



Pathfinders are top performers in the Danish National Health Service

In January 2004, Birgitte Østergaard and Karsten Bech – Pathfinders and later also Natural Leaders – faced an exciting and extremely demanding challenge. Birgitte and Karsten work in the top management of gastrointestinal surgery in Køge and Roskilde and had said yes to head up a long-term and extensive process of change. This process had been decided by politicians who had talked for years about the measures without anything happening and would involve up to 200 people who were not very interested in change. Read their success story here.

In 2003, Køge and Roskilde Hospitals had been amalgamated under one joint and reduced hospital management. Now the two surgical departments at the two hospitals were also to be amalgamated under one management consisting of Birgitte Østergaard, head nurse, Karsten Bech, managing consultant and the management team they intended to set up.

The challenge

“At that time, the two departments had been offering the same treatments for many years. But both had too few patients, too little was getting done and the overall impression was that both had become mediocre,” explains Karsten Bech and continues:

“The two departments were separated geographically. They represented two quite different management styles and cultures in which staff had worked for many years – some up to 40 years. The workplace and its staff were almost regarded as a family. There was a cosy atmosphere and no one was busy. No one seemed eager to change conditions, improve results or enhance the level of professionalism. As well as the competition between them, a wide range of myths and bad stories had arisen over time between the two departments. This was why no one could agree on how to allocate the functions between the departments so that one hospital handled one area and the other hospital another.”

The objectives

Birgitte Østergaard explains: “With the new amalgamation not only the specialist areas and the treatment options had to be allocated in a more practical way – geography, the physical framework and capacity in general had to be thought through too. The two cultures also had to be combined. All this with the purpose of creating a far more efficient, proactive and highly professional workplace delivering much better results – first and foremost as regards the patients – their operations, treatment and recovery as well as prognoses for the future. But behind all this lay also the necessity of establishing a higher professional level in all staff groups, streamlining the ‘production apparatus’ and the internal processes and making the new surgical department a profitable business seen from a socio-economic perspective.”



Karsten Bech is the managing consultant of gastrointestinal surgery in Køge and Roskilde. Karsten became a Pathfinder in 2005 and a Natural Leader in 2007

Birgitte Østergaard is the head nurse of gastrointestinal surgery in Køge and Roskilde. Birgitte became a Pathfinder in 2005 and a Natural Leader in 2007



Pathfinder philosophy

As Pathfinders, Birgitte and Karsten had no doubt that success depended on how they tackled their role as leaders. They had to show authentic, visionary, clear and visible leadership. They had to be able to set out a course towards an exciting and attractive future for the department. They had to communicate and illustrate the objectives – seen from the perspective of all the stakeholders. They had to show the way and the values that were to be the basis of the whole process. Development and innovation, commitment, mutual respect, job satisfaction, professional pride and a good atmosphere in the department all needed to form part of working there on a day-to-day basis. Birgitte and Karsten also realised that they needed to act and create fast, visible results in order to keep the momentum going. Finally, they were very conscious of the fact that they would encounter plenty of resistance. With Hawks' Circle of Change from Module 3 of the Pathfinder Programme in their back pockets, they were prepared for all kinds of emotional reaction.

The reactions

Karsten explains that they succeeded in getting the specialists on board quite quickly in their plan to move all cancer surgery to Roskilde and concentrate emergency and benign surgery and diagnostics in Køge. Even if this meant that they needed to move and would see their travelling time to work increase. The vision and strategy were clear. "But," he continues, "when we got to the other staff groups and started to investigate the options for doing things in

a smarter way in the different sections, ways that would benefit the patients, well, frustrations started to pile up. We experienced all the phases in Hawks' Circle of Change from the staff - from denial of reality and action paralysis and anger to acceptance and willingness to cooperate. We experienced being backed up against a wall, abused, slandered – and that employees left and resources were reduced. At the same time we were challenged with increased demands from hospital management to achieve savings."

Middle management

With approx. 200 employees, Birgitte and Karsten had to ensure that all middle managers were as well-equipped for the task as possible so that they understood, were enthusiastic about and could communicate to their teams and departments why and how these many changes had to take place. That is why they started holding regular management seminars and theme days focusing on strategy, vision, communication and leadership – in short everything managers need to know.

