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The Importance of Curiosity in Pharma

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The curiosity gene

The story goes that when he was a child, Albert Einstein would come home from school each evening and, rather than ask him how his day was, his mother would ask him ‘what good question did you ask today?’.

Of course, this story could be little more than just that – a story. But without question curiosity was the trait that Einstein held in highest esteem. “I have no special talent. I am only passionately curious,” is one of the physicist’s most iconic quotes.

Many years on, and curiosity is a skill that should still be nurtured and revered. And indeed it can be nurtured – curiosity is more than a character trait that you either have a specific level of or you don’t, it’s a talent you can embrace and learn through conscious effort. According to journalist Ian Leslie, curiosity is a combination of ‘intelligence, persistence and a hunger for novelty’. And, he writes in his book *Curious: The desire to know and why your future depends on it*¹, it’s more vital than ever.

Perhaps that’s why greater value is being placed on employees who showcase inquisitiveness and a desire to learn.

The World Economic Forum, for instance, reports² the top three skills every professional will need to thrive in business in 2022:

- 1 : Analytical thinking and innovation
- 2: Active learning and learning strategies
- 3: Creativity, originality and initiative

Future of Jobs Survey 2018, World Economic Forum.

All characteristics that are greatly enhanced by those with a curious mind.

These aren’t new skillsets, but it’s interesting to note their prominence on a list held in such high regard. When a similar report was carried out in 2015, ‘complex problem solving’ was still number one in the rankings, but ‘coordinating with others’, ‘people management’ and ‘negotiation’ were traits that filled out the top five instead.

¹ Leslie, I. *Curious: The desire to know and why your future depends on it*. Quercus. 2014.

² [The Future of Jobs Forum](#). World Economic Forum. 2018.

Know your CQ

Employers themselves are already getting in on the act. When looking for new recruits, a person's 'CQ' may be just as important.

We've all heard of 'IQ' – where people display an intellectual quotient. And it's become popular in the past decade to consider a person's 'EQ' as well – judging their 'emotional quotient', or how emotionally intelligent they are.

But 'CQ' – curiosity quotient – is now a third string to the bow. London Business School recently declared that 'CQ is the new EQ'³ which, not long ago, was being cited as the new 'IQ'.

Indeed, when asked about the secrets of her success, GlaxoSmithKline CEO Emma Walmsley told Management Today⁴: "I'm curious, I get lots of energy from expanding my knowledge." It's recently resulted in her being named Britain's most admired leader⁴.

A 'curiosity quotient' resonates for us at Evaluate Ltd, too. "It's a complex race for our clients to create innovative medicines," Anthony Raeside, Evaluate's Chief Research Officer, says. "If I want to expand Evaluate's solutions to provide for these clients, it's essential that I put myself in their shoes – to understand their own view of drug development risk and commercial potential in the R&D landscape. Being curious is the only way I can fulfil that explorative role."

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Chief Research Officer, Evaluate

Curiosity in pharma

Curiosity helps employees engage more deeply in their work and generate new ideas.

It means recognising that no-one can know everything. It means being restless to explore more.

In pharma, we see the best in the business understand this. Perhaps that's because much of the risk is out of human control. You can have the best laid plans, born out of a clear strategy and inspired by the most accurate forecasts, yet with the low odds of a drug making it to market, it still may not be enough to succeed.

To increase the odds, you need to stay curious throughout the whole journey. And we know it's a long and arduous journey – EvaluatePharma Vision data shows that developing a drug currently takes an average of ten-and-a-half years.

During that period, you need to be constantly asking 'what if?'. What if the drug doesn't work as intended? What if a competitor drug comes along and makes your product irrelevant? What if a side effect appears that increases your regulatory and clinical burden?

It's those who thoroughly investigate the long-term possibilities that put themselves in pole position to benefit. You need to be able to answer the 'what ifs', to work out how to minimise damage when things don't go to plan – and know how to take advantage of your success when they do.

Dig deeper

In pharmaceuticals, most answers are not a Google away. And the industry changes too rapidly to assume or accept information at face value.

It's up to you to interrogate the right data, ask the right questions, take on board the right insight. Only then can you begin to make decisions that you can have confidence in.

Can you ask questions that others have ignored? Can you look beyond the obvious to find the hidden pain points or tucked away opportunities? If you're simply relying on the same basic information as everybody else, chances are you'll get to the same answers as everybody else. Where's your strategic edge then?

To put it bluntly, pharma requires pioneering thinking. Getting a drug to market needs scientists who challenge the status quo. Scientists whose new perspective results in developing a new molecule or discovering a new pathway.

But it also needs pharma businesses to embrace curiosity too. To understand a drug's potential and what may be on the table to be gained or lost. To spend more time interrogating possible outcomes and probabilities.

