many line managers first turn to a colleague, their line manager or a HR expert for information. ACAS is the most common generic reference source.

Priority topics

According to survey respondents, the top three topics for coverage in the hub are:

- o   dealing with poor capability,

- o   setting objectives and standards, and

- o   supporting learning and development.

While workshop participants focused on:

- o support for giving feedback effectively.

This was be in the context of day-to-day supervision (involving observation, evaluation and informal feedback) or more formal appraisal - and dealing with 'muddy' situations (including understanding when to 'draw the line').

Implications for Hub Development

- Consider aiming the hub explicitly at entry-level line managers and supervisors, and ensuring that managers in smaller organisations without dedicated HR functions are adequately considered and appropriately catered for.

- The hub needs to use everyday language wherever possible, not HR jargon; consider avoiding the term 'performance management' in the hub contents and particularly in the title.

- There are a number of underlying principles and messages that should be promoted in the hub, including the need for fairness and transparency, the necessity for good leadership, and the values-based nature of positive performance management.

- The hub needs to strike a balance between presenting performance management as a positive activity, and being clear that decisive action is needed to deal with under-performance.

- Information needs to be as closely contextualised as possible – this will be a challenge given the diversity of settings it is required to address and may necessitate specific 'glosses' for NHS or diverse social care settings.

- There are many topics and activities the research consultees would ideally like covered in the hub – more than is practically possible, at least in the initial development phase.

- Many of the priority topics identified have an underlying thread of managing conversations between line manager and staff member. One possible approach is to develop simple 'How To' scripts or checklists for managers to help them with performance management conversations at various stages in the HR cycle, for example at induction, during day-to-day supervision, for appraisal meetings, and for dealing with specific problems such as absence, poor performance or poor conduct.

Summary of considerations for hub development

Audiences for hub

The audience groups for those in need of support and information around performance management include:

• junior and entry level line managers and staff with supervisory roles;

• managers in smaller organisations without specialist HR functions.

The corollary of this is that the hub must be directly practical, use plain everyday language and not HR jargon, and must not assume prior knowledge about performance management or other related issues.

Health and social care managers value information that is as specific as possible to their context; it is likely that separate glosses or commentaries for various NHS and social care contexts may be necessary including for differences in size of organization.

Key messages framing hub

• Performance management must be presented in a holistic way and as a positive activity, but one that includes taking decisive action on under-performance.

• Managing performance effectively is essential in a well led service; as such it is a key criterion for the new CQC inspection regime.

Language of hub

• The term 'performance management' should not be used in the hub title and careful consideration should be given to its use in the content. Managing performance is preferable.

• The language throughout must be everyday, jargon-free plain English.

Contents of hub

• Consider focusing the hub contents on supporting soft skills. Induction, supervision and appraisal, for example, are cornerstones of performance management, and require good soft skills whether supporting good performance or managing poor performance.

• Consider using individual ACAS resources – the advisory booklets aimed at frontline managers would be obvious candidates – and producing contextualised commentaries on them for different types of organisation within health and social care. Resources could be developed around: 'What might this ACAS advice mean in an NHS context' and 'What might this ACAS advice mean in residential care'. Any case study material could also be used in this way. Appropriate permissions would need to be sought to reuse any copyright material.

• Consider how the hub might support line managers in developing confidence and skills around decision making and knowing when to draw the line. This could be in the form of a simple flow chart or a more interactive online tool.

- If the hub contains links to third party information resources:

    o Each linked resource should be succinctly described and its relevance for specific parts of the health and social care sectors clearly stated; part of the value of the hub will be in saving managers time by listing relevant practical resources that have been reviewed by experts who understand managers' information needs

    o Each resource will need to be periodically checked, in terms of the currency of their content and the continued accuracy of links and so on.

    o A disclaimer or statement about the accuracy and authority of third party resources may be needed.

Next Steps

Research findings will be considered by the project management team alongside outputs gathered from two project stakeholder groups made up of representatives from across health and social care.

These groups have been formed to offer advice and challenge to the project and to expertly shape and steer the development of the hub and its content.

It is anticipated that the hub will be launched in early 2015.