



MOBILE LEADERSHIP

A key to success for life science in the coming decade



When someone in the life science sector has reached a position of responsibility, let's say as a team leader or section head, they may get an experience that is their first really scary one: leading a cross-function activity. A project or a working group with a team drawn across many company functional silos and locations.

Yet this project-centric way of working is so fundamental to the life science world, you would think that employees would be trained in its disciplines from day one?

This may be happening in some organisations, but in very many, it does not.

This and subsequent articles focus on the importance of developing the critical skills needed to thrive in this environment. **Something we term 'mobile leadership'.**

Why is this so important, looking ahead to the 2020's?

For Life science – Pharma, Biotech, Diagnostics, CRO/CMOs, Genomics/Data, Technology firms and even academia, there are no free lunches anymore, yet much is expected. We are having to cut costs, yet supercharge innovation, particularly to make a difference in the huge unmet areas such as neurological diseases.



In the coming decade, we must not allow our organization structures to impede progress. Despite this being an internal and in theory controllable challenge, managers in surveys still cite ‘effective cross-function working’ as being a major aspiration, yet frequently seem unable to bring that about. Still deeply embedded in our culture, conflict between hierarchical cross-company structures is to be found alive and well, worldwide.

It isn’t surprising that senior leadership in Pharma companies is looking toward new Agile methodologies, not just for their traditional target – IT projects – but for mainstream product development. Cross-silo work structures such as efficient scrums and sprints, are fundamental to the success of agile working, but may be well ahead of an organisation’s hierarchical base.

With top-down cultural change being slow to take effect, it’s ever more important for people to acquire the critical skills and mindsets that they need, to thrive and lead in a messy environment. Many professionals are entering the workplace to this day without any grounding or real experience of this way of working; academic institutions do not necessarily understand it.

Another reason that individual’s skills and resilience is critical: **the frequent lack of expectations for the role.** A clear description of the duties, required, behaviours and approach for the cross-function leader is often *not* formally documented. Talent management units may identify the top performing, highly confident stars who can influence and drive in any environment, but not have the tools and practice to assess the large number of lower/middle managers, for development into a specialist, or cross-functional leadership role.

What are organisations doing to meet this challenge?



HR functions are moving from their traditional territory, focused toward line management, objective setting, performance and reward management. But making real difference to mindsets and confidence, developing people to effect change and focus on customers, rather than satisfying the needs of the hierarchy, requires re-thinking.

They can’t work alone. The ‘corporate university’, a concept that may be led from HR, may be built together with the company’s product development and commercialisation systems – senior portfolio management bodies, the Project Office, and so on.

Agile working and Operational Excellence, where it is built into mainstream working, encourages proper attention to the effectiveness of cross-functional bodies, with trained scrum masters and lean sigma black belts, leading groups that have highly defined expectations for outputs and continuous learning.

What can you do to explore this further?

Look out for our subsequent articles on this theme:

2. *'Changing the Mindset'* What comprises the 'mindset' of the good cross-function leader? How does it differ and what can we do to encourage it?
3. *'The skills required to gain commitment and build trust'* What are the critical leader skills that are specifically required by the cross functional leader, as compared to traditional line management.
4. *'Developing new skills'* Traditional management training methods frequently fail to make a real change. How can we change this?
5. *'Who is your customer?'* How a customer-oriented view, especially within an organization, can provide the essential context that legitimizes the expectations and impact of the cross-functional leader.
6. *'Seeking sponsorship for development activities'* Fragile leadership skills can be easily stifled by a culture that doesn't change. How can we influence those who can change it?

Written by [John Faulkes](#)

Have you thought about:

- Talking further about cross-functional, or 'mobile' leadership in your organization?
- What are the special skills required in this arena?
- Volt Pharma Associates can help you explore the issues raised

Meanwhile – look out for the subsequent articles!