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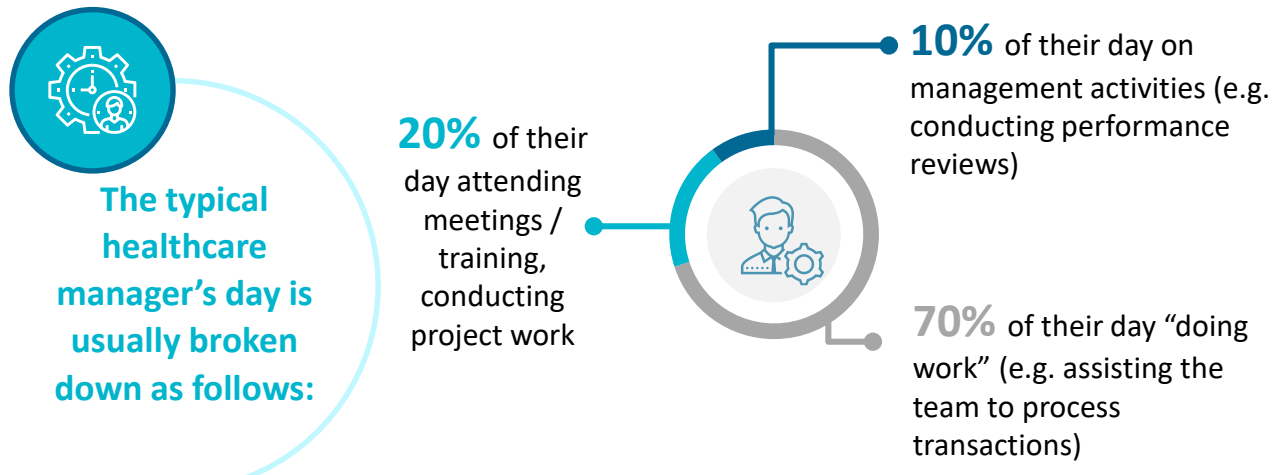
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WHY MANAGERS IN THE HC INDUSTRY DON'T MANAGE

A consistent theme emerges from hundreds of studies we have conducted in the healthcare industry; Front-line managers are spending a disproportionate amount of their time processing transactions rather than engaging in crucial management functions, such as planning, organizing, leading, and controlling their teams to optimize performance. It doesn't have to be this way. There are several steps you can take to ensure effective managerial behavior is deeply embedded in your organization, leading to dramatic and sustainable performance improvement.

enlighten
operational excellence

The role of managers in the healthcare industry

Our observations in the healthcare industry reveal the same phenomena time and time again: the typical team leader spends more than 70% of their time "doing work", rather than managing the team. Consequently, the approach to management is reactive and focused on "putting out fires", rather than on proactively anticipating and responding to issues before they manifest.

The typical healthcare manager's day is usually broken down as follows:

20% of their day attending meetings / training, conducting project work

10% of their day on management activities (e.g. conducting performance reviews)

70% of their day "doing work" (e.g. assisting the team to process transactions)

While we have seen fluctuations in the time managers spend between "doing the work" and attending meetings, the portion of their day spent managing and optimizing performance is consistently very low, much to the detriment of their team's performance.

It is worth noting that other industries have witnessed much greater success in defining and adapting the role of the manager compared to the healthcare industry. The financial services industry, for example, has gone through decades of intense global competition that resulted in the evolution of management best practices. They were forced to focus on how to best measure and manage daily operations to produce high quality at a low cost.

> *The healthcare sector has been more sheltered from competition, resulting in a complacency when it comes to evolving the role of a manager*

The manufacturing industry, too, has been more successful in differentiating between managerial and processing roles. Their success can be attributed to the clearly visible difference between "line staff" and managers in the manufacturing setting. For example, if a manager joins staff at the assembly line, it becomes immediately visible at all levels of the organization that he/she is "doing the work", rather than managing the team. Consequently, senior managers can easily intervene if a manager spends an excessive amount of time processing work rather than managing.

> *In the healthcare industry, the distinction between "doing" and "managing" work is not as easily visible as in a manufacturing setting because the work is predominately paper, or computer based.*

Empowering managers by removing barriers:

There are steps you can take to ensure that effective managerial behavior is embedded at the front-line of your healthcare operations, leading to sustainable and dramatic performance improvement:

1 Ensure managers have access to information

It is very difficult to manage something you do not measure, and most front-line managers simply lack access to a robust metrics system that provides them with information that matters. They have no way to measure efficiency, capacity, waste or the impact of errors. Without this information, managers are neither able to understand nor to effectively manage their teams' performance. They are also unable to conduct a range of essential management functions. For example, how can they use latent capacity if they do not know what capacity there is?

2 Implement management methodologies

Even if the appropriate metrics are in place, it is how this information is used that ultimately drives results. In order to ensure that front-line managers use information in a meaningful way, their role must change drastically. Specifically, they must evolve from seeing themselves (and be seen by their peers) as superior technical resources that "do the work" and become superior managers and leaders that spend the majority of their day, typically 80% of their time, actively managing their teams.

3 Self-perpetuating behavioral norms

Front-line managers (even those with the best intentions to apply their management skills) are often unable to perform their role as a leader because "this is not the way it's done here." Behavior is self-perpetuating and becomes engrained in organizations over time.
For example, imagine an eager front-line manager one day decides to walk around the team and follow up with individual team members to see how each of them is performing. The manager approaches a team member to see how they're progressing and the natural response is "why are you following me up? No one has ever done that before, don't you trust me?" The eager frontline manager soon adheres to company norms as "this is not the way it's done here!".

> *Inertia has been the norm in the healthcare industry for decades and will take a good deal of concerted effort to overcome.*

In summary:

There are several steps you can take to help managers focus on actually managing their teams, rather than processing transactions. An excellent way to commence this journey is via an enterprise wide transformation program such as Enlighten that introduces management practices across the organization and "resets" current practices. Through the introduction of new metrics and management methods, you can drastically improve management's ability to understand and optimize operational performance, leading to extraordinary results.