

Roundtable Session 1 – Table 10 – Acknowledging and Discussing/Addressing Imposter Syndrome in the Biopharmaceutical Industry

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Abstract:

Imposter syndrome is a psychological phenomenon where individuals doubt their accomplishments and have a persistent fear that they are not as bright, talented, and qualified as others perceive them to be. At its core, imposter syndrome is the unrealistic and unsustainable belief about what it takes to be competent and to "do your best." Imposter syndrome commonly affects high-achieving professionals who struggle to internalize their positive accomplishments despite their successful and well-earned careers. This syndrome is particularly prevalent in scientific fields, including the biopharmaceutical sector. While imposter syndrome does not discriminate, it has been reported that 75 percent of women compared to just 24 percent of men feel imposter syndrome at some point in their careers. Factors contributing to imposter syndrome in this field include the complex nature of the industry, the high level of expertise required, and the constant need for critical thinking and innovation.

By acknowledging and addressing imposter syndrome, the biopharmaceutical industry can create a more inclusive and supportive atmosphere that allows professionals to thrive, feel valued, and experience increased overall well-being. This supportive environment enables professionals to contribute more effectively to the continued success and innovation within the field.

Strategies and discussion topics for addressing imposter syndrome are outlined below:

1. Foster a supportive work environment:

- How can we create a workplace culture that encourages open discussions about mental health and acknowledges the challenges of imposter syndrome?
- How and when is your company having these discussions and what can we learn from each other?
- How can both people leaders and individuals facilitate open discussions about mental health and imposter syndrome?
- How can people leaders better ensure individuals feel valued and supported to facilitate increased productivity, job satisfaction, and overall well-being?

2. Provide mentorship and professional development opportunities:

- How mentorship programs and opportunities for professional growth can help individuals build confidence in their abilities?
 - How can individuals advocate for professional growth opportunities when dealing with imposter syndrome?
3. **Understanding the true source of impostor syndrome:**
- **What approaches and resources do different companies have to help address imposter syndrome at its roots?**
4. **Building increased visibility within the organization:**
- Discuss strategies for expanding personal influence and achieving goals?
 - How can individuals build increased visibility when dealing with imposter syndrome?
 - How can individuals build increased visibility when working at a large global company?
 - How can people leaders better increase the visibility of individuals in their organization?

Additional Discussion Questions:

Does the pressure come from the role itself, the company, is it all internal?

Notes:

New perspectives after the pandemic- mindsets have shifted and emotions have shifted

Awareness as a primary message and repetition – to confront the issue

Companies needing individuals to “wear many hats” can stretch exposure thin

The dreaded “SME” designation puts an individual on an island and sets artificial expectations

Gender/societal roles and expectations can also set outside pressures

Turnover and organizational shifts constantly can set up an unstable foundation which can damage feelings of trust and safety

Even within different organizations the engagement levels can be very inconsistent -80% of people leave a bad manager not a bad job stat got mentioned

Idea: grassroots manager gathering within the organization to help add awareness to the issue from the managerial level

Psychological and emotional safety are key to getting your team to open up

Make yourself vulnerable – but not too vulnerable that it could impact productivity or reputation

Troubleshooting and error correction early in the learning process can lead to a stronger more/well-rounded (and possibly more confident) individual

The idea of “grow together” when there are knowledge gaps, or pressure/intimidation about presenting on topics

High quality feedback and coaching is very important to keep that psychological safe space

Open and clear communication and availability as a leader keeps coming up as a topic

Unlocking Leadership Mind Traps – good book on communication in these perspectives

Add some metrics that can show positive performance in a positive light – hard data to support the claims being made – make it a business case

Talk to a different leader/Find a mentor if you are not getting that reinforcement or coaching from your direct manager

Do you live to work, or do you work to live? – motivations about why we do what we do must be considered

Career Anchors by Edgar Schein – great book to look at motivations that give individuals their purpose or reason to come to work

There is a large gap culturally between the support system of the industry vs that of academia

As a leader, try and gain an individual understanding of people’s history and backgrounds

Understanding that you are being heard can create trust, even if actions can’t be taken immediately

Set up the space to work in the expanse that they want to – don’t make the Steady Eddie, the happy all the time contributor the new project manager that is highly visible to mgmt. if that is not the space they want to exist in

Active listening means letting go of your own agenda

Self-coaching and buddy coaching can also help with psychological safety

Self: Update your resume frequently possibly even make a fake resume – and then go and achieve the line items you came up with

Conclusions: There were two parallel conversations happening, that involved dealing with imposter syndrome within self, and as a lot of people leaders were in the conversation, it took a direct turn about how to get some up-and-coming young scientists to drop their own case of imposter syndrome. Both conversations discussed the importance of making the human factor a key focus and to build on that using evidence – as that is a language that scientists align on. The reality is that science currently is a high stress field and that can lead to feelings of doubt and questioning of one’s own skills. There is no single answer to solving the issue, but working to make genuine connections both up and down our organizational chains will help create spaces of trust where it hopefully becomes easier to have more difficult conversations.