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Choosing a Clinical Collaboration Platform

Selecting a Strategic Partner, not a Vendor

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Introduction

Poor clinical communication leads to patients enduring longer lengths of stay, delayed care, and higher readmission rates. In tandem, fragmented, outdated clinical communication systems increase clinician burnout and bloat IT infrastructures.

Deciding to unify clinical communication and improve collaboration with a clinical collaboration platform (CCP) is a start to addressing these challenges but choosing the right CCP is rarely a simple decision.

Budget, ease-of-use, scalability, maintenance, security... these are just a few of the considerations at play when attempting to select a CCP.

However, healthcare leaders can simplify the selection process from the start by identifying the kind of journey the company provides: will the company act as a vendor or strategic partner?

The latter is transactional, while the former is transformative. This guide will explain and demonstrate the difference, to set your organization up for success.
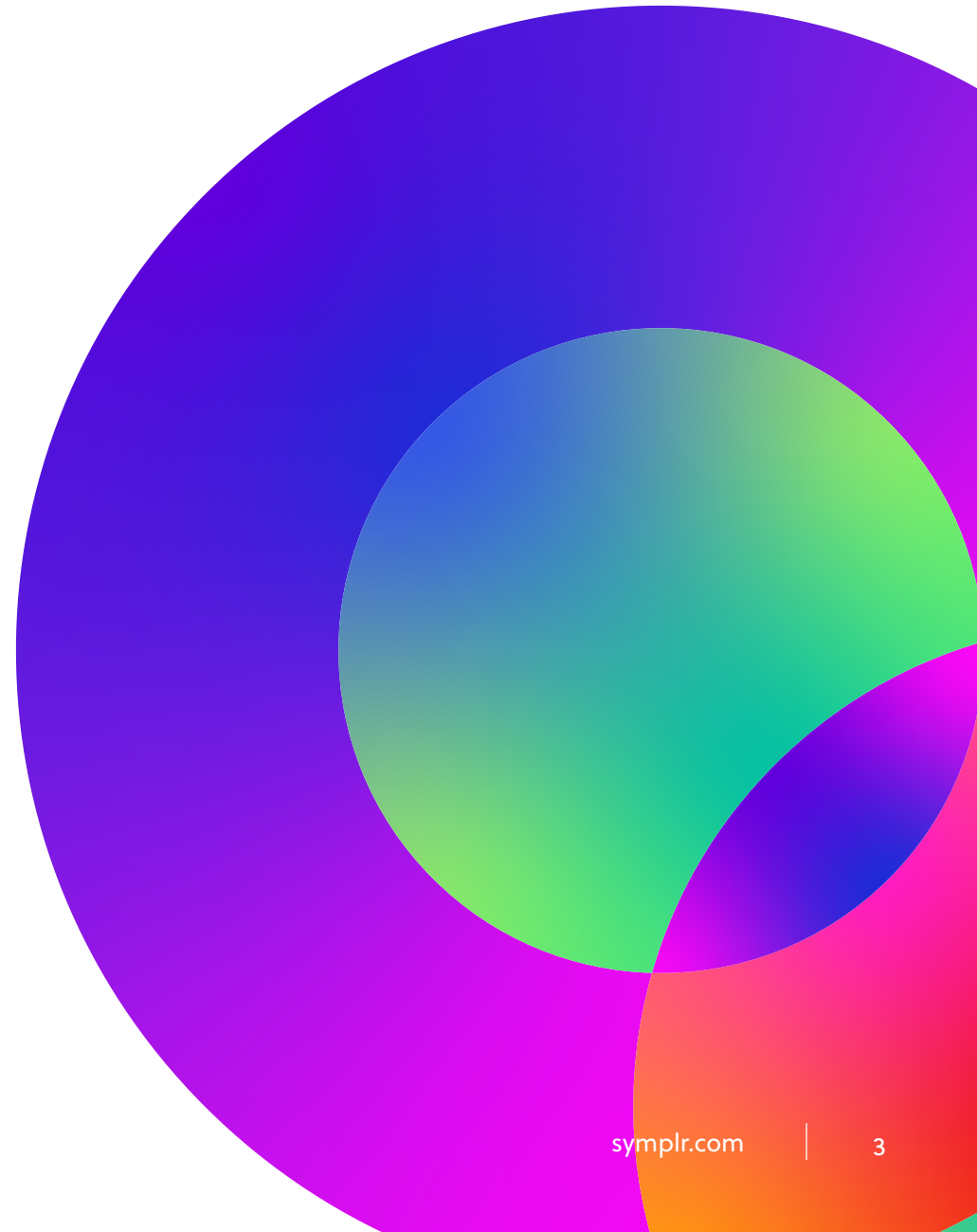
Understanding the Difference:

