


CASE STUDY

Initiatives to Better Understand Customer Needs Leads to a Look Within at EMD Serono

COMPANY PROFILE

EMD Serono is a 350-year old family-owned pharmaceutical company that operates in the United States and Canada.ⁱ Its products are for diseases that primarily affect women, including multiple sclerosis, thyroid dysfunctions and fertility needs. "Caring about patients and families is in the DNA of the company itself," says Jocelyn Ulrich, Senior Director, Global Government and Public Affairs. Understanding their customer base led the company to realize that the therapies offered were also important to the caregivers of the patients and they began to take on the concerns of carers as well as patients.

In 2014, EMD Serono, through its parent company, Merck, began a policy research initiative in the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) economies. This initiative, entitled *Healthy Women, Healthy Lives*ⁱⁱⁱ sought to explore the barriers to women's health and their economic participation. The initiative looked at five broad categories of issues that affected women's health seeking and their economic participation: workplace health and safety; health awareness and access; sexual and reproductive health; gender-based violence; and work-life balance. The initiative also sought to analyze the business case for private sector investment in women's health and economic participation and developed a policy toolkit that presents the findings from the research in a user-friendly way. The toolkit provides a menu of options that APEC member economies can draw from to pilot, implement and scale up on a voluntary basis, choosing the actions appropriate for their economies.^{iv} It encompasses a range of issues including gender-based violence (GBV), disease awareness, and work-life integration and addresses care work as an impediment women's labor force participation. Subsequently, the country members in conjunction with EMD Serono and Merck have held implementation workshops every year, to explore and highlight progress in implementing the policy toolkit.

"WE IDENTIFIED THE NEED TO CREATE AWARENESS OF THE DOUBLE-BURDEN OF WORK AND CAREGIVING AND ITS IMPACT ON HEALTH AND ON THE ECONOMY."

– Jocelyn Ulrich, Senior Director, Global Government and Public Affairs

Similarly, in 2016, EMD Serono and Merck collaborated with eight global caregiving organizations to launch Embracing Carers, a public private partnership designed to increase awareness of caregiving and to provide tools for policy change in economies around the world.^v As part of this initiative, EMD Serono and partners conducted a survey^{vi} in a number of economies to understand the impact of caregiving on these economies,^{vii} they also explored in depth what constituted good care policy and identified the existing gaps in policy, ultimately producing a White Paper.^{viii} The White Paper lays out a number of key action areas including:

- **BROADEN STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT:** Support capacity building and increase collaboration with caregiver organizations and broader stakeholders to elevate the needs of caregivers across the world.
- **INCREASE GLOBAL AWARENESS:** Activate and increase levels of global discussion and digital community coverage highlighting the unmet challenges that caregivers face.
- **ACTIVATE POLICY:** Identify and drive legislative action and visibility among policy makers, government and international public health organizations.
- **ENGAGE HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS:** Create innovative opportunities and share best practices across the broader healthcare community to recognize caregiver needs, intervene, and link to meaningful support and solutions.

ADDRESSING CARE

The success of their engagement externally and in the policy arena led EMD Serono management to look within and ask how they were addressing care needs within their company. EMD Serono worked with Merck to do a full diagnostic of their HR policies to see how well they match up against the *Healthy Women, Healthy Economies* objectives. They also undertook a deeper dive into their work-life balance environment and commitments to see how well they supported caregivers in the company.

As a result of this analysis, they identified a number of challenges and opportunities to foster greater work-life balance and support women's ability to rise through the ranks of the company:

“WE KNOW THAT EVEN WHEN WE HAVE GOOD POLICIES, TAKING LEAVE IS HARD, PEOPLE ARE NOT ALWAYS AWARE OF THE BENEFITS OR FEEL ABLE TO USE THEM, WE NEED A CULTURAL SHIFT, LEGITIMIZING THE USE OF CARE LEAVE.”

– Jocelyn Ulrich, Senior Director, Global Government and Public Affairs

Peer network. One initiative set in motion as a result of the analysis is to create a peer network - an internal employee resource group of caregivers for those workers in dual roles.

Culture change. Because employees did not always take advantage of the leave policies in place, the company also set out to address the internal culture that may limit people seeking and taking leave for caring responsibilities or asking for greater workplace flexibility.

Action planning. EMD Serono created a task force and developed an action plan to support flexible work places.

Bias training. The company also implemented a series of unconscious bias trainings throughout the organization to enable workers and managers alike to address and mitigate any unconscious bias that may limit women’s ability to thrive in their company.

EMD Serono/Merck is a global company that operates in 55 countries, where some countries have a lot more infrastructure and policy support for caring and where the government provides or mediates access to care services, supports care policies and

legislates for care needs. Given this contextual diversity, the company is developing family-friendly work-life balance policies that are fair across their workplaces.

MEASURING RESULTS

In order to calculate the cost and return on investment of these activities, EMD Serono is developing a detailed baseline that they will use to measure improvements. They are planning to develop metrics that demonstrate tangible ways to support women’s rise to leadership, calibrate the investments in formal sponsorship and mentoring, training opportunities and in changing HR policies.

The focus on data and metrics is critical. EMD Serono conducted focus groups around the globe. They convened 40 colleagues at a time who were brought together to discuss work-life balance, women in management and leadership and HR policies. Many participants began the interaction stating their belief that they did not have a challenge recruiting, retaining and promoting women in their company. But once they were shown the data and the demonstrable attrition of women in higher job categories, they reacted with surprise. In this way, the metrics could reinforce commitments to changing internal policy and developing a more supportive internal environment.

EMD Serono is rolling out new policies for work-place flexibility to accommodate caring needs. They are also collecting a great deal of data internally on recruitment, retention and promotion of women and beginning to track the return on investment in terms of productivity and job satisfaction. They plan to hold themselves to account for the same metrics across the realms identified in their Healthy Women Healthy Economies initiative and will report out to peer companies and investors as they move this initiative forward.

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Conclusions and opinions expressed in this brief and study are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or official positions of EBRD.

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