

Intermediate Managers Experiences: Operational Performance Within Veterinary Clinical Institutions

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Abstract

This paper is an overview of a qualitative grounded theory study that investigated if there are potential challenges intermediate managers face within veterinary clinical institutions and if so; do these challenges impact operational performance. The study also obtained data pertaining to intermediate managers and if specific attributes and experience is required in order to contribute to an organizations success and add to operational performance. The data obtained was recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed. From this data codes and themes were developed that allowed for the validation and ability to answer the research questions for this study. Themes that were developed based off of the participant responses include Do Good Communication With Upper Management, Facilitates Problem Solutions/Heads Up To Upper Management, Importance Of Working Together, Importance Of Communication, and Intermediate Manager Acts As Go Between. These five themes are all key to an Intermediate Managers success and ability to contribute to an organizations operational performance according to the data. Due to the lack of data prior to this study additional research must be conducted to add validity to this topic.

Keywords: Dissertation, Small Business Administration, Intermediate Managers, Veterinary Institutions, Operational Performance.

Introduction

Once a Dissertation topic is formulated and the method in which the researcher will be utilizing; it is then necessary to locate an instrument to collect data. For this qualitative study that used grounded theory; the instrument was a modified survey. This allowed for the collection of data via face-to-face interviews with all the participants. The questions that were modified and asked came from a survey that was taken from an article by Masaoka (2011) titled *Executive Director Evaluation Survey Form*. That article addressed how executive director's evaluations were lacking and were not conducted as frequently as regular employees. This article based its development of the survey by referencing Daring to Lead Research Methodology developed by CompassPoint and Meyer Foundation in 2011.

CompassPoint and the Meyer Foundation developed and tested an electronic survey containing 69 questions. Eleven partner organizations distributed the survey electronically during the fall of 2010 to their constituents using email and website placement. (DaringToLead.Org)

From this survey the participants were chosen based on the relationship with Veterinary Hospitals/Clinics; which consisted of patrons, employees of these institutions at various levels, and Doctors/Veterinarians. The use of a diverse pool of participants for any study is necessary and important. This is so that the data collected cannot be tainted as compromised or biased. The questions that were asked during the face-to-face interviews were all important and pertinent to this study. Having the ability to make participants feel comfortable and honest is key if obtaining the most accurate and reliable data is the goal a researcher is attempting to accomplish. Also, according to Qu & Dumay (2011), "these interviews 'requires not only the use of various skills, such as intensive listening and note taking, but also careful planning and sufficient preparation.'" All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed accordingly. This process allowed for the following data to be presented.

Results

This study allowed for the collection of data to aid in understanding how attributes and preparedness of intermediate managers can aid in potential challenges they may face within veterinary institutions. With this data other industries that employ an intermediate manager can review their own practices and determine how they can modify or change their processes when overcoming their own challenges. The participants for this study were all pertinent due to their relationship with a veterinary institution. This can be also considered purposeful sampling; which allows for key data to be provided from individuals linked to or within a specific field. For this study the data shows that 10% of the participants were managerial employees, 40% of the participants were regular employees, and 50% of the participants were patrons/customers. Of the participants 70% were female and 30% were male. Also, the data showed 10% of the participants completed college-undergraduate/masters class, 20% of the participants completed high school only, and 70% of the participants completed some college-undergraduate coursework. The participants relationship with a veterinary institution was also apart of the demographics that were pertinent to this study. According to the participants responses; 20% of the participants have had a relationship with the facility between 3-6 years, 30% of the participants have had a relationship between 1-3 years, and 50% of the participants have had a relationship with the facility between 7-10 years. There were also three other demographic data that were collected which showed participants race, age, and income level. All of the demographic data was required for this study to be completed and fall under the Qualitative Grounded Theory Method and utilize Purposeful Sampling. The data was also presented in Tables 3-9.

Table 1

Participants

Participants	# Of Participants	% Of Participants
Regular Employee	4	40%
Managerial Employee	1	10%
Owner / Veterinarian Patron / Customer	5	50%
Total % of Participants		100%

Table 2

Gender

Gender	# Of Participants	% Of Participants
Female	7	70%
Male	3	30%
Total % of Participants		100%

Table 3

Demographics

Race	# Of Participants	% Of Participants
Black		
White	2	20%
Hispanic/Latino	8	80%
Pacific Islander		
Other		
Total % of Participants		100%

Table 4

Income Level

Income Level	# Of Participants	% Of Participants
Less Than \$25,000		
\$25,000 - \$35,000	1	10%
\$36,000 - \$45,000	2	20%
\$46,000 - \$55,000	2	20%
\$55,000+	5	50%
Total % of Participants		100%

Table 5

Age Group

Age Group	# Of Participants	% Of Participants
18-25		
26-35	3	30%
36-45	6	60%
46-55	1	10%
55+		
Total % of Participants		100%

Table 6

Highest Grade Completed

Highest Grade Completed	# Of Participants	% Of Participants
Grade School		
High School	2	20%
College- Undergraduate	7	70%
College- Undergraduate/Masters Classes	1	10%
Doctorate or Terminal Degree		
Total % of Participants		100%

Table 7

Employee/Patron

How Long Have You Worked For Your Employer? or How Long Have You Been A Patron Of This Facility?		
	# Of Participants	% Of Participants
Less Than 6 Months		
6 Months To 1 Year		
1-3 Years	3	30%
3-6 Years	2	20%
7-10 Years	5	50%
Over 10 Years		
Total % of Participants		100%

As previously stated the tool utilized was a modified survey that was specific to this topic. This survey was developed and consisted of 12 questions that all participants were asked. The basis of the questions was created to answer the three-research questions that were developed for this specific study/dissertation. The three research questions were:

RQ1: Are there challenges faced by intermediate managers (office/practice) in veterinary clinics?

