Horizon
Leading with both Hands

Orion Corporation | University of St.Gallen, Executive School of the University of St.Gallen
Dr. Simon Stöpfgeshoff & Susanna Sevón-Laakso
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Orion Corporation is the largest Finnish pharmaceutical company operating in Finland and globally. In 2017, the company wanted to further revitalize growth and boost the innovation activities to set the basis for sustained success. It chose to partner with the Executive School of the University of St. Gallen to build a program that would enhance the organization’s capability to grow and innovate at a higher pace.

**Executive Summary**

Orion Corporation is the largest Finnish pharmaceutical company operating in Finland and globally. In 2017, the company wanted to further revitalize growth and boost the innovation activities to set the basis for sustained success. It chose to partner with the Executive School of the University of St. Gallen to build a program that would enhance the organization’s capability to grow and innovate at a higher pace.

**Growth and Innovation**

At the outset, the objectives were clear: provide external impulses based on latest insights and research into the organization to enable stronger revenue growth and innovation including of course digital innovation (“From Insights to Impact”). Sponsored by the top management and its team and based on a quickly established trustful partnership the program “Horizon – Leading with Both Hands” was developed. The joined commitment was to build an innovative, business impact-driven program, in which experience and experimental based learning to achieve deep learning and shifting mindsets were key design parameter: challenging existing orthodoxies and developing new mental models how to lead and run Orion’s business into the future. The journey was structured along 4 modules in different international locations to cover the challenges of becoming an ambidextrous organization – thus the title “Leading with Both Hands”.

**Real-world VUCA experience**

One of the highlights for the participants was a real-world VUCA experience in rural India in Udaipur. This unique learning experience provided new methods and practical tools for the organization to explore new frontiers to innovate without yet neglecting the efficiencies / exploitation perspective to ensure profitable growth. An individual leadership assessment and coaching to set learner intention as well as business projects based on Design Thinking to deliver real business value were built into the program. Today, about 70% of the senior leaders of Orion have attended the program in 3 runs between 2017 and 2023 and the impact on the expected shifts and the business has been huge: Leaders display a broader bandwidth of leadership behavior to “lead with both hands”, new practices to explore, innovate and grow are embedded and applied in the organization as new organizational capabilities and many of the key strategic processes have been improved to keep the organization efficient and ready for further scale. Orion today is on a clear path to achieve the 1,5 billion Euro turnover by 2025.
“Daring to rely very little on fixed content agendas and instead on open learning processes fully paid off: The radical focus on action learning and real Business challenges led to significant impact in the organisation and its leaders”

Dr. Simon Stoepfgeshoff
Academic Director
Introduction of Partners

Orion Corporation

Orion Corporation founded in 1917 and headquartered at Espoo, Finland, is a globally operating Finnish company which develops, manufactures, and markets human and veterinary pharmaceuticals and active pharmaceutical ingredients for global markets. All of the company’s manufacturing sites and the majority of its R&D units are in Finland*.

It operates out of Finland in a number of European countries and recently also in the Asia-Pacific region. Next to proprietary business in a number of therapeutic areas, it develops also a broad range of consumer health products and is active also in animal health.

University of St. Gallen

Executive School of Management, Technology and Law (ES-HSG)

One of Europe’s leading business schools, the ES-HSG is the central point of contact for executive education at HSG. It serves as both the public face and coordinator of further education and training activities at the university of St. Gallen, founded in 1898.

The Challenge

How can the pipeline of innovative both traditional and “beyond the pill” digital products and services be improved? How can the organization get external impulses to get to new ways of thinking and acting to be future-ready for continued growth? How can the organization and the processes be further streamlined to remain cost-efficient going forward? How will the individual mindset and the shared culture need to evolve to address the growing “VUCA” uncertainty in the pharmaceutical industry? These were some key questions around Orion’s business challenges that the program needed to be address.

