A. Communication and conflict resolution in radiology: how to recruit and retain the best team

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Learning objectives

Many radiologists will face conflicts in their daily practice, where that be upset patients, irrate referring physicians, or difficult hospital administrators or ancillary staff. Understanding how to resolve conflicts is a vital part of the responsibilities of a radiology department. Many of a radiology group’s responsibilities, including those related to conflict resolution, will be handled by a collaborative group effort. Recruiting top talent to such groups and retaining these personnel in leadership roles can help make tasks easier and more likely to succeed. This poster will aim:

- To outline strategies and challenges for recruitment of new radiology faculty to leadership roles
- To provide methods of enhancing the retention of existing radiology faculty
FIRST STEPS:

The first steps in creating a task force for conflict resolution involve an accurate assessment of the resources available to a radiology group (1). Creating effective groups requires a strong knowledge of the individual backgrounds and expertise of individuals who will make up the group. The person in charge of creating the group must therefore look through the list of available employees to determine these characteristics. Qualifications to seek can include:

- business acumen, such as an MBA or MHA degree
- experience of working in groups
- experience in conflict management and resolution
- personable characteristics such as working well with others

The chairman of the group can then attempt to recruit individuals with experience. The total number of people needed for the group will vary based on the needs of the group, however the chairman should know that with additional personnel in the group comes the added difficulty in reaching consensus and in balancing different personalities and viewpoints.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT:

Conflict in radiology departments and groups can have many consequences (2):

- lost revenue in poor productivity
- employee turnover which can also contribute to cost
- poor work environment
- increased stress
- poor view of the department/group by outside administration, clinicians, and patients
- decreased funding for research and department expenses
- encroachment of non-radiologists on radiology turf

The most important aspect of conflict resolution is the concept of active listening (3). To appropriately manage conflicts in groups and come to a consensus, it is important for all members to understand the viewpoints of all other members. This involves getting to know the other individual, which can be facilitated by the chairperson with social activities. When attempting to learn about other people in the group and their viewpoint, the group
should be active and open in asking questions for further clarification when different viewpoints conflict.

In dealing with different issues, it can become difficult to reach consensus if people feel competitive in getting their wishes fulfilled. It is important therefore to promote a collaborative spirit in the daily functioning of the group. When individuals in the group feel like they are working toward the same goal, people are more accepting of using different means for the same ends (4). Setting a goal early in the agenda of a group can help avoid difficult and unnecessary conflicts later on. Frequent revisiting of the primary goal can help make sure the group remains focused and does not get caught up in the agendas and personalities of the individual members.

CREATING A TEAM:

Once appropriate personnel have been selected, offers to participate in the group must be made to the best individuals. The chairperson must keep in mind that the additional responsibilities of asking individuals to participate in a group must be weighed with the existing clinical and academic responsibilities and the productivity requirements expected by the department. Not all individuals who are selected and extended offers to participate will be willing. Depending on the resources and the availability of potential participants, groups can offer additional incentives such as salary bonuses to entice further participation.

Having individuals from multiple different backgrounds is also of great importance as it adds additional viewpoints that can be important in creating solutions to problems. Academic departments can further provide for the future of the field as well as of their individual departments by incorporating junior colleagues such as residents and fellows into groups (5). This can help garner experience and teach skills to younger individuals that they are not traditionally exposed to during medical training (6,7).

RETAINING A TEAM:

Some of the most common reasons for the decision to leave a group include:

- interpersonal differences
- lack of focus or achieved goals
- lack of incentives
- overworked
Work environment has been quoted as one of the most important reasons for job retention and satisfaction (8). In creating groups, managing conflict and creating a common purpose can help improve satisfaction and prevent different viewpoints from creating an 'us-versus-them’ mentality. When individuals in a group are friendly and know each other on a more personal level, they are more inclined to stay in the group. Groups can facilitate this sort of relationship building by having members participate in social activities outside of work and encouraging of sharing personal details with members of the group. Further, groups must keep in mind the other responsibilities that clinicians may have including family commitments, clinical duties, and academic and research interests. Working around these obligations will improve satisfaction and make team members more willing to stay in the group. When individuals are overworked and are expected to do more than what they are capable of handling, involvement in a task force or other type of group will often be the first time to be abandoned in favor of personal and clinical expectations.

The second most common reason for personnel turnover in a group is lack of achievements. When a group fails to accomplish anything tangible, individuals are less willing to put up with the time commitment and difficulties in working together in a group. Clear goals and examples of what the group has managed to do for patients or clinicians can help motivate members to stay in the group during more difficult times.

Salary is often the least quoted item as a contributor to satisfaction. Additional financial incentives can help improve recruitment and retention, but will often not be enough to retain individuals if other aspects of the work environment or functioning of the group are not addressed and improved.

**CONCLUSION:**

Creating and retaining a team is a very difficult task, however it is necessary in handling many situations in a radiology department and in managing conflicts and other types of issues. Finding the right personnel for the group is essential and can be achieved by looking at the past experiences and types of personality of people in the department. Balancing other work responsibilities, creating an environment of comradery, focusing the group toward achievable and concrete goals, and providing incentives can help with retention of the best team members.
References


