

Estimate of the Situation

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Top Improvement Opportunities, Part 2

The factors that limit human performance in the clinical setting can be found in four major categories: systems and work process factors; resource factors; organization factors; and institutional culture factors.

In our last issue, we discussed a commonly encountered performance limiting factor from the systems and work process factor category. In this issue, we'll talk about performance limiting resource factors.

Resources include such things as equipment, supplies, physical plant and human resources. We recommend that these subcategories be inventoried when looking for improvement opportunities.

- Obsolete or malfunctioning **equipment** can cause “rework” and lost staff time while adversely affecting quality, patient and physician satisfaction, employee relations and community image. Examples of performance limiting factors of this type include everything from computer data entry screen design to slow elevators.
- Inferior quality **supplies** or inadequate quantities of supplies will increase labor costs, particularly if items have to be replaced frequently from remote storage locations or routinely don't work as required.
- The importance of **physical plant** layout and construction on performance cannot be overstated. The ability to efficiently structure work flow is limited by physical plant design and construction. Long hallways, nursing station location, and the availability (or lack of) of adequate equipment and supply storage sites make varying demands on staff time. Floor coverings or floor surfaces in work areas can contribute to employee fatigue and even be a cause of work-related injuries.
- The hospital's employees (**human resources**) are undoubtedly its most important “resource”. When all other resource factors are the best possible, it is the motivation, competency and skill set mastery of the work force that will ultimately define the upper limits of attainable performance. Employee turnover is among the greatest barriers to optimum performance. In highly technical departments it can take as long as two years for even well-trained and motivated employees to reach optimum performance levels.

The hospital's managers deserve special mention. They are the key to optimum workforce performance because it is they who set the tone, communicate expectations, and plan, organize, direct and control all other resources that the hospital has deployed to do the department's work. Intelligent investment in their training and development will produce the best possible return.

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Next Issue: Organization Factors.



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