CHASE PARTNERS
Finding leaders in life sciences

CDMO Leaders: Making the Right Moves at the Right Time



Prepared by Chase Partners-LLC
Jennifer Chase – Boston / RTP
Nick Hicks – Paris / Lyon

The Riot Point
Iwan Jenkins - UK



Executive Summary

The CDMO industry is undergoing a structural shift from capacity-driven manufacturing to integrated, innovation-led service models, driven by advanced therapies, outsourcing growth, and increasing complexity. Technologies such as mRNA are accelerating this transformation by requiring specialized capabilities, flexible production, and deeper collaboration, repositioning CDMOs as strategic development partners. At the same time, market volatility and regulatory uncertainty are increasing investment risk.

Success now depends on aligning leadership with strategy. Innovation-led, service-oriented, and efficiency-driven models each require different approaches to problem-solving and decision-making. High-performing organizations balance structured, efficiency-focused thinking with more flexible, innovative approaches.

Managing this cognitive diversity is critical. Leaders who can bridge different thinking styles enable organizations to balance innovation with execution and navigate complexity. Ultimately, competitive advantage will come from intentionally designing leadership teams that match strategic priorities, making leadership alignment a key driver of performance and growth.

Key Takeaways



To maintain growth seen during C19 CDMOs are using three main strategies

Develop novel technology more rapidly.

Deliver services more effectively.

Relentless cost efficiency.



The commercial strategy determines the soft skills required of CDMO leaders.

Innovative & experimental: Rapid, flexible production of small customized batches to develop new technologies.

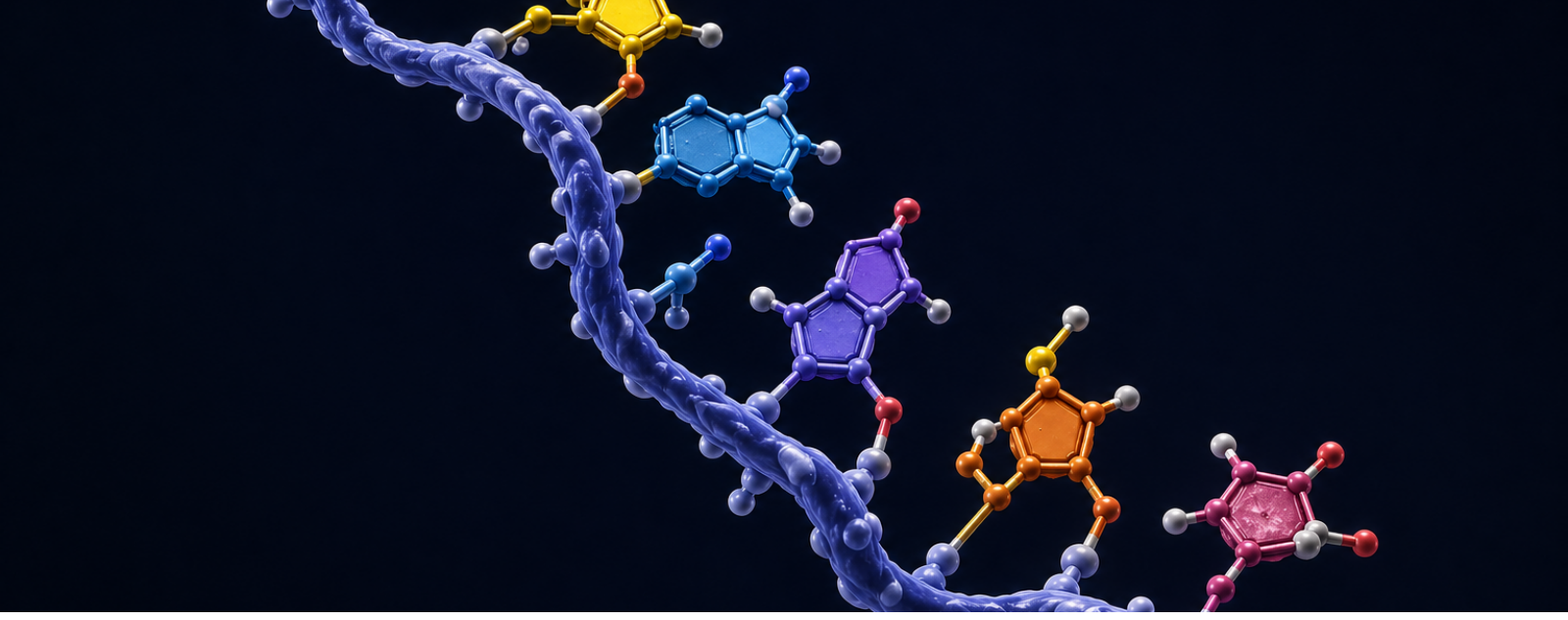
Practical & pragmatic: Efficient, service-oriented manufacturing for biologics

Predictable & controlled: Large-scale API/small molecule production focused on cost efficiency.



