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Life Sciences

## Are you ready for the true Physician-Leader?

As more and more physicians transition to, or within, the corporate world, recent research by Amrop shows that your company may not always get what's best. What should you look for when hiring physician-leaders?

by

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Life Sciences companies are re-inventing themselves in the face of growing market pressures. Shifting realities drive a need to recruit and develop leaders who can operate decisively in times when the rules of the game are evolving. These are leaders with experiences from other settings and sectors, less constrained by tradition and able to set new directions and develop new ways of operating to succeed.

But as more and more physicians transition to, or within, the corporate world, recent research by Amrop shows that your company may not always get what's best. What should you look for when hiring physician-leaders?



## What makes a leader?

In any field this is a difficult question to answer and the Life Sciences industry is no exception. Amrop conducted an in-depth study of the topic under the leadership of its Global Life Sciences Practice. Spearheaded by Amrop in the US, and in conjunction with Caliper Corporation, the 2011 study uncovered the realities behind the transition from being a leading physician to a physician-leader. Adam Millinger, LCSW, a Partner at Amrop in the US and the lead on the study, calls it a "big step in opening our eyes to the challenges involved in finding the right fit" for physicians progressing through the corporate world.

How do you decide if the candidate in front of you has what it takes to be a successful physician-leader?

Physicians demonstrate a variety of leadership skills every day in clinics, hospitals and companies around the world. But what happens when the physician makes the jump into the corporate world or changes within it? How do you decide if the candidate in front of you has what it takes to be a successful physician-leader, and how do you evaluate them as their career progresses? What should you be evaluating to understand their true leadership ability?

A leader cannot themselves in the weeds, but must be focused on the end goal.

While future performance cannot always be predicted, Amrop's research outlines the key characteristics of physician-leaders, and how these factors could be useful in helping a physician-leader thrive in a leadership role in a pharmaceutical company. The key is in creating the right profile for hiring executives. According to Eskil Westh, head of Amrop's Global Life Sciences practice, this includes "people management skills and the ability to lead other physicians, as well as the ability to express their thinking and direction in a commercial context."

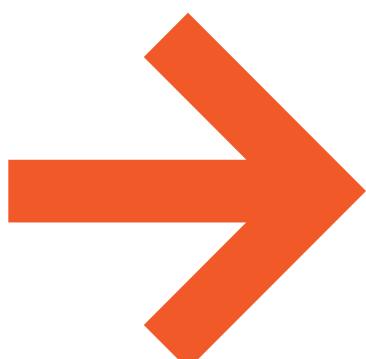
Participants in the study were selected from a number of well-known organizations including Bristol-Myers Squibb, GlaxoSmithKline and Sanofi, among others. These managers held a wide variety of positions ranging from Senior Director to Chief Medical Officer. Some 67 candidates from the pool of possible choices were selected, while 39 participated in the year-long study.

The study utilized the Caliper Profile, an assessment tool that measures 23 different personality traits and motivational factors that have been found to be highly predictive of job performance. This tool has been used by over 30,000 companies over the past 50 years.

The results from the study are clear and compelling. "A strong profile emerged from the data. We discovered that in order to be a great physician-leader, one had to be first a successful leader and second, a successful physician," said Millinger. "In addition to evaluating their core competencies as physicians, we needed to evaluate the 'soft skillset' that they possess," Millinger added.

"The results of the study not only help organizations choose the best candidate, but also ensure retention rates are high," Millinger noted.

These skills and innate talents can be grouped into core units or competence areas, which are expressed in specific behaviours. A true leader, it appears from the research, is one who knows how to effectively persuade others and who is able to be highly strategic in his/her thinking and orientation. "Strong leaders do not lose themselves in the weeds but stay focused on the end goal," Millinger said.



## Bedside Manners: Interpersonal Effectiveness

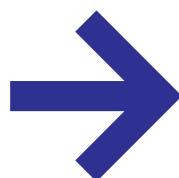
Physician-leaders, in addition to developing their soft skillset, also need to be action-oriented, goal-oriented and self-disciplined. Often they have an international outlook. The strongest leaders, it was found, typically have a bias towards action over deliberation, and are motivated to win consensus from others and communicate clearly.

Whether driven by a desire for consensus or because they understand the need to communicate well with their team, the importance of communication skills cannot be overemphasized. "We all know, both in Europe and in the United States, that bedside manners are not taught in medical school. Additionally, to be truly successful, these physician-leaders need to be able to express themselves in a non-scientific manner," Westh noted.