RQ2: Are there attributes of preparedness of intermediate managers in veterinary clinics do owners, front line employees, and customers correlate to intermediate manager performance?

RQ3: Is there a relationship between potential challenges faced and the attributes of preparedness of intermediate managers as perceived by owners, front line employees, and customers within veterinary clinics that impact operational performance?

Once the data was collected, transcribed, and analyzed using SPSS software; the development of codes and themes emerged. There was a total of 347 responses which allowed for the development of 67 open coding categories. The open coding categories then allowed for the development of five axial categories. The five axial categories that emerged consisted of

importance of working together, importance of communication, intermediate manager can create smooth changes and operations, operational performance, and goals. These can be referenced in Tables 11-15 listed below.

Axial Coding Tables

Table 8

Importance of Working Together

Invariant Constituents	# of Participants to offer This Experience	% of Participants to Offer this Experience
Input Based Decisions Will Benefit Whole Organization	3	30%
Staff Feels Good About Intermediate Manager	3	30%

Table 9

Importance of Communication

Invariant Constituents	# Of Participants To Offer This Experience	% Of Participants To Offer This Experience
Sincere Communication	3	30%
Input Based Decision To Will Benefit Whole Organization	3	30%
Effectively Communicate	4	40%
Boundaries Between Intermediate Managers And Staff	3	30%
Do Good Communication With Upper Management	4	40%

Table 10

Intermediate Manager Can Create Smooth Changes and Operations

Invariant Constituents	# Of Participants To Offer This Experience	% Of Participants To Offer This Experience
Successful Team Management Achieve Goals	4	40%
Intermediate Manager As Model For Staff	2	20%
Responsible For Junior Staff	3	30%
Importance Of Leadership Qualities	1	10%
Intermediate Managers Getting Respect And Getting The Right People	2	20%
Intermediate Managers Being Relevant To Relationships And Respecting Line Staff	4	40%
Intermediate Manager Seeing The Past As A Learning Tool	1	10%
Upper Management Values Trickle Down To Intermediate Manager	1	10%
Facilitates Problem Solutions / Heads Up To Upper Management	6	60%
Importance of Building Repour With Staff	3	30%
Relationships Help Create Caring About Staff Success	3	30%
Building Trust Creates Better Communication	1	10%
Good Relationships With Clients Creates Trust	3	30%

Table 11

Operational Performance

Invariant Constituents	# Of Participants To Offer This Experience	% Of Participants To Offer This Experience
Operational Performance = Efficiency	3	30%
Successful = Happier	2	20%
Operational Performance As A Guide	2	30%
Everyone Is Empowered With Operational Performance	3	30%
Operational Performance Creates Fairness Under Rating System	1	10%
Intermediate Managers On Ground With Staff & Clients	5	50%

Table 12

Goals

Invariant Constituents	# Of Participants To Offer This Experience	% Of Participants To Offer This Experience
Goals As Incentives	2	20%
Use Of SMART Goals Check	1	10%
Use Of Small Attainable Goals	1	10%

From the axial categories the data was then arranged into three selective themes. The themes that emerged consist of importance of communication as the most important according to the participants with a total of 21 responses. The second theme was facilitates problem solutions, heads up to upper management with a total of 16 responses. Lastly there was three themes that

tied for third each consisting of 15 responses. These included do good communication with upper management, importance of working together, and intermediate manager acts as go between. This can be referenced in Table 16.

Selective Themes

Table 16

Selective Themes

Responses	# Of Responses	Count	% Of Participants To Offer This Response
Do Good Communication With Upper Management	15	4	33%
Facilitates Problem Solutions, Heads Up To Upper Management	16	6	50%
Importance Of Working Together	15	7	58%
Importance Of Communication	21	7	58%
Intermediate Manager Acts As Go Between	15	7	58%

From this data alone; there are in fact challenges intermediate managers face based off the selective themes that emerged from the data analysis. If an intermediate manager can communicate effectively with all levels of staff; this can allow for an organization to operate accordingly; again, this is referencing the axial coding and allows for the Research Question 1 to be answered. The data presented that the basic challenges intermediate managers within a

veterinary clinic would be having good relationships and good communication. Another challenge that is present would be ensuring a smooth operating clinic. Research Question 2; was answered and was quite clear that the attributes of an intermediate manager must be that they have good relationships that can create good communication from the intermediate manager. Also, another attribute is making sure things are done to create a smooth operation. Research question three was answered in a way that participants distanced their answers from operational performance as a concept to be emphasized. It was more oriented to an attribute that allowed for ensuring processes are done to create a smooth operation. Communication is important for any organization and necessary for employees to work together. Communication is also a must at all levels of the organization to ensure that a veterinary clinic or any size of a company can run smoothly. The data also made it clear that intermediate managers must have the ability to solve problems and can relay information to all levels of employees. This is evident based on the data and referencing the ability to give a heads up to upper management and acts as a go between. Communication and relationships seem to be both challenges and attributes necessary for intermediate managers. If intermediate managers are able to communicate well with upper management this will contribute to a smoother operating facility; which can benefit everyone and the organization as a whole.

