EXAM CASE: Between care and control in NordCare Solutions

NordCare Solutions is a Scandinavian private healthcare technology company headquartered in Trondheim, Norway. The company develops digital systems used by hospitals and municipalities to coordinate patient care and communication between healthcare professionals. With approximately 300 employees across Scandinavia, NordCare has built a reputation for innovation, employee autonomy, collaboration, and flexible work arrangements. Many employees describe the company as meaningful because its services directly contribute to public healthcare quality.

Over the last two years, however, the organization has experienced rapid growth due to new contracts with large public healthcare providers. Increased competition and pressure from investors pushed senior management toward stronger performance control systems and faster delivery expectations. To manage this transition, NordCare hired Erik Holm as Chief Operations Officer half a year ago. Erik previously worked for an international consulting company known for efficiency-oriented management systems and strict performance targets. Shortly after joining the company, Erik introduced several organizational changes. NordCare implemented detailed performance indicators, tighter reporting routines, shorter deadlines, and more standardized procedures. Team leaders were instructed to monitor employee productivity more closely and ensure that milestones were delivered on time. While senior management viewed these changes as necessary for growth and professionalization, many employees reacted negatively.

One of the departments most affected by these changes is the Integrated Care Unit, a cross-functional department responsible for developing digital systems used by hospitals and municipal care services with 24 employees. The unit consists of software developers, healthcare specialists, designers, and project coordinators from different professional backgrounds. Previously known for strong collaboration and open communication, the department has recently experienced increasing tension and conflict.

Maja Sørensen, an experienced healthcare specialist who has worked at NordCare for eleven years, openly questions the new direction of the organization. During a recent meeting, she commented: “Before, we had time to discuss problems properly and find solutions together. Now everything is measured, timed, and rushed. We used to focus on helping healthcare workers and patients. Today, it feels like everyone is chasing numbers instead of quality, and nobody really trusts our professional judgment anymore.”

Maja also believes employees have become less willing to speak openly in meetings because criticism is often interpreted as resistance to change. “People stay quiet in meetings and save their real opinions for smaller groups afterwards. It feels safer that way. Nobody wants to be seen as difficult or negative.” Although Maja was previously

highly engaged and known for voluntarily helping colleagues across departments, she now limits herself to her formal responsibilities and avoids taking initiative unless specifically asked.

Jonas Berg, a 27-year old software developer recently recruited from a technology startup, experiences the situation differently. He appreciates the clearer structure and expectations but struggles with the communication climate inside the team. “In my previous company, people disagreed openly and moved on quickly. Here, nobody says directly what they think during meetings, but afterwards you hear completely different opinions in private conversations. Honestly, it sometimes feels harder to understand the people than the technical problems.” Jonas also notices growing divisions between professional groups in the Unit. Technical employees complain that healthcare specialists slow down projects with too much discussion about risks and ethics, while healthcare specialists believe technical employees ignore important quality concerns.

Recent HR climate survey “NordCare Insights” shows declining trust in leadership, lower job satisfaction, increasing stress levels, and reduced feelings of belonging within the organization. Employees also report concerns about workload and work-life balance. Some employees have quietly started searching for opportunities outside the organization, while others have become passive and disengaged.

Despite these concerns, Erik Holm remains convinced that employee reactions mainly reflect temporary discomfort during organizational change. During a management meeting he stated: “We cannot continue operating like a small idealistic startup. If we want to compete internationally, we need more discipline, accountability, and performance orientation. People will eventually adapt.”

NordCare’s senior leadership now faces a difficult challenge. While operational efficiency has improved in some areas, concerns about employee motivation, trust, communication, and collaboration continue to grow. Erik Holm must therefore determine how to maintain performance and growth while rebuilding a healthy and sustainable work environment.

CASE TASKS:

1. Explain the problems: Identify and analyze problems related to three employees' experiences in the case using relevant concepts and theories covered in the course.

2. Explain the potential causes: Describe possible underlying causes of these problems using relevant concepts and theories covered in the course.

3. Provide solutions: Describe possible solutions to Erik's current leadership challenges in NordCare Solutions. Support your arguments with relevant concepts and theories covered in the course.

Source: Natalia Fey, 2026