

Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust

Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust is one of the largest acute NHS Trusts in the country. It employs around 16,000 staff at seven different sites, managing a budget of £1bn and treating approximately 1.5m patients every year.

Why did Leeds Teach Hospitals NHS Trust want to use social media to access employee voice?

The senior management team at the Trust firmly believe that having effective voice mechanisms in place which empower staff and let them collaborate and ‘co-create’ is crucial to staff engagement. The Trust have recently implemented a new staff engagement strategy called ‘The Leeds Way’ to help change the culture of the organisation. The Leeds Way gives staff the opportunity to provide feedback and contribute their views to help shape the vision, values and goals of the Trust.

Central to delivering this vision is their online collaboration tool called WayFinder, which enables the Trust to crowdsource ideas from staff, patients and other stakeholders.

The Trust uses WayFinder as an addition to the numerous channels for employee voice they already have, including face-to-face communication, emails, the NHS Staff Survey and the trade unions. Social media is seen as complementing, not replacing these established channels.

What did Leeds Teach Hospitals NHS Trust do?

Leeds’ crowdsourcing platform, Wayfinder, set up by Clever Together – enables employees to anonymously share ideas and comments on ongoing organisational campaigns. Everyone can access the responses, comment on and rate others’ ideas.

The Trust recently ran a campaign to assess their diversity and inclusion policies – and staff and patients were encouraged to contribute to the ongoing discussion. WayFinder was used as one of the key channels to involve staff in this topic. Managers at the Trust are now keen to use the tool to address local issues with staff and get their feedback.

This focus on involving staff in service improvements fits in with a growing focus in the NHS on staff involvement. This is driven by strong evidence of the link between employee engagement and outcomes in the sector, ranging from staff wellbeing, absence and turnover, to patient satisfaction and even mortality levels.¹

Senior managers at Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust have played an important role in promoting WayFinder. Dean Royles, Director of HR and OD highlighted the important role the senior management team play in making an enterprise social network a success, both in terms of rolling it out, and building and sustaining use.

Unless senior leaders get actively involved and ‘become advocates’ of social media platforms, he argues, they can never fully take off within organisations. When senior managers clearly back the platform, and indeed use it themselves, staff will feel more comfortable using it and ‘it will become a *perpetuating success factor*’.

WayFinder is anonymised, allowing employees to contribute their views, suggestions and comments without being attributed to them. This is seen as allowing employees to speak freely and openly,

¹ West and Dawson (2012). *Employee engagement and NHS Performance*, Kings Fund: London, and Dromey (2014). *Meeting the challenge: Successful employee engagement in the NHS*, IPA: London

without fear of retribution from colleagues or managers. This has traditionally been a concern within the NHS. The latest NHS Staff Survey showed that, in England, while nine in ten employees who had witnessed potentially harmful errors, near misses or accidents in the last year had reported them, only seven in ten said they felt safe doing so.²

There were some concerns that this may also lead to inappropriate usage, such as excessive criticism or abuse, but this has not been the case so far and the tone has remained professional and productive. However, a limitation of the anonymity is that Trust may not be able to identify and go back to named individuals to collaborate on any actions that arise from discussions on WayFinder.

What has the impact been?

To date, the Trust has received over 45,000 contributions on how to shape the vision, values and goals of the Trust. As Dean Royles explained: *“The fact that we have got 5000 to 6000 people engaged, a good one-third of the organisation, viewing and contributing on that [WayFinder], and we are then able to feed that back to people on their thoughts and views – that resonates with people, that was helpful.”*

Dean Royles believes that social media has some clear advantages over traditional forms of communication and employee voice:

“If you go to a meeting with 50-60 people and you ask their views on things, couple of brave folk will give their view, and often that shapes then the rest of the discussion, it becomes the received wisdom. So, those that feel a bit shy or quiet or disagree feel unable to do that in a meeting with other people. WayFinder is a great equaliser in that everyone’s views are equal and it is anonymous. You get a more genuine view and feeling of a range of people of different ideas than you would get in a face to face way.”

Senior managers at the Trust believe that WayFinder has also helped to deliver service improvements. One such example was an initiative where Theatre Directors used the crowdsourcing tool to look at different ideas to run their theatres more efficiently - from the supply of stock to making sure that all theatre staff are on time in order to prevent delays. Getting ideas from people who are experiencing the work day in and day out ‘in a very democratic way’ is seen as helping the Trust to improve and innovate services.

Another consistent theme of feedback through WayFinder was the concern about staffing levels. Again, this is a consistent challenge across the NHS. The Trust Board, having considered feedback from staff including through WayFinder, approved an additional £6 million investment in nursing and midwifery staffing for 2014/15.³

Where are they now?

Dean Royles feels that despite various benefits social media can deliver for public sector organisations, especially large ones like the NHS, there is still some ‘conservatism’ amongst some senior leaders to use social media internally with staff. He thinks this maybe because they are

² NHS Staff Survey 2014

³ <http://www.nhsemployers.org/~media/D55A32348ED64931BBD4796EDE3057E6.ashx>. Accessed on 19/11/2015

'anxious that it can all go wrong'. But he firmly believes that social media is a *'fantastic tool'* for innovation and voice. While some employers are wary of using it, and of what might go wrong, he sees the benefits of social media as far out-weighting the risks.

Key Lessons

- Social media can support innovation and voice at work, allowing employers to 'crowdsource' ideas from the workforce.
- Engaging with staff through social media can both identify concerns among the workforce and access ideas for service improvements.
- Senior managers play an important role in ensuring enterprise social networks are well-used and successful.
- Anonymity may make employees more willing to speak up, but it poses risks in terms of inappropriate use, and it limits the ability to involve staff in actions identified from discussions.
- Fear of unfamiliar technology and potential problems can make senior leaders reluctant to embrace social media for employee voice.