



The value of the engaged radiologist

Lucy B. Spalluto, MD

[I]nstitutions that seek to understand and leverage the value of the radiologist as an individual who possesses unique skills and talents stand to achieve significant success in multiple areas.

The value that radiologists provide patients has been greatly improved by an increasing focus on imaging study appropriateness, quality and performance efficiency, as well as greater attention to patient safety and satisfaction.^{1,2}

Increasingly, efforts are also being made to ensure patients and the surrounding community have opportunity to influence the type of care our patients receive.^{3,4} These efforts will certainly contribute to the formulation and evolution of diagnostic and therapeutic imaging.

To truly maximize the potential for a successful radiology department, however, institutional and departmental leadership should not forget to engage those at radiology's very core: radiologists themselves. This, perhaps, is a fundamental process that has been given limited effort for the pursuit of more immediate, apparent, or easier-to-attain goals.

Nevertheless, institutions that seek to understand and leverage the value of the radiologist as an individual who possesses unique skills and talents stand to achieve significant success in multiple areas. Those who fail in this endeavor, meanwhile, risk

missing out on identifying and developing raw talent, disengaging their radiologists, and minimizing the potential for organizational improvement in both private and academic practice models.

The overall value of a radiology practice, and the field itself, can be considered a synergistic sum of the efforts of individual radiologists. Highly successful practices are diverse and complex, and driven by the efforts and skills of their members. Skills in radiology include, but are by no means limited to, clinical work, research, business and administration, community outreach, recruitment, diversity maintenance and quality improvement. Individual radiologists often excel at certain of these skills more than others.

Yet the culture of many practices drives them to emphasize the value of selected skills over others. Undoubtedly, other talents exist among group members that can also bring value to a department; an engaging personality, general facility with computers, and conflict-resolution skills are some examples.

The overarching culture and priorities of an organization may result in inadvertent marginalization of certain radiologists. As in

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Dr. Spalluto is Assistant Professor of Radiology and Radiological Sciences, and Associate Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Department of Radiology and Radiological Sciences, Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Nashville, TN.

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all business organizations, it is easy for the dominant group to become the norm, creating feelings of “otherness” among those who do not fit.⁵ There are many scenarios with potential for marginalization in radiology, and they extend far beyond the typically considered cultural challenges of gender, race, ethnicity, and physical disability. Indeed, private practices and academic institutions may face very different challenges.

As an example in academic radiology, one institution’s model for success and promotion may be research driven, leaving those who focus on bearing the clinical workload feeling undervalued. Radiologists assigned to work primarily in outpatient facilities may feel geographically marginalized from the activities of the department. Faculty within a division focused on the brunt of the clinical work may be undermined in their attempts to pursue research activities.

In many private practices, shifting from a partnership model to an employee model may result in feelings of alienation among non-partnership radiologists. Excluded from partnership meetings, employee physicians are often unaware of the practice’s focus and goals. They do not have an understanding of how they as individuals fit into the practice and how they contribute to the practice’s overall success.

Perceptions of alienation and lack of value can result in diminished productivity, and even decreased career aspirations. Not only are marginalized employees frequently given less access to career growth opportunities, they also feel less comfortable seeking them. Without appropriate opportunities to apply one’s skills, the potential for career growth is stifled.

Individuals and institutions can take steps to avoid marginalization and instead engage radiologists in their organizations. Extensive studies of numerous organizations and interviews with thousands of people have found three things almost everyone wants or needs to remain fully engaged and satisfied with their position: 1) a meaningful vision of the future; 2) a sense of purpose; and, 3) great interpersonal relationships.⁶

Radiology organizations, both academic and private, can provide transparent promotional guidelines, regularly scheduled opportunities for feedback, and equal access to higher-level mentors. Promotional tracks at academic affiliates can include a clinical practice track to recognize the accomplishments of those excelling in this arena.

In today’s constantly evolving and fiscally restrictive healthcare system, opportunities for time-consuming and expensive career development programs are limited. However, inexpensive efforts to engage radiologists in their place of work have the potential to enhance individual creativity, productivity, and career satisfaction. People who are engaged with both their workplace and colleagues work “harder and smarter,” boosting overall organizational success.⁶

Recognizing and celebrating individual talents and strengths will enable radiology organizations to expand their horizons. Allowing radiologists to maximize their unique potential creates an environment that embraces diversity and promotes excellence.

Institutions that understand the value of inspiring each radiologist to achieve career success invest not only in the success of their own organization, but also in the success of the field of radiology.

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