



Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities Inventory for Healthcare Administrators

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Abstract

This paper identifies a number of important administrator leader characteristics often overlooked in healthcare administration studies. The inventory of knowledge, skills, and abilities or leader personal attributes that are discussed in this work include stamina, integrity, courage, self-security, accounting knowledge, finance knowledge, statistics knowledge, computer skills, decision-making abilities, planning abilities, team building skills, appearance, interpersonal/people skills, political skills, knowledge of industry and trends, public speaking skills, adaptability to new technology, commitment, willingness to be a lifetime learner; professional association participant; and the ability to switch managerial roles; and the courage for heroic engagement with the complex environment of health care on a global scale.

Keywords: Healthcare, Technology, Self-Security, Stamina, Courage, Knowledge

Introduction

To successfully manage global healthcare organizations both effectively and efficiently, administrators must possess and effectively utilize various complementary skills; not all of which can be learned in textbooks or classrooms in preparation for a career in health care leadership. Healthcare is a dynamic series of complex systems requiring administrators to be flexible, adaptive, and possess specific skill sets for boundary spanning goals and tasks (Stowe, Haefner, and Behling, 2010). Healthcare administrators must have command of a diverse inventory of knowledge, skills, and abilities that include among others; stamina, integrity, courage, self-security, accounting knowledge, finance knowledge, statistics knowledge, computer skills, decision-making abilities, planning abilities, team building skills, a professional bearing and appearance, interpersonal/people skills, political skills, knowledge of industry and trends, public speaking skills, adaptability to new technology, commitment, willingness to be a lifetime learner, professional association participant, and ability to switch managerial roles seamlessly. Additionally, health care administrators must also be familiar with current and future clinical applications and technologies even though they are not clinicians.

Inventory

Stamina

The healthcare industry requires coping with some of the most stressful and physically demanding situations found in any workplace. Healthcare administrators must maintain their physical and mental health to successfully do the tasks required of their position (Eubanks, 1990). Good mental and physical health is important in maintaining the stamina required of healthcare administrators (Healthcare, 2009).

The ability to effectively manage and cope with stress is important to maintaining stamina. Healthcare administrators must be able to effectively manage the healthcare organization while

navigating complications, such as being overworked, understaffed, managing tight deadlines, and meeting the demands of governing boards; all of these contribute to mental and physical stress (Rees, 1997).

Excess stress has been associated with mental and physical fatigue, decreased overall health, loss of appetite, increased appetite, ulcers, mental disorders, migraines, difficulty sleeping, emotional instability, disruption of social and family life, and the increased use of cigarettes, alcohol, and drugs (Rees, 1997). Excess stress can adversely impact worker attitudes and behavior; and cause difficulties making decisions, maintaining pleasant relations with coworkers, and judging the seriousness of a potential emergency. Maintaining good physical and mental health is essential to maintaining the stamina required of a healthcare administrators.

Integrity

Healthcare administrators should be committed to managing healthcare organizations with honesty and integrity (Stefl and Bontempo, 2008). Healthcare leaders are expected to respect the law and refuse to participate in or conceal unethical, false, fraudulent, or deceptive activity (Clancy, 2003). Patient's lives are not only in the hands of nurses and physicians; but, they are also in the hands of administrators who make organizational policies. Healthcare leaders who lack integrity will struggle with their duties and may fall to dishonest billing practices, cutting corners, unethical reporting practices, or developing policies that jeopardize the health of patients for financial gain (Clancy, 2003).

Healthcare administrators who perform their duties with integrity also create an organizational culture of employees with integrity (Murray, 2007). Employees are more likely to perform their duties with integrity when integrity is valued and displayed by upper level leaders and management. Acting with integrity is a highly valued skill required of healthcare administrators.

Courage

Healthcare administrators are not immune to unethical behaviors. They face ethical dilemmas on a regular basis. Shortages in the numbers of clinicians to deliver patient care, inadequate staffing levels, cost containment measures, consolidation of healthcare organizations, and ineffective leadership have resulted in the escalation of ethical dilemmas faced today in healthcare environments (Clancy, 2003; Einarsen, Aasland & Skogstad, 2007; Murray, 2007). How individuals respond to these ethical dilemmas depends on their previous experiences with unethical behavior, their individual personality traits, and their ethical values, as well as knowledge of ethical principles (Clancy, 2003). Moral courage is needed to confront unethical behaviors. Healthcare administrators must be able take appropriate actions, which are consistent with organization policy regarding any instances of incompetent, unethical, illegal, or impaired practice. Courage is a valued trait for healthcare administrators to possess.

