Digitalizing Life Sciences Logistics: Lessons from Industry Leaders on Ensuring Agility, Resilience, and Patient Safety

In today's life sciences supply chains, logistics has become a strategic differentiator. Companies face mounting complexity: new therapy models, evolving distribution channels, sustainability pressures, and heightened expectations for speed and transparency. To navigate this landscape, manufacturers and logistics providers must move beyond visibility alone—towards orchestration that drives real-time, intelligent decision-making.

At FutureLink Barcelona, industry leaders Ateh Atabong, Senior Product Manager, Healthcare at DSV, and **Tsu Rasolonjatovo**, Independent Industry Expert and former Director of Global Logistics Transformation at Elanco, joined Henry Ames, TraceLink's General Manager of Healthcare and Life Sciences, for a panel discussion exploring what digitalization truly means in life sciences logistics. Their conversation revealed how collaboration, data orchestration, and shared accountability are shaping the next era of resilient, patient-centric supply chains.

From Visibility to Orchestration

Rasolonjatovo opened the discussion with a reflection on what digitalization should

actually achieve. For him, it's not about collecting more data—it's about using information to enable strategic supply chain orchestration and execution.

He drew a vivid analogy from human anatomy to illustrate the interconnected nature of supply chain partners:

"If we consider the logistics partners, they are the eyes, the senses, and the arms of the supply chain. Technology partners are like the nervous system, taking that information and making it available for orchestration. And manufacturers are the heart—because we bring the purpose, the products, and the responsibility for patient safety."

That perspective reframes digitalization as a system of coordinated roles rather than a collection of siloed functions. Each participant—the logistics provider, the technology enabler, and the manufacturer—plays a critical part in a single living organism. When orchestration replaces sequential, isolated decision-making, the result is agility, responsiveness, and better outcomes for patients.

Turning Collaboration into Action

A major theme throughout the discussion was how to turn collaboration into tangible results—especially when facing disruptions.

Rasolonjatovo shared a story about a time his team implemented an innovative multimodal shipping route via rail, and encountered congestion at the Kazakh border during test shipments to China. Using data from multiple systems—including temperature monitoring and container tracking—they identified a clear alternative route and rerouted the shipment through a less congested entry point.

"We leveraged the data coming from temperature control and container companies," he explained. "The temperature was stable, we had enough fuel, so

we rerouted the shipment—and it passed successfully."

That reroute, executed through a control tower framework, wasn't just a reactive fix. It demonstrated the power of real-time orchestration in practice: combining people, processes, and technology to make decisions collaboratively and confidently.

"It was many hands working together—people, processes, and systems collaborating across partners," Rasolonjatovo said. "Visibility is good, but what matters is actionability."

The result wasn't only a successful delivery—it changed how the organisation viewed risk. According to Rasolonjatovo, the team discovered that their multimodal rail solution provided "more security, visibility, and actionability" than other tested modes, prompting an adjustment of their standard operating procedures.

Equal Responsibility, Shared Outcomes

Atabong built on this theme, highlighting the evolving relationship between manufacturers and logistics providers. He called for a shift in mindset—from transactional contracting to strategic partnership.

"We have different roles but equal responsibility to provide one purpose—that is, medicines to patients," he said. "Pharma companies must understand that logistics providers are not a consequence of their work; they are part of providing healthcare."

This shared accountability, he argued, must be reflected in the way partnerships are structured and governed. Logistics service providers need predictability and long-term visibility to justify investments in digital capabilities, while manufacturers need reliable partners who can deliver on resilience and compliance.

Rasolonjatovo described how his team institutionalized that partnership model through formal governance: annual strategic workshops with logistics and technology partners to align on mutual goals.

“The first question we ask is: how far do we want to go together? If we’re going to be strategic, then we need to share our respective strategic goals and find a common point to work together.”

This approach allowed every partner—manufacturer, logistics provider, and technology enabler—to bring their strengths to the table and co-own the outcomes. As Atabong summarized, “Your job is not done at QP release. It’s done when the patient takes the medicine at the right time.”

Building the Skills for a Digital Future

Digitalization isn’t just about systems—it’s about people. Atabong warned that the industry must develop new skills and mindsets to keep pace with changing business models such as direct-to-patient delivery and home healthcare.

“If we want to look at what skills we need, we can’t just look inside logistics. We have to look at the sector we’re serving,” he said. “When drivers start delivering medicines to homes, they become the face of the company. Our operational staff will need more competencey in IT, and management will need a mindset shift.”

He noted that every company should assess its current competencies, define what success will look like in five to ten years, and identify the gaps between today’s capabilities and tomorrow’s requirements. In his view, agility isn’t achieved through technology alone—it’s cultivated through adaptable people, empowered by orchestration tools that help them act faster and smarter.

Three Lessons for Life Sciences Leaders

Throughout the panel, three themes emerged that define the path forward for digitalizing logistics:

- Think orchestrated, not sequential. Bridge siloed systems and one-directional data flows with shared visibility and coordinated action across all partners.
- Build trust through partnership. Establish governance structures that promote transparency, shared KPIs, and long-term collaboration between manufacturers, logistics providers, and technology partners.
- Invest in people as much as platforms. Future-ready logistics depend on upskilled teams who can interpret data, act on insights, and manage new delivery models with confidence and compliance.

A New Model for Agility and Patient Safety

As the conversation drew to a close, Henry Ames observed that digitalization is redefining the relationship between visibility and control. The industry's challenge, he said, is not simply to see what's happening, but to act on it collectively—to translate information into decisions that protect both business performance and patient outcomes.

That message captured the spirit of the panel: digitalization in life sciences logistics is not an end in itself. It's a means to build a resilient, orchestrated network where every partner across the supply chain shares responsibility for quality, agility, and patient safety.

Ready to learn more?

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