ORGANIZING YOUR CLINIC WORKFLOW FOR OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE:

Betina Rama, DVM, EMCCC
Practice Management Professor, Universidad del Salvador, Argentina

Whether is considering a new organisation of the tasks of the clinic (or work flow) or a change in processes or systems is important to realise that how we do the work is as important as the “what we are going to do”.

Motivation and engagement grow exponentially when employees can trust their managers to make good decisions and to act with integrity. The lack of trust causes disengagement and it costs the company a significant amount which is difficult to quantify. The impact on the business can be huge as a result of the fact that a disengaged employee is withholding ideas, commitment and drive to the organization. In addition the affected employee can influence others to develop the same attitude. When ideas and commitment are the currency of knowledge based organization the risk of losing them can be enormous and impact growth and profit.

It used to be thought that people cared mostly about a fair outcome. Now we know that people care as much or more for the process on how decisions are taken. For the past 20 years there are numerous examples that show the positive business impact of taking into consideration “how” the outcome is achieved.

What is Fair Process and how does it build employees' trust?

The Fair Process, as a legal term, means that it is only fair to give people affected by a decision the opportunity to refute potential decisions by proposing alternate explanations. Fair or Due Process in business terms is referred as justice in managerial decision making.

W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne discovered during their study of strategic decision making in 19 multinational corporations that many top executives in those corporations were frustrated and failed to share information and ideas or they sabotaged the execution of plans they had agreed to carry out. They found a direct link between processes, attitudes, and behavior: managers who believed the company’s processes were fair displayed a high level of trust and commitment, which, in turn, engendered active cooperation. Conversely, when managers felt that a fair process was absent, they hoarded ideas and dragged their feet.

In other business contexts (companies in the midst of transformations, in teams engaged in product innovation, and in company-supplier partnerships) Kim and Mauborgne also found that individuals are most likely to trust and cooperate voluntarily and freely with systems when a fair process is perceived present, and that it it does not matter whether they themselves themselves win or lose by those systems. Basically, employees will accept and commit to a manager's decision (even with one they disagree with) if they believe that the process the manager used to make the the decision was fair.

In order to achieve the voluntary cooperation cooperation that drives the desire to stretch and do even better there are three Principles that can be applied and are part of a Fair Process:

“1.- Engagement means involving individuals in the decisions that affect them them by asking for their input and allowing them to refute the merits of one another's ideas and assumptions. Engagement communicates management's respect for individuals and their ideas. Encouraging refutation sharpens everyone's thinking and and builds collective wisdom. Engagement results in better decisions by management and greater commitment from all involved in in executing those decisions
2.-Explanation means that everyone involved and affected should understand why final decisions are made as they are. An explanation of the thinking that underlies decisions makes people confident that managers have considered their opinions and have made those decisions impartially in the overall interests of the company. It also serves as a powerful feedback loop that enhances learning. An explanation allows employees to trust managers’ intentions even if their own ideas have been rejected.

3.-Expectation clarity requires that once a decision is made, managers state clearly the new rules of the game. Although the expectations may be demanding, employees should know up front by what standards they will be judged and the penalties for failure. An explanation of the thinking that underlies decisions makes people confident that managers have considered their opinions and have made those decisions impartially in the overall interests of the company.

What are the new targets and milestones? Who is responsible for what? To achieve fair process, it matters less what the new rules and policies are and more that they are clearly understood. When people clearly understand what is expected of them, political jockeying and favoritism are minimized, and they can focus on the job at hand.

Notice that fair process is not decision by consensus. Fair process does not set out to achieve harmony or to win people’s support through compromises that accommodate every individual’s opinions, needs, or interests. While fair process gives every idea a chance, the merit of the ideas-and not consensus-is what drives the decision making.

Fair process responds to the very basic human need for justice and respect. Even if an outcome is good (pay rise, better working conditions etc.) if the process is not fair it is demotivating for individuals and can risk the success of the clinic.