



Collaboration experts JAMIE HARRIS and ANDY ATKINS reveal how pharmaceutical companies can meet critical leadership and team challenges.

**Pharmaceutical organizations face important leadership and organizational development issues. In your experience, what are some of these?**

**JH:** As pharmaceutical companies have grown and globalized, they have faced increased challenges to sustain innovation with global teams and to be nimble and stay ahead of ever more diverse competitors. They are constantly challenged to accelerate the process of bringing new drugs to the market that are medically effective and differentiated from the competition. While trying to meet these challenges, they must continuously manage the very difficult balance between market driven “need for speed” and the absolute need for scientific rigor and safety. The result is that the largest pharmaceutical companies today have chosen a team-based matrix form of organization; yet managing in a complex matrix structure adds an additional set of complexities – not the least of which is creating and maintaining alignment of focus and strategy across the organization and its multi-functional and team-based parts.

**AA:** Pharmaceutical organizations have highly capable and highly trained workforces. The challenges of managing high-level knowledge workers are significant. These are particularly acute when a leader is trying to coordinate the efforts of diverse experts. Collaboration is a key skill area that is needed to harness the power of this diversity. Linking individual efforts to the higher purpose of improving the well-being of consumers is especially important in pharmaceuticals given the essential nature of the business.

**How can leadership development influence these issues?**

**AA:** Leadership development can improve skills in managing teams. Given the cross-functional nature of many pharmaceutical development and production efforts, there’s a further opportunity in building leaders’ capabilities to influence across matrices. The knowledge-intensive nature of the work places a premium on proactive succession management to ensure continuity on long-range development efforts and preservation of institutional knowledge.

**JH:** Being fundamentally science-based organizations, scientific expertise and “leadership” in a discipline are usually highly prized in pharmaceutical organizations. However, being a leader in one’s field of science or research does not necessarily make one an effective leader of people and teams. Making the transition from solid scientific contributor to a leader who can inspire, bring out the best in people and manage to align creative efforts for productivity is a huge challenge. Leadership development carefully crafted for the unique cultures of pharmaceutical research and development can help people make this transition.

**Pharmaceutical research and development (R&D) relies heavily on a team work structure. What are the typical challenges that pharmaceutical R&D teams face?**

**JH:** Teaming across different geographies is a typical issue; working on virtual teams brings a host of communication and relationship building complications that are often compounded by cultural differences. Basic team dynamics can suffer resulting in reduced productivity.

Often, scientists on R&D teams get into conflicts over different interpretations of data. In the absence of strong conflict resolution skills on the team, these disagreements can stagnate a team, slowing the development process while the conflicts are escalated for resolution outside the team. Another common challenge to R&D teams is that they must gain approvals, peer reviews, resource allocations and go/no-go decisions from an array of committees, functional leaders and other groups. In addition to slowing the development process, these multiple and overlapping review processes can contribute to the development of wasteful politicking. They may generate “back door” influencing processes. When this happens, decision-making becomes less and less transparent. Consequently, aligning project portfolios with coherent strategies becomes more difficult.

**AA:** Pharmaceutical development is a long-cycle process – often lasting over a decade. Maintaining the focus of development teams, despite inevitable changes in team membership and throughout the various stages of development,

is an ongoing challenge. Long development cycles mean a team is likely to experience turnover among team members. As team membership shifts, teams are challenged as to how to pass along institutional knowledge.

Since team members are drawn from functional areas and are responsible to their teams, they have matrixed responsibilities. Affiliation with a functional home organization, the source of one’s expertise, may overwhelm team affiliation. Differing functional homes and past professional experience may also lead to diverse and incompatible approaches to the work process, such as differing expectations on how to have productive meetings. Maintaining a necessary balance in the matrix is a central capability area for leaders to develop.

**What kinds of development can support teams to better meet these challenges?**

**AA:** Capability development should focus at multiple levels. First, team members need to learn teaming skills, such as how to mutually contract, build agreements, collaborate more effectively, and manage their own team processes. Secondly, team sponsors need to learn how to provide air-cover for teams, such as ensuring access to resources, freedom from unnecessary interference, etc.

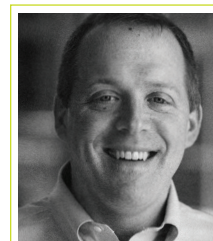
**JH:** I agree, and would add two very important things here:

1. Provide a consistent, comprehensive approach to the chartering and formation of teams so that there are shared expectations and practices throughout the company for how to start, transition and end teams.
2. Develop in team leaders and members the skills for effective intra-team behaviors, but also for negotiating the agreements and clarity of roles needed between teams and functional organizations. What this amounts to is giving people the understanding and tools they need to better manage the dynamics of a team in context -- that is, in the context of the matrix of which the team is a part.

**What are the priorities for planning an effective leadership or team development program in a pharmaceutical organization?**

**JH:** Let’s say you are an internal human resources professional who is asked to create a leadership or team development program. First, seek to understand the vision and strategy of the organization. Where is the company headed – short term and long term? Then ask, what are the current organizational changes that leaders and teams must be able to support? Focus on the specific business challenges or needs that arise from the strategy and changes that are happening. Then, your needs assessment can hone in on the question: What is it that leaders and teams will need to do differently from what they are doing now? Lastly, be sure you are working toward real behavioral changes and developing skills that can be practiced on the job – not just knowledge or awareness about “leadership” as a motivational topic. My own view is that a lot of what passes for “leadership development” these days is really a thinly disguised exhortation for participants to work harder. These approaches, in the end, tend to generate cynicism – not more effective and inspiring leadership. Give people tools, coupled with knowledge, and a changed mindset that enables them to use these tools.

**AA:** First, identify the business needs the leadership or team development program is trying to affect. This raises the development effort from a “nice to have” option to a business enabler and imperative. Second, determine how the effectiveness of the program will be assessed in relation to the business need. Work in both these areas is integrally linked to the third priority: Creating a plan for the design, development and implementation of the leadership and team capability building efforts. Finally, create the means for embedding developmental changes with support tools, performance management and coaching.



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