Natural Leadership

"In order to maintain our own energy and belief in the project," says Birgitte, "Karsten and I went on the Natural Leadership course – a continuation of the Pathfinder Programme where you work in more detail with yourself as a human being and as a leader. The Deep Listening Module which is about the natural ability to be completely present, listen and coach another person encouraged us to have a chat with the middle managers in the department: Was it something they wanted to try? They said yes and got so much out of it that they were also keen to go on a day involving Horsemanship." Birgitte explains that Horse Whispering is a discipline on the Natural Leadership course where participants also train their ability to be fully and naturally present in the here and now. She says: "As herd animals, horses will always seek out a leader who is sure of himself. Horses react instinctively when they sense both fear and the opposite. That is why it is exciting and very instructive to work with horses which almost function as a mirror for each manager."

Karsten explains that the two Natural Leadership days made a radical difference to the middle managers. The management team has therefore decided that the whole management team should attend the Pathfinder Trails in May (2009). Trails is a four-day intensive course in the Pathfinder philosophy.

Pathfinder Case Story

Roskilde og Køge Sygehus

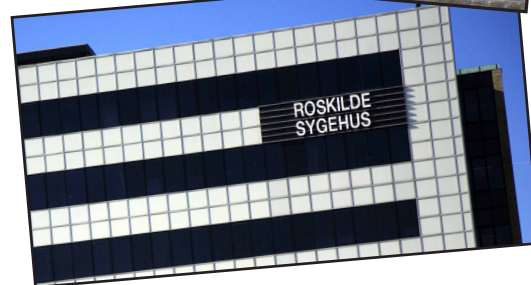


The results

As regards the whole process and its results, Karsten and Birgitte say that it has been a long, tough haul and that there have been necessary replacements and actual dismissals in the management team – even though it has not always been possible to employ new, highly qualified employees straight away. “But,” says Karsten, “we knew from the start that we would rather be short on resources than have employees who were not up to the task, including the transition itself. Nevertheless, we have succeeded in turning frustration into positive energy in the department!”

The surgical departments in Køge and Roskilde are currently a very attractive workplace – not least among younger doctors. They know that they are allowed to work, take responsibility and really show what they can do. We get lots of positive comments about our training. That sort of thing gets around and has created a very good recruitment base for us among younger applicants. We get many talented specialist applicants and several are already working on their specialisation. We have also gained a fantastic recruitment base among nurses and medical secretaries. Because we chose to focus very much on emergency cases and on providing the optimum treatment and admission process. This is exciting for the nurses and the secretaries get much more involved – among other things by participating actively in examinations so that they have a far better basis for writing case reports and making entries on our electronic systems.

From getting the blame for a high level of patient complaints we are now being presented as one of the best. Patient complaints have fallen drastically. We get thank you letters and presents instead. A national database tells us that we have the lowest number of deaths after cancer operations and one of the lowest number of medical complications after these operations.



We are seeing the same trend for acute patients and this is down to one of the many quality projects – that we have set up new programmes to ensure that quality levels are increased in Emergency Surgery. Another project which is to ensure that 80% of our cancer operations are keyhole operations – the patients are admitted for shorter periods of time, recover more quickly and experience faster restoration. Our patient information has also been strengthened. We have produced a video that patients are given on DVD to play in the comfort of their own homes so that they can see what they will be going through rather than reading about it in a folder.

“All in all,” conclude Karsten and Birgitte, “things are going really, really well. The skill, energy and vision are there. Soon we will be raising the bar even higher”.

Objective/vision for the Surgical Department in Roskilde and Køge

The objective/vision of the Surgical Department is to create a university department offering a range of treatments at a high professional level. This is to be achieved through systematic, multidisciplinary skills development concentrating on professional spearheading and a focus on national and international development. The treatments offered by the Department must be documented and improvements authenticated on a scientific basis.

The objective/vision of the Surgical Department must be achieved in partnership with the patients that will ensure the creation of processes through which expectations are met. The objective is to be achieved through systematic work with patient treatment descriptions and information materials for both planned and emergency procedures. Organisationally, the right framework needs to be put in place in which processes across geographical locations take place as a matter of course. In partnership with other departments – external and internal –

these processes must be free of unnecessary waiting times and ensure professional continuity.

The objective/vision of the Surgical Department is to create a working and developmental environment in which employees view their busy working day with a great enthusiasm to create unique solutions. This objective is to be achieved through participation, real influence and delegation of tasks in combination with the use of employee appraisals.

The objective/vision of the Surgical Department is based on the excellent results we have achieved in recent years. By focusing on productivity, organisational initiatives, patient procedures and meeting service targets we have achieved significant quantitative and qualitative improvements.

The objective/vision of the Surgical Department is based on the Department's value base and has been incorporated into the operations agreement.