

An Assessment Guides Strategic Leadership Development at Biotech Giant



To accelerate strategy execution through strategic leadership development, an accurate depiction of high potential leaders' capabilities proved critical to Biogen Idec's success.

A pioneer in the pharmaceutical industry, Biogen Idec applies cutting-edge science to discover, develop and deliver worldwide innovative therapies for the treatment of neurodegenerative diseases, hemophilia and autoimmune disorders. As one of the oldest independent biotech firms in the world, the company's success can be attributed to its strategic focus on innovation and growth. Biogen Idec prides itself on fostering a culture of "courageous innovation" among its scientists and all other employees.

To accelerate execution of the company strategy, Biogen Idec is making a strategic investment in leadership development to develop future leaders and create a culture of excellence.

Building Execution Capabilities

To build the skills and capabilities of high potential leaders, Biogen Idec created the Management and Executive Academy (MAXA), an intense global leadership development program stretching over two years. For the program's kick-off event, the organization partnered with BTS, a leading global strategy implementation firm, to develop and deliver an experiential learning initiative that builds the engagement, commitment and capabilities needed to successfully execute strategic priorities. The two-and-a-half-day engagement with BTS consisted of a business simulation-based workshop and an integrated, customized assessment.

A Business Simulation Provides the Foundation

Tailored to the company's industry, the business simulation provided an interactive and competitive experience enabling participants to practice strategy implementation in a complex and rapidly changing global environment. Teams of participating junior leaders were challenged to scan the competitive landscape, develop operating plans, implement strategy, manage change, develop key strategic alliances and relationships, and maximize the contribution of management team members. Reflecting the opportunities and challenges

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within the industry, the simulated experience effectively engaged participants and created a learning experience highly relevant to their daily work.

Individual Assessment Enables Strategic Leadership Development

Integrated into the two-and-a-half-day workshop, an assessment component provided the motivation and direction for participants to create a personal development plan guiding individual growth going forward. Senior leaders and HR representatives observed participants while working in teams throughout the program.

To make the assessment most effective, the following steps were followed throughout process:

- **The Identification of High Impact Behaviors:** Long before the program started, interviews with a select group of Biogen Idec's Senior Vice Presidents and General Managers provided a precise understanding of the company's business challenges, the objectives required by each role to meet those challenges, and the critical capabilities and behaviors necessary for success. The extracted high impact behaviors and execution factors became the foundation for the observation and feedback tools used during the program. This upfront component maximized the program's relevancy.
- **Feedback Delivered by Senior Leaders:** One of the most powerful program components, each participant received feedback from a senior leader in the final phase of the workshop. Feedback was focused on one or two areas of strength as well as one or two opportunities for development. This critical, honest and actionable feedback was complemented by additional support helping participants set learning goals for the remainder of the Management and Executive Academy Program.
- **Talent Assessment Data:** The program design also allowed Biogen Idec to gather relevant talent data without intimidating participants with an excessive focus on talent assessment. The individual findings were shared with the central HR organization and Succession Planning function.



The customized program allowed leaders to make the connection between the company's strategic objectives and their day-to-day work.

Additional Program Elements Maximize Impact

Financial Acumen Development: Prior to the BTS workshop, participants developed their financial literacy through an online financial acumen development program. They became more comfortable with financial data and built a comprehensive understanding of the drivers of profitability and cash flow.

Building Collaboration across Business Divisions: To facilitate cross-functional and cross-country collaboration, teams were challenged to bridge the gaps between functions and geographies to reach a specific goal. Engaging in discussion, participants were challenged to cooperate and determine how much information to share (or not share) to achieve their goal.

Improving Leadership Behavior Through Peer Feedback: Throughout the workshop experience, participants received feedback on the implications of their business decisions. They also provided and received feedback from one another regarding the effectiveness of their behavior within the context of the simulation. Team members were repeatedly given opportunities to discuss how they worked as a group and explore how they could behave more effectively. These feedback experiences enabled additional personal growth opportunities and set the tone for developing a new generation of leaders well versed in personal, behavioral feedback conversations.

Assessment Results in Powerful Leadership Development

Overall, the business simulation was highly effective in building the skills and capabilities of the high potential participants. However, the insights from the assessment were invaluable.

To accelerate execution and secure a competitive advantage on an organizational level, an accurate depiction of high potential leaders' capabilities proved critical. The impact of the assessment was tangible—the company received the focused, relevant and actionable development needed to effectively link learning to high performance. As a result of the engagement, Biogen Idec is armed with the information needed to develop the execution factors essential to strategy execution.

Going forward, this strategic leadership development is expected to accelerate the development of Biogen Idec's high potential leaders. By raising the profile of the company's talent, Biogen Idec's leadership development initiatives will enable the successful execution of the company's innovation and growth strategy and drive business results.

About BTS

BTS focuses on the people side of strategy, working with leaders at all levels to help them make better decisions, convert those decisions to actions and deliver results. At our core, we believe people learn best by doing. For 30 years, we've been designing fun, powerful experiences™ that have profound and lasting impact on people and their careers. We inspire new ways of thinking, build critical capabilities and unleash business success. It's strategy made personal.

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