Boehringer Ingelheim

Developing Leaders Poised to Succeed in the
Face of Change and Complexity
The Boehringer Ingelheim (BI) group is one of the world’s leading pharmaceutical companies. Founded in 1885 and family-owned, it has 145 affiliates and more than 42,000 employees in 55 countries.

Though the company has enjoyed great success, its industry is facing significant change and complexity—from growing regulatory pressures to razor-sharp competition.

“As the pharmaceutical industry becomes increasingly competitive, even small differences in leadership competency and technical expertise can lead to highly differentiated outcomes in the marketplace. It is imperative that we accelerate the development of managers and better prepare them for senior leadership roles.”

- Sissy McKee, BI’s leadership program director

BI wanted its leaders to become more results-oriented and more aware of the external environment impacting the company’s operations. It also wanted to cultivate stronger decision-making and strategic-thinking skills, as well as the ability to inspire and lead others in support of a shared vision, strategy and business goals.
BI selected the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) as its partner in the design and delivery of a new leadership development initiative. CCL’s distinct approach—drawing on proven methods and pursuing new ways to accelerate effective leadership—appealed to the BI team. They wanted a highly interactive and practical program that would prepare BI leaders for marketplace challenges—not an impersonal or cookie-cutter solution. “We didn’t want to take an academic or didactic approach,” McKee says. “Instead we wanted to fully engage our developing leaders in a way that would bring learning to life—reflecting our culture, our industry and our competencies.”

CCL designed a seven-month, multiphase leadership development initiative that focused on key competencies BI knew would be critical to future growth. Two separate but closely aligned programs were created—a Management Development Program (MDP) for select first-level managers, and a Leadership Development Program (LDP)® for high-potential middle-level leaders. Participants are handpicked through a rigorous nomination and assessment process that is closely integrated with BI’s talent management process.

Both programs blend a variety of highly interactive learning strategies and delivery approaches—from experiential activities and simulations to stimulating classroom dialogue. “We focus on the individual and what it means to be a leader within BI, but also on the strategic leadership skills needed to guide personal, team, and organizational success,” McKee says. CCL’s leadership-at-every-level perspective informed both the content and design of the programs.

While the overarching format of the initiative has proven successful and has remained largely unchanged, the content is reviewed and updated continuously with an eye on practical goals and meaningful results. Together, BI and CCL have piloted a number of “next practices,” including meditation, sessions on the neuroscience of leadership and an “adult time out” game room to promote resiliency and sustainability. The thick binders used in early program sessions have been replaced with iPads that have been quickly embraced by learners and used in creative and practical ways to enhance the experience.

“This is another area where the CCL–BI partnership truly shines—our shared willingness to pioneer new ideas.” says McKee.
As a prelude to classroom work, participants complete a battery of 360-degree assessments to identify strengths they can leverage and competency gaps they need to close. They then attend three multiday, face-to-face group training sessions, participate in monthly meetings with their managers to discuss their development and use an online Fort Hill ResultsEngine® tool provided by CCL to document and track progress toward specific goals.

To reinforce new skills taught in the classroom and connect them to desired results, each leader works one-on-one with a CCL executive coach and participates in a peer-learning group project focused on one of a number of specific organizational interests—from innovation to organizational systems.

CCL Solutions:
- Customized Programs
- 360 BY DESIGN® Feedback
- Looking Glass 360-Degree Assessment
- Reina Leadership Trust Scale
- Myers-Briggs Type Indicator
- Hogan Self-Assessments
- ResultsEngine® Online Goal Tracking and Reporting
- REFLECTIONS® Follow-Up Assessments
- Personalized Executive Coaching

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The Results

BI’s leadership development initiative has led to significant outcomes, real results that are helping the business and individual leaders achieve what matters most.

Improvements in core leadership competencies

Hundreds of supervisors, peers and direct reports have rated program participants and report significant improvements in core competencies important to BI—from an increased focus on strategy and strategic partnerships to significant improvements in the quality of decision-making. For example, among 724 individuals surveyed three months post-program, nearly three out of four reported that participants had an improved ability to collaborate across boundaries and to understand different perspectives.

Significant contributions to the bottom line

There is strong anecdotal evidence that participation in the program has had a significant impact on BI’s bottom line, with graduates pursuing initiatives to reduce costs and drive new revenue opportunities.

A few examples:
One participant says skills learned in the classroom informed an improvement program that resulted in a one-year savings of $1.8 million. Another program graduate led a project team that was able to reduce its costs by more than 80 percent. Yet another led an organizational turnaround that resulted in a $2- to $3-million improvement in financial performance.

Improved on-the-job effectiveness

On average, 98 percent of program graduates report they are now more effective leaders—better able to identify and tackle issues and opportunities and to achieve measurable outcomes. “As a result of the (program) and my ability to foster alignment among the senior team, we are more clearly addressing key issues head-on, such as pricing, promotional strategy and planning, and strategic customer focus,” one participant noted. “This allows us to quickly resolve issues and address opportunities with a focus on issues, not people or personalities.”

Another reported, “There are . . . significant changes that I attribute to my participation in the LDP program. I applied effective strategy to manage the department I led . . . through challenges related to lack of resources and an increase in demand for our services.”
Support for a new global governance model and global talent strategy

At the time of their inception, the MDP and LDP programs were targeted to talented leaders in BI’s U.S. businesses. Since then, though, both programs have been expanded regionally to include businesses in Canada, Mexico and other countries in Latin America. Simultaneously, BI adopted a new global governance model that has had a profound impact on the skills needed by its leaders.

