

# Information Management Challenges for Autologous Cell Therapy Manufacturing and Supply

## **Cell therapy manufacturing requires key information management solutions to support bringing treatments to market.**

The personalized nature of cell therapies means that organizations are required by regulators to demonstrate end-to-end visibility across the product supply chain, ensuring chain of custody, identity, and condition.

New facilities face pressure to identify, prioritize, and implement the necessary IT systems.

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Michael Smart

Senior Business Consultant

BSc Electrical Engineering, MBA



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## Introduction

The number of cell and gene therapies in clinical trials and reaching commercialization are growing rapidly as new platforms and technologies are constantly being developed. CAR-T and TCR engineered immunotherapy products are examples of technologies that have been in the news recently with recent FDA approvals for new products. Startups and new facilities are being established to manufacture these therapies. Many of these new therapies involve autologous transplantation of cells where tissue or blood cells are collected from an individual patient, expanded, modified, edited, or otherwise conditioned in an aseptic manufacturing environment, and then returned for treatment of the same individual.

Regardless of the specific scientific technology involved, the manufacture and delivery of these cell therapies share similar characteristics which make them uniquely different from traditional pharmaceutical or biopharmaceutical products, namely:

**Personalized Product** - the product is personalized in that the patient's own cells are returned to the patient after the manufacturing process. This has several implications:

- A manufactured batch is for one patient. This means there are potentially far more 'product' batches running through an individual manufacturing facility than traditional pharma/biopharma. This equates to more batch record data that needs to be stored and



Figure 1: Typical CAR-T Cell Therapy Process

available for future process development analysis, and the potential for more batch to batch variability.

- The starting material (the patients cells) is variable in quality (e.g. number of viable cells in a sample, or responsiveness of cells in the process may vary). This means that it is difficult to implement a truly standardized process across all batches (e.g. times for induction or cell expansion may vary depending on the quality of the starting material).
- It is essential that the product is administered to the same person from which the cells for that batch were taken. The ability to confirm patient and batch match at various points and maintain an absolutely solid chain of custody along the end to end process, are critical.

**Made to order** – the personalized 'made to order' nature of the treatment means that there is no inventory of the key starting material (the patients cells). This means that production scheduling can be constantly changing as cell collection times invariably get changed and shift. Additionally, production capacity planning becomes more difficult as it is not possible to build a finished goods inventory.

### **Largely manual manufacturing processes**

– current manufacturing processes are largely manual, conducted in an aseptic processing environment, with operators transferring the product to different bags/containers for different steps in a multi-step process, manually setting and checking equipment setpoints and process parameters, and manually taking samples for QC purposes. This means that a lot of the process data that might be available through supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) systems in more mature continuous processes, is manually recorded in the batch record.

**Large number of input materials** – due to the complexity of the process and its largely manual multistep nature there are a large number of reagents and disposables used in a single batch. The bill of materials for a single batch may be several hundred items (an order of magnitude more than traditional pharma/biopharma products). All these materials need to be available in manufacturing inventory, suitably quality controlled, and fully lot traceable to the manufactured batch.

**Extended supply chain** – collection of starting cell material at clinics and shipment to manufacturing sites introduces another cold supply chain (in addition to the cold supply chain associated with the final product distribution) that needs to be validated, and where storage and handling conditions need to be verified and ensured. The supply chain extends beyond the traditional pharma/biopharma manufacturing and is truly

end to end, encompassing both the cell collection and product administration points, where storage, handling, and patient identity need to be confirmed. This extended supply chain requires a broader and deeper integration of data across multiple partners (clinics, couriers, in house manufacturers, CMOs) than is traditionally the case.

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## **What are the Implications for Information Management Strategy?**

*Figure 2* below maps some of the key information management (IM) capabilities needed to support cell therapy manufacturing and supply to the ANSI ISA-95 standard Levels and Functions model. Many of these capabilities are required (either practically or from a regulatory perspective) to support a commercially launched product. There are, however, few therapies that are currently commercially launched and many organizations are at the clinical trial stage (early phase through pivotal trials). For these startup companies, or independent spin offs of larger established companies, the priorities for standing up these information technology capabilities will need to be established.