Recommendations

This study showed that the ‘communication’ between upper management and line staff was a challenge intermediate manager could face. Acting as the “Go Between” as referenced from this study, it is recommended that communication be considered an attribute intermediate manager should possess within this role. Executives overwhelmingly indicated that integrity and communication were the top two soft skills needed by employees in today’s workplace, (Robles,

2012, p. 455). Organizations must capitalize on their employee's attributes and experience especially when it comes to individuals in managerial roles. When these individuals retain these specific attributes, they can only aid in operational performance which allows for success within their organization. One recommendation that veterinary clinics and other small businesses should follow would be to develop a policy and procedure handbook. This book would contain the operations of the facility, policy on procedures, and employee titles with required qualifications. Ensuring that organizational goals and expectations are met this would require for every employee to review the handbook and provide written confirmation that they understand company policy and will comply. Organizations small or large usually have set goals, mission statements, or objective that they are striving for. Goals of course will vary depending on the organization. If goals are conveyed correctly and made clear by intermediate managers; this can assist in the employee's productivity and efficiency, which benefits the organizations overall operational performance.

McDonnell, Lamare, Gunnigle, & Lavell, (2010), states 'Every employee does, in theory, contribute to organizational performance and every worker may need a certain level of training and development to be productive.' This especially is key to smaller businesses based off of their ability to sustain themselves in their competitive market. As organizations understand the significance of this they can equip themselves with the proper tools to prepare their employees on their duties and expectations. With that being said, another recommendation would be that not just intermediate managers within veterinary clinics but, all organization be required to have some from of previous training and or experience. According to Beck & Harter, (2014), 'Bad managers cost businesses billions of dollars each year, and having too many of them can bring down a company.' Organizations small or large that utilize policy, procedures, and requiring

previous experience can avoid that possibility. If a business is able to eliminate this possibility and hire intermediate managers with previous experience have a chance at surviving and an advantage over their competitors. For veterinary clinics; prior experience would consist of having training or experience in veterinary care or veterinary clinics/hospitals, management/supervisory experience, and soft skills (communication). As previously stated, small businesses vary and so do their goals and objectives. When this is present that would also require that previous experience align with the industry in which the intermediate manager would be employed.

Providing training for intermediate managers is also a recommendation that all businesses should follow. For operational performance to be successful it requires that the individuals in key roles (intermediate manager) have some form of training. This can allow for the enhancement of the individual and the organization. Having an individual in a managerial/leadership role without some form of training is a disaster waiting to happen. Intermediate managers should participate in some form of training and development classes or workshops. This would be dependent on previous experience and organizational goals. The training should also be provided yearly to determine its impact on the organization and individual. It can also provide the latest trends in technology, managerial practices, and organizational success. Having a continuous form of training can develop more productive and efficient managers which aids in successful operational performance.

Having a policy/procedure handbook, requiring intermediate managers to have previous experience, and then providing additional training for intermediate managers based on organizational goals can benefit businesses small or large. All organizations regardless of size are in businesses to succeed. It would not be wise to any of them not to consider all three of the

recommendations listed above. This study was specific as it focused on veterinary facilities as it falls under the small business industry. The data that was collected provided information that can also be beneficial to the following fields of study: Intermediate Managers, Small Business, Operational Performance, and Veterinary Institutions. Having collected, analyzed, and presented this new data it is also suggested that additional research be conducted. One of the contributing factors of this was the lack of data to this specific topic of intermediate managers within the veterinary industry. There are studies on intermediate managers, small business, operational performance, but; not specific to Intermediate Managers Experiences: Implications For Operational Performance Within Veterinary Clinical Institutions. Allowing for additional research to be conducted can add to this topic/field and contribute to other industries. Additionally, having purposeful sampling allowed for specific data and if other studies are done this option may not be present. Also, there may be a different tool utilized in collecting data and a researcher may use a different method for this study all together. All of which can be of great use to the field of research and specific industries. Individuals who are also seeking information on opening a small business can benefit from new data in the form of continued research as well as the data from this study.

For small businesses to be successful they must plan accordingly when they are in the process of developing their company. Understanding that it does in fact require experienced individuals in key roles such as intermediate managers; these businesses will have an advantage over their competitors. Having the ability to follow and implement policy and procedure correctly, have experienced and trained employees are all key ingredients to operational performance and assist in a thriving organization.

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