

PROFESSIONAL GROWTH



Essential Skills for Successful Strategists

Do you possess the core competencies required to not only survive, but to thrive in a dramatically changing healthcare environment?

By Heather Prasad and Adriane Willig

The role of the healthcare strategist has seen its ups and downs over the years. While many strategists have been duly recognized for their contributions to the success of their hospital or health system, there have also been times when some organizations have eliminated strategy positions, particularly as a way to reduce expenses. Such downsizing still happens today.

Fortunately, many forward-thinking healthcare executives realize the added value of transformational strategists who have the ability to inspire, influence, mentor, and motivate others within their organization.

SHSMD's *Bridging Worlds* report inspired

us to explore the competencies required to be considered a champion for a healthcare organization. The report is chock full of powerful information. Among the most impactful implications for future transformational strategists, as outlined in the document, is the importance of being nimble to exceed the rate of change.

How Nimble Are You?

As leadership speaker Mark Sanborn is often quoted as saying, "Your success in life isn't based on your ability to simply change. It is based on your ability to change faster than your competition, customers, and business."

Healthcare strategists today need to evolve as fast—if not faster—than the rapidly changing environment around them. They must swiftly identify issues, confidently ask questions, and skillfully offer solutions to move their organization forward.

No matter the level in the organization or the job title, successful strategists are able

to turn ideas into actions. They are curious, creative, connected, and serve as role models for change within their organizations.

Core Competencies for Strategists

So, what characteristics define today's transformational healthcare strategist? *Bridging Worlds* outlined a roadmap for professional development, which included a comprehensive list of attributes, skills, and tools for the future strategist. When developing a competency model for your organization, department, or team—or even yourself—we suggest including these three key competencies:



1. Innovation/Creativity. The successful healthcare strategist is not just creative, but also brings out creativity in others. Transformational strategy leaders foster an environment that encourages brainstorming, challenges the status quo, and then builds a consensus around innovative concepts in order to move forward with them.

ASK YOURSELF: *How do I stimulate creativity? Do I pause before an important team meeting to think about the situations and the people involved? How might my approach change to fit the environment or the group?*

2. Driving Results. Although healthcare strategists often do not have bottom-line ownership of initiatives, they certainly need to be accountable and take responsibility for ensuring that strategic initiatives are successful. Transformational strategy leaders are action-oriented, persistent, and have boundless energy. They have the ability to instill a sense of urgency and possibility in others. They also are able to keep teams focused and committed to seeing initiatives through to completion.

ASK YOURSELF: *Do I drive results? If I see an initiative being derailed, can I bring that to light and step in to help get it back on track?*

3. Informal Power. This term connotes working with and through others to accomplish goals. Successful healthcare strategists are able to develop mutually supportive relationships. They find ways to learn how and when to use their power to solve problems and propel their organization forward. Some might call this having political savvy, but it is much more than that. Informal power means you are seen as the go-to person who knows how to get things done through persuasion and consensus, rather than through force or authority.

ASK YOURSELF: *Do I have informal power? Am I frequently sought out by others for my opinions? Do I also pay back or support others in my network?*

Assess and Enhance Your Competencies!

As much as we might like to think that we're "all that and a bag of chips," the successful healthcare strategist also possesses the desire to continuously learn and the courage to take on projects that might be outside his or her comfort zone.

We encourage you to find ways to assess your attributes and skills. Psychometric tools, such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, 360-degree reviews, and mentor programs, are a means to measure your aptitude and find out how you are seen by others. Sign up for formal training programs. Consider hiring an executive coach. Take on new challenges and different roles. Whether you are your organization's chief strategy officer, marketing manager, analyst, or you hold some other strategy title today, you have the opportunity now and in the coming years to make your mark on the healthcare industry.

To learn more about what it takes to become a transformational leader, visit shsmid.org/bridgingworlds.

Editor's note: This year, SHSMD will offer an assessment tool for healthcare strategists based on the skills and attributes identified in *Bridging Worlds*.

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Putting a Competency Model into Action

A Case Study

SHSMD's *Bridging Worlds* report provides valuable resources to help assess your own strengths and weaknesses. For healthcare leaders, it can also be utilized in performance management to identify the competency needs of team members.

The strategy team at Thomas Jefferson University and Hospitals in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, recently used *Bridging Worlds* as a reference to build its competency model.

The process of constructing a framework for staff assessment and improvement was initiated during a time of tremendous change and challenges, which included integration as the hospital, university, and physician group came together, followed by subsequent mergers. As the healthcare environment rapidly

evolved around them, it became imperative to discern how the team could remain relevant and provide value to the organization.

By melding the health system's leadership development program with *Bridging Worlds* attributes, the team created a new competency model, from which several lessons have been learned. (See Exhibit 1.)

When developing a competency model for your organization:

- Review team job descriptions.
- Use attributes and skills from *Bridging Worlds*.
- Describe competencies based on job level.
- Create multipronged

action plans with SMART goals (defined as specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound).

- Integrate professional development plans into existing performance management architecture.

Exhibit 1

Thomas Jefferson University and Hospitals Competency Model

Transforms	Engages	Executes
Demonstrates Adaptability	Communicates Effectively	Leads Change
Innovative Thinking	Builds Trust	Applies Business Acumen
Strategic Orientation	Motivates & Influences	Analyzes Needs & Proposes Solutions
	Partners & Networks	Manages Projects
	Develops People	