

Adoption of digitalization tools high on the cards of pharma industry

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Digitization

The increased output, cost-effectiveness, seamless operations, and better safety are a few perks of fast-tracking digitalization in the pharma sector



The digital revolution is all set to making headway towards the pharma sector which experts say was a bit reluctant before COVID19. To consolidate the positive changes during the pandemic, companies are now looking at the complete adoption of digital technologies. In practical terms, it means more connectivity, more productivity, simplified compliance, and the marshaling of production information to respond to problems as they emerge.

Digitalization plans aren't merely a few incremental changes but should be taken far more seriously, says Geena Malhotra, Global Chief Technology Officer, Cipla. She explains, "Companies must have value back view on investments and make sure they are accredited from ROI perspective. At the same time, people are an important part of the entire digitalization value chain and the up-scaling of the current workforce will drive faster implementation. As I reflect on Cipla's journey, when an industry progresses, it empowers the entire ecosystem. We hope to keep inspiring other companies."

Malhotra was speaking virtually along with the other top company executives at the 6th India Pharmaceutical Forum held recently by the leading pharma association, Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA).

Calling digitalization a silver lining in the dark clouds, Rajendra Chunodkar, President, Manufacturing Operations, Lupin feels that whatever investments are being made into it will result in visible improvements in functioning. He opines, “Digital operations is the new normal. Virtual platforms have become a norm for audits. Because of this paperless and contactless operations were made possible. While the pharma industry was left behind earlier but it is catching up. Pharma industry 4.0 is an orbital change that will be more forecasting based and avoiding the unnecessary wastage.”

Chunodkar also points out the role of virtual reality to train the personnel. “Augmented reality, Big Data, and Artificial Intelligence will play a huge role in the new world order as we move towards quality and assurance. While Data Analytics and Machine Learning will drive the future, equally important are the security threats that must be dealt with with infrastructural updates on Information Technology. Data backups and their backups are important.”

Industry 4.0 technologies will change pharma manufacturing processes dramatically in the next five years. Companies that get started now will have a head start in creating a competitive advantage. As per experts, advanced analytics could help in identifying the loopholes within conventional operations. Having as many as 50 variables helps in the creation of control through more predictive ways and thus helps in tackling challenges in recurring business.

As per Jila Breeze, Global Head-Quality and Compliance, Sun Pharma, the amount of data we have is equal to the amount of business value when utilized. “At Sun Pharma, small is big. We have bucketed data into a lot of small segments based on whether it can improve the functioning and cost-effectiveness. What is good with other industries may not work with us. So it has to fit well within the objectives of each organization.”

Sanjay Sharma, Global Head operations, Dr Reddy’s Laboratories explains how the company picked up few cases and applied them to each of their plants. He explains, “We identified and implemented 30 used cases and after observing for six months, we found a huge improvement in terms of performance. Once the belief was built, we were able to create a Centre of Excellence at the formulation and API plants. It will take another 18-20 months for completing the journey. It is important to focus on digitizing the whole core. Harness data, build the right capabilities and talent, transforming with digital technologies using virtual reality with real linkage to business value.”

Since the regulatory changes, the proliferation of generic drugs, and more personalized medicine put pharma profits at risk, many top industry experts believe that it makes a strong case for digital manufacturing. On the top of the list they say is the Production Performance Manager that gathers near-real-time data from manufacturing equipment to produce an overview of the entire production system, including the condition of each

machine. Second in line is Advanced analytics for predictive maintenance that uses data from sensors to identify breakdown patterns and can predict problems in advance, giving production teams the chance to maintain machinery before it goes down.

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