

Streamlining of selected office management procedures at the Regional Director of Health Services office Matale

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Abstract

Background Office management is defined as the application of principles and functions of management for getting office work through the office personnel (1). Business Process Management (BPM) is a new management concept that has widely been using for the office environment to increase the productivity. As per 13th amendment to the Sri Lankan constitution, Regional Director of Health Service (RDHS) office is responsible for the management of health care institutions of the district comes under the provincial council. Inefficiencies in RDHS office can directly be affected to the requirements of health care workers of the district and subsequently to the health care services.

Objective The aim of this study was to streamline the selected office management procedures at the RDHS office, Matale.

Methods An interventional was carried out. Finalization of annual salary increments and claims forms were selected as the most needed office procedures during the pre-interventional stage. Interventions were based on the basic principles of BPM including process identification, process analysis, process redesigning.

Results Average time durations to finalize the annual salary increments was reduced from 71 days to 48 days, statistically significant ($p=0.000$) and finalization of claim forms was reduced from 54 days to 16 days also statistically significant ($p=0.000$).

Conclusion & Recommendation Re-evaluation of the intervention after 6 months is recommended to determine the sustainability of the project.

Key words: office management, BPM

Introduction

Office management is associated with the application of principles and functions of management for getting office work done through the office personnel (1). Procedures are collections of activities that using together to produce outputs for customers (2, 3). Management of health care services has been decentralized according to the 13th amendment of the current constitution in 1987(4). Therefore, management of health

care institutions which comes under purview of provincial councils is a responsibility of the relevant RDHS office.

The Matale district is located in the Central Province of Sri Lanka. It comprises with 11 MOH areas and 39 health care institutions. Administration of all the health care institutions has been brought within the purview of the Regional Director of Health Services(5). Management Assistants and Development Officers are the main categories that have

mainly been involved in the office. However, offices in government sector of Sri Lanka including the health sector have also been subjected to many criticisms due to their inefficiency and this issue has frequently been addressed by governments in order to maximize the public sector efficiency (6,7,8). Inefficiencies of RDHS office directly affect the requirements of health care employees of the district. If their requirements are not fulfilled at acceptable time durations, they used to visit the RDHS office mainly on Wednesday, public day. Subsequently, it affects to functions of relevant health care institutions and had raised this issues in management meeting too. Therefore, a study on the office management procedures which includes the identification of the gaps in the current process and make an intervention would be helpful to overcome the inefficiency in office management. Providing of solutions to selected and prioritized problems yields more outcome than solving all problems and shortcomings (9).

Objective

To streamline the selected office management procedures at the office of the Regional Director of Health Services, Matale.

Methodology

The study was conducted at the Regional Director of Health Services Office, Matale. Management Assistants, Development Officers, who were involving with office management process of the RDHS office of Matale (n=37) were selected as the study population.

Study design

This project was an interventional research project. Both quantitative and qualitative techniques were used. It consisted of three components, namely Pre interventional assessment, Planning and implementation of interventions and post interventional assessment.

Pre interventional assessment

After reviewing the previous management meeting minutes with heads of the institutions and discussions with RDHS, Administrative Officer (AO) and the Accountant, following issues which are related to office management were selected.

management at the RDHS office.

1) Time duration to finalize the annual salary increments.

the immediate supervisor should recommend the increments according to performance of the employees (10). It is a responsibility of the RDHS office to proceed and finalize the approved salary increments within a reasonable time frame.

2) Time duration to finalize the monthly claims (travelling cost and composite allowances).

As per establishment code and general government circulars of 06/2006, 03/2016, government employees are eligible to claim the travelling cost and other related expenses that were generated during their duty related matters. Delay in the finalization of received claim forms is further delayed the payments.

A self-administered questionnaire in office management was used to assess the baseline knowledge and attitude on office management while time survey formats were used to calculate the time durations. Study instruments were pre tested at the RDHS office, Kandy.

Pre interventional data on knowledge and attitude was collected at the introductory session of the project. Finalized formats within the previous month from each category of annual salary increments (n= 160) and claim finalization (n=650) were selected to obtain the data. Finally, an average time for each procedure was calculated.

Formulation of Interventions.

