Medical talent management: a model for physician deployment

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Abstract

Purpose – This article aims to provide a focused cost-effective method for triaging physicians into appropriate non-clinical roles to benefit both doctors and healthcare organizations.

Design/methodology/approach – Reviews a validated career-planning process and customize it for medical talent management.

Findings – A structured career assessment can differentiate between different physician work styles and direct medical talent into best-fit positions. This allows healthcare organizations to create a more finely tuned career ladder than the familiar “in or out” binary choice.

Practical implications – Healthcare organizations can invest in cost-effective processes for the optimal utilization of their medical talent.

Originality/value – Provides a new use for a well-validated career assessment and planning system. The actual value of this approach should be studied using best-practices in ROI research.

Keywords Careers, Doctors, Medical personnel, Medical management

Paper type Viewpoint

Healthcare leaders and organizations derive competitive advantage by effectively hiring, developing and deploying their physician talent. Hiring the right doctors and placing them in the right positions over the course of their tenure will generate significant return for every healing organization, and healthcare leaders can access models and processes that serve that purpose.

Many physicians decide at some point in their careers that they want to transition from clinical medicine to “something else”, either within or outside the healthcare arena. In most healthcare organizations, there is a relatively flat medical career ladder. Staff physicians tend to face a harsh binary choice: stay (as a clinician) or go. Because of this stark decision tree, many doctors who are ready for a change either leave or resign themselves to staying put. This results in an expensive talent drain as well as a cohort of stalled professionals within the organization (with all the morale and performance problems that creates). Fortunately, it is possible to create a more nuanced set of transition options for physicians by using a well-validated career model for the purposes of internal staffing/succession planning.

Career models and career choice

All doctors are not the same, and this diversity can be managed in a way that benefits both the medical staff and organization. Recognizing that physicians have different work styles can assist in the hiring, placement and development of each doctor for optimal performance and satisfaction.

While there are many theories of career choice and adjustment (Osipow and Walsh, 1995), John Holland (1992) has developed the most validated and widely used system...
for matching people with jobs that fit their interest, abilities, values and personal style. His so-called “RIASEC” model describes six different work styles[1]:

1. **Realistic.** People who have athletic or mechanical ability, prefer to work with objects, machines, tools, plants or animals, or to be outdoors.

2. **Investigative.** People who like to observe, learn, investigate, analyze, evaluate or solve problems.

3. **Artistic.** People who have artistic, innovating or intuitional abilities and like to work in unstructured situations using their imagination and creativity.

4. **Social.** People who like to work with people to enlighten, inform, help, train, or cure them, or are skilled with words.

5. **Enterprising.** People who like to work with people, influencing, persuading, performing, leading or managing for organizational goals or economic gain.

6. **Conventional.** People who like to work with data, have clerical or numerical ability, carry out tasks in detail or follow through on others’ instructions.

By completing the Self-Directed Search assessment instrument (© Psychological Assessment Resources, Inc.; available online at: www.self-directed-search.com), people can determine which of the six Holland style(s) are most similar to them and which jobs are a good potential fit:

**Realistic jobs/careers**

This category contains occupations where individuals have an interest in working with objects such as tools and machines. Mechanical creativity and physical dexterity are important skills for this theme and some of the work activities of these occupations involve operating equipment, using tools, building, and repairing. Individuals who score high on this theme prefer dealing with things rather than with ideas or people.

**Investigative jobs/careers**

This group of occupations center around an interest in science, theories, ideas, and data. Analytical skills are important for this group and some of the common work activities are performing lab work, solving abstract problems and researching. A high score in this theme is indicative of someone who is creative, prefers to think through problems, and enjoys intellectual challenges.

**Artistic jobs/careers**

This theme includes occupations involving self-expression and art appreciation. Some of the skills needed in these occupations are creativity, talent, and artistic expression. Composing music, writing, and creating visual art are a few of the work activities involved in careers in this category. High scorers have artistically oriented interests and a greater need for individual expression, and generally describe themselves as original, expressive and unconventional.

**Social jobs/careers**

This category contains occupations that involve working with people such as human welfare and community service. People skills such as listening and showing understanding are very important for this category. Teaching, helping, and explaining
are all potential work activities for this category. Someone who scores high in this category tends to be sociable, humanistic and get along well with others.

**Enterprising jobs/careers**

Occupations with an interest in business and leadership roles can be found in this theme. Communicating with others and an ability to motivate and direct others are important skills for these occupations; selling, managing and persuading are all possible work activities. Those who score high in this theme are often described as ambitious and enthusiastic. They tend to prefer social environments in which they can assume leadership and enjoy persuading others to their viewpoints.

**Conventional jobs/careers**

This category consists of occupations with an interest in organization, data and finance. Math, data analysis, record keeping and attention to detail are all important skills for these occupations. A high score in this theme indicates that an individual is most effective when dealing with well-defined tasks. In addition, these individuals prefer to know precisely what is expected of them and could be described as orderly and dependable.

**Career assessment for physician talent management**

In the traditional use of the Self-Directed Search, the first letter of the three highest scoring Holland styles provides a career “code” that can be used to research a range of potentially good-fit jobs. For instance, if someone’s top three work styles are investigative, social and enterprising, their three-letter code is I-S-E. Many jobs/careers are a good fit with the ISE code, one of which just happens to be . . . physician.

The two most common styles that lead to the physician career choice are the investigative pathway (science aptitude) and the Social pathway (helping orientation). There are also people who choose a medical career (especially surgery) because they possess remarkable hand-eye coordination and manual dexterity (the realistic pathway) or because they like to make an impact and take a leadership role (the enterprising pathway). The artistic and conventional styles do not appear to be major drivers of the physician career choice.

