Case Study

Reducing sales force learning and development cycle times, improving effectiveness of customer communications
About “ABC Pharmaceutical Company:”

“ABC Pharmaceutical Company” is a leading player in the pharmaceutical industry.

Headquartered in the United States, ABC Pharmaceutical Company employs 43,000 people worldwide and markets its medicines in 146 countries.

In Australia, the company operates a research and development function and employs over 200 sales representatives. ABC Pharmaceuticals’ worldwide commitment to excellence and the pursuit of innovation has been instrumental in the realization of many significant medical advances.

Project Overview
Reduction sales force learning and development cycle times and improving the effectiveness of customer communications.

Objectives

♦ To create awareness at both the sales manager/coach and individual sales representative level of the varied mental demands of the sales function within the pharmaceutical industry.

♦ To design Whole-Brained learning experiences, tools and approaches that would have a greater level of impact for an audience of sales reps with varied thinking and learning preferences.

♦ To create awareness at the sales manager/coach level of the varied thinking preferences of their sales reps so that they could tailor their coaching to the unique thinking and learning preferences of the individual rep.

♦ To provide sales reps with an understanding of varied thinking preferences of individuals in the sales process and tailor their communication styles in a way that would more likely resonate with varied individuals.

Desired Business Outcomes

To reduce the time it took to train new graduate sales reps (to achieve “job mastery”) from 24 months to 12 months.

Key Stakeholders

Sales Manager (Australia/New Zealand sales region) National Training Manager (Australia/New Zealand)

Project Duration

Core project deliverables: Three years (including “Horizon” sales training program)

On-going reinforcement of Whole Brain® Model (“Color Your Client”): Ten years

Background

The project was initiated because of an opportunity ABC Company wanted to capitalize on, which involved the introduction of a new “wonder” drug. The challenge ABC faced was that within the pharmaceutical industry, companies typically only have about seven months after launching a new drug before competitors know “everything there is to know about it.” Therefore, there is a very limited time window to make a mark with a new drug. Companies must market aggressively at the earliest stages of launch because the competition will launch “me-too” drugs within a fairly short period afterwards.

This new wonder drug represented a huge opportunity for the company, and with large markets in both Australia and New Zealand, ABC would have to quickly add sales people in order to fully capitalize on it.

The Australian/New Zealand sales manager had a very specific need: to double the sales force and to get them trained to a level of job mastery as quickly as possible.
Like most pharmaceutical companies, ABC invested heavily in training, but in particular, sales training. The National Training Manager had already experienced and implemented several Whole Brain® programs for his sales force at a previous company, and he believed a Whole Brain® solution would provide the right framework for achieving ABC Company’s goals.

**Accelerating Job Mastery**

Herrmann International Asia worked with ABC Company actively over a three-year period.

ABC’s typical process was to hire a number of graduates from universities each year to add to their sales force. Through the training and coaching that was in place, it would take, on average, two full years for graduates to achieve what ABC called “job mastery.” This meant they were on top of all the aspects of the job of a pharmaceutical sales rep and were selling to their maximum potential.

A two-year ramp up, however, would be too long for this opportunity.

With a new CEO in place who was very supportive of learning as an organizational value and a corporate culture that was open to new methods and approaches to improve training effectiveness, the time was perfect to introduce the Herrmann Whole Brain® methodology as a way to shorten the time to job mastery and give recent graduates the necessary tools and skills to be successful right out of the gate.

**The “Horizons” Program**

The Herrmann International team worked with the managing director, sales manager and training director to develop the program. Called “Horizons,” the program had four primary objectives:

1. Create an environment that supported and reinforced learning.
2. Provide support for the sales coaches — to understand their own thinking preferences and understand how to tailor their coaching to reflect the unique thinking preferences and learning styles of their sales reps.
3. Provide support for the sale reps themselves — for them to understand the mental demands of their jobs and the implications of their unique thinking preferences on mastering those demands.
4. To assist the training manager in the development of learning experiences, tools and approaches that would reflect a more Whole Brain® approach, and therefore resonate with all sales reps, regardless of their profiles.