The following examines key capabilities and considerations for some of the Level 4 and Level 3 systems.

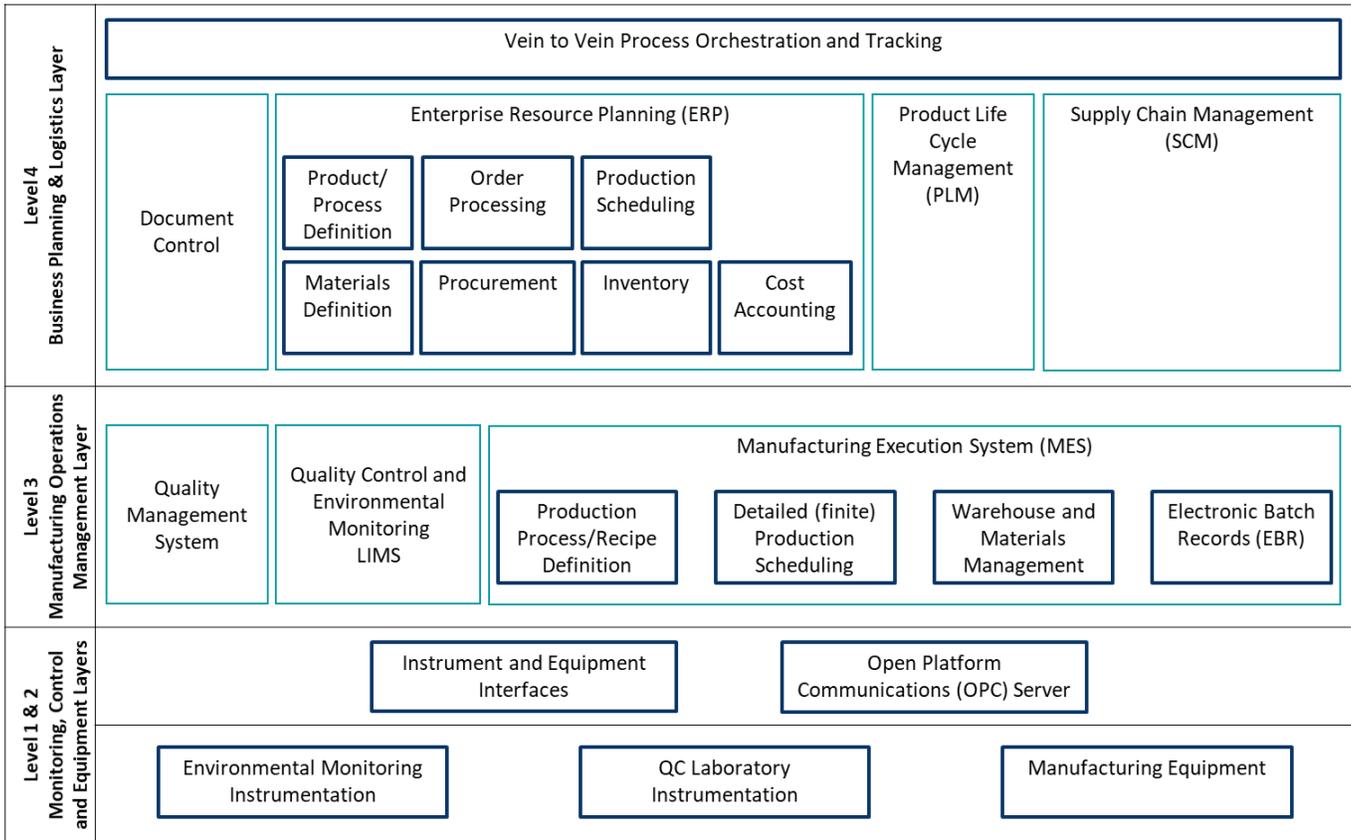


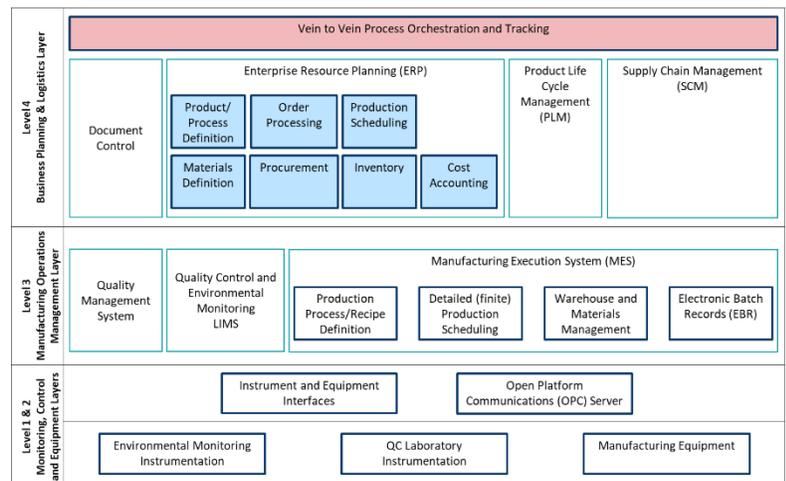
Figure 2: Cell Therapy Manufacturing and Supply IM Capabilities (Mapped to ISA-95 Model)

## Level 4:

### Enterprise Resource Planning

Given the number and criticality of material inputs to the processes it is essential to establish, early on, a clear definition of product lines, the high-level process steps for each line, associated bills of materials (BOMs), material identifiers, definitions, and specifications. The ability to electronically procure materials and manage multi location material inventory

(receipt, storage, restocking points, distribution, and valuation) is also needed.



Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) solutions provide such capabilities in addition to being able to process orders, perform cross site production scheduling decisions, manage product lot number assignments, and coordinate material use. ERP systems provide a common environment to instantiate key master data (such as sites, suppliers, material items, product ids and names, employees, accounts). Solutions may also extend into Level 3 and encompass site warehouse management, kitting and issuance of materials.

Cloud based systems offer a relatively quick route to establish ERP for basic financial and cost accounting needs, but the introduction of production material definition and control functions will require GMP validation. The time and effort needed to establish these capabilities will need to be assessed given the velocity and maturity of operations. As such some organizations may opt initially for a light ERP implementation that focuses on order processing, production scheduling, inventory management, and financials in the short term. The implementation of GMP relevant areas such as lot number assignment and materials and warehouse management can then be implemented as part of the Level 3 systems (MES, or standalone solutions).

There are many commercially available ERP suites that provide the full range of capabilities discussed above. Given that a solution will, eventually, need to include some GMP functions organizations should look for solutions that

