

Managers in the Middle: Building Manager Engagement Through Peer Support and Professional Development

Blake Gregory, Alameda Health System, Beg81@mac.com

Project Description:

- Middle managers play an essential role in helping organizations achieve greatness.
- Many organizations promote managers from within and do not provide adequate training or support to help them succeed.
- My CHIP, Managers in the Middle, is a forum for managers to come together for peer support, skill development, and professional growth so they have the tools they need to be successful.

Outcome-Oriented Objectives:

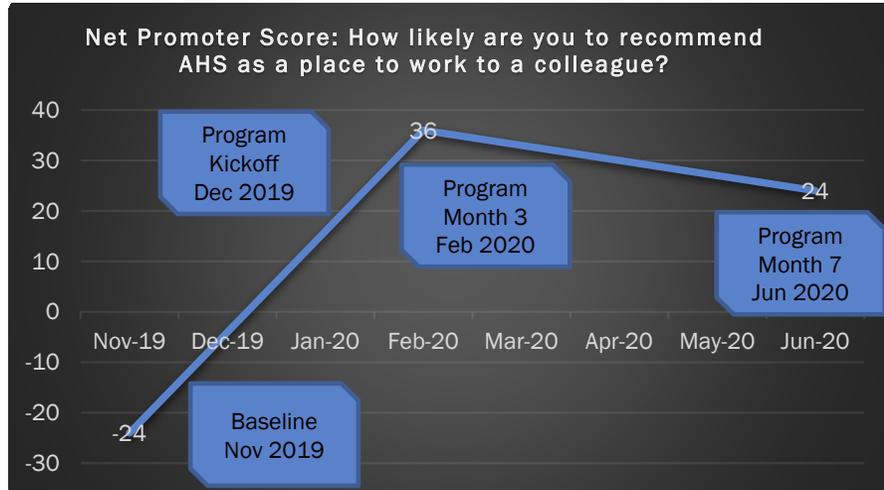
- Increase manager engagement by investing in their professional development
- Create a forum for managers to collaborate, share, and grow their leadership skills
- Cultivate manager self-efficacy by involving them in the project design from day one

Solution:

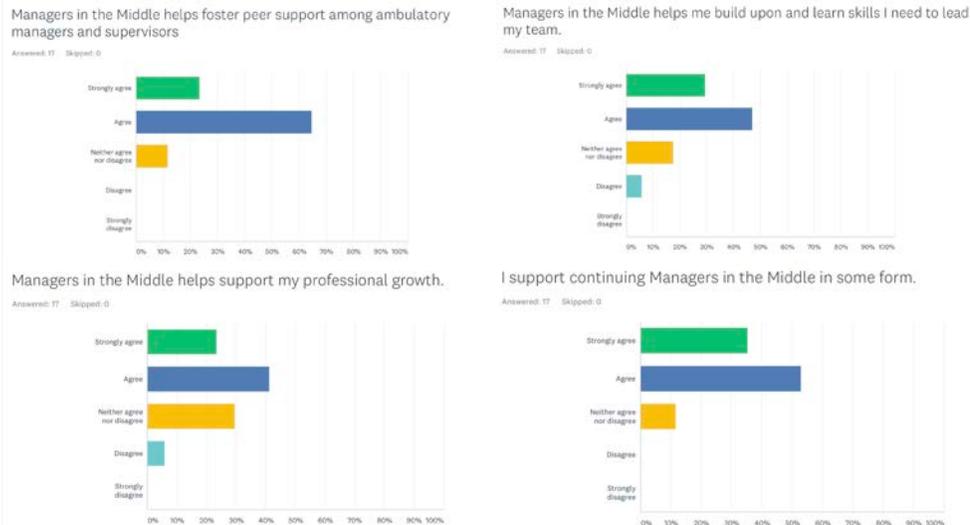
- The original focus of my CHIP was to explore the drivers of workplace culture. Over the course of 49 interviews within and outside my organization, it became clear that middle managers are essential in setting the tone of the work environment.
- When I spoke with managers, I heard how overwhelmed and unsupported they felt in their roles. My “aha” moment came when one medical director told me, *“I wonder if there are avenues for us as middle managers to solve problems together? We need more ways to pool our collective wisdom.”*
- In December 2019, I implemented Managers in the Middle, a monthly meeting involving only ambulatory managers (i.e. practice managers, medical directors, nurse supervisors, and patient service supervisors).
- The goal of Managers in the Middle is to create a dedicated space each month for collaborative problem-solving and skill development. I engaged managers at every step in the design: managers thought up the name “Managers in the Middle” and helped develop content based on self-identified knowledge gaps.
- Monthly Managers in the Middle meetings have continued since its inception. The COVID pandemic required a pivot from in-person to Zoom sessions, which was a necessary but challenging adaptation. Recent national and global events inspired modifications to the original curriculum, which incorporated sessions on leading through crisis and talking with your teams about race.

Results: I started this project in December, 2019. We are now in the program assessment and succession planning stage.

Manager Net Promoter Score Pre- and Post-Implementation



Managers in the Middle Program Assessment, September 2020



Next Steps:

- During the program assessment process, managers provided valuable feedback on improvements to meeting structure and content. It will be important to integrate this feedback and involve managers closely in future decision-making.
- Succession planning will be an important next step so that the administration of this program does not depend on me exclusively. The manager group will review the program assessment feedback and help determine the process for decision-making, governance, meeting structure, and content development.
- If this project sustains itself, it will be important to look at the impact of this program on manager performance. Collecting data on turnover rate and manager performance evaluations could help guide future iterations of this project.

Lessons Learned:

- Managers in the Middle helped foster peer support, skill development, and professional growth among ambulatory middle managers.
- During this process, I discovered that managers are hungry to learn from each other and from content experts. Investing in manager growth pays dividends by boosting manager engagement.
- Other organizations could replicate this project at a relatively low cost. The impact of 1-2 hours of manager time to attend these sessions each month is relatively small compared to the impact on manager engagement.
- The project does require a dedicated champion to lead the work and form partnerships with subject matter experts and facilitators. Providing the project champion with protected time and resources to support the program would make the program more likely to succeed.