“It is not unusual for managers based in one country to have people across the globe reporting to them,” McKee says. “With skills learned during LDP and MDP, though, our leaders are able to build teams and to exert influence across country borders.”

In a post-course evaluation, one participant wrote:

“The program has sharpened my skills to work with my foreign counterparts in a way that we can openly discuss topics in a safe environment, respecting our differences and yet come to agreements in order to move the organization in an efficient and effective way.”

“With skills learned during LDP and MDP . . . our leaders are able to build teams and to exert influence across country borders.”
Greater numbers of leaders ready to step into new roles

There is both statistical and anecdotal evidence that program participants are better prepared to move up and take on new responsibilities—indicating that the program is showing results in terms of accelerating leadership. In a 360-degree assessment by peers, direct reports and bosses of an LDP cohort, 75 percent reported the training had resulted in an increased readiness for leadership responsibilities, while 71 percent noted an increased ability to handle real-world challenges.

Of the first 84 high-potential developing leaders completing the LDP program, 14 percent have been promoted. Among them were two individuals promoted from director to vice president within six months of completing the program—skipping the intermediate executive director position. Another 16 percent of program graduates have made a lateral move to a new assignment to broaden their experience.

“I have had the opportunity [since completing the program] to serve on several different committees, work projects and task forces that have involved individuals from many different departments and channels within the organization,” one participant wrote in a post-program survey. “I think my exposure with this type of work diversity allowed me to be confident, engaged and be a productive part of the process.”

Improved Retention

In internal climate surveys, program alumni indicate a greater satisfaction than other BI employees with opportunities to advance and the company environment. “It is clear the program has had a positive impact on our retention of valued employees,” McKee says. “More of them are motivated to go above and beyond their defined role, feel they have opportunities to achieve personal career goals, and say they have trust and confidence in our executive team.”

A participant in the LDP program shared the following perspective in a post-course follow-up survey. “Going through this program has strengthened my confidence in our company’s vision and preparedness to deal with challenging times. It gave me a new appreciation of BI’s willingness to invest in its people, its ability to recognize and nurture talent, and to drive innovation.”

If McKee gets her way, BI will become branded as a company that invests in and develops its people—providing an important differentiator in recruiting top talent.
Participant Satisfaction with the Leadership Development Experience

BI’s new leadership development initiative is highly valued by those who participate in the program.

Participant Impact Survey Results: Program Relevancy and Usefulness

- Would recommend the program to their colleagues: 100% (LDP) 94% (MDP)
- Said the lessons learned in the program are relevant to leaders at BI: 99% (LDP) 97% (MDP)
- Believe they have enhanced their ability to be more effective leaders: 99% (LDP) 97% (MDP)
- Regularly apply the knowledge and skills learned to their job: 94% (LDP) 94% (MDP)
Success Factors

Getting results from a leadership program involves many factors. The collaboration between CCL and BI set a course for development that will have enduring impact. Key elements for success include:

A network of support

Managers of those participating in BI’s development program are crucial to its success. BI conducts an up-front orientation to tell them what to expect and what they will be asked to do to help their employees get the most out of the development experience—from meeting with them to review progress to supporting changes in their behavior that may challenge the status quo.

Follow-up briefings give McKee an opportunity to share organizational themes that surface during each training session. She helps managers understand the new employee skills they must be prepared to support and ways they can be more closely engaged.

There also is visible, top-down support from the BI senior executive team, with kickoff speeches, lunchtime discussions and “fireside chats” to share lessons learned. Senior leaders also attend final presentations made by LDP and MDP teams so they can ask probing questions and sponsor or support innovative ideas.

A focus on accountability

To get the most out of its training investment, BI insists on accountability from participants.

“We have a ‘letter of commitment’ that spells out every key deliverable and date and makes clear there are no exceptions,” McKee says. “When an individual accepts the invitation, they accept those terms and are held to them.”
Follow-up activities and reinforcement

McKee says BI reinforces its development program with continuous learning and networking—turning program graduates into change agents. The company offers continuing education workshops, supports self-directed communities of practice and looks for opportunities to reinforce new behaviors leaders have learned. The MDP and LDP now have formal alumni associations whose members continue to educate and collaborate via remote technologies between annual alumni workshops.

“You can’t work on leader development and organizational change in isolation,” says McKee. “The networks within an organization work like the systems in a body. Everything has to operate in sync. So you have to support meaningful change with other formal and informal systems throughout the organization. As a result, we encourage our program graduates to work hard at promoting internal alignment around their change efforts.”

The power of partnership

Michelle Malloy, leadership development portfolio manager for CCL, cites BI’s unique relationship with the Center as one especially important factor in the success of the LDP and MDP programs. “It has been a true collaboration, from the design and delivery of the program to the evaluation of the results,” she said. “Above all, we listen to each other and are jointly committed to the program’s success.”

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The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) is a top-ranked, global provider of leadership development. By leveraging the power of leadership to drive results that matter most to clients, CCL transforms individual leaders, teams, organizations, and society. Our array of cutting-edge solutions is steeped in extensive research and experience gained from working with hundreds of thousands of leaders at all levels. Ranked among the world’s Top 5 providers of executive education by the Financial Times and in the Top 10 by Bloomberg BusinessWeek, CCL has offices in Greensboro, NC; Colorado Springs, CO; San Diego, CA; Brussels, Belgium; Moscow, Russia; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Johannesburg, South Africa; Singapore; Gurgaon, India; and Shanghai, China.