

# Weave these threads together to strengthen your systemness

“Systemness” is the ability of a health system to overcome challenges and progress toward goals—as **one unified organization**—because of its scale, not in spite of it. Systemness is exemplified by making complex decisions centrally and rapidly, operating consistently, and achieving superior performance and goals otherwise difficult as individual entities.

But for most organizations systemness is not yet self-sustaining, and leaders need to build structures that support and strengthen it for the long term. Systemness is a rope woven over time from many individual threads. These threads represent diverse areas of connection and collaboration across the health system. Each is individually valuable, but together they form an even stronger bond that unites the system in common purpose and effort. Five of the most important of these threads are described below. Making system-oriented decisions in these areas is critical for sustaining systemness in the long term.

## 1 At the core LEADERSHIP AND DESIGN

Health system leaders should start by creating structures, strategies, and incentives that define system-wide goals, then spread them across the organization. These decisions are the core of a successful systemness strategy and inform implementation of the remaining threads within the systemness rope.

### Organizational blueprint

*Ask yourself*

**“Do our leadership structures consistently reflect a system-level perspective?”**

*Be sure to examine*

- Governance and board effectiveness
- Organization design and reporting structures
- Service line management
- Decision-making authority

### Strategy-setting processes

*Ask yourself*

**“What are our core principles for making major decisions and navigating the trade-offs?”**

*Be sure to examine*

- Capital allocation
- Outsourcing decisions
- Business model evolution
- Corporate strategy

### Goal-alignment mechanisms

*Ask yourself*

**“How do we translate strategy into action to achieve enterprise-wide goals?”**

*Be sure to examine*

- Internal information dissemination
- Cascading performance goals and KPIs
- Incentive and rewards structure
- Change management infrastructure

## 2 SHARED SERVICES INFRASTRUCTURE

Health system leaders can continue building systemness by demanding more from shared services than just efficiencies to achieve economies of scale as organizations grow. These business functions are especially well suited to strengthen systemness by generating strategic value beyond their primary roles.

*Ask yourself*

**“How could we transform our shared services to generate business intelligence and hardwire coordination, in addition to generating efficiencies?”**

*Be sure to examine*

- Supply chain
- Payer contracting
- Human resources
- Marketing and branding
- Finance and accounting
- Philanthropy

## 4 WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT APPROACH

An engaged and flexible workforce is a powerful force for achieving any system-wide initiative. Leaders should strive to build a culture where the workforce identifies with the organization as a whole, not just an individual facility or team.

*Ask yourself*

**“How can we cultivate an engaged, productive, and flexible workforce that embraces and advances system-wide priorities?”**

*Be sure to examine*

- Workforce planning and recruitment
- Staffing models
- Talent development and partnership structures
- Top-of-license role design
- Clinician compensation models

## 3 INFORMATION EXCHANGE SYSTEMS

Comprehensive, easy-to-use, and centralized systems for sharing and analyzing information are critical for improving care delivery, measuring performance toward system-wide goals, and enabling rapid, data-driven strategic decisions.

*Ask yourself*

**“How do we create a free flow of information to make rapid, data-driven decisions and a seamless consumer experience?”**

*Be sure to examine*

- Interoperability
- Shared EHR
- Data sharing
- Integration with partners
- Advanced analytics
- Digital platform

## 5 CARE DELIVERY MODEL

The ultimate ambition of systemness is improving patient care so it is consistently excellent and efficient across all the providers, services, and sites within the system. While achieving this goal is a complex endeavor, fortunately there are several inflection points where leaders can look for wins in improving the consistency of care delivery.

*Ask yourself*

**“What are our best opportunities for becoming more consistent across practice patterns, patient outcomes, and consumer experience?”**

*Be sure to examine*

- Care variation reduction strategy
- Pharmacy strategy
- Top-of-site care and volume distribution
- Telehealth offerings
- Population health
- Referral management