One component of the program was interpersonal skills training. The second component was using the Whole Brain® Model as a framework for teaching and learning. The desired business objective was that these new sales reps would achieve job mastery in twelve months as opposed to two years, cutting the typical ramp-up time half.

**Better Coaching Results through Better Thinking: Training the Sales Managers**

Because the Horizon program would require the sales managers to perform ongoing, on-the-job coaching, the program kicked off with a three-day interactive skills program designed to train the sales managers (approximately 12 people) to be on-the-job coaches.

The company already had a strong coaching culture, as sales managers spent most of their time conducting joint calls with the reps. Typically, after three or four joint calls, the sales manager would have an opportunity, in the car or back in the office, to coach the sales rep on what he or she had observed in a real client call. This training was designed to help refine the managers’ skills and give them new perspective on how to effectively coach sales reps, based on their own thinking.
preferences, the thinking preferences of the rep, and the mental demands of the sales rep job itself.

During the first morning of the coaches' training program, sales managers learned about their HBDI® Profiles and the Whole Brain® Model. Then, in the afternoon, they explored the job of pharmaceutical sales rep, as well as those of marketing support and marketing research.

Using the Whole Brain® Model, sales managers completed an exercise that answered the question, “What are the mental demands that being a pharmaceutical sales rep will place on the incumbent?” Afterwards, the group analyzed the role in terms of the four quadrants of the Model and developed a map that demonstrated those demands, sorted by each distinct quadrant of the brain.

From there, the group took the total job and broke it out into what the sales reps needed to learn in the first three months, six, nine, and then mastery at 12 months. Each job ended up with four job maps at three, six, nine and 12 months.

According to Michael Morgan, CEO of Herrmann International Asia, “Now the managers had done the coaching workshop, and they were able to say, ‘I’m going to be a coach, but because of my own HBDI® I probably am going to coach in a particular way.’ They were aware that they would need to adjust their coaching style based on the unique profile of the sales rep they would be coaching at any given opportunity.”

Outthink, Outpace, Outperform: Training the Sales Reps

The second program was conducted for the pharmaceutical sales reps or the graduate recruits.

The first morning was similar to the manager’s program, with everyone receiving their HBDI® Profiles and learning about how they prefer to think and, in particular, how they prefer to learn. “There were lots of insights from that morning,” Michael says. “Many of the graduates said they wished they’d known this information while at university as it probably would have made their lives a lot easier in terms of how they learned.”

In the afternoon the sales reps received their job maps. These maps showed them clearly the journey they would be taking in the next three, six, nine and 12 months — what it was they had to learn in terms of time, but also in terms of the mental demands it would place on them.

They then overlaid their individual HBDI® Profiles on the job maps, making the connection to some of the implications and challenges they would individually face over the coming year.

Armed with this knowledge, they were each then able to create an individual learning plan based on the formal structured learning and other learning resources that were available in the organization. This plan would plot their individual journey and would be based on each person’s unique HBDI® Profile.

Better Learning Results Through Better Thinking

The third component was working with the National Training Manager to create Whole-Brained learning experiences, tools and approaches for the sales reps. Most of the existing training programs came from ABC’s parent company in the U.S. and weren’t necessarily Whole Brained.

The training manager went though each of his programs and tailored them so they would be delivered in a more Whole Brained way — appealing to all four quadrants of the brain — and thus, would resonate with the different thinking and learning preferences of the people he had in the room.
“We continued this program for three years,” says Michael. “I spoke at the annual sales conference every year, speaking on the application of Whole Brain® Thinking in sales. Whole Brain® training was also delivered to a mix of new graduate hires and experienced sales personnel. The biggest application that we did on an ongoing basis for all sales reps outside of this ‘job mastery’ program was called ‘Color Your Client.’”

“Color Your Client”

“The typical pharmaceutical rep has an unusual selling situation,” Michael notes, “where he or she does not sell to the end user: they sell to a recommender, that is, the doctor.”