While companies need to know what they are looking for when hiring a physician-leader, the study also made clear that these individuals need a specific corporate culture in order to thrive in a work environment. They need a corporate culture that helps them to make a smooth transition from practicing medicine to the priorities of a profit-making business. The company needs to create an environment that encourages and embraces creativity. Physician-leaders thrive in an environment that is not overly structured or plagued by a silo mentality on projects. These leaders tend to adopt new ideas without fear of failure. The company must be comfortable and supportive of this approach.

## Driving physician performance? Ask yourself:

- Are we truly ready to be quick and nimble?
- Can we take new risks in parallel to our conventional approaches?
- Do we actually value and incentivize creativity leading to innovation?
- Can we truly let people lead by instilling an overarching sense of accountability to all layers of management?



## Patients No More

The research also found that physician-leaders are more goal-focused than relationship-focused. This can be a benefit but also an obstacle to achieving corporate goals. Often these leaders might lack certain diplomatic skills that can be used to 'grease the wheels' of everyday relationships. These physician-leaders tend to be "selectively accommodating or prone to waiting until their help is sought out," according to the study.

While this does keep everyone focused on the task at hand, a physician-leader will be more successful in a corporate culture that:

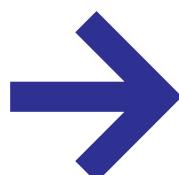
- matches the right people to the right roles (with ways to measure this)
- encourages a collaborative work environment where goal achievement is highly prized
- aligns the expectations of direct management with matrix team reporting

**For the physician-leader,  
the value of creating  
relationships with colleagues  
cannot be overstated.**

This type of culture not only attracts physician-leaders at the outset, but also serves to retain them throughout their careers. The following is an example of how interacting with colleagues can lead to greater depth of understanding that can foster success for the unit:

A physician in a major pharmaceutical company is leading a global clinical development team. The core strategy team is only about 6-7 members but through their functions, the worldwide project team is about 150 staff. Before the kickoff meeting for the project, the team leader met individually with the core team members to learn about their level of interest in the project, to ask for their views on the issues at hand, and to stress that she wanted their input prior to formally setting a plan in place. These meetings proved invaluable, even though the team leader was not entirely comfortable in these social interactions – as opposed to letting her “work do the talking for her”. She was able to build a rapport where people felt heard; she was a team player not looking to commandeer the project. This feeling of empowerment drove the team to openly express ideas, hammer out issues more quickly and ultimately build a consensus around a plan to which all were committed.

While companies are focused on bottom-line goals, it is important that they consider how to foster relationship building and partnering when working on a project



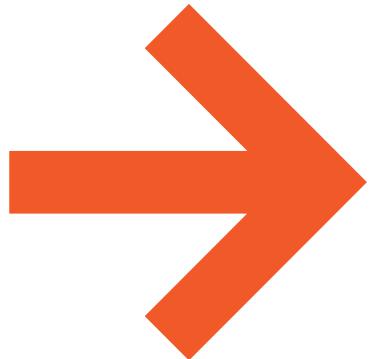
## Problem Solving & Decision Making

A third area that was deemed necessary for physician-leaders to be a success was their ability to be commercially influential, noted Westh.

Successful executives who took part in the study were each considered to be particularly innovative in their approach to projects and in their ability to make decisions in the complex world of pharmaceuticals. This is especially important in an industry that is facing new uncertainties in pipelines, pricing and reimbursement, as well as the impact from emerging market competition and generics.

The executives studied were also willing to think outside the box and to “tap into outside information sources to expand the scope and range of their analyses,” according to the report. As a group, these executives were willing to “challenge conventional thinking and perceived wisdom.” On the other hand, physician-leaders are not necessarily detail-oriented when creating or planning a project, especially if they don’t consider something a priority.

Ask your candidates: What stifles your creativity? When is it important to “step outside of the box” and when is it better to rely on a “tried and true” solution?



What does this mean in terms of making the right hire? Ask your candidates: What stifles your creativity? When is it important to “step outside of the box” and when is it better to rely on a “tried and true” solution?

It seems clear that these executives, while able to drive sales and the team, need to be surrounded by strong team members and staff who can implement the high-level strategies that they develop. During the hiring process, it becomes crucial to understand not only what skills the candidates may offer but also which ones they consider to be less important. Missing or complementary skillsets can either be achieved by looking for them in other team members or by creating the kind of environment where the executive is called upon to do that which they do best and others are called upon to do what is considered of a “less crucial nature.”

