

## CURING OE PROBLEMS IN THE PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY

Managers in the pharmaceutical industry succeed not only because of their technical expertise, but also because they can create synergies and a sense of purpose among groups of diverse professionals. Pharmaceutical companies are generally highly matrixed, team-based organizations. The key in speeding drugs to market is to have functions such as R&D, regulatory affairs, manufacturing, and marketing work together closely. Clinical trials are performed by multidisciplinary teams that are often virtual and multicultural.

Uniting team members around common goals and objectives and keeping the process on track and on budget can be a challenge. Teams often comprise people who are accustomed to working independently and have different priorities and technical expertise. As in IT, the professionals tend to have strong skills in their disciplines and a focus on technical achievement. Less attention is given to interpersonal skills and how those contribute to achievement of results.

Not surprisingly, much of the work we do in the industry relates to team effectiveness and leadership development. Following are several examples.

**Case Study 1:** The data management department of a clinical research organization suffered from poor morale and high turnover. The survey we designed to assess the issues revealed inconsistency in the managers' approaches to project management. This was critical since staff rotated among project teams.

Based on our findings, we worked with the management team to develop a leadership competency model. We then developed an online 360° instrument that helped us evaluate each manager against the model and a team-effectiveness assessment in which the managers identified individual development and team needs.

The next step was to help managers create individual development plans. In addition to one-on-one coaching, they received group leadership training through a customized four-part program that addressed their shared challenges and business issues.

**The results:** Managers not only improved individual leadership skills, they also built effective mechanisms for working together, sharing best practices, and collaboratively managing individuals across teams. Turnover declined significantly within a short period of time.

**Case Study 2:** The R&D unit of a major pharmaceutical company was missing some milestones in clinical trials. There was a pattern of conflict within the virtual project teams and lack of recognition of who was in charge. Because clinical-trial teams are peer groups, managers need to achieve results through influence rather than authority.

Our objective was to enable the clinical trial managers to improve their positive influence skills, helping them build and manage stronger teams. The first step was a customized survey to elicit the managers' strengths and weaknesses. This allowed us to create a program that focused on key issues while using the managers' vocabulary and day-to-day situations.

The program was designed to help them recognize strengths and weaknesses in their teams; appreciate and respect the differences in others; and understand that diversity provides strength. An effective team draws on the different styles of its members in communicating and problem solving. Open discussion and constructive disagreement can lead to insight and creativity. Having a limited behavioral style within the team stifles this, resulting in an approach that is narrower and less effective.

We provided background on different behavioral styles; how they present in interactions; how they need, share, and use information in different ways; and how to influence each. Role-playing allowed the managers to practice "selling" ideas to people with different behavioral styles. A unique feedback strategy enabled each of the department subteams to provide advice anonymously to the others.

**The results:** Individual clinical trial managers became more flexible and skillful in influencing team members. As a group, they developed stronger relationship-building skills. Knowledge sharing increased and fewer milestones were missed.

**Case Study 3:** Not all of our OE work in pharmaceuticals is team-focused. A global health care organization lacked bench-strength for a pivotal role in R&D. This was a critical issue since the company was making multiple acquisitions, and there was major growth in the business. We designed and delivered a structured interview process to assess current succession practices and scientists' perceptions of opportunities for promotion.

**The results:** We worked with HR and R&D leadership to restructure certain roles and increase the number and quality of senior scientists who were ready for key leadership positions. ■

*Pharmaceuticals is one of many industries to which Ayers brings depth of experience in OEC. For more information, contact Managing Director Joan Caruso at [joan.caruso@ayers.com](mailto:joan.caruso@ayers.com) or 212.889.7788.*

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