

Fast-moving Pharma Organisations Prescribe Gamified Training to Keep Coaching and Management Skills Scalpel-sharp

In an industry where new technologies and techniques are advancing all the time, cutting-edge coaching training is key to helping people keep pace with change. Big pharma organisations, like Boehringer Ingelheim and Merck, have turned to simulation training for the solution...

As the pharmaceutical industry continues its post-pandemic recovery, experts predict the sector's value will grow to US\$2.4 trillion by 2029.

This rapid growth is fuelling accelerated change across the industry, with new medicines, technologies and regulations, making it crucial that employee training keeps pace in an environment of constant transformation.

Big pharma companies, including Boehringer Ingelheim and Merck, are seeking fresh ways to ensure that their training is

flexible, fit-for-purpose and fast to respond to ever-shifting needs.

That's why pharma is increasingly turning to gamified simulation training to keep their teams' expertise and know-how scalpel-sharp at all times. Computer game-style simulations place people in true-to-life scenarios where they can practise skills in situations that replicate job conditions. These simulations are combined with gaming elements that increase motivation, attention and learning.

Immersive training has proved particularly effective in improving employee skills in two core areas:

- 1. Coaching and Development**
- 2. Relationship Management**

1. Coaching and Development – Helping Managers Lead From the Front

Coaching is a vital aspect of success in the pharma industry, where first-line managers (FLMs) have finite opportunities to observe their direct reports interacting with customers.

Many FLMs have advanced from being successful sales representatives, but that does not guarantee that they have the skills or knowledge to effectively coach and develop their team members.

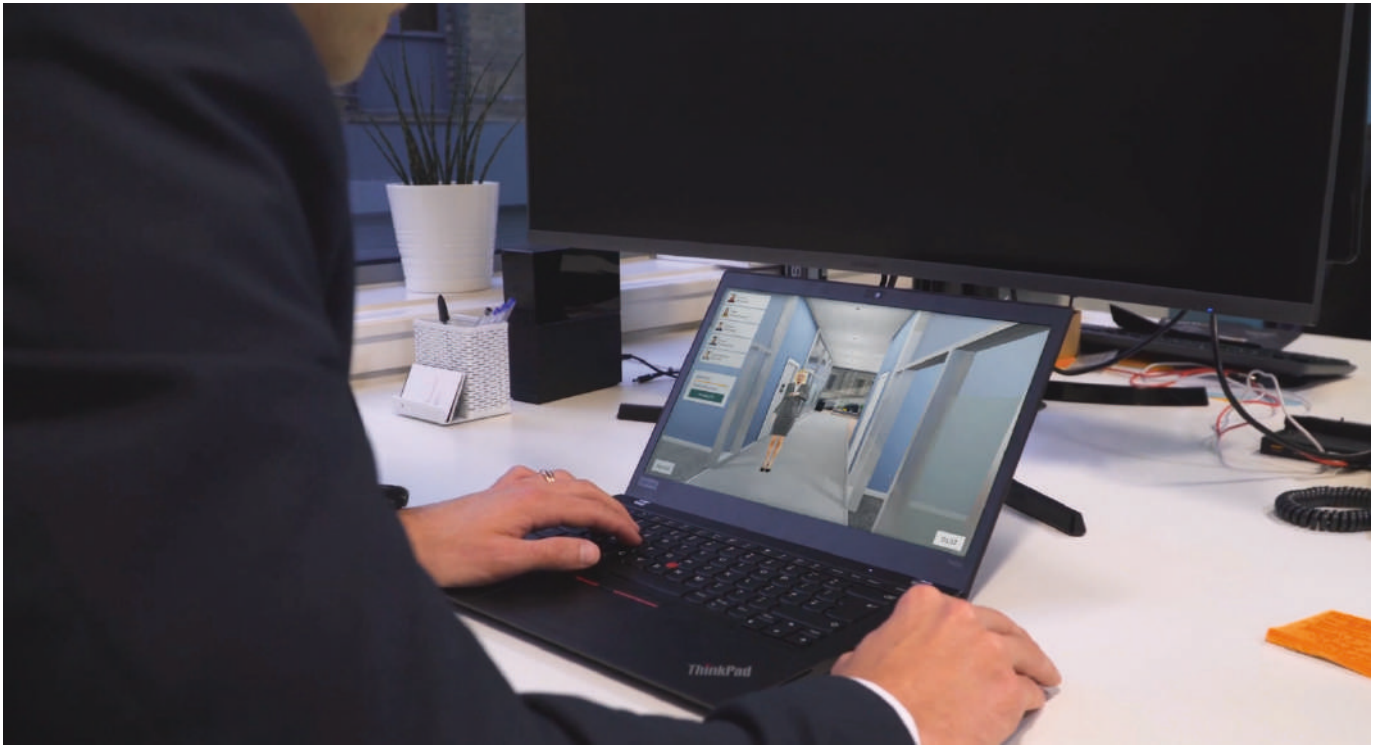
Holding effective coaching conversations is a skill that needs to be learned and regularly practised.

