

## Using relational coordination as a tool for process improvement in organizational development in a Danish Nursing Home

*Birgitte TØRRING, RN, MHH, Educational Consultant,  
Finn NIELSEN, MLP, Organizational Development Consultant*

*University College in the Northern Denmark, act2learn HR/Management & HEALTH,  
Aalborg, Denmark*

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### 1. Introduction

In the past decade, pressures on health professionals in the Danish healthcare system have increased substantially. Professional and economic pressures caused by many different trends: An increased demands of professional specialization; new opportunities with new advanced technological and medical treatments; an increased number of health professionals per. bed in the hospital; a reduced length of stay in the hospital and an increased complexity - Multidisease Care Management. In addition, there are today more stringent requirements for the municipal healthcare system. In Denmark, there has been an increased focus on the welfare that is offered to our senior citizens at the municipal nursing homes. The focus is on community-centered health care, and particularly vulnerable senior citizens should receive healthcare as close as possible to their own homes (or nursing home) rather than admission to medical wards in hospitals. Municipal healthcare must therefore offer concrete measures to prevent inappropriate (re) admissions to hospital. Municipal health services should offer senior citizens the possibility of moving into the nursing home, which offers to:

- Support the residents, so quality of life is as high as possible despite the physical and mental limitations
- Provide holistic care and treatment to the vulnerable residents, so hospitalization can be prevented

These challenges require special focus on coordination and communication. Technical expertise is not enough – there are additional needs for coordination and communication. From January 2014 the new *Nursing Home of the Future* in Aalborg stands ready to receive 75 elderly residents and a new group of employees must be trained to meet the new requirements. In addition to overall care for the elderly residents, there is a special attention to involvement, motivation for physical activity, sensory stimulation and networking. Prior to the opening of the new nursing home – a pilot project is completed in which relational coordination is used as a tool for process improvement for team and organizational development.

The project had two specific purposes. **Firstly**, the project initiate quality improvement of a specific municipal nursing home in order to strengthen cooperation in the employee group, increase the quality of overall care for the residents as well as improve efficiency. With the overall aim to offer a holistic care, living up to the vision for *The Nursing home of the Future* and thereby offering the older residents a home where participation, motivating for physical activity, sensory stimulation and networking are paramount. **Second**, the

implementation of the project make it possible to gain knowledge about 1) the use of relational coordination as a tool for process improvement and thereby explore how an interdisciplinary team can establish shared goals, shared knowledge, mutual respect and develop a communication that is frequent, timely, accurate and problem-solving.

## 2. Methods

A team development process is carried out in the period from February 2013 to March 2014. All 35 employees and the two leaders participate in the team development program containing eight days of workshops. Relational coordination is used as a tool for process improvement along with LEAN and other creative methods. An experience-based theory of elderly resident's lives in a nursing home - *The life phase model* is included as a knowledge background and the participants' stories of good interpersonal and communication situations are involved as a basis for development of an appropriate communication. The Relational Coordination Survey is used with two purposes in mind – a tool for guiding the process and a measurement tool. A measurement of the relational coordination was given before the interventions in March 2013 and a measurement of the relational coordination will be analyzed after completion of the pilot project in March 2014. A focus group interview with a group of employees and an interview with the managers were made after implementation of the interventions (October 2013 and February 2014). The pilot project was initiated by the steering committee for *The Nursing Home of the Future* and the project has been developed in collaboration between the managers in the municipal nursing home in Aalborg and consultants from UCN, act2learn.

## 3. Results

New teams are established and several new procedures, forms of communication and workflow processes are implemented. The nursing home manager has received a very useful strategic management tool. Both managers and employees recommend the use of relational coordination as a tool for team development. The results and experience from the pilot project has been integrated in the introduction program to the new employees in *The Nursing home of the Future* in January 2014 and is expected to be a part of the team training program running from February to December 2014.