Predicting Physician Executive Performance

A Study by Witt/Kieffer and Hogan Assessment Systems
Contents

Introduction: Why study physician executives? .............................................. 1

Key Findings .................................................................................................. 2

About the Study ............................................................................................. 3

A Closer Look at Competencies and Assessments ........................................ 4
  • The 16 Competencies Leadership Model
  • About Hogan personality assessments
  • How the assessments and competencies work together

Results and Analysis .................................................................................... 6

1. High-performing physician leaders can be differentiated from others by characteristics such as resiliency, even temper, and a willingness to share successes.

2. Strong physician leadership fosters patient loyalty in a health system.

3. Physician and non-physician healthcare leaders operate differently and can learn about, and learn from, each other.

Conclusions and Implications: What we’ve really learned about physician executives ........................................ 9
Introduction: Why study physician executives?

Healthcare benefits when physicians help lead their organizations. Physicians have unique insight into what happens in the corridors of care as well as the intellectual capacity to grasp the broader challenges facing their organizations and the industry today. If healthcare is to continue to reform as it desires to do — to improve quality of care, reduce costs, shift from volume to value, address population health and wellness, and more — physicians who are also executives will help lead the way.

We are just beginning to understand how physician executives, individually and collectively, can best lead their organizations. To this end, Witt/Kieffer* and Hogan Assessment Systems approached Providence Health & Services and Swedish Health Services (“Providence,” headquartered in Renton, Wash.) to conduct a study of the system’s physician executives. The goal was to learn more about these executives through proven personality and competency-based assessment methods. For Providence, it was a chance to identify and develop high-potential physician leaders for its future.

Other objectives shared by Witt/Kieffer, Hogan, and Providence included:

- Understanding the differences between good and great physician executives;
- Identifying differences between physician executives and other healthcare leaders to help these leaders complement each other and work more effectively together;
- Developing tools and methodologies to help physician executives continue to grow as leaders.

Witt/Kieffer and Hogan assessed 137 physician executives, and ultimately collected performance data from nearly 100 physician executives within the Providence system. The assessment methodologies were those that Witt/Kieffer and Hogan developed for general healthcare leaders which are now being adapted for physician executives as well. Witt/Kieffer and Hogan hoped to use the data to draw conclusions about characteristics that predict strong performance in physician executives in general and how to apply these conclusions to improve physician leader performance across the industry.

* Witt/Kieffer conducts ongoing research on physician executives and supports the leadership assessment and development needs of clients through its Leadership Solutions practice (www.wittkieffer.com/services/leadership-solutions/)
**Key Findings**

While the sample size of physician executives is modest, assessment experts from Witt/Kieffer and Hogan were able to see several clear patterns in the results.

1) High-performing physician leaders can be differentiated from lower performers by characteristics such as resiliency, even temper, and a willingness to share successes.

2) Strong physician leadership fosters patient loyalty in a health system.

3) Physician and non-physician healthcare leaders operate differently and can learn about, and learn from, each other by understanding competency differences.

This research and report represent a step toward improving the performance of physician leaders. By identifying individuals who possess key characteristics and score highly on Witt/Kieffer’s competency model, it will be easier for organizations to predict which physicians are more likely to excel in leadership roles. If hospitals and health systems understand the characteristics and habits of high-performing physician executives, especially compared with other healthcare leaders, they can be more effective at selecting and retaining physician leaders and at shaping their future leadership teams.
About the Study

Hogan and Witt/Kieffer had been working for several years to assess and identify high-performing healthcare executives, mapping Hogan’s proven assessment methodologies to an industry-specific 16 Competencies Leadership Model (see page 4). They now sought to adapt their methods and tools to competencies indicative of high-performing physician executives.

In 2014, Witt/Kieffer and Hogan began conducting focus groups and collecting data using Hogan’s Job Evaluation Tool with physician leaders at Providence. This allowed Hogan to identify the personal characteristics critical to success across competency-related behaviors in the role (e.g., communicating a vision, giving feedback, developing high-performing teams). Next, 137 physician executives across the health system completed personality and values assessments to provide information about their personal characteristics. These assessments included the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI, a measure of day-to-day behavioral characteristics), Hogan Development Survey (HDS, a measure of behavioral tendencies that may hinder job performance), and Motives, Values, Preferences Inventory (MVPI, a measure of key motives and drivers).