Boehringer Ingelheim took an innovative approach using psychology and gaming mechanics and created a simulation training solution. It had to be mobile-first, easily accessible and shaped into bite-sized modules that employees could easily fit into their already busy schedules.

The simulation encourages effective coaching behaviour in FLMs to help themselves and others grow so that they can be game-changing leaders for their direct reports.

As a part of this project, Boehringer Ingelheim identified the key capabilities required by





both customer-facing (CF) employees and their FLMs.

Coaching that Counts

Of the capabilities identified for FLMs, coaching (for performance and development) was the top skill that had the potential to make the biggest impact on performance. Effective conversations with great coaches can significantly improve performance, increase motivation, and enhance job satisfaction for individuals being coached. They also have the potential to foster a positive and productive team culture, and to develop future leaders.

Additionally, effective coaching can help individuals identify and overcome obstacles, develop new skills and knowledge, and achieve their personal and professional goals.

To meet Boehringer Ingelheim's needs, a solution called Coach to Grow was developed, and recently launched in India and Canada. The primary goal of the simulation is for FLMs to gain a clear understanding of coaching methodologies, the EGROW framework and when to use coaching over other leadership skills such as feedback, mentoring or direction.

Learning Through Games

The game-based training, which can be accessed on mobile, desktop or tablet, consists of five modules, focusing on: coaching and leadership skills; leading employee development discussions; engaging in difficult

discussions; and customer engagement. In each of these modules first line managers are faced with true-to-life scenarios that they will typically encounter in their day-to-day roles.

Set in realistic environments, these managers engage in dialogues with avatar colleagues who are all encountering their own set of workplace challenges. FLMs are faced with a range of scenarios including helping team members understand the value of coaching, creating development goals using the EGROW model and navigating difficult conversations. How employees answer each of the questions determines their unique journey through the modules. Employees earn points based on their answers and are also provided with feedback as they work their way through the simulations.

Reaching Peak Performance

The early response from Boehringer Ingelheim's users is overwhelmingly positive with employees seeing their knowledge improve from 30% to 92%, repeating the training three times on average.

After engaging in the training, a Boehringer Ingelheim employee said: "The options in the game are not inherently obvious, making you pause and work through the process of coaching. I also like that you can pick up non-verbal cues as part of your coaching simulation."

Virtual World. Real-world Impact

Jennifer Quist, Global Capability Owner –

Leadership Development & Coaching, said: "Simulation training is already having a real-world impact. Because employees are playing in a virtual world, they can practise and repeat the training in a safe-to-fail environment until they feel confident in their coaching skills.

"The engagement and early results are something that we would have not achieved through traditional methods, like role play or classroom-based training," said Quist. "It's been a game-changer for us – and we look forward to rolling out this simulation training to 25 countries as part of a wider competency training initiative."

That reflects the fact that the organisation needs to keep people's skills sharp across the board. Even experienced managers need refresher training, and FLMs everywhere nurse a genuine desire to be better coaches.

2. Relationship Management – Skills Which Score Big in Every Land and Language

Global pharmaceutical company Merck was tasked with upskilling 650 frontline healthcare sales managers from 65 countries in seven different languages.

To create training at scale, Merck rolled out game-based 3D simulations with Attensi, ensuring that each of its sales managers received the same level of instruction whatever their location.

Just like a computer game, the training simulations were accessed on computer, tablet or mobile. They immersed managers in realistic scenarios and settings (doctor's office, conference room, office, a train) that they typically encountered in their day-to-day roles.

The initiative involved creating gamified simulation training for a range of topics, including coaching and performance reviews, goal-setting and problem-solving.

