

National Report - Slovenia

Case study 3

About the organization

The Retirement Home in this case study is a well-regarded institution dedicated to providing care and support for elderly individuals over the age of 65. The facility offers a range of services designed to meet the diverse needs of its residents, ensuring they receive comprehensive care in a supportive environment.

The primary services provided by the retirement home include residential care, nursing care, and various social and recreational activities. Residents are encouraged to participate in these activities to maintain their physical and mental well-being. The home also offers home care services and social services to support elderly individuals who prefer to stay in their own homes but require some assistance with daily activities. The retirement home is part of the public sector, which means it must adhere to standards set by legislation. Additionally, the employees are public servants. Funding for its operations comes from both the state and the residents themselves.

The retirement home is committed to creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere for its residents. This is achieved through the dedication of its staff, who are always ready to engage in conversations and provide support. The staff's approach is guided by the core values of responsibility, knowledge and competence, empathy, reliability, dedication, trust, and social responsibility. These values are reflected in their daily interactions with residents and their families.

The facility employs a significant number of staff members, including healthcare professionals, caregivers, administrative personnel, and support staff. The exact number of employees can vary, but the team is structured to ensure that all aspects of resident care and facility operations are managed efficiently. The staff is well-trained and participates in ongoing professional development to stay updated on best practices in elderly care.

The retirement home places a strong emphasis on continuous improvement and innovation in its services. This includes regular assessments of resident needs and feedback to enhance the quality of care provided. The home also collaborates with various organizations and participates in community projects to promote social engagement and support for the elderly. Overall, the retirement home provides high-quality care and support for its residents. The facility's comprehensive services, compassionate staff, and commitment to continuous improvement make it a leading institution in elderly care in Slovenia.

Two interviews were conducted at the retirement home. The first was with the director of the organization, who is responsible for overall operations, and the second was with an employee who represents the staff on the institution's council, the highest decision-making body. Unfortunately, a third interview with the union representative could not be conducted due to her being on long-term sick leave. Nevertheless, both interviews were very thorough and provided insight into the institution's operations from the perspective of direct worker participation.

Interviewees

The worker representative is a university-educated social worker who has been employed at the retirement home for seven years. Recently, she became a member of the institution's council, stepping in as a substitute when a colleague left. In her role, she also serves as the secretary for the council meetings. Although she is not a member of the union, she actively participates in discussions and decision-making processes. Her influence is most notable during voting and discussions, where she can present various perspectives on issues. The council, which includes two worker representatives among its eight members, values professional arguments and is open to diverse viewpoints. The council members, being experts themselves, make decisions collectively and have not overridden the worker representatives' opinions. This collaborative approach is attributed to the leadership's openness and the good relationships fostered by the director.

As a social worker, she is a key point of contact for many people who are unsure where to turn. While workers typically go through their supervisors, they can approach her directly if needed, and she would raise their concerns at the council meetings. Operational issues are usually resolved within the institution, but any significant initiatives would be brought to the council. The main concerns revolve around salaries and staffing levels, which are frequently discussed and explained as being dependent on state funding.

The director began his five-year term after serving as the assistant director for a year and a half. With seven years of experience in the organization, he has witnessed numerous changes, including societal shifts, the COVID-19 pandemic, and various systemic, organizational, staffing, and legislative changes. His extensive experience equips him to manage the current demands of the institution effectively.

Labor relations

The worker representative observed significant changes in the values and attitudes of the workforce. She noted that the current generation places different values on work and hierarchy compared to the past. Previously, employees were grateful simply to have a job, but now, with a shortage of staff, workers are more likely to leverage their position to negotiate better terms for themselves. This shift has led to more direct, sometimes aggressive communication, with employees demanding their rights or threatening to leave or take sick leave if their demands are not met. This trend of absenteeism has become a notable issue, particularly in the public sector.

The director, who began his five-year term after serving as the assistant director for a year and a half, emphasized the importance of leadership experience in navigating the current challenges. He highlighted the institution's strong team of leaders and professional staff, who are capable of addressing the various issues they face. The director's philosophy is to view problems as challenges to be overcome, and he aims to establish the retirement home as a reference point for other institutions. The home is set to participate in an international conference in Warsaw next year to present the implementation of a model in the public sector, showcasing their strengths in quality and employee-friendly practices.

The director acknowledged the systemic issues, such as insufficient capacity and financial constraints, which are exacerbated by the upcoming implementation of long-term care requirements. However, he believes the institution has an advantage as they are already practicing many of these requirements.

Both the worker representative and the director discussed the generational shift within the workforce.

The director noted that the incoming generation has a different perception and way of working compared to their predecessors. Bridging the gap between younger and older employees, who may lack professional experience, is a significant challenge. The director emphasized the importance of transferring knowledge from retiring employees to the younger generation and ensuring that all processes are conducted professionally and legally. He also highlighted the need for continuous training and development to keep up with the evolving demands of the job.

