Beyond performance indicators: A case study in aged care

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Stack, S.

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Abstract

Benchmarking both absenteeism and labor turnover rates focuses on centrally driven performance measures emerging in aged care organizations in the health sector. This case study suggests that there is a need for performance indicators to take broader account of the essential characteristics of care work and the impact on employees of the changing focus of aged care work. Study participants express concerns about their working conditions and the impact that these have on their well being. They are also concerned about the interests of another group, the residents in aged care facilities, and the quality of care for those residents. The paper identifies some recent trends in reporting human resource management outcomes that are consistent with the expectations of New Public Management (NPM). It then outlines the case study approach, briefly describing the aged care organization involved and some of the study outcomes. Absentee rates and factors accounting for it are highlighted and the paper discusses the unique features of care work and the different ways it is made more difficult by NPM priorities. These priorities not only appear to affect negatively the working life of aged care workers but also point to underlying problems that question the efficacy of NPM when applied to the essential relational elements of care work. While acknowledging some personal factors accounting for exhaustion and illness among respondents, the paper reveals that the requirement on them to report continuously and document activities effectively increases the administrative component of their work. This reduces the time available for hands-on care. In the absence of additional resources and organizational support, these factors inhibit key aspects of effective caring, increase the likelihood of burnout and absenteeism, and ultimately affect labor turnover.