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â??To address talent supply crunch, we should devise a 'Buy & Build' pipeline for designer profiles"

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As an industry leader and ecosystem builder, Cytiva has been supporting the Indian biotechnology industry for more than 30 years by forging close collaborations between the industry, government and academia. In a follow up to the comprehensive Cytiva Global Biopharma Resilience Index launched last year, this yearâ??s study, which focuses on government policy and regulation and its impact on the resilience of the global biopharma system, reveals a bright spot in India. BioSpectrum India spoke to Benjamin James, HR Business Partner, Asia-Pacific, Cytiva to unearth what's happening in the Indian biopharma sector in terms of newer job opportunities. Edited excerpts-



What is the current 'Talent Crunch' scenario in the biopharma sector in India?

According to Cytiva's 2021 Global Biopharma Resilience Index, the talent pool is the weakest pillar globally in the biopharma industry. In the same vein, India scored 6.15 out of 10 in the talent pool pillar, making it one of the weakest results in Asia compared to Singapore, South Korea, China, Japan and Australia. 65 per cent of respondents in India have pointed out that it is challenging to find R&D and manufacturing talent in the country, with only 35 per cent & 41 per cent of them respectively thinking that it's not a challenge to recruit in those areas.

When we dissect the talent into three categories, we will be able to see the issue closer. The three talent categories would include a) the ones who design solutions b) the ones who make solutions and c) the ones who sell and service. Additionally, we have two groups of companies - a) manufactures and b) suppliers.

The ones who design solutions are part of the Research / Engineering / Digital arm of the company and the competition for talent here is enormous. We often need to apply the "BUY" strategy as "BUILD" from within takes time.

The ones who make the solutions are part of the manufacturing arm of the company. This is clearly an area where we lack exposure and capability. The manufacturing hubs of India's biopharma industry exist in concentrated pockets today. This means export of talent is limited by geographical location. The exposure of talent to manufacturing processes has limited reach. On the contrary, today's biopharma industry gains significantly from talent who have Goods Manufacturing Process (GMP) experience. This poses a real issue of manufacturing exposure and ecosystem crunch.

The ones who sell and service are part of the commercial arm of the company. This group is generally a tenured one, and show a lot of longevity with their current company. Talent exchange here is limited.

With the rising demand in the biopharma sector, how can we manage this talent crunch in India?

In summary, we have three different types of talent crunch in the biopharma sector a) talent supply crunch b) manufacturing exposure and ecosystem crunch and c) diversified talent pool crunch. To address the talent supply crunch, we should devise a "Buy & Build" pipeline for the designer profiles. To tackle exposure and ecosystem crunch, we should apply a "Collaborate & Exchange" strategy between industries. To address "diversification crunch", we should scale partnership with academia to "Promote & Prepare" science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) enthusiasts towards the industry.

We also need to look at two ways of approaching this strategy – what we can do externally for the industry as an ecosystem builder, and what we can do internally as an employer to attract and retain talent.

India's biotechnology industry, estimated to reach $150 billion by 2025, expects to see the number of emerging biotech companies boom from 3,475 to more than 10,000.

To manage the talent crunch in India, the biopharma industry needs diversified talent – not only Chemistry and Biology graduates – but also graduates specialising in digital transformation and automation. Another area where the talent inflow can be supplemented is through R&D and innovation.

As the Biopharma industry continues to evolve, it increases the demand to develop a pool of skilled workers. Process development and manufacturing operations are two major areas of skill development in India. There is a growing focus on niche drugs for smaller patient populations. The industry is moving from making one antibody with huge investment in one plant to multi-product facilities.

This change brings the need for new skills. They include, but are not limited to:

o Technical support operations for both upstream and downstream manufacturing

o People who can facilitate both design and transfer process

o Large / Small scale column packing

o Cell and Gene therapy technology

o Automation and digital

o Working GMP (Good Manufacturing Process) knowledge

o System Integration

How are you ensuring that the right talent is being onboarded, as per international standards within India?

Cytiva India is a microcosm of global Cytiva. India houses talent across all functions – R&D, Digital, Marketing, Sales, and Services. This gives India Cytiva the unique advantage of hiring diverse talent groups. Most of these talents work with global stakeholders, hence the hiring standards automatically level play with international standards.

Cytiva India's R&D centre, founded in 2008, is a world-class institution that now has 100+ scientists and 110 patents. This is a flagship facility for attracting world-class talent.

Our associates in India are all working on global projects. For example, in 2020, our India R&D centre contributed to our global technology innovation - the Xcellerex Automated Perfusion System for a more efficient manufacture of biotherapeutics.

Cytiva brings a strong focus on people through process. There are several in-house learning and development programmes to coach, train, mentor, and ultimately develop talent with opportunities that vary from on-the-job, classroom and community learning.

How are you deploying AI technology to train the workforce in India?

Training personnel creates fundamental challenges in bioprocessing. These challenges include limitations in access to the equipment and trainers, as well as global and regional barriers. In search of a solution, experts at Cytiva have turned to virtual reality. This virtual training platform reduces costs and provides a more flexible training schedule and learning environment to the workforce in India.

Although this example of how we leverage new technology is not exclusive to India, this virtual-reality system can train our customers in India without having them shut down commercial production or maintain equipment used only for training.

Besides training, another example of how we use technology to engage with incoming staff is through the Enboarder onboarding app. The pilot was launched in India to engage new joiners prior to their start date. Bite-size onboarding activities include introducing the new joiner to their manager, introducing them to the company culture and asking them about their concerns and what they like.

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