Healthcare business environment and the pharmaceutical industry are changing towards a “VUCA” world. The industry is equally struck by cost pressure from relevant stakeholders (insurances, governments) as challenged to be more innovative and to provide faster, more effective, and customer-centric health solutions. The Horizon program aims at building leadership capabilities to succeed in this context of tension and competing stakeholder needs to ensure further growth of the company. Developing “ambidextrous leaders” who can lead with both hands will become key for Orion’s future development: Leaders who have the capability to run and exploit today’s business to deliver results for today AND to explore innovation with and beyond the core capabilities of the organization for the future – leaders who are equipped to “lead with both hands”. In short: Orion wanted to stimulate its growth and innovation agenda while keeping and improving the focus on the bottom-line as well. Orion had an ambitious turnover target by 2025 and wanted to ignite the organization to deliver on this promise. On an individual level, the learning journey challenges participants’ mental models and their existing orthodoxies and provides them with innovative methods and approaches to tackle Orion’s future challenges.
A successful organization with more than 100 years of history – Orion wanted to expedite and create true passion for growth and innovation in the organization. With its strong Finnish cultural legacy and an already strong market position with limited growth opportunities in the home market, the objective was also to evolve from a local Finnish into a true international pharma company leveraging the international network and the partnerships with other pharma players.

Outside-in perspectives for innovation

The organization wanted to boost an outside-in perspective getting fresh, innovative and new ideas by being exposed to different ways of working, operating, both culturally and business-wise. Stimulating the innovation and growth agenda needed more diversity of thought, multi-perspectives and an enhanced collaborative spirit in the organization across cultural and functional boundaries. Next to the communicated turnover target, the initiative was a pro-active and anticipating move to ensure Orion’s sustainable success.
The Commitment

Both parties entered into the partnership without prior experience of working with each other, but from the beginning there was one clear commitment from both sides to offer a program rich in innovative design using simulations, real-world experience and action learning formats related to Orion’s business challenges to ensure deep learning by the participants. Orion’s Executive Management Board (OEMB) was entirely committed to the project and showed its strong ownership from the very beginning.

The program was drafted, presented and shaped in a number of iterative discussion rounds including and facilitated by HR’s Learning & Development department. Although moderated by L&D, the business representatives, notably the entire board sponsoring the different modules, demonstrated a high sense of ownership to ensure business impact. This shaping process created the basis for a lasting partnership: From the initial start, trust between the two partners was vital to run such a complex and ambitious project spreading across 4 modules in different international locations with a partly open agenda to remain flexible and agile. Both the Finnish as well as the Swiss trust-based culture and way of operating was helpful to create a partnership where openness, feedback and strong collaboration was established from the beginning. In fact, prior to going to India with a very open agenda with little content to allow for a maximum of “VUCA”-flexibility. In that way, the Board demonstrated and role modelled the openness to embark on an open design and learning process where control and planning security were replaced with flexibility and acceptance of open-ended didactics – exactly the sort of behavior they wanted to instill in the organisation to deal with the VUCA context.

“With limited pre-defined contents and agendas, trust by all involved was vital to embark on open learning processes”

Commitment of the participants:
To ensure full learner motivation and engagement, participants need to apply to get into the program, which meant significant time and resource investment for them. The application process ensured the necessary level of engagement and intrinsic motivation demanding a full application dossier including a self-portrait video to demonstrate the motivation. It was purposefully designed in a competitive manner. For the 20 seats per run more than 50 applications were received, and the participants were “hand-selected” considering their performance, potential, development needs and of course considering functional and cultural background to have an optimal mix within each cohort.
The commonly shared commitment from all stakeholders involved was to build a program that was innovative, intelligently designed with limited traditional Business School teaching, that would stretch participants out of their comfort zone in real-live situations and simulations in a sometimes-pressured environment that would foster true learning. The demanded “stretch” to be built into the program was not just “lip-service”. The St.Gallen team trusted the Orion project team that also unconventional ideas to facilitate true and deep learning would be accepted.

