Course Learning Outcomes for Unit IV

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Discuss the various sources of power within health care organizations.
2. Distinguish amongst the various types of conflict that exist in health care organizations.
3. Interpret how power is used in health care organizations.
4. Discuss the characteristics of complex health care systems.
5. Identify the various measures that can combat power abuse.

Unit Lesson

What is Power?

Power is the ability to make someone do what you want them to do. To put this in perspective, we can think about having control over someone. When we control groups or individuals, we get them to act or behave or to do what we want them to do. As mentioned in previous lectures, all organizations exist for a purpose, thus organizations must meet their strategic vision and goals in order to achieve its purpose. Therefore, it is important to motivate groups or individuals toward the common goals of a department or organization. In order to do this, administrators need to possess the appropriate level of power or authority and know how and when to exercise their power and authority. Power involves the influence and dependence of individuals and groups (Burns, Bradley, and Weiner, 2012). There are times when the misuse of power or political will can lead to organizational conflict. Administrators must be skilled in managing power, politics, and conflict. This lecture will address the sources of power, power and politics within an organization, and the abuse of power within organizations. This lecture will conclude with a commentary on the complex health care system.

Organizational Power

Organizational power includes structural power, structurally derived power, cultural power, and knowledge power. Each of these sources of power has their own ability to sway individuals and groups, as well as impact the progress departmental or organizational goals.

1. Structural Power: This source of power exists within organizations in the way of formal policies and procedures that the organization supports.
2. Structurally Derived Power: This source of power exists when there are individuals or groups that are dependent upon the output or support of other departments.
3. Cultural Power: Cultural power is derived from the norms and values that exist within the organization.
4. **Knowledge Based Power**: This source of power is derived from the amount of knowledge a group or individual possesses and how that knowledge is wielded to impact decisions.

In most cases, it is the cooperation amongst of each of these sources of power that brings about change and exhibit power within an organization. Health care organizations are interconnected organizations in which each of these sources of power exists within health care organizations.

**Power and Organizational Politics in Health care**

Health care organizations are very complex and very political because of the various groups that exist, as well as the interest of each of these groups. For example, though physicians and nurse’s work together to provide what is best for each patient, each group may have varying ideas on how best to achieve this objective. When varying ideology exists there is a greater chance that each group will seek to flex its political muscle to ensure that their idea is implemented. Managers and administrators need to be skilled in pulling out the positive side of each argument and exhibiting the commonalities of each side and providing suggestions and directives on how each side can work together to ensure that objectives are met. Sometimes there will not be a win-win situation and this may cause one side or group of employees to become frustrated and disgruntled. Administrators will need to provide rationale over why one decision was made or one idea liked over the others that were offered. Additionally, there may be times when decisions made will cause conflict amongst various individuals and groups within the organization. Administrators must be skilled at approaching, dealing with, and resolving conflict. Change has the ability to shift power. Organizational change such as staffing changes or the implementation of new systems or changes made in regulations or requirements can shift power from one individual or group to another individual or group. For example, physicians currently have knowledge power over many other professionals in the health care field; however, as more states accept that nurse practitioners can diagnose and treat patients and fulfill other duties that are completed by physicians, the power that physicians possess will diminish due to changes in the law.

**The Abuse of Power in Health care Organizations**

To witness the abuse of power and trust in organizations, all we need to do is tune into the nightly news. In the recent decade there have been many individuals and organizations that have abused their power. Health care organizations and the administrators and managers that run these organizations must be careful not to abuse power. The abuse of power can come in many forms. For example, the hospital CEO that misappropriates funds and the nurse that takes patient medication are abusing their power. Usually, the abuse of power benefits the abuser. For example, the CEO that misappropriates funds may have been using those funds for personal gain and not for the best interest of the organization. The misuse of power can cause conflict amongst employees and management, as well as external stakeholders. The misuse of power can also cause employees to lose trust in management and in the organization, which may lead to low morale and employee turnover. External stakeholders may also lose trust in the organization and decide to seek services or conduct business elsewhere. Transparency and clear communication is one way to combat the abuse of power. Additional steps to help combat abuse of power include: creating a strong code of ethics, using a board of directors to advisory groups as counterbalances to managerial authority, designing appropriate appraisal systems, and emphasizing personal integrity (Burns, Bradley, & Weiner, 2012).
The Complexities of the U. S. Health Care System

There are many internal, external, and structural issues that contribute to the complexities of the U. S. health care system. The characteristics of a complex system are interconnectedness, nonlinearity, and dynamism. The health care system possesses all three of these characteristics. A few additional characteristics exclusive to the U. S. health care system include: the lack of a central governing agency to assist with integration and coordination of information, high costs and unequal access exist, quality issues are a problem abound, and the system is technology driven. Additionally, the system involves both private and public providers and organizations and consists of multiple stakeholders. Some of the stakeholders in the health care system include: patients, physicians, suppliers, hospitals, insurance companies, regulators, and enablers. Each of these stakeholders have varying independent interest, but are connected in many ways, and because of the many players and varying interests that exist, there has to be a careful balance of power.

The health care system is in a constant state of flux. There are always new mandates, medical and technological advancements, and other changes that are happening in health care. In order for organizations to remain compliant and competitive, administrators and employees need to embrace the notion that change is ever-present. Additionally, it is up to administrators and managers to foster a climate of organizational learning that support adaptive and generative learning and in which change is accepted and innovation can thrive. Organizational learning is influenced by the organizations structural power, culture, policies, and leadership. Of equal importance to influencing organizational learning is learning from the mistakes that may be made along the way. Implementing projects and meeting organizational goals and objectives require careful planning, benchmarking, and collaboration amongst various stakeholders. Due to the complex nature of the external environment in which organizations must operate in order to survive, managers must actively decide who has responsibility for making which decisions, and they are responsible for who will have power in the organization and for what purposes. Administrators need to sufficiently allocate resources and time to ensure that a project is fully implemented and supported in the workplace. Learning from mistakes that may happen during this process will help the organization avoid the same pitfalls and bottleneck when implementing future projects.

References


Suggested Reading

Click here to access a PDF of the following article:

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Learning Activities (Non-Graded)

Reflection Paper

For this activity, you are asked to reflect on the concepts covered in the reading assignment and the written lecture and write about them. What did you understand completely? What did not quite make sense? The purpose of this activity is to provide you with the opportunity to reflect on the material you finished reading and to expand upon those thoughts. If you are unclear about a concept, this will give you a chance to write those questions down and email them to your professor for feedback. Can you apply the concepts you learned in this unit toward your career? How?

This is not a summary, but is instead a chance for you to express your thoughts about the material learned in this unit by writing about it.

The reflection paper should meet the following requirements:

- At least one page;
- Contain your thoughts about the material and its value to you personally;
- Contain any questions you may have concerning the material.

Format your writing using APA style. This activity was designed to allow you an opportunity to put your thoughts down on paper so you can determine what concepts still may be foreign to you and give you a chance to ask your professor any questions you may have. This is a non-graded Learning Activity, so you do not have to submit it. If you experience difficulty in mastering any of the concepts, contact your instructor for additional information and guidance.

Non-graded Learning Activities are provided to aid students in their course of study. You do not have to submit them. If you have questions contact your instructor for further guidance and information.