

Human Resources Management – A Strategic Key towards Public Hospital Performance

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Abstract

Improving patient care has become a priority for all healthcare providers, with the overall goal of achieving a high degree of patient satisfaction. The quality of patient care is essentially determined by the quality of the infrastructure, the quality of training, the competence of the staff and the efficiency of the operating systems. Staff constraints often compromise the quality of care. This can be corrected by introducing efficient and coherent human resources management policies. The capacity of hospitals to provide quality health care to all patients is based on competence, work and commitment. The medical challenges of recent years make it necessary to renew the approach to human resources management, seen as a major factor in organizational performance. The paper aims to analyse from a theoretical point of view the management of human resources as the main factor of increasing the performance of public hospitals. The article analyses the challenges of human resources management, the strategic management of human resources, the particularities of hospital services, the satisfaction and motivation of employees at the hospital workplace. Finally, a series of findings on the issue addressed are presented, highlighting a series of challenges on modernizing human resources policy in public hospitals.

Keywords: *employee motivation, employee satisfaction, hospital services, human resources management, public hospitals.*

JEL classification: I12, I15

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1. Introduction

Improving patient care has become a priority for all healthcare providers, with the overall goal of achieving a high degree of patient satisfaction (Manzoor et al., 2019). Increased public awareness, increased demand for better care, fiercer competition, better regulation of health care, increased litigation over medical malpractice and concerns about poor outcomes are all factors contributing to this change (Awad & Al-Shaye, 2014).

The quality of patient care is essentially determined by the quality of the infrastructure, the quality of training, the competence of the staff and the efficiency of the operating systems (Zineldin, 2006). The fundamental requirement is the adoption of a patient-oriented system (Piras et al., 2019). Existing health problems concern both medical and non-medical factors and a comprehensive system needs to

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be implemented that improves both. Healthcare systems face an even greater challenge, as quality and cost recovery must be balanced with equal opportunities in patient care (Kroneman et al., 2016).

The fact that the patient is the most important person in a health care system must be recognized by all those who work in the system (Santana et al., 2018). This unique factor makes a significant difference in patient care in any hospital. Financial constraints and staff shortages often compromise the quality of care (Kanchanachitra et al., 2011). This can be corrected by introducing management systems that focus on cost recovery and attracting competent staff.

In the strategy of hospital reform, a central place is occupied by the elaboration and modernization of the human resources management policy in order to satisfy the patients' needs and to improve the professional paths of the medical staff, in terms of quality and costs (Sharma & Goyal, 2010). Today, it is necessary to move from a human resources function based on administrative management, in which quality is widely recognized, to a strategic approach to valuing and recognizing human capital which is undeniably the factor that contributes to creating the value of the hospital (Graff Zivin & Neidell, 2013).

Human resources management is recognized as a major factor of organizational performance (Potcovaru & Gîrneală, 2015), compared to other factors (investment in research and development, quality of products offered on the market, etc.). The mechanisms of the human resources development strategy that influence the organizational performance aim at the creation of human capital, respectively recruitment, selection, training, development; motivation of human capital, including practices of progress, career development, remuneration, relations with staff; and the organization of a work environment that allows the individual to make an effective contribution, namely the organization of work, the endowment of jobs.

Human resources raise special issues in terms of quantity and quality (Kramar, 2014). This quality has been a concern, especially in recent decades, and one of the central themes of public policy in many countries. The quantitative and qualitative analysis of human resources in the health system involves the evaluation of its level of school and professional training, a level that forms human capital (WHO, 2018). The majority of knowledge, skills, and qualifications are acquired in school, through the instructive-educational process, and, as a result, the education and professional training of human resources in the health system play a decisive role in the accumulation of capital and developing the system of which they are part. In order for the effects generated by the quality of human resources on the health system and implicitly on its social and economic side to be maximum, certain conditions must be observed, which become more and more significant and which require a strategic approach.

In terms of human resources within the health system, the strategy provides the necessary framework for the annual planning, the annual budget and the evaluation cycle within the system (Uzarski & Broome, 2019). The process is rational and encompasses the whole system, but it is admitted that this rational approach has an external dimension, since the plans are made and executed in

accordance with the external environment. In such circumstances, a process of continuous improvement of human resources through what is being done, through trial or error, can be used. However, in defiance of strategic planning, this change involves a reactive process throughout the system.