Apply qualitative tools to align soft skills with the chosen strategy.

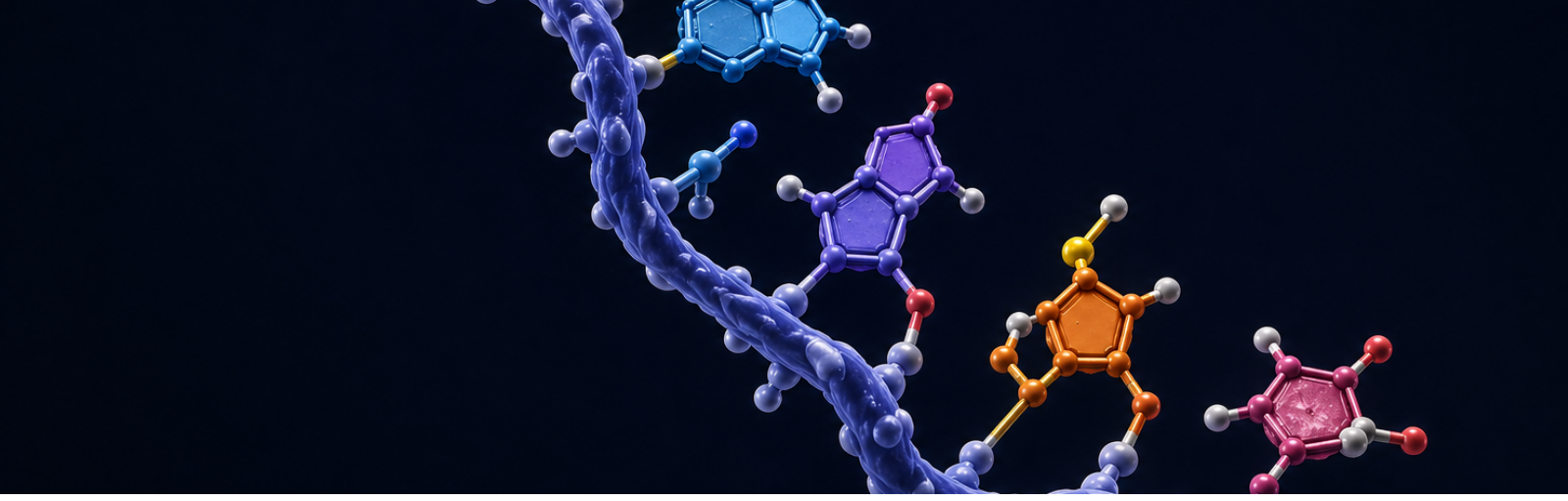
In this white paper, Chase Partners LLC outlines its approach to identifying and aligning the soft skills CDMO leaders need to execute their chosen strategy.



Impact of xRNA Technologies on the CDMO Landscape

The expansion of xRNA technologies is significantly increasing demand for highly specialized manufacturing capabilities across the CDMO sector. Unlike traditional small-molecule drugs or many biologics, RNA-based therapeutics require complex and highly controlled production processes. These include plasmid DNA production, in vitro transcription (IVT), RNA purification, and advanced formulation strategies such as lipid nanoparticle (LNP) delivery systems, as well as emerging alternative delivery platforms depending on the specific RNA modality. Variations across mRNA, siRNA, antisense oligonucleotides, and next-generation RNA formats introduce additional layers of technical complexity, requiring CDMOs to build adaptable and deeply specialized capabilities. As many pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies—particularly emerging firms—lack this infrastructure internally, reliance on CDMOs continues to grow, driving a rapidly expanding outsourcing market.