In each of the 40 simulations, Merck's managers were faced with working through a range of scenarios and dialogues with avatars representing internal and external stakeholders.

Motivated Managers

Tasks included managing relationships with the organisation's sales representatives who faced their own unique challenges, including difficulties securing client meetings, navigating sales conversations or handling a data breach.

In each of the scenarios, managers had to evaluate the situation before selecting the most appropriate course of action. Their responses shaped their progress through the game and affected how the narrative ended. Managers saw the sum of their choices play out with realistic results. This highlights a stark difference with traditional training methods which offer only right or wrong answers in an artificial training environment.

These gameplay mechanics motivated managers to keep playing until they achieved mastery in each of the modules. With the simulations providing carefully tailored feedback on managers' choices, they understood exactly what they could have done differently – and were ready to repeat the training in a safe-to-fail environment.

The Story of Success

The simulation scenarios involved narratives depicting common work situations. This is a key element in promoting durable learning.

As recent research explains: "Narrative provides not only meaning but also a mental framework for imbuing future experiences and information with meaning, in effect shaping new memories to fit constructs of the world and ourselves." Learning theorists call this "active retrieval".

When people must respond to diverse circumstances, learning involves the ability to retrieve a relevant model or scenario, and

this ability is extended with each iteration. In fact, there's some evidence that this process reshapes neural pathways over time. In other words, engaging storylines promote durable learning.

VP Hails Effectiveness of New Approach Chetak Buaria, Vice President Global Commercial Operations for Merck's Health-care Business, told Harvard Business Review: "The training was a phenomenal success which significantly improved the effectiveness of Merck's sales leadership team."

Compared to training in a classroom, Buaria said this new approach "reduced the training time by 70%, saving over 2,000 working days of frontline managers' time".

Another benefit was that busy sales managers repeated the training outside work – this wasn't down to the organisation pushing them to work beyond contracted hours, but because the training drove the motivation for individuals to improve their score and increase their knowledge.

Dedicating this much time to training is rarely achieved with conventional methods, which are often used as tick-box, assurance exercises.

Flexible and Accessible

As the training is available anywhere, anytime, managers dipped into modules at their convenience. For example, if a manager required a quick recap on best practice for navigating a sales conversation, they could play through the relevant module to refresh their memory and increase their confidence ahead of a real-life meeting. The training is also scalable.

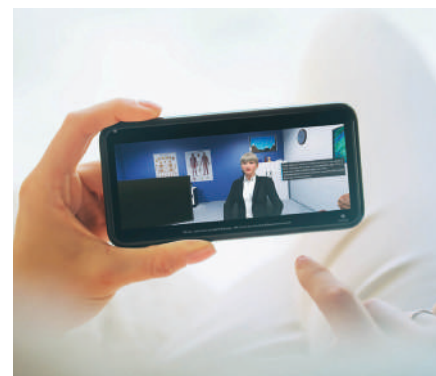
Should training be required in another language or an entirely new module developed to keep pace with changing pharmaceutical regulations, this can quickly be created and rolled out simultaneously to all relevant markets.

With an ever-increasing rate of change across the industry, keeping pace with the sector's innovation is vital.

To do this, organisations require new training technologies, like gamified simulations, that match the market's demands, patient needs, medical developments and regulatory requirements.

Investing in flexible and accessible training tools will ready individuals and

organisations for a constantly growing and evolving industry.



Thomas Andersen

Thomas Andersen is the VP for Health and Pharma at Attensi. He has been with Attensi since 2019. Thomas has over 20 years' experience in marketing, and commercial and business development in the pharmaceutical and biotech industry. Prior to joining Attensi, Thomas held the position of CEO at Nextera for 6 years. He has also held various commercial roles at Pronova Biopharma and AstraZeneca. Thomas holds a Bachelor in Medical Laboratory Sciences (Bioengineer) from Oslo University College and a Master of Management from BI Norwegian Business School.



Jennifer Quist

Jennifer Quist is the Global Capability Owner of Customer Facing Team Learning, Training & Coaching at Boehringer Ingelheim. She has been with Boehringer Ingelheim since 2005 and has over 20 years' experience in sales, training and management in the pharmaceutical industry. Jenn is an LCI Certified Coach from the Leadership Coach Intensive, and also holds a Bachelor with Honours in Biology and Biological Sciences from Brock University and a Masters in Neurogenetics from the University of Toronto.