At the level of the healthcare unit, it is not recommended that any individual leader try to understand every detail or aspect of the major reform that human resources have to go through. In practice, they would delegate the responsibility of an individual subject leader and hold him accountable for the overall requirement of the system.

2. Research objectives and methodology

The medical challenges of recent years, the most important of which is the COVID-19 pandemic, which has put the global medical system to the test, make it necessary to renew the approach to human resource management. The current paper aims to theoretically analyse human resource management as a major factor in increasing the performance of public hospitals based on a systematic literature review that included analysis of major scientific articles, books and reports published in this field. In this sense, the following objectives of the research were established:

- analysis of the challenges of human resources management,
- the theoretical approach to the strategic management of human resources,
- presentation of the particularities of the hospital services,
- analysis of employee satisfaction at the hospital workplace,
- highlighting the main aspects of the motivation of hospital staff.

The paper was structured in distinct sections, but interconnected as information, which addresses each of the objectives set out above. Finally, a series of findings are presented on the issue addressed, identifying a series of challenges regarding the modernization of human resources policy, as well as main weaknesses that prevent the implementation of a successful human resources management in public hospitals.

3. The challenges of human resource management

Human resources management requires an open environment (Nastase et al., 2019). Therefore, it is influenced by internal and external changes in environmental forces. It also works in a dynamic environment. Thus, change can create opportunities but also threats to the organization. The main problem behind the challenges of human resource management is the emerging trends in the organizational environment and the policies or procedures to address these issues in order to achieve organizational goals (Mulang, 2021). A number of obstacles are presented in human resource management by the constantly shifting internal and

external environment. The main concern is how to treat the people in the organization (Munteanu et al., 2020).

As human resource management is concerned with people working in an organization, it becomes very important for the hospital to hire good people, train them and retain employees to achieve the long-term goals of the organization (Abelsen et al., 2020). The goal is to maintain better human relationships in the organization by developing, implementing and evaluating policies, procedures and programs related to human resources to optimize their contribution to achieving organizational goals.

Human resource management helps to achieve maximum individual development, a desirable working relationship between employees and employers and efficient modelling of human resources, in contrast to physical resources (Stone, Cox & Gavin, 2020). Human resource management is a vital part of any organization. Moreover, the authority must be adept at integrating human resources with other important resources, including finance and technology. Human resource management is a broad concept that refers to the philosophy, policies, procedures and practices used in their management throughout the organization. In other words, it can be said that human resource management is the systematic planning and control of a network of the fundamental organizational process, which influences and involves all members of the organization (Davidescu et al., 2020).

These processes include human resources planning job and work design, job analysis, staffing, training and development, performance appraisal and review, reward, employee protection and representation, and organizational improvement. In order to further control and refine these processes, systems are continuously planned, developed and implemented by management, frequently with the help of non-leading employees.

The strategic management of human resources is defined as: the set of activities of the human resources function favouring the coherence of the strategies and practices of human resources management in relation to the strategic stakes of the organization: vision, orientations, values and great objectives (Greer, 2021). The introduction of the notion of strategy in the phrase human resources management, which defines a new theoretical model, the strategic management of human resources, is materialized by considering the function of human resources not only at the operational level, but also at the strategic level.

The challenge is to create a proactive and resource-oriented human resource management of the organization, through flexible anticipation and adaptability (Shet, Patil & Chandawarkar, 2019). This perspective takes into account the fact that the strategic management of human resources requires a coherent knowledge or vision of the requirements of the future.

Human resources management is recognized as a major factor of organizational performance, compared to other factors such as investments in research and development, quality of products offered on the market, etc. The mechanisms of the human resources development strategy that influence the organizational performance are (Al Khajeh, 2018; Kareem, 2019):

- creation of human capital: recruitment, selection, training, development;
- motivation of human capital: progress practices, career development, remuneration, relations with employees;
- organizing a work environment that allows the individual to make an effective contribution: work organization, employment.