The director stressed the importance of responsibility at all levels, from the director to department heads, in managing the workforce effectively. He pointed out that professional mistakes in their field can have severe consequences, making it crucial to maintain high standards and make informed decisions. The institution is currently in crisis management mode, dealing with daily challenges and making critical decisions to avoid mistakes, such as closing capacities due to staff shortages.

Overall, the interviews revealed a complex and dynamic environment at the retirement home, with both the worker representative and the director providing valuable insights into the challenges and strategies for managing the institution effectively.

Direct employee participation and the interplay

The worker representative highlighted that the fear of authority, which was more prevalent in the past, has diminished. Employees now feel more confident in expressing their opinions and making requests. This shift is seen as positive, as it indicates that employees feel they can approach management without hesitation. The institution promotes accessibility and encourages open communication, which is facilitated through various initiatives such as health promotion activities, educational opportunities, and team-building events organized by the director. These activities help create a relaxed atmosphere where employees feel valued and heard.

The worker representative noted that while she cannot comment extensively on the role of immediate supervisors, she is aware that employees do approach their supervisors with concerns. The leadership style at the institution is informal, and there are semi-formalized complaint procedures. However, the ability for employees to voice their concerns informally helps reduce their stress and makes them feel heard and valued. This sense of satisfaction is crucial, as it ensures that employees do not feel like just another number but rather as important members of the team.

From an economic and business perspective, the worker representative mentioned that employee satisfaction has tangible benefits. When employees are happy, it reflects externally, attracting new staff through word-of-mouth recommendations. This informal recruitment process has proven effective, as satisfied employees often encourage others to apply for open positions.

Regarding the union, the worker representative described its role as somewhat “connecting”, with the union representative actively participating in meetings related to employee issues. Although the union representative's activity level varies, she is seen as a crucial link between the employees and management, ensuring that employees' rights are upheld.

The director emphasized the importance of fostering a culture of direct participation and openness. He encourages employees at all levels to voice their concerns and suggest solutions. This approach is based on the belief that the best solutions often come from those directly involved in the work, including cleaning staff who might have practical insights into operational efficiencies. The director

aims to create an environment where employees do not work in fear but feel comfortable admitting mistakes and discussing problems openly.

The director also highlighted the formal and informal mechanisms in place to support direct participation. Formally, the institution has a quality management system, regular team meetings, and operational meetings every two weeks to discuss observations and agree on actions. Informally, the director fosters a relaxed atmosphere by engaging in casual conversations with staff over coffee, promoting a positive work environment.

The director stressed the importance of empowering department heads to provide direct feedback and resolve issues at their level. This empowerment is crucial for the smooth functioning of the institution, as it ensures that problems are addressed promptly and effectively. The director also pointed out that professional expertise should guide professional decisions, while management decisions should be handled by those with the appropriate managerial skills.

The union plays a significant role in the institution, with an experienced union president who has been active for 30 years. The union ensures that employees' rights are protected according to the law and provides a channel for employees to raise concerns and seek information.

In terms of direct participation, the director mentioned several initiatives, such as attending nursing reports to provide direct answers to staff questions and conducting satisfaction surveys to gather employee feedback. The institution also uses suggestion boxes for anonymous feedback and conducts organizational diagnostics to identify informal leaders and address any negative influences within the team.

Overall, the interviews revealed a strong commitment to direct employee participation at the retirement home, with both the worker representative and the director emphasizing the importance of open communication, employee empowerment, and continuous improvement.

Future development

The worker representative expressed satisfaction with the current state of communication, noting that employees can easily reach their superiors, usually on the same day or within a couple of days. However, she believes there is always room for improvement, particularly in making communication even more effective and fostering a stronger sense of community. She suggested organizing more activities like picnics and sports events to enhance team bonding. While participation in such activities varies, she noted that fostering a sense of social belonging is crucial, especially as the sense of gratitude for having a job has diminished over time. The younger generation tends to view these events as obligations rather than opportunities for building relationships, which reflects a shift in values and internal motivation.

Looking ahead, the worker representative anticipates that the upcoming generations will be more vocal about their opinions. It will be essential to give them a voice and pay close attention to their relationships, particularly in the context of working with the elderly. She observed that younger employees often have a different attitude towards older residents compared to their older colleagues. The role of the union will also be significant, depending on the motivation and goals of its representatives. An active and communicative union representative can ensure that the union's role remains relevant and effective.

The director emphasized the need for a new way of thinking and operating, acknowledging the generational changes that have taken place. He believes that the future will require more collaborative decision-making, moving away from a "one-man band" approach. Employees will be able to contribute significantly if given the opportunity. Listening to employees and extracting the best ideas from them will continue to be important.

The director also highlighted the importance of creating an environment where employees feel comfortable sharing their ideas and concerns. Encouraging open communication and fostering a positive work atmosphere are key priorities. The director aims to maintain a relaxed and supportive environment, where employees are not afraid to admit mistakes and discuss problems openly.