Expert Delphi Study to get the real and deep issues

To ensure the right and sometimes also controversially discussed topics were integrated into the program, a Delphi-based study was executed to the participants and additional (expert) stakeholders. The objective was to discern the deeply held beliefs, orthodoxies and conviction in the organisation in order to be able to challenge and change them with the journey. At the heart of the study are a number of provocative and controversial statements, which participants were invited to answer quantitatively (to what extent they agreed with the statement) as well as qualitatively (verbatim’s to generate additional insights). The results and perspectives were picked up and discussed in the modules, enriched with additional faculty input. Goal setting in a VUCA context for example was one of the controversial topics where perspectives differed significantly, and the discussion results brought forward a number of ideas how to go about it in a better way (e.g. working with OKR’s which were introduced in the organization after module 1 of the second cohort in 2020).
The Initiative
“Leading with both Hands”

The entire program consists of 4 modules to cover “both hands”: explore and exploit with the objective to provide sustainable learning both for the individuals (“individual competence”) but also for the organization (“organizational capability”) to support the growth and innovation ambition.

- **Getting ready**
  - Individual competence assessment
  - Pre-Readings
  - Delphi atudy
  - Individual preparation

- **F2f delivery**
  - Development of Individual Competencies and organizational capabilities
    - VUCA Leadership
      - Strategy execution through process- and change management
    - Exploitation Journey
      - Bottom-line focus: Execute the strategy via strategic and operational processes based on gamification
    - Prototyping Garage
      - Design thinking and customer centricity
    - Exploration Trip
      - Innovation beyond the pill

- **Impact & transfer**
  - Implementation through Orion Senior Management
  - Peer-learning and networking between internal and external participants
  - Horizon Alumni
  - Business impact tracking

**MODULE 1**
(“Uncertainty adventure”) Real-life VUCA experience in rural India

**MODULE 2**
(“Exploitation Journey”) Bottom-line focus: Execute the strategy via strategic and operational processes based on gamification

**MODULE 3**
(“Prototype Garage”) Explore for customer benefit through Design Thinking and Customer journey mapping

**MODULE 4**
(“Exploration Journey”) Stimulate Orion’s innovation agenda through exposure-based learning with and from start-ups and open innovation

- **Self awareness**
- **Competence assessment**
- **Reflexion & Coaching**
- **Winning new insights in myself & others**
- **Graduation & Alumni Day**
- **Action Learning projects**
- **Orion Action Learning Projects**
The participant journey started with an individual competence assessment and a coaching session to ensure participants had their development intentions for the program set. Additional coaching and feedback sessions were offered during the modules on an ongoing basis. Additionally, after each intervention, a sub-group of the participants was asked to run a “teach-back” session consolidating all learnings and insights gained to a wider Orion leadership audience. This deepened the learnings of the participants as they had to summarize the content in the light of implementing and transferring it into the organization.

“...The most important change was the MINDSET. The way we approached any topic/challenge/project underwent a major change. Instead of directly diving to solutions we applied the principles of Design Thinking in many problem-solving cases and projects. In summary, great learnings which could be converted to real life working. I personally feel I have changed my own way of leading, working with others and developing solutions post Horizon.”

Country Manager India

Shifting mindsets in a VUCA world to broaded the leadership bandwith

To live up to the promise and commitment to “stretch” participants deliberately leading them out of their comfort zone, an unfamiliar and true VUCA location was chosen for module one: Rural India in Udaipur. Bachelor students of the University of St.Gallen had founded a “Water Shop” in Udaipur, whose mission was to provide purified water to the local rural communities. 2 water shops already existed, and a growth plan needed to be developed how to scale up the water shops to more than 25 in the coming years. The 3 student owners were more than happy to receive advise from the Horizon participants. After a brief introduction to the Water Shops in the first morning (no lecturing), the Executives had 48 h to come up with a business case how to grow and scale. They were provided a driver and a car to do field research with relevant stakeholders. This was a deliberate high-pressure environment to work in, on top in a culturally completely unknown context.
The Water Shop Operations of Jivana Vitality consist of THREE major parts:

**PART I: WATER FILTRATION**

**PART II: WATER DISTRIBUTION**

**PART III: HR & TECHNOLOGY**

During the 4 days in India, we alternated project work, dedicated specific input by faculty and case coaching. On the last day, the case result was presented to the water shop owners, the Orion top management and faculty and a winner was voted for.

What were the main learnings and take-away’s for the participants and Orion?

