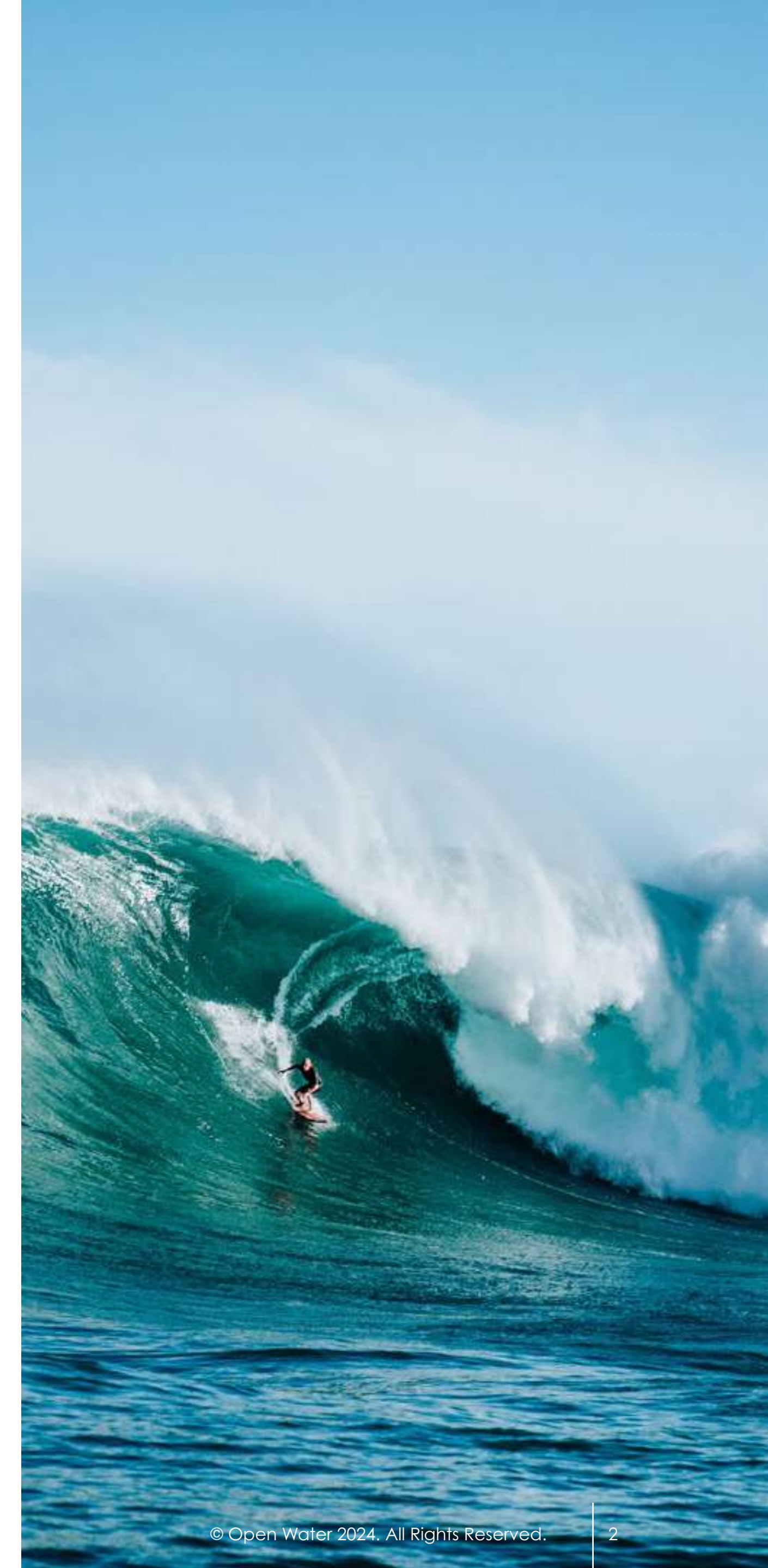


A New Wave of Transformation

As biopharma leaders recalibrate and refocus on creating new opportunities for growth and impact, structural changes are reshaping the industry and significantly affecting the workforce. Major players such as Pfizer, Roche, Bayer, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Biogen, and Takeda have announced they are implementing new ways of working and trimmed their workforces to prepare for, as one insider put it: “a new wave of transformation.” Recent reports show biopharma layoffs may affect as many as **25,000** employees in **2024**.

