

Quantified

Using AI to Boost Growth and Field Force Productivity

The Next Wave of Innovation in
Life Sciences Training



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Executive Summary

Artificial Intelligence (AI), long anticipated as a breakthrough technology, is emerging as the next major force to transform industries. AI tools are now present in many of the software tools we use daily, enterprises are adopting AI across many functions, and advances such as ChatGPT make headlines daily.

With this rapid change, we need to remember two things. First, even with rapid progress, we're still in the early stages of industry change. Second, as with the microprocessor, Internet, and other transformational technologies, it will change our businesses in both expected and unexpected ways.

Particularly within the pharmaceutical sector, initial ventures into AI have yielded mixed results as many companies remain in an experimentation phase. But an area where AI is already delivering significant returns is one of the most human areas of the industry - field force coaching, performance, and productivity.

The field force, representing the largest commercial investment for pharmaceutical companies, is essential for achieving commercial triumph through the establishment of substantial relationships with healthcare professionals (HCPs). One of the perennial hurdles for field leadership has been to maximize the potential of their teams, enhancing their selling behaviors, communication skills, empathetic listening, and thereby solidifying their status as trusted healthcare partners.

Traditionally, boosting productivity, honing field force capabilities, and effectively engaging with key HCPs has been an intensive and manual endeavor. Whether going on ride-alongs to visit HCPs with a team member or performing external audits, these tactics are labor-intensive, give limited visibility, and don't scale well across a team of any size. Despite the difficulty, optimizing the field team –

Executive Summary

a critical resource – stands as the sector's most promising strategy for advancing performance metrics, fostering trust, and catalyzing measurable gains in commercial outcomes.

What's exciting is that a suite of new tools have arrived and are ready to be implemented. They are set to revolutionize commercial teams in two primary ways:

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| 1. By providing visibility into field interactions, pinpointing improvement opportunities and providing comparative benchmarking. Up until now, data has been too scarce and subjective to allow for true optimization. | 2. By fostering skill enhancement through customizable training modules, simulating diverse customer personas and scenarios for experiential and scalable training. Field reps can now be trained for each unique HCP interaction. |
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In this context, technology is both a catalyst and a multiplier of human effort, giving us the best of both worlds by amplifying human strengths and providing precise data-driven insight. AI can liberate representatives from mundane tasks, operating as a digital helper that delivers actionable intelligence at the right moment.

However, the key to success lies in the implementation. The integration of these tools should reinforce, not diminish, human initiative and authenticity. It is vital to acknowledge and utilize the intrinsic benefits of human interaction. Effective deployment necessitates a clear understanding of the tools' capabilities and strategic application within the organization.

This paper will delve into the deployment of these innovations, their achievable outcomes, and how the pharmaceutical industry is beginning to harness AI to augment human aptitudes, thereby enhancing overall performance.

Special Thanks

We're grateful to these talented experts and thought leaders for taking the time to share their insights and perspectives with us. We hope their guidance helps the industry adopt AI in a way that helps patients, healthcare providers, and everyone involved.

George Zarkalis

Global Head of Sales Excellence & Omnichannel Deployment, Viatris

Dr. Mark Chakravarty

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Advisor, Archetype and Quantified

Gustavo Pesquin

CEO of Asklepios BioPharmaceutical

Dr. Christian Velten

Strategic Lead Digital Customer Experience & Lead Roche Pharma Global VOC Program

Prof. Ethan Bernstein

Assoc. Professor in the Organizational Behavior Unit, Harvard Business School

Rick Hollis

Customer and Business Excellence Director, Ipsen

Markus Hinderberger

Principal Life Sciences Consultant, EPAM Systems

Putting People at the Center of AI

We've seen our industry transformed by the widespread adoption of digital technology, and seen it transformed again by a pandemic that changed the way many of us work.

However, that reveals a timeless truth:

Despite changes, core principles persist.

While digital engagement momentarily took center stage and has since become an integral component of the engagement repertoire, the transition to a digital-dominant approach has not entirely materialized.

George Zarkalis, Global Head of Sales Excellence & Omnichannel Deployment at Viatris, notes that not all healthcare professionals (HCPs) pivoted to digital interfaces instantly. The competition for HCP attention online is fierce, contends Zarkalis. Pharmaceutical companies compete with each other, of course. But they also compete for attention with the entire breadth of online content, from scholarly research to battle-tested advice to cat videos. That makes engagement a core metric to track in digital - and AI - transformation.

