It's Time to Get Excited About PLM in Life Sciences

Achieving Long Term Transformational Success with PLM in Life Sciences: Part 4

by Dave Hadfield

In this blog series, I provide insights as to why PLM could be so transformational. In the previous post to this series, I summarized why there is a struggle to achieve PLM transformation in the life sciences industry.

In this entry we will start to look at why PLM is such a great opportunity and, if you are not already, get you as excited as I am about PLM and what it means for product innovation.

PLM can have many impactful business benefits:

- Safer and better products
- Greatly reduced organizational risk (fewer recalls, litigation and compliance issues)
- Improved product throughput
- Reduced operational / manufacturing costs
- Consolidation of unnecessary inventory
- Leaner production
- Cleaner, more environmentally friendly products
- Less stressful work environments
- Improved market share
- Simplified audits with regulatory bodies
- Operational quality consistency

There truly is solid rationale to believe in all these benefits, and we'll touch on some of these later, but I ask that before we do, you to consider this a little more abstractly. Let's put the business justifications aside for a second, and instead let's think more like the innovator or the dreamer.

It all comes down to broad adoption of smart (automated) and seamlessly integrated, fully traceable processes across the entire product lifecycle.

My colleague Graciella Beyers and I confirmed what we instinctively knew: the number of interchanges between processes in a typical product lifecycle is staggering. In one company there were thousands of places where we identified data changing hands between one process and the next, which means it probably takes 10X that number of data exchanges to get a product to market.

What if those interactions happen in real time, without delay or uncertainty, and based on the correct data?

As my colleague, Chris Kay, suggested to me many years ago, the potential for PLM is not in the automation of any given process but in the interconnectivity of all the processes smartly working together across the enterprise.

Imagine if every process was leaned out to just the steps needed to deliver high quality outcomes consistently every time (think six sigma but automated), affording flexibility in the right places to encourage innovation.

Next, imagine that each process receives and serves up data to all the other processes that are related. Data is never duplicated, but always available. Data is always searchable and reportable in any way imaginable, and analytics can predict outcomes with scary levels of reliability.

In such a world, you log-in to work, regardless of how you contribute to the product lifecycle, and you always have what you need to contribute to the best of your potential. You have all the information in the right place and when you miss something, the system has a decent chance of detecting it and letting you know.

This is the potential for PLM. Not just the parts, BOMs and documents (as much as I love helping clients with those things), but all things across the lifecycle of the product, from the ideas, to the design, the supply chain, and consumer experience supercharged with 2015 or 2020 automation (like big data, cloud, augmented reality and mobile). We will consider some tangible examples in the next few entries.

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