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Workplace learning:

Guidance for Managers



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FOREWORD

For anyone who works in care it can be difficult to pause for a moment and look up. It is all too easy to drown in the daily tasks and demands. But that is exactly why it is worth taking the time to think about developing staff skills over the longer term.

Raising the competence of staff helps them meet the needs of the people they care for and support in a more professional way. It increases self-esteem and job satisfaction. It strengthens the ability of staff to find solutions to difficult situations. It reduces stress.

Through the ArbetSam project, we have gained knowledge and experience of what it takes to build long-term collective and individual learning. It's about investing in learning for those most in need. About getting the whole staff group involved in the learning process – and about creating time and space for joint reflection.

Last but not least, it is about working with language, to help ensure that staff have the skills to communicate effectively with colleagues, care recipients and relatives – an increasingly important aspect of care work.

Background

This is a guide for anyone who works as a manager in elderly care or care for people with a disability and wants to improve the occupational and communications skills of their staff. It was written by a team that included ArbetSam's information officer, one of its project leaders and four managers from participating care providers.

Through the ArbetSam project, some 670 care workers from seven local authority and five private care providers in the Stockholm region participated in a health and social care learning programme. The majority of these care workers were born abroad and a large portion also received Swedish language instruction (alongside their care learning). Care teachers and Swedish language teachers worked in teams to deliver the learning, in most cases actually in the workplace. The project offered each participant a learning programme that included half a day a week of classroom learning, usually for between two and three semesters (roughly nine to 12 months altogether).¹

In parallel with this learning for staff, the project also trained designated care staff to become workplace language advocates and reflective discussion leaders. Language advocates help staff with study assignments, keeping records and writing reports, and communicating with care recipients and relatives. Language advocates also review workplace documentation to make it more accessible and work with the care manager to help structure meetings in a way that encourages all staff to participate. The project also trained reflective discussion leaders to hold reflective discussions in the workplace with their colleagues. In a reflective discussion the group consider dilemmas arising from everyday situations at work. The group may also reflect on a predetermined topic, such as a national initiative on care values. These discussions develop the service and strengthen professional identity in staff.

Over recent years there have been a number of competence development projects for the care workforce in the Stockholm region. One of the lessons that we have learned from these earlier projects is that the learner has to apply their knowledge when he or she gets back to his workplace. Knowledge gained from learning programmes is much more likely to take root in workplaces that embrace new knowledge and allow staff to try out new things. ArbetSam's ambition was to involve the entire workplace in learning, not just the manager, key staff (i.e. those responsible for specific functions) and qualified staff.

Starting points for ArbetSam

- The entire workplace should be involved in learning
- Learning should develop the service
- The learning programme should be based on workplace needs and also on participants' wants and needs, language level and educational background

Language development is a shared responsibility – those who speak Swedish and those who are still learning it must work together to create a workplace that promotes language development.

¹Translator's note: The Swedish academic year is divided in two semesters, an autumn semester of 17 or 18 weeks and a spring semester of 22 or 23 weeks.

THE MANAGER'S COMMITMENT IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS

ArbetSam has helped several workplaces themselves into learning organizations. And more are on the way. These workplaces have created space for the sharing of experience, reflection and language development. They have developed language advocates, reflective discussion leaders, champions for relatives and documentation supporters², all key staff for workplace learning. These key staff have both the organisational support and the individual ability to carry out their roles.

These successful workplaces have also managed to actively involve staff, including through the use of various forms of dialogue in workplace meetings and different kinds of work groups. There is also an awareness of the importance of communication for service to provide quality care.

Another distinguishing feature is the consistent use of qualified staff with expertise – such as nurses, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and dieticians – to train their own care staff. They work in teams with care recipient at the centre.

The difference between these workplaces that have succeeded in building a culture of sustainable workplace learning and other workplaces where ArbetSam's impact has been more limited is often an involved and active manager.

Participation and empowerment

Empowerment has become a widespread concept in many different types of organisation.

Empowerment gives the employee a direct responsibility for organisational performance and development.

The step from being just an employee who does only what they are told to being a colleague willing to take real responsibility is often large. But it can be made easier if the workplace provides the right conditions. Employees need a chance to articulate their experiences and reflect on them. They need to be able to discuss their experiences and knowledge, see patterns and draw conclusions with their colleagues. One of the manager's most important tasks in a

learning organization is to create time and space for learning and reflection.