These cuts aren't just about efficiency and cost—they're mostly part of a much larger strategy to focus on the most promising products that will make the biggest difference to patient outcomes and ensure the organisation can stay ahead in an increasingly tough market. While these changes are necessary for to advance and grow, they bring about substantial people challenges.

Externally, the sector continues to navigate unprecedented change with firms facing increased scrutiny on drug pricing, new regulatory requirements, and the need to adapt to new technologies such as AI and personalised medicine – and shareholder price.



According to leading **workplace burnout** researcher Christina Maslach, the main drivers of burnout are:

Unsustainable workloads without the right tools

A perceived lack of control over one's work life

A lack of fairness, and feeling disrespected

Poor team or workplace community connection and support

Mismatched values and skills

Low recognition for effort



In this climate, how are biopharma decision-makers clearing the storm to drive momentum, deliver priorities and meet expectations?



Why Managers **Matter**

The role of the manager in helping to drive change in biopharma has never been more critical. Research firm Gallup's 'State of the Global Workforce 2024 Report' found that managers have more negative experiences and emotions than non-managers. And this is the group of people who are supposed to drive change, influence and motivate their teams positively!

On the flip side, engaged, thriving managers are 70% more likely to inspire their teams to move forward. Managers who are skilled at helping their team members set achievable stretch goals and who can provide meaningful feedback and coach for accountability will lead to higher productivity and enjoyment at work.

It's why some organisations in flux are consciously investing in developing their managers with new skills and abilities as they implement change.

Open Water partners with life science organisations to equip their managers with the ability to connect with themselves, gain heightened self-awareness and the knowledge, skills, and access toolkits to connect, communicate and coach others in their team with empathy and understanding.

These are the principles behind our **Connected Manager Program**.

The Connected Manager

The Connected Manager takes managers beyond regular managerial duties; it's about making stronger human connections and working relationships grounded in emotional intelligence, positive mindsets and a genuine understanding of each employee's strengths and motivations.

A typical Connected Manager program consists of:

- A minimum of 6 months of personal and professional development consisting of interactive, experiential in-person and online sessions
- Peer-to-peer coaching forums
- Work with an accountability buddy
- A continuous virtuous circle of apply-feedback-refine-repeat methodology
- Practical toolkits
- Adapted to the organisational context, needs and desired outcomes

This approach supports and empowers new and existing managers to champion the change the organisation is going through while building trust and psychological safety.

In a sector where the work is complex, people are weary of change, and the pressure is intense; such connection is not just beneficial—it's essential.

The Impact of Empowered Managers

We measured the program's impact in a recent Connected Manager cohort with a leading European CRO, 6 months in

100%

- Had moved from being an individual contributor to a manager
- Felt better equipped to manage their teams
- Were able to embrace a culture of trust and create psychological safety

80%

- Feeling empowered to take ownership of actions and outcomes
- Having improved their resourcefulness, personal effectiveness, and performance
- Having gained strategies for building trusted advisor relationships

"The Connected Program has had an impact on the way that I look at things, the way that I want to manage myself, the way that I'm managing people; it's profoundly changed how I'm approaching managing my team."

It Starts at the Top

Leadership at the highest levels must also recognise and support the pivotal role that managers play. And it's not just the managers who need to evolve.

In times like these, leaders must come together, build trust, gain clarity and align behind a shared vision, agenda and responsibility.

Leaders need time to connect with themselves, recognise their strengths and vulnerabilities, and connect and communicate with each other with greater empathy and transparency, which is critical for productive leadership and healthy conflict.



The Connected Leader

Connected leaders lead with empathy, passion, and purpose. They have developed and implement the mindsets that will steer their teams through challenge and change. They have the emotional intelligence and communication skills to align, inspire, and influence their most important stakeholders.

