TriTiCon

Why it's time to break down the silos

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Pharmaceutical (biotech/med device) development is a complex business. It's a specialist driven business with a range of different experts in different fields working on cross-functional development-projects.

Typically, we organize ourselves in matrix organizations with functional teams in the vertical and the development projects in the horizontal. When growing, we break down functions into therapeutic areas, products and / or geographical units.

Although this type of organization does have its challenges, the focus of this article is not on the organisation as such, but on *how* we handle organisational collaboration in our business. The fact is, no matter how we draw the organizational lines, there will always be borders to cross, handovers to govern and trust. Collaboration and common objectives are key.

The risk with any specialized organization is that we become "silo-focused": we start running each silo as its own unit and whilst doing this, lose sight of the overall and common task. In my experience, this risk is higher in specialized organizations like ours.

Best case scenario: a lack of understanding develops between you and those you are dependent on (or that are dependent on you). Worst case scenario: the silos become a purpose for themselves, doing what *they* think is most important, the way *they* want to do it, for *their* own sake. From there we might start seeing deliberate local sub-optimization for the benefit of the silo, lack of cooperation, and we may even get the good old blame-game going. We think and talk "us and them", and when it gets really bad, we distrust, and we try to control or even discredit and outmanoeuvre others. A typical sign of things heading in the wrong direction is when everyone demands to sit in on every meeting. These meetings don't move us anywhere. It is simply a case of defending "your silos" position and feeling like you are in control.

Some companies try to address these challenges with process-, project- or governance functions across the silos, and whilst this can help with practical matters, it can't fix the culture. If the culture becomes "my silo first", these functions can quickly fall into the same game of "my silo first for our own sake" and they start acting as a purpose in themselves. We then see functions like process management, QA, IT and HR ending up with the same culture.

We know that this is not an optimal way to drive results, innovation, quality or job satisfaction.

We *must* be better at handling these cross-functional, cross-team, cross-organizational, cross-company and countries *relations*, and be much better at working together whilst doing so. It doesn't matter *where* the divides are specified in the organizational chart; it's about *how* you handle the divides that makes the difference. We need to break these silos, find our way back to the common objectives, and foster a culture that promotes collaboration and innovation (not only in our products) in the way we do things.

What does it take?

A new leadership culture [1st in the triology]. These are the kind of things leaders need to spend their time on. This is the type of behaviour we want to encourage and reward. What else? A humble and open attitude from each one of us, and not least individual ownership and responsibility – for the overall outcome. Put the common good in the first place. Don't be part of the "us and them".

Yes, top leaders set the culture, but if you want to break down a wall, you can start at the foundation. You don't have to be a leader to take the lead. And you can start today.

About TriTiCon

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