The actual sale or recommendation takes place when the doctor meets the patient, and the hope of the pharma sales rep is that the doctor will remember that their drug is the best.

Michael adds, “The other thing that makes selling for a pharmaceutical company more challenging is that you’re selling to a doctor who, in the Herrmann world, is typically from the ‘blue quadrant’ (rational, logical, data driven, technical), has a high level of knowledge, and probably knows a lot more than the sales rep.”

In this initiative, the Whole Brain® Model was used to teach the sales reps to recognize that they will encounter a number of different people with different thinking preferences as part of a normal sales call.

The first person the rep will encounter is typically the receptionist (“gate-keeper”) — the person behind the front desk who likely has a high preference for “green,” or B-Quadrant, thinking (process driven, organized, safekeeping), and is in charge of ordering supplies and scheduling patients and keeping a waiting room organized with a doctor who is likely to be running an hour or so behind on his appointments on any given day.

Receptionists are often extremely busy, and the last thing they want to deal with is a sales rep showing up for a sales call. If the sales rep doesn’t have a “green” preference as well, the issue is, How does the sales rep communicate effectively, befriend, and develop a positive ongoing relationship with that person behind the front desk?

This program provided an opportunity for sales reps to discuss these issues and develop strategies to communicate more effectively with the gatekeepers.

The second person reps are likely to encounter on a sales call is the nurse who is affiliated with the practice. The nurse is generally very different from the gatekeeper.

The sales reps then explored how to effectively communicate and relate to this individual, who is likely to have a high “red,” or C-Quadrant, dominance (feeling, interpersonal, helping, emotional). How do you approach this person, provide samples and be warm and interpersonal? What will you need to adjust with your own style to build a productive relationship?

Finally, there is the doctor, who again, is likely to have a strong “blue,” or A-Quadrant, preference and probably doesn’t like being sold to, doesn’t like sales reps, and thinks he/she knows more than anyone. Appealing to this type of thinker requires being sharp, on the button, and able to quickly provide the facts on the new product, deliver it succinctly, and then get out.

These were real issues that even the veteran sales reps faced on a regular basis,
so most of the ongoing work involved providing them with strategies to effectively deal with and communicate with these varied individuals, all of whom were likely participants in the sales process.

Better Results Through Better Thinking: Beating Expectations

“The program was a tremendous success,” says Michael.

The time it took for a new college graduate to achieve “sales mastery” was not only reduced by half — which was the goal — but was further reduced to just seven months’ time.

The managing director at the time was promoted and moved to the U.S., and for the next 10 years, ABC continued to utilize the Whole Brain® Model, not only as a core part of their sales training, but also within other parts of the organization.

Summary of Outcomes

♦ Improved progress towards the specific performance standards within the three, six, nine, and 12 month stages.

♦ Reduced amount of time required to go from “new graduate” to “job mastery” from an average of two years to just seven months.

♦ Increased sales revenue and improved results in key sales process metrics over a period of three years.
better results through better thinking

Clients
Herrmann International clients, for whom better thinking has become integral to their business culture, include:

- American Express
- Bank of America
- BB&T
- Blue Cross Blue Shield
- BMW
- Boeing
- Chevron
- Cintas
- Cisco
- Coca-Cola
- Columbia Business School
- Disney University
- DuPont
- Gardian Life
- GE
- Global Novations
- Harris Corporation
- HBO
- IBM
- Johnson & Johnson
- JP Morgan Chase
- Kaiser Permanente
- Limited Brands
- Microsoft
- Milliken & Company
- MTV Networks
- National Semiconductor
- Nortel Networks
- North Carolina Courts
- Novartis
- Procter and Gamble
- Purdue Pharma
- Rogers Communications
- St. John’s University
- Schering-Plough
- Shell Oil
- Target
- Telus Mobility
- The Clarion Group
- Tommy Hilfiger
- 3M
- University of Pretoria, S. Africa
- US Navy
- Vanderbilt University
- Victoria’s Secret
- Wharton Business School
- Weyerhaeuser Corporation
- Xerox