A vendor is transactional and one-and-done. Think of it like comparison shopping when looking for an appliance or TV. Once a decision is made, the buyer has little to do with the vendor – the product is yours, as is the responsibility of setup and maintenance. Using this method to purchase an enterprise-wide clinical collaboration platform often leads to suboptimal results and low adoption rates of the new technology.

A strategic partner is collaborative and strategic. It uncovers the challenges the healthcare organization is trying to improve and deploys its solution to achieve those specific objectives. A strategic partner respects that the customer knows its internal processes and people but shares the expertise of its solution and best practices. Combining customer and partner knowledge maximizes success. Additionally, the journey with a strategic partner is continuous. The relationship continues long after deployment, with the CCP partner working with leadership to assess performance, adoption, and recommending new practices and workflows to best meet the organization's goals.

In addition to these differentiators, the following details key areas in which a strategic partner will support the healthcare organization.

Key Elements of the Strategic Partner Journey

1. Assessment

During the onset of the partnership, clinical and technical experts from the partner need to outline the challenges, pain points, and goals of implementing a clinical collaboration platform. These subject matter experts should be the same team members who will be engaged throughout the sale and into implementation. Your organization needs to have confidence in the partner it chooses; knowing that the project will not be transitioned to a junior team once the deal is negotiated is one way credibility is built in working with a strategic partner.

Additionally, during the Assessment Stage, a strategic partner's subject matter experts should mine for problems such as:

- What are your communication and collaboration challenges?
- What are your communications needs outside the four walls of its facilities?
- What critical lab values need to be automated to which teams?

Almost assuredly, there will be issues your organization has not considered that a CCP will help solve. A good partner will use its expertise to identify problems and provide options during this process. This approach demonstrates understanding and commitment from the partner – that it does not just seek to implement its solution, but to understand your unique challenges to help meet your designated outcomes.

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Once the problem-solution compatibility is established, the partner should also evaluate your organization's IT and infrastructure readiness.

An onsite review should be conducted by the partner's technical team, and the information gathered should lead to the development of a plan to ensure a successful deployment.

Activities need to include:

1. Interviews with clinical applications system analysts to understand integration workflows and needs

2. Interviews with technical resources to deep dive into technical environment

3. Interviews with clinical managers to understand key clinical workflows for real-time mobilization

4. Clinical walkthroughs of units to review communication patterns with key clinical users

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2. Demonstrating Value

With a working understanding of the challenges and objectives of your organization, the next stage of working with a strategic partner involves how the solution will complement your workflows. This illustration should include opportunities for return on investment. Selecting a CCP is an important investment and should be treated as such.

To begin demonstrating value, a strategic partner should present thorough documentation of the data collected during the onsite assessment and comprehensive recommendations.

The partner should provide:

1. An outline of the key challenges and recommended solutions

2. An overview of the technical environment including current and proposed mobilized workflows

3. Examples of the solution at work in the system

4. A technical readiness assessment

5. A scope of work that details the roles and responsibilities for a successful rollout

6. An implementation work breakdown structure

7. An overview of the clinical, technical, and financial ROI

3. Defining Scope

When selecting a vendor, defining scope is analogous to the decision — the end of the journey. When selecting a strategic partner, defining scope is when the partnership is amplified. Once the partner demonstrates the value of its solution and both parties are aligned, the respective leadership teams need to agree on the scope of the project and how success will be measured. Defining scope is no small feat and complete alignment and transparency are critical to success.