Compliance and Development

Before we go into what is required of you as a manager to build a learning and language development work, we will discuss a bit about some perspectives and theories of workplace learning.

In organisational development a distinction is often made between compliance-oriented and development-oriented learning. Compliance learning is learning that maintains or enhances a worker's competence in a range of tasks.

In development-oriented learning care staff critically evaluate different working methods and approaches. Staff question and analyse both their own work patterns and organisational working practices.

This may be a matter of how care work is planned for a day or how incidents at work are managed. At a time when care is becoming more personalised, it is perhaps more important than ever to question practices and approaches and be able to see situations from different perspectives.

For an enterprise to maintain staff competences while also developing itself as an organisation, both types of learning are needed.

Different types of learning reinforce each other

Learning specialists differentiate between three different types of learning: formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Formal learning refers to knowledge gained through education. This learning is often based on theory, and learners receive proof of their learning in the form of academic credits or certificates.

Non-formal learning refers to organised learning at work, for example, coaching, workplace meetings, reflective discussion groups, networking events or seminars.





Informal learning refers to the learning that arises from interactions between staff and care recipients, relatives or colleagues. This is about the knowledge that an employee learns through daily care work. In many instances, this is type of tacit, experiential knowledge. A care assistant or support worker with extensive experience often makes the right choices and decisions in their interactions with care recipients. At the same time, they may struggle to put their expertise into words.

In workplace learning, formal, non-formal and informal learning are not separate. Rather, they interact and reinforce each other. In a workplace learning programme the teacher, for example, will often draw on participants' experiences at work, on workplace tasks and the employer-organisation's documentation. Together with the participants, the teacher will connect practical workplace examples to the theoretical reasoning and underpinning knowledge.

Another example of how informal learning and formal learning can integrate is the various forms of structured reflection. This allows individuals to share knowledge and practice and values with others in their team. Specific instances of practice can be put into a broader theoretical context that gives them coherence and meaning, leading in turn to deeper insight and more options for action.

Towards a learning workplace

We will now go through the characteristics of a workplace that actively promotes learning and language development and identify what is required of you as a manager to create a sustainable culture of learning in the service. Be prepared for a lengthy process focused on motivating your staff. You will need good two-way communication with your colleagues, with teachers, with staff participating in the learning programme, with reflective discussion leaders, language advocates and other key staff. You will also need to involve nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and other staff with specialist expertise in your organisation in the learning. Be aware that you will have to be persistent!

We refer below to two resources:

- The learning workplace – a guide for teachers
- Adapted CEFR (the full title of this publication is Adaptation of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) for work in elderly care and care for people with disabilities)

Both these resources are available from the ArbetSam website.³

²Translator's note: Documentation supporters are staff who take on an additional coach-mentoring role to help other staff with record-keeping and written reporting.

³See <http://www.lidingo.se/toppmeny/omsorgstod/projektarbetsam/arbetsaminenglish.4.1df940d7136538bffd21.html>



Starting points for the learning programme

Managers are often happy simply to choose from a fixed menu of courses offered by the learning provider. However, when a workplace wants a learning programme that will support service development, the manager should consider a different approach. The question then becomes: What competences do we need to achieve our operational goals?

The manager can draw from user surveys, conversations with family members, the views of employees and consultation with various key staff. Other starting points are the priorities of elected officials and directors of social services, as well as national guidelines and regulations. Many local authorities have focus areas for care providers to work on during the year, such as collaborative working with relatives, diet or dementia.

After the manager is clear about service objective priorities and the existing competencies of staff, they are in a position to identify what additional competencies they will need to develop.

Regarding the formal learning programme, you should create a local training plan together the teachers before the course starts. This plan should be based partly on workplace competence needs, and partly on national health and social care

qualifications – and, when necessary, Swedish language qualifications (such as Sfi⁴).

For instruction to be effective, it also needs to take participants' vocational and language competence into account and also participants' learning goals. The learning workplace – a guide for teachers offers templates for local learning programme plans and also for individual learning plans.

To help assess participants' Swedish language ability, there is the Adapted CEFR on ArbetSam's website. This resource is based on the Council of Europe's self-assessment tool for language learners, adapted for care work. This resource is designed primarily for Swedish language teachers and for care teachers, but you can also use it to support discussions about language skills at staff appraisal.

Motivate and engage

It is extremely important that you get involved in the participants' learning. To this end, ArbetSam developed a tool called the three-way discussion between teacher, participant and manager. Templates for the three-way discussion appear in *The learning workplace – a guide for teachers*.

