

Interview

LIVING IN THE NOW

Manish Soman is CEO of a leading global scientific process organisation, Sciformix. He joined the firm in October 2012 and has big plans for it to help life science companies deliver the promise of personalised medicine through better access and analysis of big data. **Jane Ellis** talks to him about his vision for the future

Manish Soman has a proven track record of growing and building successful global businesses and practices. He has more than 20 years of leadership experience, encompassing project management, consulting services, systems development and implementation, as well as business operations.

He has worked in a number of regions across the world, including the US, Europe, India and the Far East, with special emphasis in life science, banking and financial services. He believes his experiences have helped him to become a valued leader in his markets and to hone his relationship, leadership, planning, co-ordination and analytical skills.

Soman joined Sciformix in October 2012 as President and CEO. 'I was given an entrepreneurial opportunity to grow something in a niche area and it is this that attracted me to the job,' he explains.

Founded in 2007, Sciformix is a global scientific process organisation (SPO), headquartered in Westborough, Massachusetts in the US, with operations also in India and the Philippines. It partners with life science companies to develop, launch and sustain medical products that aim to improve the quality of healthcare worldwide.

Soman has a passion for making global organisations succeed in working across different time zones, geographies and cultures.

'Our plan is to be based wherever we are needed,' he says. 'I travel quite a bit, but it's the way I've lived my life for 15 years. I have video conferencing equipment set up in my home office in Pune, India.'

'Of course, this doesn't speak well of a good work/life balance, particularly as I have a wife, four children and four dogs – but at least we try to spend the weekends together. In my spare time I play the drums to let off steam and I do yoga, as my wife is a yoga teacher, which can be the best medicine you can take to help

you relax.'

At Sciformix Soman has created an organisational structure that invests in its people, its technology and its processes, enabling the firm to achieve double-digit revenue growth. His aim is to build the company into a world-leading scientific knowledge-based outsourcing organisation.

Soman says he is a 'people person' and is confident in his ability to build strong executive teams and get the most out of them, as well as inspiring their loyalty and making future leaders out of them.

'I'm proud to say that in more than 20 years I've led thousands of people and have achieved 0% attrition in my direct management teams,' he says.

Soman believes his strong leadership skills are his greatest asset and three

particular qualities have been important elements in his success. The first is having a deep knowledge of the area in which his business operates; the second is his people skills; and the third is being able to motivate teams at every level in the organisation.

'Motivation guarantees that you will constantly innovate. Success is therefore inevitable,' he says.

He believes he has an intuitive ability to identify risk from a distance, understand where a business is going, and realign its direction if it is veering off course.

He has drawn his own inspiration from a book called *The Power of Now: a Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment* by Eckhart Tolle. The management philosophy explained in the book advises people to act right now rather than wait for the future, and this has inspired him to achieve everything in his life.

He cites an event that happened while he was at Deloitte, which was a learning experience and a step towards adopting Tolle's philosophy.

At the time, Soman was in charge of negotiating a deal with a large outsourcing vendor to buy the company. He felt that the valuation wasn't right and didn't push hard enough for the deal to go ahead.

'It was an opportunity we let go and I was too careful, treading the lines too carefully. I wish I had gone with my instincts. I didn't allow the deal (and perhaps a mistake) to happen. What I learned from it was to live spontaneously and to go with my instincts, which I do today,' he says.

'Right here, right now is everything that there is. It's all you have. The future is unknown and anything could happen, while the past has gone. I believe in spontaneity and having the freedom to make mistakes and learn from it.'

Soman sees the greatest opportunities for the pharmaceutical industry going forward will be in the development of a larger culture of strategic partnerships with specialised outsourcing vendors like Sciformix who can help them grow and sustain their products in a global market.

He views the firm as the glue between a fragmented industry, patient groups, regulatory agencies and manufacturers, which has a good understanding as an impartial third party of how it all fits together. 'Sciformix is positioned in the middle,' he explains. 'We need to influence all sides equally if we are to get the best end result for the patient.'