1. “Teaming” – a true eye-opener for many participants was simply the fact how much can be achieved in only 48h, the team process and collaboration was a vital ingredient for this experience

2. Data – knowing what to know and what to search for: The information is more complex in the VUCA world. “The truth is not inside Orion”. How to gather relevant information and to analyze it?

3. Human intelligence and connection: Participants needed to connect quickly with each other, but also with other people (e.g. the watershop employees) they did not know in an unknown cultural context

4. Exploration processes for growth and innovation need a different performance management approach, an agile mindset and quicker decision-making under uncertainty

Leadership & Performance Management Challenge:
Growing from 2 Water Shops to 25 in 3 years!
The objective is to experience true uncertainty & ambiguity in the business environment discuss what this means for leadership and performance management.
“How V.U.C.A. Orion’s business environment actually is was opened in a totally new way.”

“We had a clear goal, but set 48 hrs free! It was a real mindblowing experience to see what results this type of leadership of autonomy and genuine trust can achieve!”
Improving business processes to scale for growth

The following “Exploitation journey” required a significant shift to “hard business topics and KPI’s”. The guiding key question was no longer focused on exploring the future (growth and innovation), but how the organization can deliver on today’s strategic agenda translating the strategy into strategic and operational processes optimizing these. Like in India, teaching input was limited and at the heart of the journey was a gamification / simulation where participants could experience process optimization. Based on the learnings from the simulation, they worked on a number of real Orion functional processes and defined measures and actions to improve these processes to make the organization more efficient and scalable without losing the bottom-line out of sight.

Some of the processes the participants worked on to improve according to their functional background were:

– R&D: target identification process to streamline and thus to speed up the process to achieve a higher number of targets (KPI: 50 targets, of which 5 project would be derived by 2023)

– Supply Chain & Operations: The “forecast to production process” as well as the “long term capacity planning process”

– Marketing: The “product evaluation process”

These processes were analyzed and targeted action plans, ownership and KPI’s were defined – ready to be implemented in the respective functions.
Putting the Customer in the centre

The “Prototype Garage” leveraged some Design Thinking and customer centricity methodologies to develop innovative, human-centered solutions to some of Orion’s business and customer challenges. These challenges were defined beforehand by the sponsors to ensure high relevance and business impact. Participants were taken through the step-by-step cycle of Design Thinking applying it immediately to their projects, which were presented to the Board after the program. The project teams continued their project work after the module to complete the different phase and work on the final solution. Among the projects were challenges like:

- Developing an APP for pet owners
- Developing a blueprint for Orion’s future DTx (digital technologies) business models
- Entering the Asian market in a sustainable manner incorporating CSR into the market entry strategy
- Developing a data dashboard to ensure targeted provision of relevant data in the organization

In the recent 3rd run of the Horizon program, a stronger focus on customer centricity was implemented and participants applied the customer journey mapping methodology to optimize the customer experience (re-)designing the relevant touchpoints, also using digital tools and technologies.
The final “Exploration Journey” in Berlin re-shifted the focus on exploration and innovation. Key didactical design was to expose the participants with bio-pharma start-ups in Berlin. Three start-ups were invited that were related to some of Orion’s therapeutic areas and activities. Sub-groups of the participants ran sessions with the start-up representatives to learn from them around critical leadership, business and R&D topics like decision-making, open innovation and collaboration, ways of working, dealing with uncertainty in order to derive learnings for Orion’s growth and innovation agenda. This addressed the wish for a stronger outside-in perspective and exposure-based learning.

The main purpose was to explore ways and opportunities “beyond the pill”, so any innovation beyond the traditional drug development process, where all functions across the organization play an important role and not just R&D.
The Impact

With more than 70% of Orion’s senior leaders having attended the program, it has generated huge impact against the intended strategic objectives. Due to the didactical design with limited teaching input and extensive work on real Orion business challenges along the total of 13 days, the return of the three runs has been tremendous. The impact is evident across three different levels:

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With this intensive experience, the experimental and experiential learning approach touching equally “hearts and minds”, many participants felt that their participation has boosted and transformed their personal growth as a leader. Many reported a more flexible leadership style knowing when and how to apply “both hands”: “I took advantage of the learnings especially leading with both hands – explored new opportunities in business and teamwork and exploited project management tools and routines to be more efficient”.

