Ingenuity in supplier audit & standards compliance in challenging times

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Manufacturer and supplier's ability to deliver products ensuring quality & compliance is a difficult task even in times of normality. When global events or even significant local events like a natural disaster occur this task becomes monumental, but even more crucial. When countries are locked down, some manufacturers are working in isolation and employees are working in basements, guest rooms, and kitchen tables, the new normal for business continuity is unique to say the least.

The need to manufacture and deliver critical goods and services does not end during challenging times. Whether it is critical protective equipment, pharmaceuticals or the basic needs of food and beverages, the demand is more vital than ever.

Industry and regulatory requirements to ensure that supply chain and manufacturing output is compliant and reliable continue to remain in effect. Apart from initial requirements to assess a

suppliers' fitness, there are also ongoing surveillance audits to ensure that the supplier has maintained their ability to manufacture and deliver compliant, consistent output.

When unforeseen events restrict or outright prevent the ability to travel and provide resources to perform physical audits, manufacturers are looking at innovative ways to meet their audit and compliance needs. These requirements are catalyst for considering tools that can be used on-site or remotely with equal effectiveness and audit compliance.

Some of the key capabilities that are necessary for an effective audit program:

- Audit scheduling and planning
- Developing criteria and checklists
- Qualified and authorized personnel executing audits, documenting evidence and creating findings, conducting the review of the final audit report and corrections and improvements plan
- Workflows that are integrated across processes to trigger notifications, actions & resolution with complete proof of evidence
- Integrated with online meetings / video conferencing to capture the proof of evidence documentation (real-time view or snapshot) into audit trail processes
- Document issues, corrective actions and integrate into timelines for resolutions of finding
- Integrate the results automatically to supplier scorecards and supply chain visibility

In this new way of working, supplier audits are taking advantage of integrating quality and compliance management systems with online meeting and video conferencing technologies to ensure a fully compliant audit process. In cases where physical audits are common practice, this combination is a critical first step for taking the path forward for remote audits – keeping product, process, environment, health and safety as the primary focus in adhering to compliance needs.

As a potential future to audit process digitalization, remote collaborations could be complemented with

- augmented reality – where manufacturers virtually collaborate with supplier in mixed-reality mode for required proof of evidences & validation.
- virtual process validation where upfront full digital twin of product & production processes is mapped

Future disruptions to supply chains both at local and global scales are unpredictable. Risk and contingency planning must adequately address how manufacturers will validate their supplier's fitness and readiness during times of disruption. Implementing simple and efficient methods and tools to help with the process and keep the supply chain healthy and compliant is something manufacturers looking forward to implement.

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