

"We are going to continue having these meetings, everyday, until I find out why no work is getting done."

-Unknown

"We believe that each and every patient deserves the very best care . . . " *That . . . I really appreciate, the focus on patient care goals. And this is a big step for us.* ". . . we know that having intensive care physician always available, remotely or locally, will offer the best possible outcomes . . ." he continued. *Yeah, but how long before it will start, and will they really listen to us?* As the staff meeting wrapped-up our Chief Medical Information Officer proclaimed to the group, "The participation of key members of the medical staff in the implementation decision-making process will be vitally important to the success of this new eICU project". Walking out with my colleagues I started to hear the concerns . . .

"Oh great, another IT project and more meetings, I don't have time to see all the patients I have now."

"Yeah... and we know how these IT implementation projects go, all about the technology with no focus on the clinical workflow."

"When I worked in another hospital though, this technology showed that tracking patient care data closely and exposing the medical staff to information and best practices improved our quality and standards of practice."

"But that's not because of the medical staff's input I bet. There's always some reason that our ideas won't work", I said.

As we started our separate ways I heard my name called out.

"Hey Bill" said a friend of mine. "I couldn't help overhearing your last comment. "

"Oh, hi, John", I responded as I waited for him. "How have you been?"

"Good, thanks. So tell me what you heard about that the new approach to project communication that Sam set up", he asked.

"I heard that he set it up so we can do the work online, using meeting software and a discussion board. I know computers are useful, but he's a nerd. I have trouble getting my email."

John bantered, "Ya know, I was skeptical too, until he put an icon on my desktop linking me to everything I need, even a hospital-only social network. We can keep in touch with each other and get our work done. I've just started but what I've learned has already made a difference for my patients."

"I tried social networking at home. It was a waste of time. How's this different?", I asked.

"He spent some time trying to figure out what makes doctor's tick. For most of us, relationships drive our actions, so we should probably spend some of our project time getting to know the people. Then we could enjoy our work more, be more satisfied with the results and the time spent. Now that's how I measure success."

"You mean, less meeting time?"

“Yes, although there’s more to it. I don’t know about you, but I think meetings should only be used when direct interaction is critical to developing agreement or motivation. Sharing information, providing feedback, and assuring accountability can be done in other ways. Online collaboration allows everyone to get what they need when they need it. Ever had to cancel a meeting because someone couldn’t be there? With this tool, everyone can join a meeting by phone or by web.”

“I don’t know. My computer is old, there’s no camera...”, I started.

“...wait a minute! Weren’t you just saying that ‘*they* always some reason it won’t work!’”

“Well, yeah, . . .”

“...if you want change, you’ll have to invest yourself”, John challenged.

“I . . . OK, I’ll bite. Tell me more about this. Is this available to anyone, or just for meetings?, I asked.

“Everybody. Remember your melancholy when the coat room closed? It was the end of an era when we all met before rounds. Now we only see each other at quality or medical meetings. Rounds are so rushed you rarely get to know the staff. If you know the people you discuss ideas with, you’re more likely to understand their perspective, and that creates a better process. Combine that with working on projects in small pieces, accountability to prevent rework, and not being stuck in a meeting worried about what’s on your desk. That really makes a difference and lets me think more about the team. “

John went on, “What really hooked me was the savings. I know, I sound like an administrator, but two weeks ago I had 2 people out of the office for 3 days working on a project. Every time I turned around, someone I needed wasn’t there. Meetings are expensive. “

“So if I want to try this, what do I do?”

“Call Sam, he set up a plan. He knows some people will jump, others will hesitate. The plan starts everyone out with one-on-one social contacts and then expands as you’re ready. You don’t have to worry about what you say until after you feel comfortable with the system. Early adopters are taught how to help others learn comfortably. When they’re ready, he pairs them up with new learners. After enough of us on online, it’s likely to be required. I know all the administrators and directors are online now, and they are working on the staff. You should talk to Susan. She started about a month ago.”

“ I talk to Susan regularly, but she hasn’t mentioned it.

“That’s probably because she didn’t feel comfortable right away. She’s a regular now, but you know how she is about new things and technology.”

“Yeah, I know, but that’s why I’m surprised. Although I did notice that she seems more relaxed. She hasn’t complained about having to go to those lab process improvement meetings either. “

“That’s because she doesn’t. She pretty much always gets online in her office, and the meetings are only about half as long. Everybody acknowledges that they have all the information ahead of time and provides feedback when they want to. The meetings basically summarize status, assure agreement and project energy, review next steps, and exchange a few thoughts not yet posted. Her project is also just about done.”

“Huh, the last project she was on took 6 months, and I thought this was going to be bigger.”

“It was, but not having to mesh everybody’s schedules had a ten-fold impact on the timeline. “

“Well, I’m a bit late for my meeting” I said, “but I certainly learned a lot. I’ll ask about this at the meeting, and give Sam a call later. Thanks John, I’m really glad I got to see you today.”