



Managed Onboarding of Agilent SLIMS:
An Idorsia Success Story

Preparing to Be Prepared

"Onboarding" is the process by which digital tools are adopted into daily workflows. The onboarding process specifically focuses on integrating software tools into an organization's established activities, with the goal being to ensure employees have the skills and resources they need to effectively use the new tools.

The success or failure of onboarding relies on many factors, including the type of software being onboarded and the nature of the workflow(s) being digitalized. This case study describes the experience of Swiss pharma company Idorsia and their managed approach to onboard their GMP lab operations to Agilent SLIMS laboratory workflow management software.

On-paper, bringing fundamental operational changes into an already successful laboratory environment might read like the classic "irresistible force meets immovable object" storyline. On the one side, evolution theory warns that we must adapt to survive; on the other, pragmatism advises, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it".

In practice—thankfully—there's a solution to this paradox: managed onboarding. Among the keys to successfully navigating big changes is to follow a hybrid philosophy that strives to adapt without breaking. Thoughtfully conceived and carefully implemented, a managed onboarding plan can pave the way for successful labs to grow their success—not their growing pains.

Case-in point: Idorsia, a Switzerland-based pharmaceutical research company whose market success, promising pipeline, and high-profile partnerships depict a company that is clearly getting many important things right. When Idorsia's ADQC department made the decision to move from their system of paper notebooks to modern, fully-featured, all-in-one operations management software platform, expectations (and, perhaps, anxiety) were high.



Jean-Maxime Pommery
Associate Director, Team Leader
GxP Lab Automation
Idorsia
Switzerland

To prepare, Idorsia colleagues Jean-Maxime Pommery, associate director and team leader for GxP lab automation, and Jérémy Lehning, business systems analyst, set about creating a managed onboarding plan with realistic objectives and clearly defined milestones. Their primary goal: transfer essential functions and bring essential users online in a way that would build user confidence and maintain the lab's forward momentum.

"It looks good on a presentation slide to say the plan is to immediately get the system to full capacity, with everything fully interfaced with everything else," said Jean-Maxime Pommery. "In reality, for us, it was impossible. So, the first entry point for us focused on electronic lab notebook capabilities and related activities. All the functionality we needed was there, and the system was quite nice and flexible. We decided to bring the system online on the GMP side, where everything still used paper; we thought if it can do GMP, it can probably do everything else, whereas the other way around, maybe not. In retrospect, we took the toughest path, but along the way we learned things that reassured us about the system's capabilities."

Jérémy Lehning emphasized how bandwidth influenced their onboarding strategy. "We are a small group; it's just the two of us," he said. "We are the owners and administrators of the GMP computerized systems. We take care of user activation and monitor the stability of the system, ensure that everything is up to date, the application server is running correctly with no errors, and the database is stable. We also implement configuration changes and manage system validation activities. So, with both of us wearing multiple hats, we chose to set an onboarding timetable that was maybe slower than we would have liked, but generous enough to allow us a chance to meet our milestones."

Of course, an important part of any onboarding plan is choosing the right solution to bring in. After considering the business, IT, and operational implications, Idorsia chose Agilent SLIMS, which combines laboratory information management system (LIMS) and electronic laboratory notebook (ELN) functionality in a single, comprehensive workflow management solution.

"When I started in this position, coming from a somewhat different background, I had never heard of SLIMS before, but I knew the benefits of digitalization," said Jérémy Lehning. "One of the challenges we faced with implementation was gaining the acceptance of GMP users who were used to working on paper. Maybe there was a logbook next to the fridge for registering what came in, what went out, what has been analyzed, and so on. Now, everything has to be captured electronically, and the QC environment has very strict, regulated workflows. Users sometimes have to get used to things like the extensive control and transparency of the new system, the instant visibility around who did what, and when. Of course, easy access to this kind of information is obviously beneficial, but sometimes it still takes time to adjust."

"I have to give credit for our success to the very good collaboration between the IT side and the business side, in terms of building and configuring the system," Jean-Maxime Pommery said. "But credit is also due to SLIMS itself, because when you bring in a new system, you expect bugs or other major challenges. We didn't face anything that caused anyone to view the new system poorly. Of course, users have to get used to the interface, get used to not using paper, but as soon as they have done that, they see a system that's behaving as expected. Nobody could say, 'Okay, I don't want to use it because it doesn't work'. The challenge then becomes simply getting them to adapt their habits."

It remains true that any managed onboarding plan, even a great one, can't succeed if the end result doesn't meet the needs of bench scientists. Ideally, the new system should reduce, not add to, the complexity users face in demanding environments such as those found in highly regulated pharma operations. Jérémy Lehning touched on this critical aspect.

"Users at the bench don't see, or maybe even care about, all the IT activity that goes on under the surface to keep the system optimized," he said. "They want a bench user interface that makes it easier for them to deliver high quality in a challenging situation; the UI should enhance their ability to focus on their tasks. All the views and information that are available, the different modules and windows, it shouldn't be disruptive—it should free them up to really focus on the lab work. SLIMS facilitates management of core activities, so the documentation path becomes less of a distraction. Now when I walk into the lab, I'm very happy when they tell me that SLIMS is helpful in their daily work, because they're able to do things like quickly retrieve information about a sample, a standard, equipment, anything. Finding this information on paper involved much more time and effort, looking through who knows how many logbooks and sample sheets. Now, they just log in and put some filters in place, and the information they need is right there, even for a very old analysis where they don't have the samples anymore, just the project code."

Summary

The success Idorsia experienced while onboarding Agilent SLIMS software into their existing workflows required careful attention to both planning and execution. By accurately assessing user needs, business expectations, and their available IT resources, they were able to establish a realistic timeline featuring agreed-upon priorities and clear milestones for monitoring their progress. Feedback from SLIMS end users at Idorsia reinforce their success; users reported favorable impressions about the way the new software was integrated into workflows and how it has improved key aspects of their daily operations.

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