Imagine if Curie, Pasteur and Jenner had been able to collaborate with their peers. The history of pharmaceutical invention may have been written by the hands of individuals, but the future will be written by the hands of many.

Collaboration reduces development cycles, improves decision making, connects consumer and producer, and reduces the complexity and cost of the supply chain.

Today, research expertise is located around the world; supply chains have extended beyond borders; regulation drives R&D centres to all four corners of the globe; and the public sector and health insurers are looking to drive down the cost of drugs in order to meet consumer demand.

The pharma industry relies on a vast number of external organisations to provide everything from access to enabling technologies, to sales and marketing. Today’s collaborative technologies blend skills and resources like no other time in the industry’s history and the exploitation of collaboration will be one that dominates its success for the next decade.

1. ACCESSING THE MINDS OF TOMORROW
With the pipeline of patents running low and competition growing in the pharma sector, how can organisations access the latest innovations and ideas first?

Private research firms are not the only engine for new drug development, as pharma companies invest hundreds of millions of pounds every year in universities around the world. Approximately 80 per cent of medical research in the higher education sector is within Russell Group institutions and medical schools, where the brightest and most talented make a significant contribution to new treatments, diagnostics, medical devices and the latest in research tools, with drug discovery units now commonplace in higher education.

Secure collaborative social tools, video, blogs, and being an active member of a community are all native traits of our next generation of researchers and students. The use of these tools to share ideas, work on collaborative problem solving, connect directly with fellow researchers (not by email or document but by live video) is now not simply needed by this new generation but expected.

Pharma can benefit from the collaborative nature of the next generation of graduates to integrate with research academia, break down barriers (technical, physical and interpersonal) and build stronger working partnerships with the institutions they fund - and increasingly rely on - for the next wave of products, revenue and profits.

The pharma industry is competitive in the products it develops, and competitive
in attracting the brightest minds from universities around the world. A workplace that incorporates collaboration and video tools will be the one where the next generation workforce will feel most comfortable and most productive – and will most likely be considered an attractive place to work.

2. HARNESSING COLLABORATION AND PROTECTING IP

Globalisation has enabled, and also driven, pharma to distribute its R&D centres far and wide, allowing it to leverage the skills of specialist R&D partners who might be located in different geographies and regulatory jurisdictions.

A clearly defined collaboration and content framework can ensure standards and controls are met, building a common working and collaborative environment that maintains the security expected by consumers and regulators alike.

The same collaboration tools and techniques used to enable a distributed workforce to collaborate can also be the foundation for a structured approach to good corporate governance, compliance and regulation.

Video conferencing has long been used to augment face-to-face meetings and remove the need to travel. Unfortunately, room systems are expensive and in short supply, and a video call, like a phone call, has lacked the governance to ensure a documented record is kept.

Today, high-quality TelePresence video is available on desktops, and full video call recording and audio transcription tools are offered as hosted solutions. All video conference calls can be recorded and stored, and made available through a collaboration portal immediately after the call has ended. Researchers looking for discussions containing a key word of interest can now search documents and video recordings in seconds.

Regulators are also assured that new forms of communications have the same level of governance as written documents, making video a faster and more efficient option for sharing ideas but no less secure or controlled.

Collaboration platforms can provide a more flexible front-end to structured content management systems that ensure that the flow of information being shared is secure and that the intellectual property of all stakeholders is protected.

Information doesn’t have to be locked away to be secure, and the exposure of data through collaboration environments combines structured and unstructured data. This can be combined with video and other content to provide an easily accessible, searchable and secure portal for groups of researchers, whichever country they happen to reside in.

In addition, being thousands of miles apart doesn’t stop you finding out which colleagues are available or knowing the most appropriate way of contacting them. Tools such as instant messaging, where the status of your contacts is shown, are now part of enterprise communications tools and collaboration portals, allowing you to find the person you need and contact him in the most appropriate medium.

3. QUICKER AND SMARTER DECISIONS

How quickly and effectively does your organisation make a decision on whether a new product is likely to succeed or fail; prioritising its development or dropping it from the portfolio in order to free up and re-direct valuable resources?

Pharma has long been dependent on blockbuster drugs which can drive up to 70 per cent of revenues, but at what stage in the development cycle does a future cash cow start to feel like a cash drain? US drug development, from discovery to approval, takes approximately 15 years and costs over $1bn, according to the Tufts Centre for the Study of Drug Development. An average of only three in 10 drugs makes enough revenue to sustain R&D.

Connecting researchers will improve decision making. Working as a collective to identify early opportunities, apply tougher selection criteria to progress being made and evaluate molecules allows researchers to place a greater emphasis on commercial viability beyond their initial use scenarios.

However, this isn’t simply about connecting researchers by name and telephone numbers; they can pick up a telephone and no doubt access a directory today. Enterprise social networking tools aren’t about making friends within the office or planning a night out; they are connecting people at a personal level helping them find the insight they need quickly and efficiently, based on their knowledge, papers they have published, previous products they have worked on, or even journals they have read.

4. FASTER TIME TO MARKET

If we could move the commercial success rate of medicines from three in 10 to four in 10, imagine what that could do to bottom line company performance?

Competition is increasing within the sector, with generics and unregulated drugs proving to be a significant threat. To ward off this threat and enjoy six to 12 months of exclusivity, time to market...
Many no longer make commercial sense, so how can pharma make sales calls count? This continued shift has forced many companies to think about a different approach. How can you be seen as a trusted adviser, with access to experts who can explain the value proposition behind the product as well as answer detailed questions about its use? More importantly, with stretched resources at the point of care; how can companies add value to the process of prescribing their product, while adding value to aftercare or providing direct patient advice?