have a track record of being successfully validated by other pharma/biotech companies.

## **Vein to Vein Process Orchestration and Tracking**

The need to unambiguously manage the end to end supply chain from patient cell collection through treatment/infusion means that orchestration and tracking capabilities requires early attention. Initially, this work may be done manually but demonstrated systems capabilities will be required for license application (BLA) and should therefore have already been proven during later phase clinical trials. Capabilities in this area include the ability to orchestrate and provide user interfaces or backend integrations to connect and support key processes and different actors in the supply chain (i.e. clinical collection sites, couriers, manufacturing sites, and clinical treatment sites). Such systems need to facilitate the confirmation of identity at various points in the chain, track and manage the chain of custody (who has possession of the product at every step) and chain of condition (storage and handling conditions). The system must also act as the source of record for traceability of the products from a specific collection event through the final use and disposition of intermediate and final products. GMP validation and compliance with personal information data handling regulations are key considerations when designing or selecting a suitable system.

Characteristics of such systems map well to business process management software suites

and some organizations have built custom solutions on top of BPM platforms. Relatively new dedicated commercial solutions do exist in this space and offer the promise of more standardized (and hence lower risk and cost) solutions that include many standard components such as courier integrations, and are cloud instantiated (offering easier access for use by the multiple third parties that need to access such platforms).

preventative action, change control, risk and mitigation, and training and personnel qualification management all fall under the Quality Management System.

