

Case study

Bolton Hospitals NHS Trust

Bolton Hospitals NHS Trust was formed in 1994 and serves a population of around 270,000. The Trust employs over 3,500 and has an annual budget of approximately £140 million.

The Trust is committed to ensuring that all staff have the right skills at the right time to deliver the services today and develop the services of tomorrow.

The Challenge

Quite a few years ago, as part of the health service's management development strategy 'Better Management Better Health' the Trust designed its own management development plan which included exploring the use of personality tests for selection and development and criteria based interviews within an assessment centre. Its overall aim was to improve the standard of managers throughout the Trust and deliver safe high quality care. Previously staff including clinical staff had been promoted to managerial positions largely based on experience and competence in a clinical setting. However, there was a growing recognition that a good clinician does not necessarily make a good manager. In light of the Better Management initiative the Trust decided to define what it needed from its managers in terms of behaviour.

Alex Prescott, Assistant HR Director comments "We needed to look at how we would recruit fresh blood into the Trust in addition to developing our existing managers."

"Good management is so critical in today's NHS that our recruitment decisions need to be the right ones. PPA is part of this process. It has a valuable part to play in our strategic recruitment decisions"



The Solution

Bolton Hospitals NHS Trust now uses Thomas' Personal Profile Analysis (PPA) as part of its recruitment of managers and has also used it for a team building exercise within one of its Clinical Directorates.

PPA assesses an individual's behaviour in the work environment. It can answer questions such as – What are their strengths and limitations? Are they self starters? How do they communicate? What motivates them? The PPA enables people to become more self aware, which in turn gives them the means to consolidate their working strengths and compensate for their limitations.

The PPA is a series of 24 questions on a forced choice "first impressions" basis, taking no longer than ten minutes to complete. The answers are charted on a graph under the four headings of Dominance, Influence, Steadiness and Compliance (DISC).

“We use it as part of our recruitment and selection process for new managers. I am BPS Level A trained and have used a number of psychometric instruments over the years, but PPA is good because it does not involve any ‘psycho-babble’ – it describes potential behaviour in plain English. The reports set out in a non aggressive way the work styles of the managers: it allows them to see the things they do well and the things they do less well. We can then address the limitations with training to bring managers to where they need to be.”

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PPA has also been used to reduce absence rates in a department where the absence rate was particularly high when compared with the Trust average..

“When we looked at the Trust’s overall absence rate it was about 5 per cent, however upon close investigation there were a couple of hotspots. For example, a section within the Pathology Directorate was running at about 25 per cent with a mixture of short and long term absence. Although we had a plan to manage sickness absence which included return to work interviews, one-to-ones and occupational health referral, we needed to find the cause of the high rate of absence. We decided to delve deeper to discover what was going on.

The PPA profile highlights frustrations and stresses that are occurring either in or out of work (by this we mean non-clinical stress). We profiled all of the microbiology team and then organised a series of one-to-ones with the managers to discuss individual profiles. The resulting action plan designed by staff themselves included organising a communications workshop to address specific issues that arose. We looked at the internal structures with staff and asked them how they could be changed to improve their working lives. This made them feel part of the process and empowered to change.”

PPA played a crucial part in reducing absence from this department. From September 2003 to September 2004 it fell from 25 per cent to 0 per cent although other factors will have played a part also.

“Staff are happier, managers are listening to them and the feedback we receive is that they feel empowered. Treating staff as special enables them to deliver improved results.

Although we are still facing many significant challenges there is an air of optimism in the Trust and much good work is being carried out to achieve our objectives.”