Level of knowledge, attitude and time duration for identified practices that were revealed during the pre-assessment stage were used as the basis of the planning process. Qualitative data obtained from the discussions with RDHS, Accountant were also used.

Following an expert opinion from a panel including a Consultant in Business Management, principles of Business Process Management (BPM) were used as the basis for process modification.

Main steps of the BPM such as process identification, process mapping, Process analysis, Process redesigning were applied. Selection of most effective intervention which is known as redesign heuristics was carried out by the panel. Therefore, training sessions on effective office management, introduction of new Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs) with timelines, Implementation of process monitoring system based on information

technology and resource optimizations were done.

Post Interventional assessment

After three months period, post evaluation was conducted. New time durations for selected procedures were calculated by using time survey formats. Independent t test was used to test the statistical significances. Continuous monitoring and reviewing of progress were carried out by capturing of information throughout the project.

Results

Twenty-seven (72%) participants scored more than 50 in knowledge aspect. (Table 1)

Thirty-four (92%) participants scored more than 50 in attitude assessment. (Table 2)

Average time duration to finalize the annual salary increments was decreased from 71 days to 48 days. There is statistically significant association between pre and post interventional time durations ($p < 0.05$) (Table 3)

Average time duration to finalize claim forms was decreased from 54 days to 16 days. Further, there is statistically significant association between pre and post interventional time durations ($p < 0.05$). (Table 4)

Table 1; Distribution of study population according to the level of knowledge on office management.

Knowledge level.	Frequency	
	Number	Percentage (%)
Less than 50	10	27
50- 75	21	57
More than 75	6	16
Total	37	100

Table 2; Distribution of study population according to the levels of Attitude on office management.

Attitude level.	Frequency	
	Number	Percentage (%)
Less than 50	3	8
50-75	18	49
More than 75	16	43
Total	37	100

Table 3; Association between average pre and post interventional time durations to finalize the annual salary increments.

Interventional level	Average time duration (Days).
Pre interventional.	71
Post interventional.	48
p= 0.000 t= 8.48	

Table 4; Average time duration to finalize the claim forms according to interventional level.

Interventional level.	Average time duration (Days).
Pre interventional.	54
Post interventional.	16
p= 0.000 t= 6.96	

Discussion

Mixed type of research method which includes quantitative and qualitative research types was used for this study to explore the related factors on office management. It was emphasized that using of qualitative technique with quantitative methods enrich the evaluations (11). In order to avoid resistance or unpredictable failures, stakeholders from higher level such as RDHS to ground level were involved at relevant stages and it is

consisted with findings of Mayers et al (12). Seventy three (73%) and 92 % of MAs and DAs scored more than 50 marks for Knowledge and Attitude on office management respectively. Previously introduced quality and productivity practices could be a contributing factor for these findings.

Financial incentives for employees have highly been identified as an important external factor for workers motivations in the international and Sri Lankan context (13, 14). Gamini (15) found that 65% of Public Health Midwives (PHMs) in

the Rathnapura district were dissatisfied with their extra duty payments.

However, it included both amount and time duration of extra duty payments. For a comprehensive understanding, planning of intervention was based on the pre assessment data. Similarly, Curristine et al (16) described that proper planning with scientific data and involving of key stakeholders are essential to improve the public sector efficiency.

Process modification of the project were based on Business Process Management (BPM). As described in BPM literature, process mappings were carried out to selected procedures for process identification. According to Duma et al (17), Process identification is a set of activities aiming to systematically define the set of business processes and establish clear criteria for prioritizing them. For the process analysis, both qualitative and quantitative findings from pre interventional assessment was used. Further, many international studies identified that qualitative analysis should be carried out to prioritize the issues and elimination of waste while quantitative analysis suitable to measure the process performance (11).

Average time duration for annual salary increment finalization was reduced by 32% (from 71 days to 48 days) and claim forms finalization was reduced by 70% (from 54 days to 16 days). Similarly, Samuel et al (18) identified the BPM is a suitable tool to reduce the processing time in businesses.

Conclusion

This institution based intervention was significantly reduced the average time durations for finalization of annual salary increments and claim forms in the RDHS office Matale. Finally, re-evaluation of the intervention recommended after 6 months to determine the sustainability.

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