

IMPLEMENTING TEAMS WITHIN THE ELDERLY CARE: THE EFFECTS OF TRAINING

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Background: Having good team organization has become an increasingly popular goal for organizations (Marchington, 2000; Mueller et al, 2000). There appear to be good reasons for this: a recent review found that working in teams was positively related to interpersonal relations, autonomy, wellbeing and job satisfaction (Rasmussen & Jeppesen, 2006). Although there is general agreement of the beneficial effects of good teamwork there is to date little research that has focused on how to ensure teams are established and maintained effectively. Early intervention research (Wall & Clegg, 1981; Wall et al, 1986) examined the outcomes of implementing teams, but did little to examine the impact of the processes used during the implementation. There is a lack of research focusing on the implementation processes that may help ensure successful implementation of teams. This paper presents the results of a longitudinal intervention study in which teams were implemented within the elderly care sector. The aim of the study was to investigate the effects of employee and management training in order to support the implementation of teams.

Methods: The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods. A questionnaire was used to detect changes before and after the implementation of teams. Questionnaires were distributed on two occasions to employees with an 18-month interval between them. On both occasions, participants were asked questions about their perceptions of team organization, team functioning and wellbeing. Three months prior to follow-up, a qualitative process evaluation was conducted: this gathered data about the process and context surrounding the intervention. All managers (n=28) and employee representatives (n=94) from all teams were interviewed.

For the questionnaire survey the sample consisted of 542 staff working in a large Danish local government. Two elderly care centers participated in the study, both included both elderly care homes and home care. One elderly care center had some managers participating in a voluntary off-the-shelf training course whereas all managers in the other elderly center participated in a training course tailored to them. At time 1, questionnaires were distributed to 551 staff with a 81% response rate. At time 2 the questionnaire was distributed to 521 staff with a response rate of 53%. New staff was included in the second round of the survey. In order to test the effects of training, the teams and their manager were divided into six groups: 1) Teams where neither managers nor employees received training, 2) Teams where only employees received training, 3) Teams where managers received an off-the-shelf training course, 4) Teams where managers received a tailored training programme, 5) Teams where managers participated in the off-the-shelf training programme combined with employee training and finally 6) Teams where managers participated in the tailored training course and employees received training. Multilevel analyses were used to analyze data.

Results: The results indicated that in teams where no training had supplemented the implementation there was little change but in several cases decreases in team functioning and wellbeing were found. Employees from these teams reported disappointment that nothing had happened. Surprisingly, the teams where managers had participated in the tailored training course also reported few improvements. However, the process evaluation revealed that although managers had been greatly satisfied with training programme two factors had prevented them from implementing teams. First, the elderly care center had undergone major downsizing even in a time where it was difficult to get staff and that many managers felt it unethical to implement teams. Second, the elderly care center would be merging with another elderly care center the following year and many of the managers were in the process of reapplying for their own jobs. The largest positive changes in team functioning, and employee health and well-being were found in the teams where managers had participated in the voluntary off-the-shelf training course. During the process evaluation managers described how they had benefited from the training course. Most of these were newly appointed managers who had applied for the job because they wanted to work with teamwork. Similar large improvements were found in the teams where only employees had participated in the course.

Discussion: Two important implications can be drawn from this study. First, the results indicate that both employee and management training should be provided to help ensure the successful implementation of teams. The largest changes were found in teams where managers participated in an off-the-shelf training course. However, it is not possible to conclude whether this was because the management training that had the greatest impact or the fact that newly appointed managers were committed to the concept of teamworking. Second, the results illustrate a broader methodological point about evaluation: conclusions about the effectiveness of training cannot be drawn from the analysis of quantitative outcome data alone. The qualitative process evaluation provided useful insights in which factors in the context may have influenced the observed pattern of changes.

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