As an Indian participant outlined: “Throughout my career of 18.5 years, I was always focused on details, systematic, structured way of working in my own/relevant area of expertise. Horizon program has provided me an excellent opportunity to have a broader focus and it expanded my perspective of leadership skills to higher level. I started stretching my own boundaries to the fullest and improved my working efficiency to reach Orion’s goals and for continuous improvements”.

As one outcome of the journey, Orion renewed its company-wide leadership principles using learnings from program. Today, they provide a common frame and language for what “great leadership” looks like within the company. These principles were elaborated by a number of Alumni together with HR prior to being rolled out into the company. They provide an ongoing basis for feedback, development planning and are now firmly integrated into the culture and respective HR processes.
“The program has changed my way of thinking to a broader level. I learned to grow as a leader in Orion to be able to lead with both hands in the VUCA world. Design thinking methodology, continuous improvement, exploration in addition to exploitation are now important aspects of my leadership success.”

“I applied so many new tools for doing business like Design Thinking, upgrade ways of preparing my strategies (from Module 1 - strategy in uncertainty), operations in VUCA (the Watershop Indian case), digital therapy knowledge and utilization of orthodoxies to challenge my thinking from module 4.”

Participant feedback after the Horizon journey

Many of the Design Thinking practices and methodologies were immediately applied in the participant’s daily work: “Design Thinking technology improved significantly my approach to the management of the projects. Mainly due to education roots (medical doctor graduated in USSR time) having several alternatives in place was not what I had learned in the university based on Marxism – Leninism background. It opened a lot of ways how to proceed in daily business life and grow initial raw ideas to the level when things become perfect” says Viktor Poushkarev, Head of the Ukrainian operation.

To many participants the program provided
- a holistic understanding of leadership and their leadership behavior to foster growth in an efficient and scalable organization, their bandwidth and leadership “repertoire” expanded
- innovative practical leadership tools and practices to stay effective in VUCA world
- a process efficiency mindset and practical tools for process improvement
- cross-functional process leadership

A strong impact was achieved on the collaborative spirit in the organization. This was particularly seen as an important ingredient for innovation as it requires effective collaboration between different functions across the value chain. The participants learned and practiced collaboration on an ongoing basis in their projects. The topic was subsequently picked up both within the OEMB (Executive Board), which ran a separate session on collaborative behavior to boost their Top Team collaboration. The R&D organization offered specific interventions to RD leaders to ensure collaboration is fostered in the research processes. Collaboration was thus enhanced across several levels to contribute to Orion’s innovation agenda with a focus also on collaborating differently with external partners based on the exposure to start-ups in the last module.”
While on an individual level, a sharper understanding of leadership behavior required for exploration was developed, the input during the journey on efficiencies and exploitation generated a wealth of immediate business impact. During the Exploitation journey, functional groups were formed working on process improvements in their respective functional areas. This created direct business impact on process efficiencies, of which a few examples can be given:

- The German Marketing organization significantly improved the Marketing Planning process with more lead time in preparation of campaigns due to holistic and integrated process view on the activities and steps (customer journey, personas) – the relevant KPI “time saved” improved 15 – 20% compared to past process.

- Forecast Accuracy process was one of the identified areas in 2020 and a separate cross-functional project was established to improve the process. The forecast accuracy (MAPE) increased during the project and its implementation. Targets to reduce inventories by 15% and to reduce write-off’s by 50% were set and subsequently met with a process owner established and transparent improvement actions in place.
A key insight that participants gained from the India experience was that exploring new paths in a VUCA environment required a different approach to goal setting. Rigid goals that cannot be changed are no longer adequate in an environment that constantly changes. As a consequence, Orion started to work with OKR's instead (“Objectives and Key Results”), an approach allowing more flexibility and adaptability managing the performance of the company. Initially implemented in the operations area, it was subsequently rolled-out to the company level for strategy implementation.