Self-Security

There are many reasons why healthcare administrators need self-confidence and security in their abilities. Being a leader of a healthcare organization is a very difficult job. A great deal of information must be gathered and processed, a constant series of problems must be solved and

decisions made, and competing interests have to be satisfied (Griffith, 1999). A leader who is riddled with self-doubt would rarely be able to take the necessary actions nor command the respect of others (Kotter, 2005).

Self-confidence plays an important role in decision-making and in gaining others' trust

(Kotter, 2005; Katz, 1974). If a healthcare administrator is not sure of what decision to make, or expresses a high degree of doubt, then the followers are less likely to trust them and be committed to the vision of the organization's mission. Self-confidence and security in ones abilities are an important attributes for healthcare administrators.

Accounting Knowledge

Accounting is often referred to as the language of business. Very generally, the accounting process is concerned with recording, classifying, reporting and interpreting the economic data of an organization (Weygandt, Kimmel ,and Kieso, 2014). This data is important to users, who may include healthcare administrators, managers, investors, governing boards, and other interested groups (Langabeer, DelliFraine, and Helton, 2010).

The ability to understand basic accounting concepts helps in decision making processes by showing how resources have been used, by judging performance, and providing a level of assurance to investors (Weygandt, Kimmel ,and Kieso, 2014). Reliable accounting information in a healthcare facility is necessary for sound decisions concerning the allocation of scarce resources. Langabeer, DelliFraine, and Helton (2010) reported that, "accounting professionals are relatively scarce in healthcare organizations, making up barely 1.5 of every 100 employees per facility." Thus, having well developed accounting knowledge plays a very significant role in the duties of a healthcare administrator.

Finance Knowledge

The healthcare industry offers some of the most complex finance situations and decisions. Healthcare administrator's responsibilities include creating budgets for the organization, mapping out spending projections for the next few years, and considering and recommending investments in the newest medical equipment (Langabeer, DelliFraine, and Helton, 2010). Healthcare administrators also become intimately involved in negotiations with insurance companies and other financial entities.

In general, the financial management function includes the following activities; evaluation and planning, long-term investment decisions, financial decisions, working capital management, contract management, and risk management (Langabeer, DelliFraine, and Helton, 2010). Although more important to senior administrators; healthcare managers at all levels must be concerned with the finances of the organization. Such decisions, which focus on the acquisition of new facilities or equipment, fund allocation, asset management, contracts, and the overall financial risks are the primary means by which businesses implement strategic plans, and hence they play a key role in a business's financial future (Langabeer et al, 2010). Having well established knowledge of finance is vital to the success of healthcare administrators.

Statistics Knowledge

Statistics are important to healthcare administrators in measuring performance success or failure (Neun and Santerre, 2010). Statistics are numerical data collected from measurements or observation that describe the characteristics of specific population samples (Neun and Santerre, 2010). Descriptive statistics summarize the utility, efficacy, and costs of medical goods and services. Statistics are used in healthcare organizations to implement data-driven improvement programs to maximize efficiency (Neun and Santerre, 2010).

Health administrators reference statistics on service utilization to apply for grant funding and to justify budget expenditures to their governing boards, Neun and Santerre (2010) emphasize the importance of statistics in the allocation of scarce medical resources. Statistical information is invaluable in determining what combination of goods and services to produce, which resources to allocate in producing them, and to which populations to offer them. Increasingly, healthcare organizations employ statistical analysis to measure performance outcomes as well. Basic statistics knowledge is an important skill to learn for healthcare administrators.

Computer Skills

It is necessary for healthcare administrators to have various advanced computer skills (Côté, Van Enyde, DelliFraine, and Tucker, 2005). Working in the healthcare management field, a large portion of your time will be spent analyzing data to make your facility more efficient (Côté, et al, 2005). Consequently, you will need strong computer skills to make sure that each department within the organization you are managing is running smoothly and cost effectively (Côté, et al, 2005).

Knowing how to maximize microsoft office applications can increase productivity (Côté, Van Enyde, DelliFraine, and Tucker, 2005). Advanced knowledge at using spreadsheet software programs will aid healthcare administrators in managing large volumes of data and developing budgets. Developing Microsoft Power Point skills is very relevant to produce presentations that will affect decisions within the healthcare organization (Côté, et al, 2005). Advanced computer skills are important for healthcare administrators to perform their job successfully.