Simultaneously, Hogan and Witt/Kieffer created an online performance rating form based on job analysis results, the 16 Competencies Leadership Model for Healthcare, and their own expert judgment. Using this form, supervisors provided overall performance and competency ratings for nearly 100 physician executives who completed the personality assessments. In addition, Providence provided information regarding operating commitments for accessible physician executives. These ratings were used to identify top performers across various metrics including the competency behaviors.

The last step of the study process was for Hogan to analyze all data to examine the characteristics predictive of key performance outcomes and competency-related behaviors. These characteristics are now being used to provide insight to Providence and the physician executives who participated in the study, with the expectation that it will lead to improved on-the-job performance.
A Closer Look at Competencies and Assessments

The 16 Competencies Leadership Model*

The 16 Competencies Leadership Model was developed by Witt/Kieffer as a means of assessing leaders based on critical competencies needed on the job for healthcare leaders, to support personality-based and other progressive means of assessment and evaluation that Hogan had helped to pioneer. (These competencies were first outlined in the book *Exceptional Leadership: 16 Critical Competencies for Healthcare Executives* by Carson F. Dye, FACHE and Andrew N. Garman, PsyD.) Thus, the model was intended to be far different from traditional experience and skills-oriented executive assessment methods. Its key elements were that it was industry-specific — indicative of what actual healthcare leaders were, are, and should be doing — and that it emphasized big-picture leadership areas such as vision, awareness, and a leader’s “way with people.” The graphic below illustrates this model.

More about Hogan personality assessments
For three decades Hogan has been a leader in personality assessments, emphasizing a strict adherence to empirical and scientific evidence in the practice of talent management. Physician executives from Providence involved in the study were asked to complete three of Hogan’s personality assessments.

Hogan Personality Assessments

- **Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI):** a measure of normal personality; used to predict “bright-side” personality, or what is seen when people are at their best.
- **Hogan Development Survey (HDS):** identifies “dark-side” personality-based performance risks and derailers of interpersonal behavior — what is exhibited when people are stressed or when their guard is down.
- **Motives, Values, Preferences Inventory (MVPI):** reveals a person’s core values, goals, and interests — what a person desires and strives to attain.

The Hogan approach presents results as they might relate to a person’s professional behavior and reputation, not necessarily how he or she views him or herself.

How the assessments and competencies work together
Hogan collaborated with Witt/Kieffer in 2011 to create scoring algorithms for the 16 Competencies Leadership Model using the HPI, HDS, and MVPI. The purpose of the current study was to determine whether the competency scoring used for non-physician executives would predict performance in physician executives. To do this, Hogan examined relationships between Hogan scales and key outcomes provided in performance variables provided by Providence. Hogan was able to correlate the existing 16 Competencies Leadership Model for Healthcare with key outcome variables (i.e., operating commitments and performance ratings). Using Hogan’s assessments to measure the 16 Competencies Leadership Model for Healthcare provides a framework to measure a physician executive’s potential for success on any one of those competencies.
Results and Analysis

First, Hogan analyzed the relationship between personality and performance ratings. Using these results, it then combined personality characteristics to adjust the competency scoring to predict performance in physician leaders. Based on these results, experts from Hogan and Witt/Kieffer identified key conclusions. The following three findings are what we believe to be the most important:

1. High-performing physician leaders can be differentiated from others by characteristics such as resiliency, even temper, and a willingness to share successes.
   The research results indicated several characteristics that truly differentiate “top-performing” from “good” physician executives. Physician executives who received higher performance scores are:

   Resilient under pressure, able to handle competing priorities with ease, and optimistic and confident.
   The physician executives who were rated as top performers by their supervisors had higher scores on Adjustment than good performers indicating that being composed under pressure, confident, and having high self-esteem is important for performance.

   Even-tempered, not letting small things become bothersome
   (as shown by the Excitable scores), and trustworthy and approachable
   (as shown by the lower Skeptical scores for top performers). Per Hogan, the Excitable characteristic suggests someone who is moody, hard to please, and emotionally volatile, while Skeptical suggests someone suspicious and sensitive to criticism. The lower percentiles for top performers suggest that they are less vulnerable to these habits.
Motivated by sharing credit with others and achieving results, as shown by lower Recognition scores for top performers. The MVPI Recognition scale measures whether an executive is “responsive to attention, approval, and praise.”

What It Means
Taken together, the graphs above suggest that a few select characteristics are clear differentiators between good versus high-performing physician executives. Qualities such as flexibility, optimism, even-temperedness, and a willingness to share praise and approval with others are predictive of exceptional physician leadership. This is critically important insight for healthcare organizations such as Providence who are looking to successfully develop physician executives internally and recruit new ones.