First, as previously mentioned, you and your leadership team are the experts in your organization – from your processes to your people. The strategic partner is an expert in its CCP. Both parties need to be represented to drive the project to a successful transition into the implementation.

Additionally, a well-defined project scope should include products with associated details (e.g., launch phases, technical callouts), services with clear descriptions (e.g., clinical workflow consultation activities, education overviews and types), roles with associated responsibilities and time commitments, an implementation term with a high-level work breakdown structure and any relevant exit criteria, and the project change procedures if any adjustments are required.

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4. Implementation

During implementation, the strategic partner begins to deliver on the promises made during the sales process. And, because the strategic partnership includes subject matter expert involvement from the beginning, the transition into implementation is a seamless one.

At this stage, the partner and your organization should be an official team that works to create a baseline project plan that guides implementation. To facilitate a common language and approach, adhere to the PMO Framework: Initiation, Planning, Execution, Monitoring, and Closing.
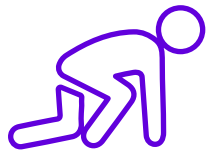
| 1. Initiation	2. Planning	3. Execution	4. Monitoring	5. Closing

Conveniently, some of the initiation work begins during the onsite assessment by the technical team. During Planning, clinical workflows walkthroughs are completed; technical, education and clinical communication plans are created; and the baseline project plan is finalized.
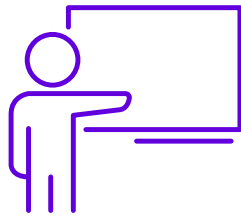
5. Execution

Execution of an enterprise-wide CCP demands transparency, discipline, and teamwork. Through the first five stages discussed, the strategic partnership develops a solid operating rhythm to help deliver on the defined project plan.
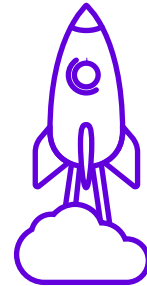
The three key events of the Execution Stage include:
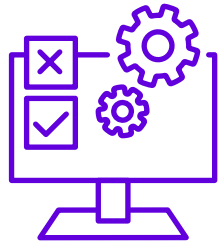
1. Build and testing   **2. Training**   **3. Go Live**

With a CCP, Go Live is best completed in a carefully-crafted sequence. The cutover process is complete when change is most optimum for the clinical area. Partner teams are deployed alongside customer champions to help end users adapt their workflows with changes in shifts, making sure to address any issues or questions that arise when the CCP is deployed.

6. Post-Live Support

As mentioned, a strategic partnership is perpetual —
it never ends.

Once the CCP is live, the partner continues to provide hands-
on customer care and assists in optimizing the solution. As
your organization and its challenges evolve, so should your
CCP workflows. These activities strengthen the relationship
between you and your partner and ensure continued success
of the CCP as well as improved ROI for your organization.

The partner should provide dedicated account management,
onsite workflow optimization, an aggressive release schedule
that incorporates user feedback, and robust knowledge center
access for individuals to use for training purposes.

A strategic partnership is perpetual —
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Conclusion

When purchasing technology like a CCP, you go on a journey with the company and solution you select. A strategic partnership is one that is consultative and inclusive, not transactional, and reaps the greatest reward for healthcare organizations.

While a strategic partnership is comprehensive and may take a little longer to align than the transactional approach of a vendor, the reward is far greater. When technology consolidation and clean, simplified IT infrastructures are top of mind for healthcare organizations, don't run the risk of adding a poorly performing CCP to your IT graveyard of poorly adopted applications. The steps achieved throughout the strategic partnership lend themselves to a smoother implementation transition and lasting success.

Additionally, balancing your expertise with partner best practices will help lead to markedly improved clinical and financial outcomes.

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