



Digital Transformation

The shift from paper-based to automated systems can increase productivity and save employees valuable time, thus bettering the delivery of manufacturing businesses across the pharmaceutical sector

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Industrial Revolution 4.0 is the term used to describe the latest wave of digital innovation sweeping through the pharmaceutical sector. This innovation includes the deployment of modelling technology, artificial intelligence, and smart systems to improve quality and, of course, save time and money.

As might be expected, for many manufacturers, the prime focus for the implementation of this wave of digital transformation is the factory floor. While this makes perfect sense to further improve productivity and to reduce costs, manufacturing needs to make sure that other parts of the business are not being left behind. After all, the Organisation for Economic Co-

operation and Development claims that British worker productivity is still well below that recorded by EU neighbours such as France and Germany – and that is even after a recent adjustment to the calculation that includes a more accurate record of hours worked in the UK. This begs the question: how can technology help other functions in

the manufacturing business ensure they are working efficiently and delivering value to the business?

Investing in automation should not be limited to improving production time and costs. All employees and business services can benefit from digital transformation in a very basic way, from accessing our payslips on an app to finding data quickly to processing invoices. However, these basic functions are often neglected by senior teams when it comes to investing in solutions.

Take document and data management as an example. All employees have to deal with paperwork to some degree, with many of them wasting time doing so. Many areas within pharma companies deal with huge amounts of paperwork – from R&D to sales and finance – and all of those teams are tasked with processing a certain amount of information each day to carry out their daily tasks. There is also the added challenge that some of this data is more sensitive and will require security measures to prevent it being lost, stolen, or viewed by unauthorised employees or falling short of legislation, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

In addition to the security requirement, paperwork creates a lag in productivity. The average worker spends 2.5 hours a day looking for information or paperwork, wasting around a week per month per employee (1). For the individual, not being able to locate documents or information easily and quickly can lead to feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction.

Therefore, how can digital transformation help business areas improve processes, ease frustrations, and speed up tasks?

How Much Paper Do We Use?

You would be forgiven for thinking that in 2019 we do not really use paper. Mobile banking, online food shopping, and emails are some examples of how we are moving towards a paperless society. However, research by Statista shows that the UK used over 8.6 million tons of paper in 2016 and estimates that, on average, an office worker will use about 10,000 pieces of paper each year (2).

Furthermore, research by the Association for Information and Image Management found that only 17% of offices have gone paperless, with 56% of respondents using paper to sign contracts, orders, and booking forms. This means that many of us are still relying on paper and not taking advantage of technology to help us with the most basic business tasks.

However, is paper so bad? It has served us all well for hundreds of years, so do we need to tear it up and move to digital solutions? In short, yes: paper comes with pitfalls that will hinder modern pharma firms as they try to compete with rising costs, global competitors, and the challenges of Brexit.

Paperless Pushes Productivity

Paper has a huge impact on productivity across all areas of the business because it is often hard to locate and time-consuming to process. It also takes time to physically print paper and collect it and file accordingly – not to mention annoyances including running out of toner or when the copier breaks down.

By using an automated document system, workers can now quickly search and find documents easily,

removing the laborious task of trying to find paperwork in the office or factory floor. Documents can also be saved correctly with a click of a button, meaning no more misplaced files. This takes away frustrations that workers often have with document processes, as well as speeding up the time it takes to carry out tasks.

Automated systems that are cloud-based platforms also allow users to securely access files from anywhere, meaning they do not always have to physically be in the office to get information. This is ideal for those who travel frequently or work flexibly from home.

Improving Internal and External Security

These days, many companies have concerns around cyber breaches from external threats who may be trying to access data for fraud. However, the biggest risk for companies comes from internal threats from workers, which costs UK businesses £88 million a year (3). For the pharma industry, preventative technology must be invested to ensure that vital data, such as clinical studies and research, are safeguarded.

Automated document management and processing software have barriers in place to prevent unauthorised eyes viewing documents not meant for them. Secure access and password parameters ensure that only those who the documents are intended for can access them. Furthermore, reputable software providers will have security accreditation that prevents external threats. While the internet has allowed us lots of opportunity, it has also caused issues for companies, such as cyber breaches and risks.

Automated document software provides additional measures to safeguard data from external attacks.

Data Compliance

Recent research has found that a staggering three quarters of UK firms are not GDPR-compliant, despite the well-publicised legislation starting last May (4). The EU has already started taking action against companies for amounts including £44 million that have been found to not comply with GDPR, and automating systems offers a great way to ensure one's business complies with GDPR (5).

As part of the process of going paperless, the right digital document management provider will help compliance with GDPR in a number of ways.

For example, they can help review existing documents and data storage processes, develop new document management procedures, deliver staff training, and establish a complete audit trail so that documents can be easily traced.

Keeping Costs Down

Managing costs is crucial for any business, particularly as we head towards an uncertain future with Brexit and continue to compete on a global level. Going paperless will, either partially or fully, help companies save money in a number of areas.

Firstly, it helps reduce staff costs. The time required by employees to complete tasks will decrease with automation, which, in turn, means less hours will need to be allocated to the automated tasks. Additionally, if workload increases, recruiting more staff becomes



unnecessary, as the automated systems can minimise the effect on workload.

Other factors include reduction in wasted time and an improvement in productivity. With automated systems reducing errors and preventing bottlenecks in processes, employees will be increasingly productive and able to complete more tasks, which can give time back to the business and prevent unnecessary overtime costs.

Finally, basic costs involved, such as that of paper, printing, and copiers, will be reduced, but this also means that if a supply has run out or the machine is broken, there are no longer any unnecessary delays for the team.

The benefits of automation explored across the business make it clear that it will not only free up employee time, speed up processes, reduce errors, and save money, but automation will also provide essential security and safeguarding for data.

In my experience, for many, taking the leap to digitising processes can be daunting,

but, within a matter of weeks, the whole team will be able to see the benefits and wish they had done it sooner.

References

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