The company collaborates with its clients through the entire product development lifecycle to provide a full

CV

2012 to present President and CEO of Sciformix Corporation

2010 to 2012 Director for BestShore operations in EMEA region at HP Enterprise Services

2009 to 2010 COO of Patni Computers

2006 to 2009 Global Business Leader for IT at Genpact

2005 to 2006 Co-founder and MD of 3Di Systems

1998 to 2005 CEO and MD, Deloitte Consulting Offshore ITechnology Group

Education 1991 MBA
Maharashtra Institute of Technology

1989 BSc Computer Science, University of Pune, India



Manish Soman

range of services from study design to post marketing surveillance and commercialisation support. It has a deep understanding of the regulations governing the pharmaceutical industry and expertise in the areas of safety and risk management, clinical research and post-approval support services and regulatory affairs.

The firm provides flexible and tailor-made services to the pharmaceutical industry – from assisting a small generics player in, say, Taiwan, which wants to sell its medicines in Germany, to advising a large biologics firm in the US about regulations in Cambodia.

‘We sit between Big Pharma and generics and biologics manufacturers in emerging markets,’ adds Soman. ‘This is where most of the spend in medicines will come from in the future. We will help all players to penetrate these markets faster.’

Expansion into emerging markets, growing regulatory pressures, the ever-increasing complexity of managing product lifecycles, coupled with patient and payer pressure to get the safety, efficacy and price of the product right are some of the challenges being faced by

Sciformix’s clients and the pharmaceutical industry at large.

They are also facing falling output, cultural issues, and the lack of a uniform regulatory landscape.

‘The output of the pharmaceutical industry has flattened for a period of more than 10 years, and there is little reason to expect productivity will improve,’ says Soman.

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Meanwhile, customer expectations are increasing and governments are scrutinising the price of medicines in an uncertain global economic climate and imposing cost constraints on healthcare

providers at the expense of providing patients with the drugs they need.

Soman thinks the pharmaceutical industry is still hanging onto the same old business models while hoping that productivity will soar and the industry will return to the days of blockbuster

medicines. But it has to think about changing its culture now and seizing the opportunities that are there in front of it, he counsels.

A single measure that governments could take to boost the pharma sector, according to Soman, would be to standardise regulations globally so that there is a commonality of purpose.

‘We must impress upon them that this is about human safety,’ he says.

Another necessary step for pharmaceutical manufacturers in all parts of the world, including emerging markets, will be to have access to complete electronic patient records and other data so that they can develop personalised medicines in a cost-effective way.

Soman says that the unlocking of the human genome has paved the way for the development of personalised medicines. In the future it will be possible to get hold of the genetic details of every single person in every single country worldwide, map their individual propensity to disease, and develop bespoke medicines for them.

He predicts that in 20–30 years’ time we will be living in a different world where pharmaceutical manufacturers will have to access to this data and tailor medicines to patient needs, while in the process cutting waste and reducing healthcare costs.

‘It is already possible to produce a beer in a microbrewery,’ he adds. ‘And there is no reason why we couldn’t in the future produce a tablet in the same way. Pharmaceutical manufacturers could produce pre-mixes (basic formulations), then send them on to a “micro pharmaceutical factory” to add in the other ingredients after analysing the data of patients with a similar genetic makeup, then produce a bespoke medicine to treat their specific illness.’

Whatever happens, we can be certain that Sciformix will be ready to interpret and speed up access to all data in a form that manufacturers, payers and patients can understand, as well as provide the analysis that goes into making informed decisions throughout the product lifecycle.

‘I’m passionate about electronic patient records,’ says Soman. ‘Money needs to be spent on “big data” analysis and the returns will come. If we achieve true personalised/bespoke medicines, it will change the whole manufacturing and commercial process and be a win for humankind.’

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