Decision Making Abilities

Healthcare administrators operate in within an increasingly complex system. With numerous economic, legal, ethical, organizational, and technical changes taking place, managerial decision-making has a direct impact on individuals in the workplace, and on the performance of the organization (Darr and Longest, 2008; Katz, 1974; Stefl and Bontempo, 2008). Regardless of level, all administrators make decisions, although the decisions made by top administrators have a broader scope, affect more individuals, and have a greater impact than those made by department administrators (Darr and Longest, 2008). The ability to make effective decisions is important to skill for healthcare administrators.

Strategic Planning Abilities

A strategic planning process must be established to position healthcare facilities in a rapidly changing environment. Planning requires that choices be made about the organization's future (Darr and Longest, 2008). These choices concern organizational vision and mission, the goals to be pursued, what services will be offered and to whom, the resources that will be needed, such as people, facilities, technology, money and knowledge, and how they will be acquired (Williams, 2014). The healthcare organization's chief executive officer (CEO) is involved in the planning process as a strategist, organizer, tactician and facilitator. Being an effective planner is an important skill to develop as a healthcare administrator.

Teambuilding Skills

No matter how talented individuals on a staff may be, unless they can function together efficiently and successfully, the organization will suffer (Einarsen, Aasland & Skogstad, 2007; Katz, 1974). In a healthcare organization, everyone may play different roles, but they all work together harmoniously so that the flow of the organization comes together. When a team is dysfunctional and staff is not supportive of each other, trust is lacking, deadlines are missed, and quality suffers (Einarsen, Aasland & Skogstad, 2007). The ability to collaborate is a top competency required of healthcare administrators (Darr and Longest, 2008).

The new era of healthcare will require organizations to deliver high-quality, low-cost, personalized care (Lindsey and Mitchell, 2012). This goal will necessitate teams of high-performance individuals who are motivated to work efficiently and cooperatively. Healthcare administrators will need good teambuilding skills to ensure the success of their organization.

Appearance

No matter what people say, people are judged on their bearing and appearance (Monagan, 2009). A professional with a professional bearing and appearance provides a positive impression (Whitmore, 2005). Whether interviewing for a job, giving a presentation, asking for a promotion, or performing day-to-day business duties, the appearance of an executive is an important part of the overall package (Whitmore, 2005).

Kwoh (2013) reported that, "while body weight remains a taboo conversation topic in the workplace, it's hard to overlook. A grossly overweight executive is judged to be less capable because of assumptions about how weight affects health and stamina, says Barry Posner, a leadership professor at Santa Clara University's Leavey School of Business." Kwoh (2013) also reported that overweight executives tend to be seen as less successful in the workplace according to data compiled by the Center for Creative Leadership. Maintaining your appearance and weight are important to executives in all forms of business, including healthcare administration.

Interpersonal/People Skills

People skills are an asset in nearly every line of work. In general, good people skills are defined as the ability to listen, to communicate, and to relate to others on a personal or professional level (Katz, 1974; Stefl and Bontempo, 2008). Interpersonal communication involves interchanging

ideas with others using an assortment of methods, such as words, gestures, voice tone, facial expression and body posture (Katz, 1974). Interpersonal skills are important to administrators because effective communication dictates operational efficiency and teamwork (Katz, 1974). Effective people skills are valuable in key business functions such as managing, training, and resolving conflicts within an organization (Darr and Longest, 2008). Administrators who have worked on developing strong interpersonal and social skills are usually more successful in both their professional and personal lives. Health care administrators should have advanced interpersonal and people skills.

Political Skills

Workplace politics are present in all organizations, including healthcare facilities. Avoiding or ignoring politics limits the organization and your professional career. To be an effective healthcare administrator and leader you must develop your political skill (Darr and Longest, 2008).

Ferris (2005) defines political skill as the ability to understand and effectively influence others for personal or organizational benefit. Additionally, Darr and Longest (2008) argue that, “CEO’s and other senior-level managers can influence the public policy environments of their HSOs/HSs at many levels.” Administrators with political skill can help solve problems that policies address (Darr and Longest, 2008). Managers who are not politically astute run the risk of being demoted, fired, or otherwise slipping off their intended career tracks, and affecting business outcomes (Katz, 1974).

Knowledge of Industry and Trends

Having knowledge of industry trends will assist healthcare administrator to make better decision, spot threats or opportunities early on, and spark focus on things that wouldn’t normally be focused on, which can give you a competitive edge (Katz, 1974). This is especially important for healthcare administrators that contribute to shaping the organization's strategy (Darr and Longest, 2008).

Keeping up-to-date with industry trends is key for building expert technical knowledge. By developing expertise, administrators can earn the trust and respect of the people in your organization (Katz, 1974; Williams, 2014). This is highly important to healthcare administrators from a leadership perspective. Healthcare administrators benefit from having knowledge of industry and trends.