The main definitions of strategic human resources management have as similar foundations three principles:

1. the need for internal coherence of human resources management practices between them and the need for external coherence with the company's strategy;
2. human resources become component parts of the great strategic orientations of the organization;
3. the strategic management of human resources makes real sense only insofar as it contributes to the improvement of the various parameters related to the effectiveness of the organization.

4. Particularities of hospital services

The general objectives of the public hospital are accessibility, globality, continuity and quality. Every individual, no matter where he is and no matter where he is, must find the necessary care. Accessibility must be seen from the perspective: geographical, financial, cultural, organizational. The individual must benefit from care in a complete, global way for all the needs he suffers from. He benefits from the simplest to the most specialized care. The chain of care must be permanent for all individuals, and this continuity concerns not only the care system, but also logistics, administration and medical information. The care provided complies with the quality standards imposed by the progress of medical sciences and techniques.

Hospital services involve a certain specificity of their production with managerial implications (Rouse, 2008). The managerial implications of the production of hospital services are generated by the physical presence of the patient in the system of production of the act of care provided. It is the major element that conditions the performance of the health service and its performance. The patient provides the information necessary for the design and production of the service: in the hospital, answering the questions asked, the patient guides the doctor in the diagnosis that conditions the treatment. Upon leaving the hospital, he may even be an actor in the content of his care services: he is a co-producer of the service received. This presence influences the performance of the health service provided and its performance. The patient's knowledge, personal experience and history have a direct influence on the quality of the health service. For example, the length of health care delivery is extended if the patient does not understand the information received or requested from the physician. Under these conditions, the assessment

of the quality of the service provided is problematic: on the one hand, from the patient's point of view, there is uncertainty about the final result and its evaluation, and on the other hand, from the doctor's point of view the patient's expectations are difficult to identify because they are dependent on many factors. In addition, the provision of the health service is subject to probabilities because it can vary from day to day depending on the relationship between the producer (doctor) and the consumer (patient). The quality of this co-production relationship is a key factor of performance: it involves the analysis of the human resource management policy - the main tool controlled by the provider (doctor) to improve the relationship.

5. Satisfaction of employees at the hospital workplace

Satisfaction at work is defined as a pleasant or positive emotional state resulting from the evaluation of work or work experiences (Liu, Aunguroch & Yunibhand, 2016). In hospitals, job dissatisfaction is strongly associated with staff intention to quit, suboptimal delivery of care, and poor clinical outcomes, for example due to adverse events and poor patient adherence and lower patient satisfaction (Suji & Nandhini, 2021). For medical staff, decreased job satisfaction is also associated with higher levels of stress and exhaustion. Physicians with higher job satisfaction are more likely to deliver services that are more satisfying and have a better therapeutic impact. There is evidence that many healthcare professionals are unhappy with their pay and general working conditions (Ștefan, Popa & Albu, 2020). Higher patient satisfaction and lower medical expenses are determined by happier hospital employees, which increases a hospital's competitiveness.

The following are the most crucial indicators of job satisfaction (Banjarnahor et al., 2018; Rahayu et al., 2018):

- the belief that the organization is fulfilling its mission statement;
- good communication;
- favourable decisions;
- satisfaction with the level of remuneration;
- satisfaction from the organization's recognition of employee contributions;
- clarity of tasks;
- the feeling that the organization keeps employees informed;
- efficient team work;
- allocating a sufficient period of time to complete the task;
- good organizational or personal relations.

Job satisfaction is higher in a hospital where supervisors and subordinates consult, and individuals are involved with colleagues in decision-making and task definition (Gillet et al., 2018). This can be implemented at no cost. For example, changing the night shift (without reducing the total number of tasks performed by a person) results in a significant improvement in job satisfaction at no additional cost. Recognizing staff contributions might be one of the simplest and most

affordable methods for keeping experienced staff. Currently, managers only issue letters of notification or advice. A system of forwarding letters of appreciation can greatly improve staff morale at virtually no cost.

In an era of intense competition, it is likely that only hospitals where employees have a high degree of job satisfaction will survive. Managers may neglect this aspect, but the risks are quite high.

6. Motivation - a factor in improving human resource performance

At the heart of all organizations is the key issue of motivation. The real challenge is to understand what can motivate individuals and lead them to greater individual performance and collective success (Munteanu et al., 2020). This is a fundamental concern for all managers. In a general context of the collapse of the value of work, the increase of working time and the loss of traditional landmarks, the motivational dynamics constitute the main internal and individual vital force generating effort and movement (Pinard, 2011).