Even expected benefits of digital interactions, such as efficiency gains from video calls, have not been fully realized. According to Zarkalis, virtual calls have not surpassed in-person visits in frequency. The reality is that virtual engagements face their own set of challenges: missed appointments and limited screen time from HCPs. Conversely, in-person interactions are more likely to secure HCP attention and offer a welcome respite from their demanding schedules.



We can make our people dramatically more effective and efficient by using the right tools and technologies.

George Zarkalis, Viatris

Putting People at the Center of AI

Zarkalis adds that during the pandemic, pharmaceutical launches saw a 62% decrease in average performance in the absence of representative visits. This highlights that, even with technological advancements and changes in industry dynamics, field teams are irreplaceable.

While the human component remains vital, there is great scope for technology to enhance this, contends Zarkalis. “We can make our people dramatically more effective and efficient by using the right tools and technologies.”

Dr. Mark Chakravarty, a physician and pharmaceutical communications executive who serves as a Strategic Advisor to Quantified, emphasizes the intrinsic value of human connection in the healthcare industry, a sector predicated on trust.

“Health is still probably one of the most human-centric areas and people want the whole practice to be very trust-based,” says Chakravarty. “We want to talk to a person, not a chatbot. You want people who can make sense of it and guide you. The face-to-face part of it, the human-to-human contact, is part of what pharmaceuticals does and will always continue. Human-to-human connections are hardwired into us as a species.”

Pharma Industry Trends from Dr. Mark Chakravarty



20,000

**Customer-Facing
Roles**



5

**Conversations
Daily**



100,000

**Conversations
Per Company**

Putting People at the Center of AI

The problem in the past is that communication training has always been at a premium. The most intensive support, coaching and feedback here has been traditionally reserved for CEOs and leaders, says Chakravarty.

“It’s very human intensive to do that, but it has a massive impact and that’s why they do it.

On the flip side, if you look at the customer-facing teams in pharma, you’re probably talking about, at least, 20,000 to 30,000 customer-facing roles across the globe. And they’re engaging in at least five conversations a day. So every large company is having about 100,000 conversations a day.”

Zarkalis agrees that while human interaction is indispensable, technology can significantly bolster its effectiveness. Historically, high-level communication training has been a privilege afforded primarily to executives due to its resource-intensive nature. For customer-facing pharma teams, which engage in tens of thousands of daily conversations, such training has not been feasible at scale.

The traditional approach to training—sporadic and unstandardized—presents another challenge. Commercial managers invest considerable effort into coaching with the goal of elevating performance, yet the impact of these efforts has been difficult to quantify. The art of engagement remains largely subjective and varied among representatives.

Gustavo Pesquin, CEO of Asklepios BioPharmaceutical, observes that some representatives, despite seeming capable, do not achieve expected outcomes. “You don’t even have a clear idea why some people can be smart, do many things well, but still do not manage to be as impactful as others.”

Emerging tools, powered by AI, promise to revolutionize this status quo. They offer a systematic approach to improvement by enhancing the natural human abilities to listen, share knowledge, build trust, and realize commercial achievements.

Chakravarty concurs. “I can’t necessarily tell you why you were great. I can only do the very obvious things. So unfortunately, what’s historically been measurable has not been meaningful.”

Putting People at the Center of AI

Pesquin speaks to AI-driven training's potential to provide clarity on individual strengths and areas for improvement. "You want everyone in the organization to have compelling and impactful communication skills. This is to me one way in which machine learning is changing the way that a sales force is managed. It can give you an 'x-ray' of your style in a structured way."

Christian Velten, Strategic Lead - Digital Customer Experience at Roche, asserts that AI can elevate every representative's ability to engage effectively. "Today, the quality of the conversation heavily depends on the individual. With AI everybody can get at least closer to delivering the best quality conversation."

"You get the most progress when you can combine the personal relationships between individuals with the power of digital. In the end, it's about ensuring that there's a higher quality of the conversation and [doing] more business based on trusted relationships."

Concerns about AI leading to a loss of personal touch are unfounded, Velten argues. Instead, he believes that AI facilitates a renaissance of personalized communication, enhancing rather than detracting from human connections.