“We implemented OKR as a way to set strategic goals and follow-up on how our strategy gets implemented. The OKR's helped us to get our growth strategy understandable and actionable, from high level strategic objectives down to concrete key results per quarter.” Says Juhani Kankaanpää, the initiator and now member of the executive management board for Global Operations.
3 Effect on innovation and growth – top-line focus

The exploration related learnings – in particular out of the first module in VUCA world, and the last module with start-ups – led to changes in particular in research and innovation.

Outside-in R&D

The target-identification process in early research is being reworked and streamlined to make it much more (external) data driven. External scientific expertise and research data was taken much stronger into consideration leading to a higher number of valid and completely novel biological targets, in particular in the therapeutic areas pain and oncology. Based on the VUCA experience and the start-up exposure the participants realized that a stronger outside-in perspective was needed to boost the research pipeline. Leveraging external partners and eco-systems, the lead time in the research part for a project is aiming to reduce it by several years, taking advantage of data driven approach. Orion is also now actively looking to form a novel digital ecosystem around the transformation of R&D with data and data science. While “big pharma” is doing this transformation by “big money” (M&A driven change) and acquisitions, Orion is aiming to find a novel, international network and ecosystem-based approach to compete with the pharma giants.

The overall target is to change Orion’s R&D to be more accurate, safe, efficient and data driven, where in silico is complementing and even replacing current practices with data and AI/ML. A great deal of this new thinking was related to the outside-in “stretch” requirement. As Sammeli Liikkanen, Director digital medicine explained: “The seeds from the last 3 Horizon programs are now coming into play”.

Regarding digital therapeutics (DTx), the organization has become much more pro-active in identifying opportunities for digital services and products, both independently and together with traditional medicines. The “Toxbuddy” service was developed (see: www.toxbuddy.com) and successfully launched as a service and a database for veterinarian doctors. As Sammeli explains: “The learnings and ideas provided from Professor Maier and Professor Renz in Horizon have been important element behind all these initiatives.”

Orion has managed to develop a completely novel kind of digital treatment modalities (Digital Therapeutics, DTx) closer into commercial stage. A Parkinson’s disease project won a 2.5MUSD grant from the number one global NGO Michael J Fox Foundation for the further development of a digital solution. For a new pain project statistically and clinically significant results in the treatment of chronic low back pain patients with a virtual reality based treatment solution were reported. The regulatory approval, partnering and commercialization activities as of clinical trials of the digitally connected (IoT) dry-powder inhaler product group to support the treatment of asthma and COPD are on-going. This proves Orion has been able to explore completely novel areas in digitalization. The consequential learnings on digital biomarkers based on DTx activities are actively exploited within new and additional core processes. “The framework and exploratory mindset provided by Horizon training have been highly useful. Orion’s innovation agenda and research pipeline has been significantly boosted”, Sammeli concludes.

Orion has also actively explored and exploited internal and external data and Artificial Intelligence / Machine Learning techniques and opportunities in several tents of different use cases in R&D, supply chain and in commercial activities. The learnings from other industries, as used in the exploration related content in Horizon program, have provided a valuable framework to evolve the traditionally rather rigid pharma industry in this respect. Orion is well on its way to reach the set target of 1,5 billion by 2025.

“The framework and exploratory mindset provided by Horizon training have been highly useful. Orion’s innovation agenda and research pipeline has been significantly boosted.”
Conclusion

Why has this program delivered so much value? The entire journey was strongly linked with Orion’s real business challenges and the strategic agenda contributing directly to achieving some of the strategic goals. Backed fully by the top management and its team, the commitment of all stakeholders involved was 100% at all stages of the collaboration creating true and lasting organizational momentum. Additional benefit has been that the Alumni of the program have built wide networks to previously unfamiliar areas of organization increasing their own holistic knowledge about the different functions. Radical focus on experiential and experimental learning methods were consequently implemented to facilitate sustainable learning stretching participants out of their personal comfort zones. Daring to rely very little on content input and traditional teaching methods with full focus on the partly open learning processes of the participants (with the risk of losing control) fully paid off. Hearts and minds of participants were reached, and trust and skillful facilitation of the learning processes were key to success.
Disclaimer

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