

“Harnessing employee engagement in an allied health department: moving from a culture of blame to a culture of success.”

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Background: Employee engagement is a crucial precursor to high performing allied health teams and a strongly positive culture within a workplace drives strategy and outcomes. The purpose of this study was to implement a targeted action plan centred on the cardinal pillars of cultural change, with the aim of shifting employee engagement levels in a private hospital physiotherapy department away from a culture of blame.

Methods: A pre-post cohort survey study design was used to measure the effectiveness of a departmental action plan implemented in the physiotherapy department of an inner Melbourne private hospital. This action plan centred on Best Practice Australia’s six pillars of cultural change: engagement; leadership; values and behaviours; quality and innovation; safety; and consumer outcomes. Employee engagement levels were measured via a benchmarked, anonymous electronic survey (administered through Best Practice Australia) pre and post action plan execution. This measured the proportion of staff currently in an engagement cycle, versus swinging voters and those in a disengagement cycle, with 25 respondents to the survey (60% response rate).

Results: Employee engagement improved from 24% to 76% between October 2013 and March 2015. The overall rating improved from a classification of a culture of “blame” (20-30% engagement level) to a culture of “success” (>60% engagement level). 93% of itemised questions improved from pre to post survey results. Qualitative analysis of narrative results indicated improvement in multiple areas including involvement with change and trust in the organisation.

Discussion: The results of this study indicate that a well-established action plan based on the fundamental pillars of cultural change can shift a physiotherapy department from a culture of blame to success in less than 18 months. Allied health teams in the public and private sector can achieve similar results through well-executed action plans based on the same key principles.