Motivation is a way to create a high level of enthusiasm in order to achieve organizational goals, and this situation is possible by meeting individual needs (Ganta, 2014). Basically, motivation refers to achieving the main organizational objectives by meeting the individual needs or requirements of employees. Work motivation can be seen as a set of internal and external forces that initiate work-related behaviour and determine its shape, direction, intensity and duration (Devadass, 2011). The concept refers specifically to the work context and includes the influence on the work behaviour of both the environmental forces and those inherent in the person. Work motivation is presented as an invisible, personal and hypothetical construction, which manifests itself in the form of observable and therefore measurable behaviours (Alam, 2012). Improving productivity is a major challenge that attracts the attention of employers, whether in the private or public sector, by designing an appropriate motivation mechanism for their employees. This challenge can be understood from management's perception of the strong functional correlation between employee motivation and labour productivity.

Employee motivation is defined as the enthusiasm, energy level, commitment, and amount of creativity that an employee brings to the organization each day. Motivation influences employee behaviour through stimuli, which will be transformed into motives (Kanfer, 1990). This is a set of forces and factors that stimulate and support a person in adopting behaviours aimed at achieving specific goals. These forces are needs, impulses, instincts, aspirations, and states of tension - called the mechanisms of the human body. Motivation is the factor that triggers the following chain of reactions: its onset is felt as needed, causing specific requirements or shaping goals, which in turn lead to increased psychological tension, associated with unfulfilled desires and taking action to achieve goals.

The role of motivating human resources in a healthcare organization is particularly important. In general, motivation issues are addressed in relation to the individual, however studies conducted on motivation in different groups show that

if the principles of individual motivation are applied to work teams, they become more efficient and competitive. Being an internal and individual phenomenon, motivation directs the behaviour towards a determined goal. The notions of involvement and stimulation must also be distinguished. Involvement is defined in relation to the emphasis on values, in particular attachment to the value of work and identification with the organization. Involvement corresponds to the importance that a person attaches to his professional activity, his degree of identification with work in relation to other activities. It translates into responsibility and the pursuit of performance goals. The way the organization works can, however, nullify the effects of involvement, because it responds to the need for self-esteem, achievement, investment and personal capacity building. Involvement is a determining factor for the proper functioning of an organization, it is a first step on the path to motivation (Nastase, Giuclea & Bold, 2012). Stimulation, on the other hand, is the stimulus to act from the outside, the stimulus that triggers behaviour.

Improving working conditions to protect the health of employees is a long-standing issue and has been on the agenda of organized industrial relations. However, the motivation did not receive the same level of attention - partly due to its complexity and subjectivity. This must change if the sustainability of work is to be improved immediately.

Motivation in the workplace, whether driven by job content or organizational factors, such as recognition of a job well done, adequate pay, career prospects, or fairness, is important to employees in many ways. Motivated employees have a higher level of employment, a lower likelihood that their work will adversely affect their health, fewer days off and are in general more likely to identify their jobs as sustainable (Baljoon, Banjar & Banakhar, 2018). Previous research has clearly shown that human resource practices focused on employee development are linked to greater motivation, workplace performance and employee engagement (Albrecht et al., 2015). Intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation thus lead to the sustainability of work.

Motivation is linked to the sustainable results of work in all age groups. Gender also plays an important role: women are still disadvantaged in the labour market, have a more disruptive working life (mainly due to childcare or other household responsibilities) and are therefore more likely to have a less sustainable work in general. It is also less likely that many of them will see their current jobs as sustainable. They were found to report, on average, more days off than men. On the other side, they have higher levels of optimism and are less likely to report negative consequences of work on their health, presenting general intrinsic motivation at work.

It is simple to understand the crucial role that motivation plays in ensuring that labour is sustainable, but the policies need to stimulate employee motivation are slightly more complex and are linked to both a broader social and employment policy and a good practice at work and in management (Mathauer & Imhoff, 2006). The best working conditions are just one of several variables that affect how long

someone stays at their job. Other factors, like health, formal education and income, are personal, while others are institutional and macroeconomic, such as the pension scheme, tax policy, poverty rate and employment structure.