**You get the most progress
when you can combine the
personal relationships
between individuals with
the power of digital.**

Dr. Christian Velten, Roche

The Benefits of AI

Pharmaceutical companies have faced challenges in harnessing AI to boost commercial performance. George Zarkalis points out that omnichannel decision engines have fallen short, partly due to physicians' hesitancy to fully embrace digital channels. He suggests that a digital-first engagement strategy may not prevail in the immediate future. Efforts to refine customer targeting through AI have also seen limited success.

Nevertheless, AI's role in enhancing training and communication within the field force is promising, according to Prof. Ethan Bernstein, Associate Professor in the Organizational Behavior Unit at Harvard Business School. "It's more patient, it will listen to you more frequently," says Bernstein. "It will be less judgmental. It will be more data focused."

Rick Hollis, Customer and Business Excellence Director at Ipsen, sees AI as a means to improve productivity in training by automating the analysis of sales calls, leading to a wealth of data that human managers might not be able to capture as consistently. This could be a foundation for manager-rep interactions, providing a data-driven starting point for discussion and improvement.



It's more patient, it will listen to you more frequently," says Bernstein. "It will be less judgmental. It will be more data focused.

Professor Ethan Bernstein,
Harvard Business School

Mass customization of training through AI can distill a wide range of observations into actionable insights for sales contexts, as explained by Chakravarty. By analyzing aspects of communication beyond just words, including visual delivery and emotional engagement, AI can provide tailored coaching that enhances the field force's ability to communicate effectively and respond to various scenarios.

The Benefits of AI

Moreover, AI facilitates role-playing with digital customer twins, offering reps the chance to practice and refine their approach based on predicted customer behaviors, thus improving their skills for actual engagements.

Roche's Christian Velten emphasizes AI's capacity to deliver HCP-specific insights, enabling reps to enter meetings with up-to-date and relevant information, thereby fostering active listening and more impactful interactions.

AI's ability to model successful sales behaviors and inform training across the organization is a game-changer, Chakravarty notes. This approach creates a continuous cycle of improvement, linking training to measurable outcomes.

Furthermore, AI can streamline engagement strategies, focusing on HCPs that data identifies as most impactful, and fostering collaboration between commercial teams and medical affairs, leading to more targeted and efficient engagements, as Velten points out. This could eventually mean fewer but more productive rep visits, easing the burden on HCPs and improving the quality of interactions.

In considering use cases and benefits for AI-driven training, several important use cases and benefits emerge:



Improving Training Throughput and Productivity

Training takes time, especially the human-to-human role play that's vital for building confidence as well as for assessing product knowledge and readiness. What's particularly difficult is that, for field team members, much of that time is spent waiting - waiting on training to begin, waiting for a role-play partner to be available, etc. AI can reduce wait times, increase throughput, and increase the productivity and output of your sales team.



New Hire Onboarding

It takes substantial time for a new field rep to get up to speed, especially because the learning options available - classroom training, shadowing existing reps, and doing ride-alongs - don't offer the opportunity to assess the rep's real-world skills. By placing them in a simulated training environment, it's now possible to assess their capabilities and improvement in skills in real time.



Certification

The biggest bottleneck in a certification program is often the availability of the human trainers for that vital conversation to certify that a field representative is ready. AI, by providing an always-ready practice partner and coach, removes that bottleneck. It also ensures that representatives are graded fairly and impartially based on the content they deliver, since training team members may struggle to grade performance consistently.



Greater Insight into Rep Capabilities

Chakravarty sees a more complete view of a sales rep's capabilities to be an important benefit, because AI can give a more objective and complete assessment than humans often can.

"I'm not just looking at the words you say," explains Chakravarty. I'm also looking at how you say it. So I'm looking at the structure of the words for things like storytelling. I'm looking at your visual delivery. Did you make eye contact? Did you have good presence? Did you have gestures, looking at your rate, your tone, your emotion."

The Benefits of AI

"It's fine tuned to the drivers that really drive high quality human communication. So out of all of these observations, we distil 1400 observations into what matters in a sales context. Did you actually have an inquiry-based conversation where you were not just talking but also listening? Did you use pauses? We can narrow it down to this very, very specific scenario of being in front of a customer."



Role Play with Digital Twins

One of the biggest benefits of role play with an AI-driven avatar is the realism of the experience, with 'digital twins' that mirror the behavior and concerns of a human HCP creating faster learning in a more realistic environment. Role play with an unlimited number of potential partners - each optimized for the scenario at hand - is possible now. That removes compromises from training, putting each rep in precisely the situation that, when mastered, will drive success. "I can get good at the call before I do it," as Chakravarty says - far superior to learning on the job, which creates lost opportunities and a high level of risk.