Public Speaking Abilities

Public speaking is a very influential device in healthcare administration. A good speech has the potential to create a long lasting impression in the minds of the listeners (Lauer, 2007). It is a tool that can be successfully used to develop a connection between the speaker and the audience (Lauer, 2007). Generally doctors, healthcare executives, managers, marketing professionals, company spokesperson, and corporate representatives are involved in public speaking in the healthcare industry.

There are many qualities that a healthcare administrator must have in order to make positive public speaking appearances. The personality of the speaker plays an energetic role in this and it needs to be trained accordingly (Lauer, 2007). Good support of the subject matter and the prepared material must be precise and similarly fascinating (Lauer, 2007). Having polished public speaking abilities is an essential skill for healthcare administrators.

Adaptability to New Technologies

With the accelerating pace of technological change, many employees find themselves rushing to keep up with new software, programs and technological processes implemented in the workplace. The use of technology in healthcare organizations is fundamental to its future (Warm, D., Thomas, Heard, Jones, and Hawkins-Brown, 2009). However, there is indication of a lack of technology skills within the workforce and therefore, technology skill instruction is crucial (Warm, D., Thomas, Heard, Jones, and Hawkins-Brown, 2009). Healthcare administrators must be able to adapt to new technologies to be effective leaders of healthcare organizations.

Commitment

The responsibilities and demands of healthcare administrators are vast and require a great deal of commitment from the administrator (Darr and Longest, 2008). A committed healthcare administrator holds themselves accountable for the success or failures of the organization. Committed workers are highly desirable because they strive to ensure their employers' success. Administrators will be expected to work long, demanding, and tiresome days (Darr and Longest, 2008). Demonstrating commitment is an important leadership quality for healthcare administrators.

Willingness to be Lifetime Learner

The need for healthcare administrators to develop their professional competencies and skills are important (American College of Healthcare Executive [ACHE], 2013). The way healthcare is delivered is changing quickly and healthcare administrators will need to acquire new knowledge and skills to adapt (ACHE, 2013). The willingness to be a lifetime learner will assure that healthcare administrators have the ability to obtain the education needed to serve their patients and organizations, and advance in their careers (ACHE, 2013). The American College of Healthcare Executives (2013) argues that, "It is only through an ongoing personal commitment to lifelong learning, essential at all career stages, that healthcare executives can thrive."

Professional Association Participant

As with any professional career, joining a professional association can help give you a head start in the field and provide you with resources to help you throughout your career. Healthcare administrators should consider joining professional associations, such as the American College of Healthcare Executives, to obtain access to certifications, continuing education, resources, information, and opportunities they might have not had otherwise (ACHE, 2014).

Joining professional associations provide members with a competitive advantage because they become active and informed members within their industry (ACHE, 2014). Many healthcare administrators lead busy lives and depend on their professional association to brief them on important industry trends, new legislative rulings, and advances in the field (ACHE, 2014). Joining a professional association is significant for healthcare administrators.

Ability to Switch Managerial Roles

Healthcare administrators fulfill many different roles every day. Management expert and professor Henry Mintzberg recognized this, and he argued that there are ten primary roles or behaviors that can be used to categorize a manager's different functions (Darr and Longest, 2008; Williams, 2014). Williams (2014) wrote that the ten roles are, "figurehead, leader, liaison, monitor, disseminator, spokesperson, entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, and negotiator. These ten roles are divided up into three categories, known as interpersonal, informational, and decisional (Williams, 2014).

Healthcare administrators need to be able to switch in and out of managerial roles as new situations, issues, and problems arise (Darr and Longest, 2008). The healthcare field is fast paced and always changing so administrators need to be able to adjust their roles and functions multiple times through out the day to keep up (Darr and Longest, 2008). The ability to switch managerial roles is vital to the success of healthcare administrators.

In conclusion, healthcare administrators must possess a multitude of skills to be successful (Steff and Bontempo, 2008). The healthcare industry is complex and managers must have polished competencies (Stowe, Haefner, and Behling, 2010). Healthcare administrators should possess an inventory of knowledge, skills, and abilities that includes stamina, integrity, courage, self-security, accounting knowledge, finance knowledge, statistics knowledge, computer skills, decision-making abilities, planning abilities, team building skills, appearance, interpersonal/people skills, political skills, knowledge of industry and trends, public speaking skills, adaptability to new technology, commitment, willingness to be a lifetime learner, professional association participant, and ability to switch managerial roles.

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