Once a physician decides they are ready to explore a job transition from clinical practice to something else, they will benefit from having easy access through the workplace to a focused structured assessment and planning process that enables them to generate options and take effective action. By providing this assessment and planning process as an element of the human resource function, healthcare organizations can invest in the correct deployment of their medical talent. Once a physician determines which of the Holland work styles are most like them by conducting a valid assessment, they can then consider a variety of good-fit jobs. Some of these positions may be accessible within their current organization, in which case they can consider an internal transition (an active jobs listing will facilitate this process). Others may require leaving the organization to pursue the right career move. Following is an example of how the Holland work styles can point a physician toward a variety of non-clinical healthcare roles.
The “investigative” physician

- Profile. Tend to be analytical, comfortable with abstractions, scholarly, self-confident with math/science abilities; may have conservative values; can find social situations difficult; can be very original in their thinking; may be described as analytical, creative, curious, independent, intellectual, original, precise, rational, unconventional.

- Preferred work environment. Laboratories, libraries, universities, research facilities; work best alone or in a team with clear separate duties; like achievement-oriented, intelligent and logical co-workers.

- Healthcare positions. Pure and applied medical research, biotechnology, health technology R&D.


The “social” physician

- Profile. Deeply interested in other people, sensitive to their needs, concerned for their welfare; like to help others, value relationships and solving social problems; have teaching ability; use verbal and social skills to influence others; can be described as concerned, cooperative, ethical, friendly, generous, genuine, helpful, humanistic, perceptive, responsible, sensitive, sociable, tactful, understanding.

- Preferred work environment. Prefer to work with others in the service of other people or improving society; like a harmonious work milieu with consensus decision-making; dislike conflict or power issues.

- Healthcare positions. Medical/health education, public health professional, healthcare advocate.

- Organizations. American Public Health Association (www.apha.org); American Association for Health Education (www.aahperd.org/aahe/), Medical Advocacy Project (www.doctorsoftheworld.org).

The “enterprising” physician

- Profile. Tends to be adventurous, dominant, and persuasive; place value on political and economic issues; are drawn to power and leadership roles; thrive on influencing others and use social skills to achieve political or economic goals; more interested in the big picture than the details; can be described as adventurous, aggressive, ambitious, assertive, competitive, confident, domineering, energetic, persuasive, political, status-conscious, verbal.

- Preferred work environment. Prefer a hard-driving, well-organized, results-oriented milieu focused on achieving bottom-line results; prefer a leadership position from which to organize others and receive high compensation.


The “realistic” physician

- **Profile.** Tends to prefer working with things rather than people or ideas, and have mechanical or athletic abilities; prefer actions to words and are impatient with long discussions; take pride in doing things right and producing things that are well made; tend to have conservative values, and prefer the “tried and true” approach; may be described as aggressive, honest, concrete, hands-on, independent, persistent, practical, rugged, self-reliant, stable, strong, thrifty, well-coordinated.

- **Preferred work environment.** Outdoors, labs, factories, shops where one can work with their hands, wear casual clothes and be with familiar people; like to work alone or in teams to produce things using structured procedures; like to work with people who “do it right the first time”.

- **Healthcare positions.** Bioengineering, medical equipment design/fabrication.

- **Organizations.** American Institute for Medical and Biological Engineering (www.aimbe.org), Association for the Advancement of Medical Instrumentation (www.aami.org), Medical Device Manufacturers Association (www.medicaldevices.org).

The “conventional” physician

- **Profile.** Tend to be precise, organized, conservative, orderly, with administrative and data-collection skills; value business and economic achievement, material possessions and status; can be described as accurate, careful, conforming, conscientious, efficient, hard-working, persistent, practical, precise, predictable, quiet, responsible and systematic.

- **Preferred work environment.** Structured, stable, orderly office environment with clear rules and policies; work well alone or on a team with clearly defined duties.

- **Healthcare positions.** Healthcare process/quality improvement, electronic medical records/informatics consultant, medical billing specialist, healthcare database manager.

- **Organizations.** Institute for Healthcare Improvement (www.ihi.org), American Medical Informatics Association (www.amia.org).

The “artistic” physician

- **Profile.** Like to express their imagination and feelings; are expressive, original, intuitive, nonconforming, introspective and independent; have artistic and musical abilities; can be described as creative, emotional, expressive, idealistic, imaginative, impulsive, independent, intuitive, original, spontaneous.

- **Preferred work environment.** Unstructured places with wide latitude for self-expression; work best unsupervised where product quality is valued over quantity of output.

- **Healthcare positions.** Medical illustrator, technical writer, medical journalist.

- **Organizations.** American Medical Writers Association (www.amwa.org), Association of Medical Illustrators (www.medical-illustrators.org), Institute of Medical Illustrators (www.imi.org.uk).
Conclusion
Many physicians want to leave the practice of clinical medicine at some point during their career. Most healthcare organizations offer these physicians a binary work choice: stay/practice or leave. This results in either the exodus of medical talent (with hefty replacement costs) or an underchallenged group of professionals who remain by default rather than commitment.

Physicians who are contemplating leaving the bedside will benefit from engaging in a structured process that involves clarifying their dominant work styles and then exploring a range of high-fit jobs/careers. Healthcare organizations that provide easy access to such a process (e.g. through their human resource function as a career/coaching benefit) can expect to enjoy significant gains in physician morale and performance as well as the ability to attract and retain the best medical talent.

Note

References

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