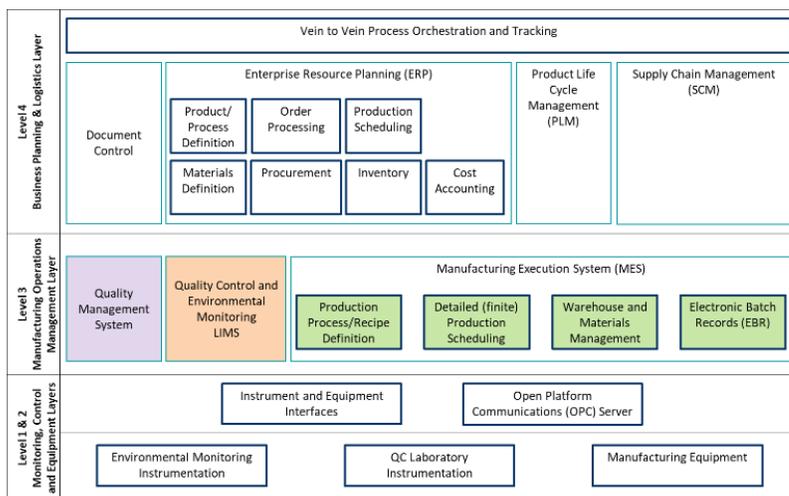
## Quality Control LIMS

The typical cell therapy manufacturing process includes tens of 'in process' sampling points per batch as well as final product testing, and batch specific and general environmental monitoring and sampling. QC testing of incoming materials also needs to be performed and documented. Initially sample and test result management may be handled manually (on paper) but will rapidly require electronic systems support as the number of patients (and batches) grows. Many mature manufacturing QC LIMS and Environmental Monitoring (EM) commercial solutions exist that can address the needs in this area. However, it should be noted that EM operations and workflows are unique and usually require specific solutions complementary to standard LIMS solutions.

## Level 3:

### Quality Management System

Quality management processes and procedures supported by systems should be established early to ensure a secure, document lifecycle management for SOPs, work instructions and manufacturing documentation. Processes for manufacturing incidents, non-conformance and deviations, corrective action, audits and



## Manufacturing Execution System

Manufacturing shop floor needs have typically been accommodated via paper and manual processes through early clinical. Going forward, systems will be needed to offer more accurate modeling of the manufacturing process for different product lines along with resource (people, equipment, shop floor)

requirements and execution times so that finite capacity planning can be performed. The resultant models are used to provide electronic detailed production schedules across product orders. Warehouse management capabilities will be needed to support site specific receipt and storage, and subsequent kitting and batch record capture of issued materials (if not handled within the ERP solution).

Implementation of electronic batch records (EBR) may also be considered but should be assessed relative to the maturity of the manufacturing process. Some of the key benefits to EBR implementation include the ability to review by exception and the availability of electronic data for process development use. Modern EBR systems are certainly easier to adjust but the manufacturing process must be stable enough to warrant the time and effort that will be expended in development and particularly validation.

There are many commercial MES solutions in the market place. Most cover the range of capabilities described above. Many have a specific focus on pharmaceutical manufacturing with consulting resources who are familiar with the pharma domain. However, as noted at the beginning of this paper, cell therapy processes are somewhat unique, smaller scale, multiple batch and employ limited process automation so some of the solution capabilities may not be directly applicable. The MES space has lacked in investment for a period of time but there appears to be renewed interest in revamping the technologies. Flexibility to deal with

changes and user interface usability should be high on the list of evaluation considerations.

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## Conclusion

Rapidly growing organizations need to think about their unique business processes, identify the information management capabilities that are needed to support those processes and, given finite resources, prioritize the implementation of those capabilities aligned with the trajectory of their product development plans. Constructed properly a strategic roadmap for IM capability solution selection and implementation can guide investment. It can also serve as a communication vehicle to align stakeholder's expectations around timing for standing up specific technical capabilities to better support the business.

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## About the Author



Mr. Smart has over 30 years of international experience in managing and directing large end-to-end software implementation and change

projects for major corporations in the pharmaceutical, biotechnology, and process industries. Michael specializes in helping companies realize transformative business strategies using cutting edge technologies. His roles have spanned multiple domains including discovery research, clinical, regulatory analytics, manufacturing, and supply chain, and have encompassed a cross-section of skills: strategy development, complex project management, business and workflow analysis, and informatics and technical architecture design.

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### **ResultWorks, LLC**

600 West Germantown Pike, Suite 400

Plymouth Meeting, PA 19462

(610) 768-2899

[www.resultworksllc.com](http://www.resultworksllc.com)