



Biopharma Leadership for a Changing World

Merle Kummer, Principal, Kummer Consulting

As the distance between colleagues increases, the need for leadership skill skyrockets. As it becomes clearer that every aspect of the R&D enterprise is interconnected, people at all levels of the organization are being forced to think more cross-functionally, more globally, and more collaboratively.

Critical lessons emerged from a knowledge exchange with leaders across the industry who convened on July 21, 2020:

- Communicate clearly and widely
- Expect the unexpected
- Look beneath the surface
- Face change with collaborative re-thinking
- Focus on your priorities

Communicate clearly and widely

A lot of cross-functional, intentional, deep, conversation had to happen to keep things going as we responded to the pandemic. This is what's required to transition rapidly to a new way. It didn't just happen. It wasn't by magic. There was a lot of deep, thoughtful effort regardless of what function we were from or where we were in the organization.

This turmoil forces us to connect across our organizations and really have these deep conversations. These aren't trivial and these aren't easy and it takes a lot of effort. People are putting that work in, and that's where we're reaping the rewards.

Aileen Morgan, Head of Program Management, Avanir Pharmaceuticals

For this virtual world I feel like we're even closer to colleagues than before. Before, you don't have time to go to their office or desk to chat, but now we are on computer, you see they're available, you just pick up the phone and talk. We also have more regular weekly group chats, very casual virtual coffee hours. We know what's going on with everybody in the past week. It's had a positive effect on our sense of community.

Dongzi Yu, Global Project Manager, EMD Serono

Expect the unexpected

When we first sheltered-in-place mid-March, we were told we could return on the 7th of April. I'm looking at a 3-week turnaround, that's great, we'll be back to normal. So I'm talking with the head of HR, who asks, "What's your 30, 60 and 90-day plan regarding this?" I was, like, "What 30, 60 and 90-day plan? We're out for 3 weeks and we're back in after that." He said, "Don't bet on it."

Neel Anand, Head of Discovery Chemistry, Nektar Therapeutics

We've tried to hear what needs are and move things around to do the best we can while still really keeping the focus on our staff and our subject safety. For example, we're doing lots of PCR testing for our staff and they're asymptomatic but they go into self-quarantine so we're running into staffing concerns. What we think staffing looks like in 2 weeks isn't necessarily viable as we keep doing the continuous PCR testing. It's a very fluid situation for us every day.

Andrea Stukel, Director, Global Project Management, Celerion, Inc

Look beneath the surface

Managing personnel is different in this situation. One employee was taking a lot of time on the phone talking to family, making management worried about getting the work done. It turned out that the family was from another country and concerned about losing their jobs, losing their visas, and being deported. I went to my HR and boss to my boss telling them the person's performance is excellent, can we guarantee something to calm down the situation, and that's what they did.

Functional manager at small biotech

It's so important for people through a difficult time to still continue their jobs. It's amazing how people react. Our lab stayed open for essential work, and people were actually writing e-mails thanking the company for letting them go to the lab to work. One problem we had is people would hide and go in the lab and work. We had to do a real check of who was breaking the rule going into the lab when they shouldn't be there.

Bato Jahic, Director of Fermentation Process Development, Evelo Biosciences

Face change with collaborative re-thinking

Our whole Research organization had to take a more global approach to the shutdown, especially for groups that were lab-based. It takes time to put together a Research-wide redeployment effort, to make that meaningful and make sure the right people are found in the right manner. It took a lot of time, reaching out to other parts of the organization, what does this task entail, who are the right people to assign to those tasks to take it forward. But now everyone has a wider perspective.

Neel Anand, Head of Discovery Chemistry, Nektar Therapeutics

The world is changed. I'm not sure we will ever go back to everybody being in the office at the same time. For example, in clinical trial monitoring we're talking about remote access to source documents. Clinical monitors are not going to be traveling as much as they used to. These are the kinds of things that I think will become the norm.

Clinical Development Consultant

Focus on your priorities

The research group worked extensively prioritizing how to perform lab activities in a safe manner, adhering to local and state guidelines. Teams had in depth discussions surrounding critical activities and how to prioritize against each other. It was a cross-functional effort across multiple sites that allowed for a phased approach for continuing to support the pre-clinical pipeline.

Samantha Galuska, Associate Director, Program Management, Sanofi

Building Leadership Skills

Kummer Consulting offers a new course, [Biopharma Leadership for a Changing World](#), designed, tested and validated with biopharma leaders facing the new realities of a pandemic world.

- Take on new leadership roles across functions and geographies
- Broaden your perspective to forge collaborative relationships with senior management
- Motivate your teams to meet new challenges with new ideas

Please contact [Merle Kummer](#) to find out if this program meets your needs.