

Managing Workflow

The capability of managing workflow describes a veterinarian who can manage priorities to **use time efficiently** and productively, and is independent and **self-organised** in their work. It includes the skills of **time management**, organisational skills, and **multi-tasking**.

In the veterinary environment, the vet is part of an interprofessional team with interdependent workflows, meaning that poor workflow management can resonate to negatively impact the work of others.

Veterinary work is also unpredictable, so workflow management requires a mix of careful planning and quick, **flexible decision-making** to best prioritise urgent work without neglecting important 'loose ends' such as following up cases and client communication. Good workflow management relies on the ability to make decisions, and to remain calm, as well as self-confidence, adaptability, diligence and a collaborative team-based approach to your work.

Managing workflow is not just about working quickly, and must be balanced against work quality and effectiveness. Clients told the VetSet2Go project that while they appreciate a vet who is efficient and **punctual** with appointments, they also do not like to feel **rushed** during consults.

What they said

"So she likes to do one job, do it well, and then move onto the next job. And she does do it well; she does a brilliant job. The trouble is with mixed practice you've often got five million things coming at you at once and you've got to change tack all the time, and it's that changing tack that she can't handle." (Employer of recent graduate)

*"I think probably the biggest negative would be her lack of decision-making and her inability to step up, make a decision ... and then that flows onto a lot of other things, like time management and so on... and I think because of that lack of decision-making, lack of confidence when the **** hits the fan we just sort of — it all just goes badly ... in terms of time management and getting things done, so then that kind of flows onto then we get staff that are stressed, and clients that are stressed, and people are kept waiting, and then it just blows out from there." (Employer of recent graduate)*

"She's very, very efficient at time management. I think she's great. Yeah, she has some days where she'll have her slower days, but they're a rarity. Most of the time, if she's busy, she'll get everything done on time and she'll have her consult notes written professionally. She'll have followed up everything she'll need to, she'll have done all the daily tasks and she'll still be getting out roughly on time." (Employer of recent graduate)

How is workflow management recognised?

Perceived by you:

- You know how to manage your time to work efficiently and productively
- You can flexibly juggle priorities and multi-task
- You can work independently and set your own schedule
- You usually feel 'in control' of your workload, not overwhelmed
- You find it easy to keep to schedule

Perceived by others:

- Productive, 'gets on with it'
- Good time management; finishes everything on time
- Doesn't hold up others; 'easy to work with'
- Decisive (doesn't stall or procrastinate)

Why is workflow management important to employability?

A veterinarian who can manage workflow is an asset to the practice or their workplace. Managing workflow contributes positively to the team's productivity and 'team dynamic', and allows the caseload to be worked through in a **proactive and efficient manner**, thus reducing stress and frustration within the team, and improving the outcome for the animal and the owner.

Successfully managing a challenging workflow creates a sense of achievement, a state of "flow", and a sense of **collegiality** within a team. By being an effective manager of your workflow, you will positively impact upon those around you, and improve their working day – as well as yours. You and your team will be more **productive** and less stressed, and much happier as a result.

Conversely, poor workflow patterns can leave you feeling rushed and overwhelmed, 'out of control', and frustrated. Inability to manage your time may contribute to prolonged work hours, which is known to negatively impact mental health and work-life balance. Colleagues may become resentful when you are indecisive or procrastinating, while clients do not appreciate being made to wait or rushed.

"She used to really struggle with managing multiple cases at once. So, if she had a consult going and was running blood or something else and had surgery to do, she was not good at that at all at the start, but she got a lot better, and now she can prioritise and direct."
(Employer of recent graduate)

"Vets should try not to rush clients. I know they are busy but if they rush clients they are more likely to call or come back to ask more questions anyway or worse! (inadvertently harm the animal because they don't understand the instructions given)." (Client)

"A disorganised and indecisive vet will make situations much worse and very unsettling for all involved." (Client)

"Time management skills ... because more than often in general practice ... you don't know what comes through the door and you can have a seemingly quiet day and, boom, you have 10 consults back-to-back. So knowing how to manage your time is quite important as well, because otherwise you get too stressed out, especially if you have five back-to-back consults and you have demanding clients ... getting the gist of it as soon as you can and knowing to work on schedule, being on time is really important because your owners will appreciate you for doing that." (Recent graduate)

Possible strategies to enhance your workflow management

Reflect honestly:

Be honest with yourself, and ask for feedback. Reflect upon your usual work day and how you react (internally and behaviourally) to a busy day, and what bad habits adversely affect your workflow.

Stay calm:

The day always finishes. The majority of the time everything gets done, and most of the time your colleagues and clients will be satisfied with the work you have done. You should be too! Becoming stressed is not likely to help your productivity.

Be decisive:

Be confident in your ability to make decisions. You can always change or adjust the plan, but you need to start with a decision. Your first decision doesn't need to be perfect, you just need to work with the information you have right now.

Plan ahead:

Five minutes spent discussing and planning the workday with your team can pay dividends for productivity.

Be flexible:

Each day will bring new challenges as the day progresses. That's ok. Stay calm, re-prioritise, and keep moving through the day.

Multi-tasking:

Look at the bigger picture. Are there multiple tasks that can be more efficiently dealt with concurrently?

Prioritise mindfully:

Is the task urgent or important? If not, consider whether it needs doing. Prioritise and mindfully direct your work to maximum effect.

Delegate where possible:

Work with others to get the task done. You do not need to do everything related to this task or case yourself.

Work efficiently:

Look at ways to be more efficient. Your medical records should not equate to a novel. They need to be complete and concise.

Avoid time-wasters:

Identify and address your time-wasting habits - emails, texting, social media, internet, etc.

Set sensible limits:

Working long hours without breaks will not make you more productive - it is more likely to do the opposite. Take a break to refresh.

Further Resources:

- Viner B. (2010) *Success In Veterinary Practice: Maximizing Clinical Outcomes And Personal Well-Being*. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- VetTimes, 21 August 2017. [Time Management](#).