

## Accelerating the Development of Latin American Leaders

Merck and BTS



"I found the simulation energizing and appropriately challenging."

As globalization and technological advancement have brought the world closer, a need has arisen for leadership development programs that transcend international boundaries.<sup>1</sup> In particular, emerging markets have become an increasingly important space; in the next 20 years alone, 78 percent of growth in global GDP will come from new markets.<sup>2</sup> This has caused a rising awareness in organizations around the world of the need to have the right leadership *everywhere* to ensure truly successful strategy execution and global business development.<sup>3,4</sup>

For Merck Pharmaceuticals, developing the right leaders for the future in every corner of the world is at the forefront of its efforts. Merck is a large global healthcare company delivering innovative health solutions through prescription medicines, vaccines, biologic therapies and consumer and animal health products. Over the years, Merck has been a leader in using global assessments to develop key talent and increase strategic alignment.

Looking to the future, Merck recognized that the development of talent with the knowledge, skills and mindsets to lead the business in achieving significant growth targets was imperative, as was creating a pipeline of talent for next-level positions. This need was particularly strong in emerging markets, areas that will be of increasing importance in the future. To address these needs and help business continuity, retention and engagement, Merck partnered with BTS to design an assessment and leadership development experience for leaders throughout Latin America. Participants included directors of business units, managing directors and functional leaders from both developed and emerging markets.

"My team has been struggling due to a recent reorganization. After going through the assessment and participating in the feedback, I feel better positioned to get my team out of the weeds and have a bigger impact."

### The Assessment Process: Uncovering the Keys to Leadership Success

Merck recognized that in order to achieve its goals, the program must be valued by all participants as a prestigious, engaging and worthwhile development experience. Using Merck's established capabilities, Merck and BTS designed an assessment and development experience to meet these needs. The overall assessment was to be completed in two parts: pre-work and a simulation. The two- to three-hour pre-work portion was composed of a self-evaluation section with a 360 degree survey, leadership-style inventories and pre-read materials. All participants were given seven days prior to their scheduled simulation to complete the pre-work.

The simulation part of the assessment consisted of several role-plays for participants. Designed to elicit the behaviors and tendencies central to leadership success, these exercises were delivered via internet and phone interactions with a trained assessor. Components included an inbox (email) exercise, coaching role-play, business case presentation and debrief interview. The functional leaders completed the scheduled simulation during a single four-and-a-half-hour uninterrupted session. The executive group worked on the inbox exercise and business case presentation during the seven days prior to their scheduled assessment and then completed the assessment role-plays during a 90-minute session.

After completion of the exercise, assessors evaluated all data associated with each participant (e.g., leadership questionnaire, 360 degree survey, behavioral information from simulation and role-plays) and created an integrated feedback report that was reviewed with a coach during the participants' personalized feedback session. Each participant then used their assessment results and the information from their manager to draft their own personal development plan.

### Emerging & Developed Market Leaders: One Experience, Unique Challenges

Throughout the design and delivery of this assessment and development experience, significant consideration was given to the challenges associated with the fact that a portion of these leaders were based in emerging markets. For Merck, it was paramount to balance the face-to-face versus remote aspects of the programs and the associated costs of conducting assessments across international boundaries.

Some of the key challenges of working with emerging markets, and how they were addressed in the program, include:

**Complexity of the Region.** Due to the complexity of the region (economic and political situations, devaluation, etc.), BTS worked closely with Merck's senior managing directors to refine the capabilities needed for success, as well as the evaluations standards.

**Language Barriers.** Language barriers within the emerging markets resulted in the need to conduct senior-level assessments in English and mid-level manager assessment in the participants' native language. To address language-related concerns, groups were provided extra time to prepare for and complete assessment activities.

"At first, I was a bit stressed by the volume of information. However, after completing the assessment I can say that the experience was a valuable investment of my time."

**Assessors & Scoring.** Assessors who were fluent or native Spanish speakers were used for the mid-level assessment. Some of the key cultural differences in the emerging markets, however, required a set of assessors for senior-level assessment who were familiar with these differences. To ensure calibration of scoring, assessor scores were calibrated against key competencies and frame-of-reference behaviors. Lead assessors reviewed each competency score for each exercise to ensure reliably calibrated ratings.

**Technology and Maturity.** According to the World Economic Forum, countries in emerging markets still display a "serious lag despite recent infrastructure improvements and coverage expansion."<sup>5</sup> To address these concerns, project organizers conducted pre-assessment technology checks to ensure reliable internet and phone connection.

### Assessment Experience Yields Long-Term Results

Participant responses, gathered after the completion of the assessment, helped gauge the efficacy and practicality of the program. Participants in both emerging and developed countries had favorable reactions to the assessment.

One of the most interesting and unexpected results, which highlights the impact of the care and efforts made throughout the assessment development and deployment, was that the participants in emerging markets had slightly higher evaluations of the assessment experience than those participants from the developed markets. They were also more open and receptive feedback. Throughout all groups, 100 percent committed to a meeting with their manager to review their development plans and establish follow-up activities. These development plans varied based on each participant's individual developmental goals.

In addition to ranking the program, participants testified to their experiences, giving feedback such as:

"My team has been struggling due to a recent reorganization. After going through the assessment and participating in the feedback, I feel better positioned to get my team out of the weeds and have a bigger impact."

"I found the simulation energizing and appropriately challenging."

"I felt positive about the usefulness of the exercises, discussions, and experience."

"At first, I was a bit stressed by the volume of information. However, after completing the assessment I can say that the experience was a valuable investment of my time."

"I appreciate the opportunity to participate and I am really looking forward to the feedback."

All in all, the deep customization and consideration taking into developing this experience delivered high returns. The continued impact and positive results seen in populations from both developed and emerging markets emphasize the widespread efficacy of objectively assessing overall leadership effectiveness.

## 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.

For more information, please visit [www.bts.com](http://www.bts.com).

- 1 Ryan, A.M. & Tippins, N.T. (2009). *Designing and implementing global selection systems*. New York: Blackwell Press
- 2 Burke, E., Kriek, H. & Jacobs, R. (2014, May). *Practical strategies for multinational and global assessment programs*. Workshop presented at the 29th Annual SIOF Conference, Honolulu, HI.
- 3 House, R. J., Hanges, P. J., Javidan, M., Dorfman, P. W., & Gupta, V. (Eds.). (2004). *Culture, leadership, and organizations: The GLOBE study of 62 societies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- 4 Gentry, William A., Eckert, Regina H., Stawiski, Sarah A. & Zhao, Sophia. (2013). *The Challenges Leaders Face Around the World: More Similar than Different*. Retrieved from [www.ccl.org/leadership/pdf/research/ChallengesLeadersFace.pdf](http://www.ccl.org/leadership/pdf/research/ChallengesLeadersFace.pdf)
- 5 World Economic Forum. (2013). *Global Information Technology Report 2013*. Retrieved from <http://www.weforum.org/reports/global-information-technology-report-2013>