

Developing leadership, fostering collaboration and building perspective through external communities

Harper Forbes, Hoffmann-La Roche Limited, Mississauga, Canada

ABSTRACT

External communities of data science range from local coding clubs of a dozen members to thousands across the globe (i.e., PHUSE). Collaborative communities such as PHUSE span a dynamic pharmaceutical industry and have driven innovation, established new ways of working, addressed the implementation of standards and continuously share ideas with health authorities. Participating and contributing to these communities can help individuals develop professionally and holistically across industry - they provide opportunities to lead and connect with other talented data scientists while expanding their pharma knowledge and perspective. This paper will highlight some of the professional development benefits including growing leadership skills, forming effective collaborations and building industry awareness.

INTRODUCTION

For the context of this paper, I will be defining an external community simply as a group of people working or meeting together outside of their employers or organization. External communities can range from local coding clubs of a dozen members to thousands across the globe, usually with a shared skill, experience or purpose. In the realm of pharmaceutical data sciences, organizations such as PHUSE span a dynamic industry and has driven innovation, established new ways of working, addressed the implementation of standards and continuously share ideas with health authorities. While many organizations have strong internal collaborative and innovative communities, there are professional development opportunities in communities outside of your employer, particularly in leadership and collaboration while also building perspective.

DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Participating in external communities has many professional benefits but this paper will focus on three key areas:

1. Leadership skills – learning from other leaders, presenting or co-chairing working groups/conferences
2. Collaboration and relationship building – collaboration sparks innovation and is a critical professional skill; relationship building helps expand an individual's professional network
3. Gain perspective and industry awareness – the importance of perspective and corporate culture; knowledge transfer from innovation, technological advancements and different ways of working & processes

LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Obtaining leadership skills by participating in external communities can be varied and diverse. For someone relatively new in their career journey attending a conference provides an opportunity to learn from leaders. Leaders commonly share their personal journey or behaviors they value as a leader, which can help guide and mentor future leaders. For more established leaders hearing another colleague can also lead to some valuable self-assessment, reflection and evaluation of their own values. Having participated in several leadership forums in recent years, it can be amazing to view the diversity of opinions amongst leaders. Leadership evolves over time and generations – it is important for inspiring and established leaders to prioritize successful skills and techniques to be successful.

Converse to listening to leaders, another leadership opportunity is available by presenting at a conference. To help inspire others, leaders must be visible and speaking at a conference offers the opportunity to practice presentation and public communication skills; an important asset for any leader. While individuals may have the chance to present within their organization, presenting at a conference or in a community will be different. For example, speaking at PHUSE Connect your audience may contain individuals from other pharmaceutical companies, CROs, software engineering, application developers, account executives, academia and health authorities. These different organizations will yield a different reception and perspective that can provide a refreshing opportunity to hone presentation and response skills.

Another leadership opportunity in external communities is to consider becoming a co-chair for a working group or collaboration effort. This is a great way to get involved with something that you may be interested in, while also helping develop your leadership skills such as collaborating, project management and influencing. PHUSE has many opportunities to lead, including volunteering for conference stream chairs, collaborating on a white paper and other similar roles. Many organizations do not have these opportunities available within their company, so these opportunities are a unique opportunity to build leadership skills in an external community.

COLLABORATION AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Collaboration has the potential to spark innovation, where people from different organizations and cultures bring a unique perspective and skillset. Bringing people together across industry provides an opportunity to learn from one another while yielding new or improved ideas or processes. In the pharmaceutical industry, innovation is key to success, especially in a field immersed in technology such as data science. Collaborating in an external community can also improve problem solving as many working groups or conference workshops tackle difficult or complex issues. Effective collaboration may require strong communication and interpersonal skills; also very important professional development considerations! Successful collaborations result in stronger relationships with your external peers resulting in a deeper purposeful network.

GAIN PERSPECTIVE AND INDUSTRY AWARENESS

Perhaps one of the biggest considerations of joining an external community (vs within an organization) is to gain perspective. Perspective plays a crucial role in resilience, growth, and self-awareness. It helps us to better understand situations from another's position and take into consideration other beliefs, experiences, and viewpoints. This in turn reduces bias, judgement, and conflict¹. From a data science or pharmaceutical field, these different perspectives can range from a patient's journey to corporate culture. For something like corporate culture you may observe some organizations where leaders serve, empower and coach their team with very little hands-on. Other organizations may still value a hierarchical approach with involved management delegation. It cements employees' confidence in their work, and keeps them motivated and inspired to do their best².

While collaboration can lead to innovation, attending something like an external conference can help you understand trends in the industry and potential sneak peeks into some of the latest in innovation. Similar to sharing clinical trial results at ASH or ESMO, many will wait to highlight their groundbreaking work for a larger audience. These forums are a great way to measure how innovative each organization is and – going back to the previous paragraph – potentially reveal how important innovation is within their culture.

Innovation isn't the only important learning lesson; by participating in an external community there is always opportunity to learn or consider different approaches such as an improved process, open source collaborative coding, cloud based-computing and so many other important fields influencing data science in the pharmaceutical industry.

CONCLUSION

The pharmaceutical industry is undergoing substantial changes and advancements within data science and across drug development. Participating in external communities has professional development opportunities for newer and established data scientists, for those in leadership roles or new to programming. Data scientists working together across industry in these communities truly has the opportunity to transform and influence drug development.

REFERENCES

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CONTACT INFORMATION

Your comments and questions are valued and encouraged. Contact the author at:

Harper Forbes

People and Product Leader, Hematology and Early Development Oncology

Data and Statistical Sciences, PD Data Sciences

Hoffmann-La Roche Limited

7070 Mississauga Road, Mississauga, ON L5N 5M8 Canada

harper.forbes@roche.com

www.rochecanada.com

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