To make work more sustainable, it is not enough for decision-makers to simply extend the legal retirement age or introduce bonus schemes for organizations, depending on the share of the older workforce. Workplace organization and human resource practices are fundamental, especially those with horizontal and vertical mobility activities, internal career prospects and development opportunities (Marchington et al., 2016).

Systematic measurement of motivation and well-being in the workplace can help develop a plan for policy intervention. Sustainability in the workplace is determined at the job, but policy measures could encourage best practices and eliminate conflicts in working life that ultimately leads to motivation.

7. Findings

Improving patient care has become a priority for all healthcare providers, with the overall goal of achieving a high degree of patient satisfaction. Increased public awareness, increased demand for better care, fiercer competition, better regulation of health care, increased litigation over medical malpractice and concerns about poor outcomes are all factors contributing to this change.

The quality of patient care is essentially determined by the quality of the infrastructure, the quality of training, the competence of the staff and the efficiency of the operating systems. The fundamental requirement is the adoption of a patient-oriented system. Existing health problems concern both medical and non-medical factors and a comprehensive system needs to be implemented that improves both. Healthcare systems face an even greater challenge, as quality and cost recovery must be balanced with equal opportunities in patient care.

The fact that the patient is the most important person in a health care system must be recognized by all those who work in the system. This unique factor makes a significant difference in patient care in any hospital. Staff constraints often compromise the quality of care. This can be corrected by introducing efficient and coherent human resources management policies.

Hospital reform needs the support of strong human resources management. The issue of modernizing human resources policy in public hospitals is part of an evolving general context, characterized by a series of challenges:

- meeting the new expectations of patients related to the transformation of society;
- respecting the patients in the health system;
- taking into account the phenomenon of population aging;
- observing and anticipating public health problems;
- integrating the development of chronic pathologies and polypathologies;
- adapting to scientific and technological developments;

- developing research and innovation.

Under these conditions, the hospital system must, at the same time, act firmly in the spirit of the committed policy, adapt the organization of care services so as to reach the indicators of performance and patient safety, ensure an active work environment for the whole medical staff.

Thus, the modernization of the human resources management of hospitals stems from two imperatives: to respond to the challenges mentioned above and to take into account and better support a series of reforms and probably unprecedented changes, whose success is conditioned by the mobilization of all categories of staff involved.

The capacity of hospitals to provide quality health care to all patients is based, above all, on competence, work and commitment. The major developments that have affected the operation of hospitals in recent decades make it necessary to renew the approach to human resources management. In particular, three main stakes stand out:

1. the evolution towards a more individualized management of the competences and of the support of the professional paths;
2. ensuring, at all times, an approach between the constant evolution of the needs of competences within each service of the hospital and the effective competences available in other hospitals and territories;
3. the know-how of the human resources management policy, a determining element of the strategy and performance of the hospital, in all its dimensions, especially the quality, the internal efficiency and the economic performance.

The main weaknesses that hinder the implementation of a successful management of human resources are at the following levels:

- the function of human resources, itself, through its current organization, its mission which remains to be defined in correlation with the means at its disposal;
- human resources management policy which is not fully defined and which remains far from piloting human resources specific processes, such
- foresight management of jobs and skills, recruitment, skills assessment and training;
- the support of the human resources management through the way of organization, the management style, the communication, the social dialogue, the motivation and the working conditions that do not act for all in the sense of the emergence of an effective human resources management.

8. Conclusions

The divided structure of the public hospital generates within it differentiated power relations between the administrative branch representing the State, the medical branch and a chain of staff providing care (nurses), attached to the administrative branch, but working daily with doctors. These different categories of staff that coexist in the public hospital are at the origin of many games of power or counter-power.

Given these specificities of the operation of hospitals, in the process of reforming them, it is, in addition to legal and regulatory reforms, a real change of culture. Integration into this medical-economic culture within the hospital must not be reduced, under the pressure of failure, to a simple logic of cost reduction. The concrete achievement of performance objectives cannot succeed and be perpetuated unless this optimization logic is put at the service of improving the services provided to the patient, taking care, at the same time, to respect the working conditions of the medical staff.

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