Unlocking Human Potential Through AI

Empower, Don't Replace

Implementing AI in field force engagement calls for a nuanced understanding of its limitations and the irreplaceable value of human intuition and interaction. As Markus Hinderberger, Principal Life Sciences Consultant for EPAM Systems notes, field reps possess a tacit knowledge about their relationships with HCPs that AI cannot easily replicate, highlighting the importance of integrating this "field intelligence" into AI models.

A human will also be able to work out why HCPs like one drug over another, Hinderberger adds.

"In the sales data you can see patterns in the usage. But it doesn't tell you why; whether it's a concern about safety, a capacity issue, or one's an injection and one's a tablet. You need a human being to do that bit. There's quite a lot of trust involved in them sharing that information as well. So that's why you need to build a relationship with them."

Humans play an indispensable role in navigating the complexities of healthcare, from understanding the decision-makers within groups of doctors to discerning sub-specialties among consultants, as Hollis points out. He emphasizes that the subtleties of why an HCP might prefer one drug over another—be it safety concerns or administration methods—are best discerned by humans, underscoring the importance of building trust-based relationships.

Authenticity in interactions remains a critical human element that AI tools should enhance, not suppress. Gustavo Pesquin stresses the importance of maintaining individual spontaneity and authenticity, crucial in building human relations within the workplace.

Unlocking Human Potential Through AI

Leaders must engage the "hearts and minds" of reps, assuring them that AI is an ally, not a harbinger of obsolescence, according to Hinderberger. However, this requires a shift in mindset among reps who may guard their knowledge, which is more valuable when shared with AI, to embrace the collaborative potential of AI and human intelligence.

Those field teams that adapt to new AI-enhanced roles will likely find success and security in their careers. Ethan Bernstein posits that AI will augment and automate tasks, enhancing areas requiring judgment and automating routine tasks. He encourages reps to embrace the opportunity to develop new skills that AI cannot replicate.

Pharma must also align its internal approach to AI, ensuring that different incentives across the organization do not create barriers to effectively leveraging AI. Hinderberger discusses the challenge of establishing ownership and direction for AI strategies, especially in large pharmaceutical companies vulnerable to siloed approaches.

Finally, the implementation of AI must be cohesive to avoid eroding trust both internally and externally. Inconsistent AI use across brands can lead to a fragmented customer experience, as Hinderberger warns. Ensuring a seamless integration of AI that enhances rather than confounds the customer experience is crucial for its successful adoption.

Conclusion:

AI + EQ = Success

In an era where AI continues to evolve, the synergistic relationship between AI and the emotional intelligence (EQ) of humans is the formula for successful engagements, as asserted by Markus Hinderberger. AI should complement rather than supplant the field force, enabling each individual to reach their highest professional potential.

AI accelerates the evolution of the field force, prompting the shift from routine tasks to more complex skills and capabilities that add greater value to customer interactions. When AI is aligned with the intrinsic human elements of emotional intelligence and nuanced understanding of interpersonal dynamics, it simplifies, enriches, and enhances the role of the representative.

The urgency for such tools is amplified by demographic shifts, such as an aging population and the departure of the Baby Boomer workforce in much of the developed world. The ensuing competition for talent accentuates the need to maximize human resources and retain talent, as emphasized by Gustavo Pesquin. Automating mundane tasks with AI allows the workforce to focus on more valuable and rewarding roles, aligning with the increasing significance of labor over capital in today's market.

Furthermore, as Pesquin notes, the future of commercial success hinges on optimizing engagements so that HCPs have fewer but more valuable interactions with reps, ensuring that each meeting delivers maximum benefit and impact.

AI is not here to replace the field force – human connection and interaction is far too important for that to be a possibility. Instead, AI is here to empower humans and help them perform at their best. Adoption of AI represents a win and a bright future for patients, HCPs, field team members, and leaders in the Pharmaceuticals and Life Sciences industries.

About Quantified

Quantified is built on over ten years of behavioral science analysis. Quantified's Simulator is an AI-based solution used by major companies to accelerate, measure, and optimize field force readiness. Simulator is used to improve onboarding, scale and speed up certification programs, enhance skills with ongoing practice and training, and more.

To see it in action, [request a demo today](#).