

SixSEED Partners: Case Study

WellSpan Health

Polarity Thinking: The Thinking Competency for Vertical Leadership Development

BACKGROUND

WellSpan Health is an eight hospital, 1500 provider integrated system based in York, PA. In 2016 they invited Wiederhold & Associates to design and implement a multi-year succession planning process for seven high potential leaders: four physicians and three non-physicians. Joy Goldman, executive director of coaching services, assembled a coaching and consulting team of experts on horizontal and vertical leadership development strategies, including executive coaching, polarity thinking, creating thinking environments, and strategic simulations. WellSpan's commitment to internal development and awareness of anticipated turnover and retirements in their senior leadership resulted in this opportunity: to increase the capacity of their high potential leaders to manage complexity. In affiliation with Wiederhold & Associates, SixSEED Partners commenced this work between 2016 and 2020.

CLIENT RESULTS

The Strategy:

To elevate the thinking competency of the seven Wellspan (WSPH) leaders, individual coaching goals gradually shifted from preparing for a specific role to preparing each leader to better manage a VUCA (volatile, unpredictable, complex, and ambiguous) world. Additional cohort-based work was needed to integrate individual learnings and provide strategic simulation case studies cross-functionally.

The Solution:

Joy Goldman, SixSEED Partners (SSP) CEO, recruited and led a team of two SSP co-founders and three additional executive coaches and consultants, to design coordinate and integrate individual, team, and systemic interventions. These included polarity mapping as development plans and a polarity assessment for more than 130 of their senior leaders and direct reports that measured four polarities WSPH identified as key to their success:

- Centralization AND Decentralization
- Continuity AND Transformation
- Mission AND Margin
- Tactical AND Strategic

In order to scale leadership capacity further into the system, polarity thinking was cascaded to all of the high potential leaders' direct reports. As a result of this work, WSPH asked us to also present a half- day session on polarity thinking to WSPH's Nursing and Physician Leadership Academies. Executive and team coaching, Leadership Circle Profile 360's, and strategic simulations were also components of this multi- faceted engagement.

The Impact:

- Through delivering polarity thinking to over 100 nursing and physician leaders and over 130 additional staff, WSPH leadership shared this thinking competency was instrumental in supporting the systems' response to COVID-19.
- The polarity framework was also integral to a strategic simulation wherein the high potential leaders assessed actual strategic challenges for WSPH and presented their solutions to a mock board of WSPH's C-Suite.
- Under a new CEO, polarity assessments are being used to measure effectiveness within regionalization efforts in the system. Four of the seven leaders have been promoted to Senior Vice President roles.