The three-way discussion takes place before, during and at the end of a participant's learning programme. Even if you are clear about the need for your staff to

⁴Translator's note: Sfi (Swedish for immigrants) is the national Swedish language programme for migrants.

develop their skills, don't assume they see the same need.

New legislation, research evidence and practice development require every service provider to be continuously developing. At the same time, employees of long-standing may feel that they know everything there is to know about their work – better than you, in fact! As a manager, you need to give out a strong, consistent message to staff that continuous competence development and learning are crucial, while also supporting and encouraging them as individual learners.

You may well encounter employees with strong defence mechanisms against learning that you will need to penetrate.

Take content from the workplace

Let learning be based on current topics and study materials from the workplace, such as attitudes and behaviour, social documentation⁵, working with relatives or knowledge of dementia.

Do you have a particular issue – for example how to improve meal times, or the quality of the record-keeping and written reporting, or interactions with relatives? Make the issue part of the learning programme.

Work instructions, policies, procedures or meeting notes, for example, all make good learning materials. Depending on the participants' level, course material from the national health and social care programme, newspaper articles from care journals and even novels can be used.

Teachers in an integrated workplace learning programme will draw on participants' experience of a variety of actual care situations. This makes it easier for participants to get to grips with theory. It also increases the likelihood of participants applying their newly acquired knowledge at work.

Consider how you can use internal resources in different learning situations. A physical therapist, for example, can explain how assistive technology is used to support mobility. The municipality may have a care services advisor⁶ who can talk about family connections and if there is a Silvia Sister⁷, they can give input on dementia.

Many workplaces plan their staff meetings annually with different themes. Let the teachers relate the learning to these themes. Typical topics to appear on the agenda for staff meetings might

include discrimination, rehab processes and dealing with incidents.

It is not unusual for communication at a staff meeting to flow one way only, or for one or two employees to dominate the meeting. One way of supporting staff who lack the confidence or motivation to participate is to prepare one of the meeting issues in a learning session, and then, at actual the staff meeting, encourage participants to share what they have come up with.

Keep in touch

Managers are often overburdened with tasks and demands. When you realize, however, that competence development and workplace learning is not just another item on your to-do list, but actually a tool that can help you achieve your goals, you see it in a new light. Be clear, though – this does require continuous contact between manager, teacher and key staff in the workplace. One way to keep informed is a weekly update on the learning programme sent out by the teachers.

You should also be sure to meet regularly with the teachers to monitor progress against the learning programme plan and to exchange information. If the teaching is going on in the workplace there are also many opportunities for more informal contact with teachers. It is also important to meet regularly with the reflective discussion leaders and language advocates to monitor and facilitate their work.

Create a structure for learning

A basic tenet of workplace learning is that learning happens all time in the workplace. But learning can be given more or less favourable conditions. One of your most important tasks as a manager is to create a structure for learning.

For a workplace learning programme, you need to provide an appropriate learning space and staff cover so that participants in the programme can attend without feeling bad about overloading non-participating colleagues with extra work. You may have employees who need help with learning assignments. Who will support them? Some may have circumstances at home that do not allow them to do assignments at home. Will they be allowed to do their course assignments at work?

If you have documentation supporters or language

⁵Translator's note: The Swedish system of mandatory record-keeping in social care is referred to as 'social documentation'.

⁶Translator's note: The care services advisor gives information and support to care recipients and their families.

⁷Translator's note: Silvia Sisters is a CPD programme offering specialist training in dementia care to auxiliary nurses (part-time over two years).

advocates, they must be given time to support their colleagues. They have to have somewhere to sit and access to a computer. Are you going to have reflective discussion groups? The group will need space and time to hold its discussion, without feeling stressed or guilty.

As a manager, it is your job to make sure that there is space, staff cover, facilities and budget needed for workplace learning. You must ensure that the learning activities and meetings are scheduled. Talking about the importance of workplace learning and organisational development won't achieve anything if you don't make the necessary arrangements. Be prepared for change to take time. If you want to establish a culture of workplace learning you need to constantly keep the issue alive in the minds of staff and make the benefits clear to all.

Review meeting arrangements

Meetings can be a great forum for learning. But all too often meetings are dominated by a few strong voices. Not giving everyone the chance to speak restricts information and provides a narrower perspective on reality. It is often worthwhile reviewing arrangements for meetings.

