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Healthcare and OKRs

COVID-19 lessons in resilience

By betterworks in collaboration with Dr. Michael Frisina

Introduction

The impact of the global pandemic on businesses can't be understated. COVID-19 caused rapid changes in employment, demand, and everyday routine forcing companies to abandon their 2020 goals and reforecast the health and fate of their business. At the same time, employees are scrambling to adjust, attempting to stay productive and connected while working from home.

This amount of change, volatility, and isolation is fertile ground for employee engagement to plummet. Leadership has to keep their eye on the horizon while proactively nurturing employee well-being—a huge undertaking. How can this be achieved, especially in a remote work environment?

Companies can realign and reconnect with their employees through OKRs. Unlike traditional business goals that are set by C-suite executives and left untouched, OKRs are designed to be changed, helping teams focus on present goals while leaving space for emerging priorities.

Done right, OKRs have a direct impact on employee engagement. The transparency eases uncertainty, allowing every member of a company access to the health of the business, leadership's priorities, and their team's impact on success—all keys to productivity and employee well-being.

While all business sectors face these unprecedented challenges and uncertainty, the healthcare industry is particularly susceptible to fearful and disengaged employees as their work is on the frontlines of addressing (and interacting with) the global pandemic.

The current reality in healthcare

Fear is the current reality in the healthcare industry. Employees working in this field are concerned daily with contracting COVID-19, spreading it, and endangering friends and family. Many have watched colleagues fall ill to the virus as well. Simultaneously, these workers are facing unpredictable job security. Many people are either losing their employment or asked to take pay cuts.

Stress influences performance

The daily health and safety risks coupled with employment uncertainty has impacted—and will continue to affect—the mental health of healthcare professionals. Stress is one of the most damaging factors to employees (and thus companies as a whole), but stress in terms of personal safety takes an even greater toll.

Individuals in the healthcare space are operating under their "survival brain" versus their "performance brain." In other words, the cares, thoughts, and priorities of workers have shifted from short-term goals and long-term vision to simply getting through each day unharmed.

Employee engagement suffers under such duress, but leadership can still positively impact experience and happiness in their workforce. Leaders must proactively provide transparent direction for individual and overall company safety and health. It's a matter of setting the right expectations—and communicating them.

Leveraging OKRs to support employee engagement

OKRs are built for identifying what matters most in a particular moment and allowing a company to holistically and quickly realign everything with those priorities. In terms of the healthcare industry, OKRs can help assuage fear and show employees that leadership not only acknowledges their concerns, but is basing their goals and future on this new reality.

Leaders in the healthcare industry must keep the following in mind when building out company-wide OKRs:

1   Reframe using the present moment

Reframing is identifying, and then changing, the way we see and are experiencing a certain situation. This is the most critical element of maintaining focus on OKRs and how they help. In crisis, we want to prevent catastrophizing—thinking the worst is going to happen. By reframing using more positive language and perspective, we mitigate the disruptive aspect to performance caused by focusing on a worst-case scenario.

2   Identify internal and external resources to overcome adversity

Internal resources are initiatives like focus groups designed for employees to discuss challenging work events and uncertainty or managing work-related stress. External resources might be hiring a performance coach to work with key leaders on focusing on OKRs and managing fear in order to reconnect and ignite the organization's performance.

3   Strive for flexibility and adaptability

The key to performance amidst uncertainty is being able to focus on what you can control and disregarding what you cannot. OKRs provide the means to maintain focus on what we can control.

Examples of strong healthcare OKRs

Below are three examples of OKRs based on current themes in the healthcare industry: safety, quality, and patient experience.

Objective 1:

Recruit World-Class Health Professionals to Enhance Levels of Access, Safety and Quality Care

Key Results:

- Interview at least 20 applicants for new surgeon openings

- Identify and integrate top three performing referral medical groups into our system

- Increase professional development participation by 5 CEUs per quarter

This objective identifies the need to recruit and retain top talent for increased and improved clinical outcomes. Working with the best talent will produce higher levels of performance results.

Objective 2:

Optimize Communication Strategies with Patients and Families to Improve Patient Safety and Experience

Key Results:

- Improve the ratio of patient calls with follow-up questions and concerns to 75% outgoing, 25% incoming

- Grow the customer service and/or website teams by a combined total of 4 personnel

- Allocate 50 hours to reviewing, updating, and improving patient discharge bundle materials

This objective focuses on the need to integrate the patient and family into the clinical care plan and maintain an optimal level of communication. That also increases the level of improved clinical outcomes.

Objective 3:

Increase Operating Room Efficiency With Cutting Edge Technology

Key Results:

- Train and certify 100% of new staff on EHR and other digital tools within one-month of implementation

- Invest $50,000 in IT infrastructure upgrades for Emergency Department and Surgical Services by the end of the quarter

- Renovate 5 operating rooms with 3-dimensional (3D) visualization, robotics, teleoperation, and computer-assisted manipulation.

This last objective focuses on the core of patient services, cost effectiveness, and increased revenues. Maintaining efficient flow of patients through the emergency department and surgical services impacts on bed management capacity of the health system. Anything that can increase efficient flow of patients through the system should be a primary revenue and expense objective for a healthcare system.
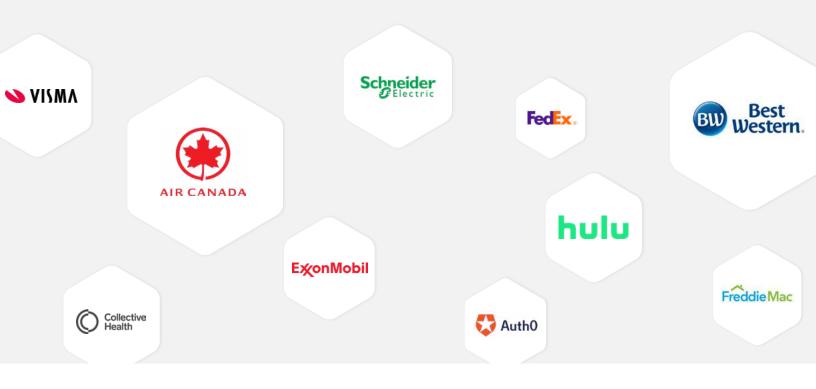
Conclusion

As working environments change and health and safety concerns remain top-of-mind in the healthcare industry and beyond, leadership has to be proactive when it comes to the mental and physical health of their workforce. Decisiveness, transparency, and communication are key factors to remaining agile, retaining talent, and keeping employees productive and happy.

OKRs are a strong tool in motivating teams, but they must be executed with careful consideration of employee needs.

About betterworks

Betterworks is the leading OKR and Continuous Performance Management solution that helps enterprises achieve agility, align their organization and accelerate business and employee growth. Our award-winning software products deliver the critical insights, conversations, feedback and recognition needed to align, engage and develop today's complex workforce. With betterworks, organizations can ensure alignment, transparency and accountability across the enterprise for sustained competitive advantage.

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