Two key technologies have collided; the availability of highly functional mobile tablets and secure video solutions that can connect any outside party to valuable and knowledgeable internal resources. Providing field sales teams with video-enabled tablets allows them to bring the expertise of the organisation with them into the GP surgery or pharmacy. The rep is now the conduit to back office resources, and able to provide answers to complex questions, access experts at a touch of a button and facilitate video calls between the practitioner and the medical liaison.

Collaboration communities can connect individual doctors or groups of doctors within a speciality to clinical experts creating shared dialogue and an exchange of information, either through content sharing or in real-time via text, audio or video.

A small team of experts can now be in front of hundreds or thousands of doctors anywhere in the world at the touch of a button. Live availability status cuts out the endless search for an expert and improves the productivity of every rep with access to the system.

It’s not all about two-way communications, as with the use of digital media production and e-learning, the latest product information and research can be delivered directly to the sales teams via mobile devices. This reduces the need to travel for classroom-based training and ensures that the sales teams have the latest information, which they can use to provide greater value to doctors and medical buyers.

Imagine a rep being able to watch the latest training video securely while sitting in a customer car park waiting for the first meeting of the day.

### 6. Supply Chain - Speed & Compliance

As the market for new drugs evolves, the supply chain is becoming more complex; we live in a world where the supply chain extends to all four corners of the globe, and operates 24/7, never stopping.

Profitability comes down to the efficiency, agility and management of the supply chain – and that means creating a seamless link between researchers, marketers, sales, third-party suppliers, distributors and all the other contributors in getting a product to market and in use by a customer.

Improving supply chain visibility speeds up the decision-making process, resulting in a faster response to market demands. For example, the retail sector is leveraging high-quality video conferencing to monitor
the quality of goods being produced in factories thousands of miles away.

Many companies now mandate that anybody in their supply chain must be available via video or other collaboration tools, reducing the need for travel, facilitating discussions and problem solving not through endless emails or documents, but via high-quality face-to-face meetings using video as a replacement for slow and expensive air fares.

Technological intervention in the supply chain, such as collaboration and video systems, does not involve spending millions. High-quality desktop video conferencing now costs as little as £30 per month per user. That’s less than the average minimum contract of a mobile phone.

7. MARKETING IS CRITICAL TO SUCCESS

Having a good product is no longer enough. The market is swamped with alternative products and generics that are often seen as being better value for money. Pharma companies need strong marketing programmes as consumers have become more savvy and are influencing their own drug choices, especially when in the supermarket or pharmacy.

Pharma is beginning to use social networking sites to engage with customers, especially with common interest groups who suffer from a collective condition.

Research has shown that people will join and contribute to online interest groups if they feel they can voice their opinion and receive honest and open feedback from group members or the supplier of the product. In fact, in the US, self-diagnosis websites are circumventing the traditional role of the GP, with members of online forums giving advice on medical conditions.

This trend is increasingly causing concern among medical practitioners and pharma, but whether this is a good thing or not, people are ever more comfortable discussing their conditions in a public forum, and receiving advice from peers.

8. THE POWER OF INFLUENCE

Thanks to digital channels - everything from websites to social media and communities - consumers are able to access a plethora of information about medicinal and wellbeing products, and have been empowered to make more informed decisions.

Using digital tools companies can take a more targeted approach to advertising through video, social media and Digital Media Signage (DMS), which has enabled them to extend their reach and influence.

For example, video pods, which are now seen in larger retailers, not only allow companies to advertise a product, but also allow that customer to interact with the ad and access more information.

A DMS unit can be programmed to show specific ads to a select demographic, for example, mid-morning ads targeted at mothers shopping for baby products. At lunch the demographic changes to working people who may be interested in the latest diet supplements or pain relief.

Shopping centres in more advanced digital nations are sending content directly to a consumer’s device as he enters a store, providing special offers using advanced barcode technologies.

9. TELEMEDICINE

Telemedicine is without doubt one of the most significant medical innovations of our time. Thanks to the growth of the internet, connectivity into the home, development of high-quality but low-cost video, and improvements in mobile computing and connection of medical devices, installing advanced medical monitoring or diagnosis equipment into the patient’s home, for short-term diagnosis or long-term monitoring is now a reality.

In the UK, an ageing population is putting enormous strain on the healthcare system, and the supply of healthcare professionals is falling short of demand. At a time of economic crisis, the cost of delivering high-quality care to millions of homes is putting tremendous financial pressure on the system.

Telemedicine recreates the experience of a doctor’s visit over a secure internet connection. Stethoscopes, thermometers and blood pressure monitors can be used during diagnosis, with lower cost health technicians visiting a patient’s home and connecting back to the surgery or hospital.

Patients can communicate face-to-face with a specialist who can check for visible signs of illness, but can also remotely monitor their vital signs in real-time.

Video has long been used between medical centres, especially in cancer care and diagnosis, but the systems have been expensive to deploy and operate. We are now entering an age when it will be as cost effective to put a medical monitoring device into a patient’s home as it is to install a Sky dish.

10. THE ART OF THE POSSIBLE

Leaving point number 10 as ‘the art of the possible’ isn’t due to a lack of examples. Collaboration and video tools can assist pharma in becoming more profitable, reducing product development cycles, improving supply chain management, innovating in market, attracting the brightest talent into your organisation, and making reps more efficient.

We are now in an era when innovation in implementing these tools to solve real challenges is happening so quickly that we are sure that by the time you have read this far you will already have thought of 10 ideas of your own.

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