One way to increase participation is by giving staff participating in the learning programme an agenda item to prepare in advance of the meeting and then having them report their conclusions at the meeting. There are also other meeting models to increase participation. For example: each person reflects on an issue and writes their thoughts on a post-it note. Subsequently, pairs discuss the issue and then go on to discuss in larger groups. There is also much to learn from the methodology of reflective discussions when it comes to getting more participation.

Provide time and space for reflection

Collectively and individually, care staff hold a considerable body of knowledge about the practical delivery of care. Often this remains an untapped resource. Reflective discussions offer one way to access this 'tacit knowledge'. With the help of a trained reflective discussion leader, a work group can

raise and discuss a range of issues and care situations. These discussions provide a break from work, they strengthen and help standardise the professional identity and expertise of staff and they support team working.

It is the task of the reflective discussion leader to make sure everyone contributes and then to summarise everyone's views and proposed solutions. By thinking together, staff gain access to a wider range of views and solutions to difficult issues. Many participants in reflective discussions report starting to see other participants' qualities in a different way. Also, the discussions usually have an uplifting effect on the group. Examples of different reflection methods are given in *The learning workplace – a guide for teachers*.

Stockholm Gerontology Research Center is one of several providers of reflection training.

Work with language

Care work is all about effective communication – both spoken and written.

Studying for a national qualification in health and social care requires Swedish language skills at a level corresponding to CEFR B1+ (i.e. a strong B1).⁸ That is why in many workplace learning programmes a Swedish language teacher works hand in hand with the care teacher. Stockholm Gerontology Research Center also trains language advocates. This training gives language advocates an understanding of second language acquisition, intercultural communication, and issues around reading and writing, enabling the language advocate to help participants on the learning programme with learning assignments and other colleagues with documentation (i.e. record-keeping and report writing).

They also make sure that meeting notes, instructions and other texts are written in language that is accessible to staff. Together with the manager, they look at how meetings are organised to make sure everyone understands what is going on and has opportunity to participate. One important bit of learning that language advocates can contribute is an understanding of how difficult it can be to learn a new language as an adult.

Make a point of developing the capability of your workplace to support language learning, both Swedish

⁸Translator's note: CEFR B1/B1+ corresponds to Sfi level D and SVA basic level.



Network meetings are an effective way to develop and maintain expertise on workplace learning. Colleagues from other workplaces have often found solutions to difficult issues.

for speakers of other languages and reading and writing skills (for native and non-native speakers alike). Developing a member of staff as a language advocate to support colleagues with spoken and written communication is often a very sound investment for the organisation.

Build networks

Any attempt to introduce change at work can meet resistance. A manager's suggestion that a member of staff might benefit from developing their competence and their language may be perceived as negative criticism. Some members of staff may consider

reflective discussions and language support a waste of valuable time. Others may feel that integrated workplace learning is not 'real learning' (which, they have been conditioned to believe, can only happen in an educational institution).

Networking managers, teachers, language advocates and reflective discussion leaders can be an effective way to keep commitment alive. Networking lets you draw inspiration from how others have solved problems and moved forward. You get tips on new approaches and methods. The networks are forums for discussion and reflection that provide support for on-going work.

Plan for competence development

When you plan competence development and learning initiatives, there are several factors to take into account. We have made a checklist that to support you, step by step, to plan, implement and evaluate learning in your workplace.

Learning may include formal training in areas such as national health and social care qualifications and Swedish as an additional language. But it can also be about building structures in the workplace to support sustainable learning. This involves, among

other things, introducing reflective discussions and learning-oriented staff meetings, presentations, language support and coaching. Remember that there are internal resources for learning as well as external ones.

Survey the wider landscape

Find out what the requirements are for the service from:

- Commissioners and regulatory agencies
- Elected officials
- Senior management

1

Gather some thoughts on development

For example, review complaints, ask for ideas and views on development from staff and note your own views.

2

List and prioritise

What do you need to develop the service? List and prioritize the areas that require development, based on the requirements that the service has to meet and your own views.

3

Review the resources available

Make a note of the workplace resources and expertise available for each type of development.

4

Survey individual learning needs

Consider whether individual staff will need specific support, such as language support. Will any other types of support be needed?

5

Compile learning needs

Make a summary of the service's learning needs, including individual needs.

6

What is the budget situation?

Calculate costs. What can the service afford in terms of, for example, staff cover? What other items related to the learning programme need to be budgeted for?

7

How should the learning programme be organised?

Should the learning programme be based on full days or half-days? Every week or once a month? In or outside the workplace?

8