## Personal Organization

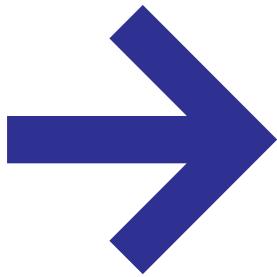
The fourth area that the study addressed was the personal organization skills of the physician-leaders. These executives tend to be very talented at multi-tasking and thrive in less rigid work environments. Take the following example:

Hiring to bring a more “entrepreneurial” feel to how the clinical group should be designing and running trials.

The Head of Clinical Research began his role about six months ago in a major pharmaceutical company. He was hired with the express purpose of bringing a more “entrepreneurial” feel to how the clinical group should be designing and running trials. During his interviews, the company was extremely keen on his leadership experience in a biotechnology company and being part of a team that achieved a high level of success. He was assured he would be able to implement his ideas and “put his fingerprint” on the group for the betterment of the function. However, because he has wanted to try new things and not operate by old axioms in the company, he is seen as too much of a “cowboy” for the company. He is frustrated by the senior leadership team’s lack of support for his action orientation around new ideas and their professing their wish to change the overall culture only to cling to their comfort zone/ the status quo. Management calls him “too proactive,” a code word for challenging the old guard.

Awareness at the outset that the physician-leader will exhibit certain characteristics, allows a company to work towards embracing different leadership styles, rather than shunning them or creating unnecessary conflict. These actions establish a virtuous cycle both for the company and for the executive and create a win-win situation for all.

All of the physician-leaders in the study exhibited a “higher than average comfort level in ambiguous or ill-defined situations.” They also showed a remarkable ability to multi-task and a preference for risk-taking and urgency. Identifying these traits and understanding how they fit within the broader team will allow everyone to work together more effectively.



## Survival of the Fittest: Identifying the Best Candidate

The ideal picture that emerges is that of a corporate culture that allows for the ability to develop and adapt strategies and ideas without over-analyzing data. The organization would be without an abundance of standard operating procedures that mistakenly inhibit progress instead of promoting it. The executive would also have proper administrative support to allow them to focus on the more strategic issues a company needs them to handle.

What does this mean during the important hiring process? Make sure to:

### What does this mean during the important hiring process?

- Evaluate the competencies and experience you really need for the position and for the team.
- Get alignment inside the organization around:
  - Assessing the current talent mix on the new hire's direct and corresponding teams
  - Identifying the characteristics and behaviors which will fit best with the team
  - Reviewing the way the potential hire will complement the team or cause disruptions
- Aligning the expectations of direct management and the reporting team
- Carefully manage the eventual onboarding process.

Physician-leaders thrive in an environment that is not overly structured or plagued by a silo mentality on projects.

When considering the recruitment or promotion of physician-leaders, it's important to focus on the key areas of leadership skills, communication skills, commercial instincts and decision-making ability. Although not a surprising set of traits in itself, their systematic expression in the study reinforces the bottom-line conclusion that ignoring them when recruiting or developing people will set you up to fail in achieving your corporate objectives. The data becomes purposeful as a guide for companies in their selection process for hiring, for on-boarding new hires, as well as gaging people's abilities for development and retention.

While not every great physician has the unique qualities to be an effective corporate leader, recognizing the ones who do and setting them up for success can make all the difference to your enterprise. The true Prescription for Transition is measured not in a person's degree but in the person who holds it.

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# Amrop

Context Driven  
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Amrop's Global Life Sciences Practice delivers on a wide range of mandates all over the world, covering all positions and roles for clients across the entire Life Sciences sector.

Our Context Driven process is a rigorous approach to understanding each individual search and how it relates to both the short- and the long-term success of your business.

Amrop is a worldwide Context Driven Executive Search network. With 89 offices in 55 countries, we know global markets like locals, so we can help you find leaders adept at working across borders, in markets around the world.

Amrop is a member of The Association of Executive Search Consultants (AES) the most respected global association for Retained Executive Search and Leadership consulting firms.

Amrop Slovakia is a part of The Amrop Group. Through our human capital solutions we help our clients build their businesses and meet their strategic goals by finding talents and leaders adept at working across borders and various sectors.

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If you have questions about this article, or the Amrop Life Sciences Practice Group please email us at [slovakia@amrop.sk](mailto:slovakia@amrop.sk)



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