In terms of future development, the director plans to continue promoting health and wellness activities, such as hiking trips, to build camaraderie among employees from different departments. He also stressed the importance of clear communication about expectations and responsibilities. The director recognizes that effective leadership and management skills are crucial, especially in crisis management situations. He believes that a collaborative approach, where employees at all levels are empowered to contribute, will be essential for the institution's success.

Overall, the interviews revealed a shared vision for the future development of the retirement home, with a focus on improving communication, fostering employee engagement, and adapting to generational changes. Both the worker representative and the director emphasized the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive environment where employees feel valued and heard.

Summary

The Retirement Home in this case study is a well-regarded institution dedicated to providing comprehensive care and support for elderly individuals over the age of 65. It offers a range of services, including residential care, nursing care, and various social and recreational activities. Additionally, the home provides home care services for those who prefer to stay in their own homes but need assistance with daily activities. As part of the public sector, the retirement home adheres to legislative standards, and its employees are public servants. Funding comes from both the state and the residents.

The facility emphasizes creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere, guided by core values such as responsibility, empathy, and social responsibility. The staff, including healthcare professionals, caregivers, administrative personnel, and support staff, are well-trained and participate in ongoing professional development. The home is committed to continuous improvement and innovation, regularly assessing resident needs and collaborating with various organizations to enhance the quality of care.

Two interviews were conducted: one with the director and one with a worker representative. The director oversees overall operations, while the worker representative, a social worker with seven years of experience, serves on the institution's council and acts as the secretary for council meetings.

The worker representative noted significant changes in workforce values and attitudes, with the current generation being more assertive in negotiating terms and less deferential to authority. This shift has led to more direct and sometimes aggressive communication. The representative also highlighted the absence of a specific collective agreement for the institution, relying instead on general agreements for the public sector and healthcare.

The director emphasized the importance of leadership experience and a strong team in navigating challenges. He aims to position the retirement home as a reference point for other institutions and highlighted the need for continuous training and development to bridge the generational gap within the workforce.

Both the worker representative and the director stressed the importance of open communication and employee empowerment. The institution promotes accessibility and encourages employees to voice their concerns and suggest solutions. Formal mechanisms, such as a quality management system and regular meetings, support this culture of participation. Informally, the director fosters a relaxed atmosphere through casual interactions and team-building activities.

The union plays a significant role, with an experienced president ensuring that employees' rights are protected. The director also mentioned initiatives like satisfaction surveys and suggestion boxes to gather employee feedback and identify areas for improvement.

Looking ahead, the worker representative anticipates that younger generations will be more vocal about their opinions, necessitating a focus on communication and relationship-building. The director emphasized the need for collaborative decision-making and creating an environment where employees feel comfortable sharing their ideas. He plans to continue promoting health and wellness activities and clear communication about expectations and responsibilities.

Overall, the interviews revealed a shared vision for the future development of the retirement home, with a focus on improving communication, fostering employee engagement, and adapting to generational changes. Both the worker representative and the director emphasized the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive environment where employees feel valued and heard.

COMPANY CHARACTERISTICS	A well-regarded retirement home providing care and support for elderly individuals over the age of 65. Part of the public sector, adhering to legislative standards, with employees as public servants. Funding comes from both the state and residents.
	Residential care, nursing care, social and recreational activities, home care services, and social services.
INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS	High level of unionization.
	Trade union and workers representatives in the supervisory board
	Collective agreement at the sectoral level.
DIRECT WORKER PARTICIPATION	Informal leadership style with moderate formalized complaint procedures. Employees feel confident in expressing opinions and making requests.
	Union representative actively participates in meetings related to employee issues, ensuring employees' rights are upheld.
THE ROLE OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS IN DIRECT WORKER PARTICIPATION	Collaboration: Strong team of leaders and professional staff capable of addressing various issues. Emphasis on continuous training and development.

	<p>Support: Union plays a significant role in protecting employees' rights and providing a channel for raising concerns.</p> <p>Engagement Initiatives: Health promotion activities, educational opportunities, and team-building events to create a relaxed atmosphere.</p> <p>Challenges: Generational differences in attitudes towards work and participation in activities.</p>
DIFFICULTIES	<p>Absenteeism: Notable issue.</p> <p>Staff Shortages: Ongoing challenge, requiring crisis management and critical decision-making.</p>
IMPACTS	<p>On Workers: Conditions and well-being affected by absenteeism and generational differences in attitudes towards work.</p> <p>On the Organization: Performance impacted by staff shortages and the need for continuous training and development.</p> <p>On Innovation: Efforts to engage employees and encourage innovation are ongoing, with a focus on open communication and employee empowerment.</p>
FUTURE PROSPECTS	<p>Sustainability: Focus on improving communication, fostering employee engagement, and adapting to generational changes.</p> <p>Emphasis on collaborative decision-making and creating a supportive environment.</p>