The Open Water Connected Leader program is centred around the neuroscience of behaviour change, emotional intelligence and well-validated leadership models. It includes a strength-based leadership approach that takes leaders from good to extraordinary.

The program includes modules to:

- **Develop the mindsets for leaders to be able to move hearts and minds as empathic leaders**
- **Build on their strengths so they can add EQ to IQ and lead with passion and purpose**
- **Equip leaders with well-validated leadership models and practical, actionable tools.**

The Connected Leader

- Case Study

Open Water worked with a late-stage biopharma start up to ensure its leadership was working towards a common goal and tighter team dynamic. When the leadership team first began collaborating, there were significant challenges in aligning around common goals and objectives.

The team lacked trust, transparency, and joint accountability, leading to unhealthy competition and conflict. Budget discussions often revealed protective behaviours, with individuals withholding information and creating “slush funds” to cover potential issues.

Leaders were more focused on their own team's goals rather than the organisation's collective objectives, resulting in a disconnected and siloed environment.



Transforming the Leadership Dynamic

Following in-depth diagnostic interviews, Open Water designed and delivered an in-person alignment and cohesion workshop to connect leaders on a human and personal level to each other and to a shared purpose.

Together we created a charter around empowering beliefs, leadership identity and guiding values.

Today, the leadership dynamics have transformed. During a recent budget discussion, a leader requested additional funds to address critical infrastructure issues necessary for patient data management and a digital disease awareness campaign. Instead of facing resistance or underhanded comments, the team responded with joint problem-solving and support. Leaders were willing to adjust their budgets and prioritise the collective goal over individual needs, demonstrating a dramatic shift towards a cohesive, goal-oriented team.



Building a Unified Culture

The transformation in the executive leadership team reflects a broader investment in developing leadership and fostering a unified organisational culture. This change is crucial as leaders directly influence the entire commercial organisation.

Establishing trust and joint accountability is essential for preventing rumours, toxic behaviours, and ensuring a collaborative environment. The goal is for leaders to model the desired behaviours, setting a precedent for the entire organisation to follow.

"This has been wonderful. It was a time to be thoughtful yet creative, proactive and opportune. An opportunity to connect in a safe, open space for open communication. I am really looking forward to working with this team and driving a shared vision."



Connected Leaders Achieve **their Outcomes**

Data-driven insights from Zenger Folkman show that leaders who achieve high levels of engagement see significant improvements in productivity, profitability, and customer loyalty—outcomes that are directly aligned with the strategic goals of biopharma firms.

This holistic approach ensures that engagement isn't just a box-ticking exercise measured by an employee pulse survey a couple of times a year, but a core component of how the business operates.

Leaders who build strong, resilient cultures prioritise hiring and developing managers. They treat engagement not as a one-off initiative but ensure it is woven into the very fabric of the organisation. Great leaders integrated engagement into every stage of the employee experience — from hiring and onboarding to coaching, performance management, and everyday interactions. In other words, they make it part of the culture- simply 'the way they do business'.

By instilling a culture of support and development, biopharma leaders can ensure that their managers and their teams are not only more engaged but also more innovative and resilient, inspiring motivation and growth.

Conclusion: Leading the Way in Biopharma

The Gallup State of the Global Workplace 2024 report highlights a critical truth for the biopharma industry. In times of change and crisis, the quality of your leaders and managers is the key to unlocking the full potential of your workforce.

Ultimately, connected leaders and managers who focus on engagement, well-being, and who develop new skills and mindsets rooted in self-knowledge and empathy can ensure they are in a solid position to overcome challenge and move forward.

By investing in developing engaged, connected managers and leaders and making engagement a central part of your culture, leaders can create a thriving workplace that drives innovation and delivers outstanding results.

Resources:

[Mapping 2024 biopharma layoffs](#)

[Pfizer announces savings](#)

[Future of mental health at work](#)

[What causes burnout](#)

[State of the Global Workplace 2024](#)

[How engagement impacts bottom line](#)



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