2. Strong physician leadership fosters patient loyalty in a health system.
In the physician leadership competency study, the results identify that physician leaders who have higher patient loyalty ratings score higher on physician leader competencies. Physician executives who received higher patient loyalty ratings within their respective practices are:

- Persistent, self-confident, and willing to lead and mentor team members
- Decisive, assertive, and open to new ideas/methods
- Able to build a healthcare environment focused on professionalism and providing high-quality patient care

As seen in the graph below, the physician leaders who have higher patient loyalty ratings (in blue) score higher on all physician leader competencies. Therefore, physician leaders possessing the characteristics predictive of these competencies will likely have higher patient loyalty ratings.
What It Means
With government and industry reform, patient loyalty has never been more vital to reimbursement and the success and future of health systems. Patient loyalty now translates into a more profitable health system, and those who understand what it takes to keep patients coming back will thrive. Identifying high-performing physician leaders is thus a key to organizational success. Not surprisingly, there has been a shift in the industry to physicians assuming leadership roles, given their unique understanding of the patient experience and its link to quality of care. What the chart on page 7 indicates is that healthcare organizations that make optimal use of the physician executives with these key characteristics within their leadership ranks will increase the likelihood of strong patient loyalty, thus increasing the likelihood of success in the marketplace.

3. Physician and non-physician healthcare leaders operate differently and can learn about, and learn from, each other by understanding competency differences.
The research presented here sheds light on the personality of and values held by typical physician executives versus a cohort of non-physician healthcare executives. Although based on a small sample size of physician executives, some general conclusions can be drawn. High-performing physician executives differ from other healthcare leaders in a number of ways. Primarily, high-performing physician executives are:

More focused on learning and remaining current with changes in the medical field (expressed by the Learning Approach score differential)
More resilient and persistent under pressure (Adjustment)
Unafraid to approach problems uniquely and innovatively (Imaginative)
Predicting Physician Executive Performance

What It Means
Understanding the differences between physician leaders and other healthcare executives allows organizations to support each group in developing their own competencies and leadership abilities, and in working better with each other. It can also help health systems create the right mix and team structure for these executives.

The curious, scientific, data-driven approach to learning representative of physician executives suggests that these leaders might be well suited for positions which require an ability to absorb large amounts of new information and adapt to a new healthcare landscape. Meanwhile, the discrepancy in Commerce orientation may suggest that physicians are not predisposed to concern themselves with profitability, monetary compensation, and the interplay between tasks and the bottom-line. This may also suggest that physicians have a unique perspective on the physician-patient relationship and overall patient experience, which may serve in bridging the gap between making money and providing high-quality healthcare.

Conclusions and Implications: What we’ve really learned about physician executives
Through this rigorous research, we now have a better grasp of what personal and behavioral characteristics drive critical performance areas for physician leaders. In the training of current physicians and physician leaders on staff, or in the hiring of new physician executives, healthcare organizations can concentrate on key areas in predicting whether an individual is likely to perform well in a given role.

Through this research, we have also been able to fine-tune our healthcare assessment model and tailor it to physician executive competencies. This makes it a much more reliable tool for gauging physician leader success factors and helping organizations to understand these executives. Witt/Kieffer is now able to offer this tool to clients and produce a corresponding Witt/Kieffer Physician Executive Potential Report.

We are not suggesting that the performance and future success of physician leaders is guaranteed through this assessment methodology. We do believe, however, that healthcare organizations can make higher quality decisions on hiring and developing physician executives. We now have a reliable template for gauging, and predicting with a good measure of confidence, physician executive performance.
About Witt/Kieffer
Witt/Kieffer is the nation’s preeminent executive search firm supporting organizations improving the quality of life, including those in healthcare, education, academic medicine, life sciences, sports, and the not-for-profit sector. It also serves clients through its Board Services and Leadership Solutions practices, which offer services that further strengthen client enterprises.
Visit www.wittkieffer.com for more information.

About Leadership Solutions at Witt/Kieffer
Witt/Kieffer’s Leadership Solutions services help executives, teams, and organizations improve their leadership and get to better. Its portfolio of customized offerings includes leadership assessment (individual and team); executive coaching; succession management; onboarding; and team development.
Visit www.wittkieffer.com/services/leadership-solutions

About Hogan
Hogan is a global provider of personality assessments and consulting services. With nearly three decades of experience, Hogan helps businesses dramatically reduce turnover and increase productivity by hiring the right people, developing key talent, and evaluating leadership potential.
Visit www.hoganassessments.com

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