The entire pharma industry is one that needs to embrace curiosity and never settle. It's time to take the curious gene out of the labs and into every business that works within the sector.

“ Curiosity remains intrinsic to Evaluate's culture. We are always investigating new ways to help our clients; it's only through our inquisitiveness that we were able to launch – and continue to support – consensus forecasting models that the pharma industry rely on today. ”

Jonathan de Pass
Chairman, Evaluate

Know your neoteny: How to stay curious in business

As earlier explored, the wonderful thing about curiosity is that it's a skill that can be developed. Or, in a sense 'relearnt'. Because we're all born curious. It's the only way we discover the world around us.

But somewhere along the way, that childlike sense of wonder starts to dissipate. Actively encouraging neoteny – that is, retaining a state found in juveniles – is a big step to taking that curiosity and turning it in to a function that can actually aid you in business. How can you apply it to your own work?

1 Ask 'why?'

And 'what', 'when', 'where' and 'how'. The most curious people ask more questions than they answer. Even the very best in the business, the ones who have seen it all and are reputedly at the top of their game, never automatically or rigidly accept the status quo. They question, question and question some more.

2 Do something that scares you

Comfort kills curiosity. So whilst it doesn't pay to be reckless, it does pay to attempt something different from time to time. Take a fresh perspective on a challenge and you may surprise yourself with the answer you get to. If you're too comfortable, it's easy to accept the obvious. It's those who dig a little deeper who ultimately get rewarded.

3 Take a broader view

Digging deeper should also mean casting the net wider. Being curious involves drawing on more areas of knowledge to help you compile a smarter and more rounded view. Of course, you then require the wherewithal to accept or reject viewpoints when they come, but anyone tackling a problem with tunnel-vision will end up with a more stilted answer. Asking for help or pulling in other opinions leads to a better outcome.

4 Listen before you speak

Greek philosopher Epictetus said “We have two ears and one mouth so we can listen twice as much as we speak.” If it’s more important to hunt for knowledge than pretend to have all the answers, then the most curious people use their ears and their mouths in the right proportions.

5 Embed it into your company

Smart companies don’t just rely on their people to have the right curious attitude, they focus on building a curious environment. That can come from incorporating it into core company values (Merck recently themed its entire 350th anniversary celebrations around being ‘always curious’), from including curious thinking into a person’s KPIs, or from sharing information and inspiration that helps people look beyond the mundane. What can you do?

“
No business can afford to ignore the power of curiosity in the workplace. In pursuit of innovation, we must dare to seek more knowledge and open ourselves to new ideas to improve our future.”

Stefan Oschmann, CEO,
*State of Curiosity Report 2018, Merck*⁵

Staying curious with Evaluate

Satisfying curiosity is why Evaluate exists. We're here to help you fill in the gaps on Pharma. What unexpected insights can you uncover that will set your thinking apart from the rest?

How can you take those insights and apply them going forward? Can you stimulate this thinking across your organisation, using different inquisitive minds to get to a more succinct answer? Connecting people and sharing information is a powerful tool to help stay curious and accelerate creative thinking. The more access and knowledge a company has across departments, the more rounded an answer is likely to be.

Pharma is changing. There are no easy wins anymore. The decisions that you make will have a long-term impact on everything you do. So we help you to ask 'why'. By providing you with cutting-edge information, through EvaluatePharma Vision, accompanied with expert, independent analysis through Vantage to help unpack it.

We're here to build your CQ. To be an indispensable tool in translating complex situations into familiar ones. Can your curiosity help you to drive better business decisions?

[I'm curious to know more about Evaluate >](#)

Evaluate

Evaluate provides trusted commercial intelligence for the pharmaceutical industry. We help our clients to refine and transform their understanding of the past, present and future of the global pharmaceutical market to drive better decisions. When you partner with Evaluate, our constantly expanding solutions and our transparent methodologies and datasets are instantly at your disposal, along with personalised, expert support.

Evaluate gives you the time and confidence to turn understanding into insight, and insight into action.

EvaluatePharma  offers a global view of the pharmaceutical market's past, present and future performance with consensus forecasts to 2024, company financials, pipelines and deals.

 [@EvaluatePharma](https://twitter.com/EvaluatePharma)

EvaluatePharma Vision  provides the first single view of the risk and reward of the R&D landscape with consensus forecasts, R&D costs at drug and trial level, success rates, predictive timelines and trial outcomes.

EvaluateMedTech  tracks, benchmarks, and forecasts global performance for the medical device and diagnostic industry with consensus forecasts to 2024, company financials and more.

Evaluate Custom Solutions  improves your strategic decision-making with customised solutions and deep insights that draw on our industry expertise and trusted commercial intelligence.

Vantage  provides award-winning, thought-provoking news and insights into current and future developments in the industry, and is the only pharmaceutical news service underpinned by Evaluate's commercial intelligence.

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