At the same time, the rise of xRNA therapeutics is accelerating the evolution of CDMOs from transactional manufacturers into strategic development partners. RNA-based therapies often move rapidly from discovery into clinical development, and sponsors increasingly require integrated support across the full product lifecycle. This includes process development, analytical development, formulation optimization, scale-up, regulatory support, and eventual commercial manufacturing. However, as regulatory agencies continue to adapt frameworks to accommodate the diversity and novelty of RNA modalities, CDMOs are also expected to play a more active role in navigating evolving compliance requirements. This added complexity reinforces their importance as strategic partners but also increases the operational and regulatory burden associated with RNA-based development.



Another defining feature of xRNA manufacturing is the growing importance of flexibility and modular production infrastructure. Compared with traditional biologics facilities, RNA production platforms can be more easily reconfigured to accommodate different molecules, batch sizes, and client needs. This flexibility is particularly important as the field moves toward personalized medicine, targeted therapies, and smaller, more customized production runs. At the same time, regulatory expectations around consistency, quality control, and validation remain stringent, requiring CDMOs to balance agility with rigorous compliance. Facilities capable of rapidly switching between programs while maintaining these standards will hold a significant competitive advantage in this evolving landscape.

The rapid growth of the xRNA field has also triggered substantial investment in manufacturing capacity and strategic partnerships. Pharmaceutical companies, biotechnology firms, governments, and investors are allocating significant capital toward building infrastructure capable of supporting RNA-based therapies at scale. Established CDMOs are expanding through acquisitions, partnerships, and internal investments in RNA synthesis technologies, delivery systems, and advanced analytics. However, evolving regulatory frameworks, particularly as agencies refine approval pathways for diverse RNA modalities—have introduced a degree of uncertainty across the sector. In response, some CDMOs and biotechnology companies have paused or delayed large-scale capital investments, despite strong clinical data and the clear long-term potential of RNA-based therapeutics. This dynamic is creating a more cautious investment environment, where confidence in the future of xRNA remains high, but near-term growth is increasingly dependent on regulatory clarity and alignment.

Finally, the rise of xRNA technologies underscores the importance of leadership and innovation models within CDMOs. Early-stage development across diverse RNA modalities involves scientific uncertainty, evolving platforms, and unstructured problem-solving, requiring leaders who are comfortable navigating ambiguity and driving innovation. As products progress toward commercialization, however, the focus shifts toward operational excellence, process optimization, and standardization—particularly in the context of increasingly complex regulatory expectations. CDMOs that successfully combine exploratory and execution-focused leadership styles—often through cognitively diverse teams—will be best positioned to manage the full lifecycle of RNA-based therapeutics while adapting to both technological and regulatory change.



Leveraging Cognitive Diversity, Why it Matters to CDMOs

Just as a chess grandmaster relies on a balanced mix of pieces, each with unique abilities and strengths, a successful CDMO must assemble a diverse and agile leadership team with complementary skills and expertise. By carefully selecting the right combination of talent, a CDMO can optimize its strategic moves, tackle challenges, and seize opportunities in the dynamic pharmaceutical market.

As the CEO anticipates their next move, it is important to take the time to consider the personality type and critical soft skills of the leadership team, which often results in accomplishing set goals and a higher talent retention rate.

Cognitive diversity is an important factor in reaching these goals. It boosts innovation, problem-solving, and collaboration. Chase Partners-LLC maintains that cognitive diversity is a key element of “innovation leadership” and should be considered as the CDMO selects new members of their leadership team.

Ultimately, victory in the CDMO sector will be achieved by those who can expertly navigate the complexities of the industry, strategically positioning themselves for success, and remaining adaptable in the face of change. As in the game of chess, there are finite and distinct resources, and each move has an important impact on the overall outcome.



Your next move will shape the capabilities required of the next generation of leaders

Now more than ever, CDMOs are making strategic acquisitions that allow them to flexibly and efficiently change their production lines to meet the increasing demand for smaller and more diverse client projects. They will need to stay abreast of these trends to reinforce their position as emerging technology leaders. The SVP of one of the largest cell culture CDMO manufacturing sites in North America said "*CDMO leaders must be ready to fully exploit cultural nuance in planning, executing and optimizing production and introduction of new lines*". Well-positioned CDMOs are making strategic acquisitions (see table 1) that allow them to flexibly and efficiently change their production lines to meet the increasing demand for smaller, more diverse projects for their clients. The CDMO that stays abreast of these trends will reinforce its position as an emerging technology leader.

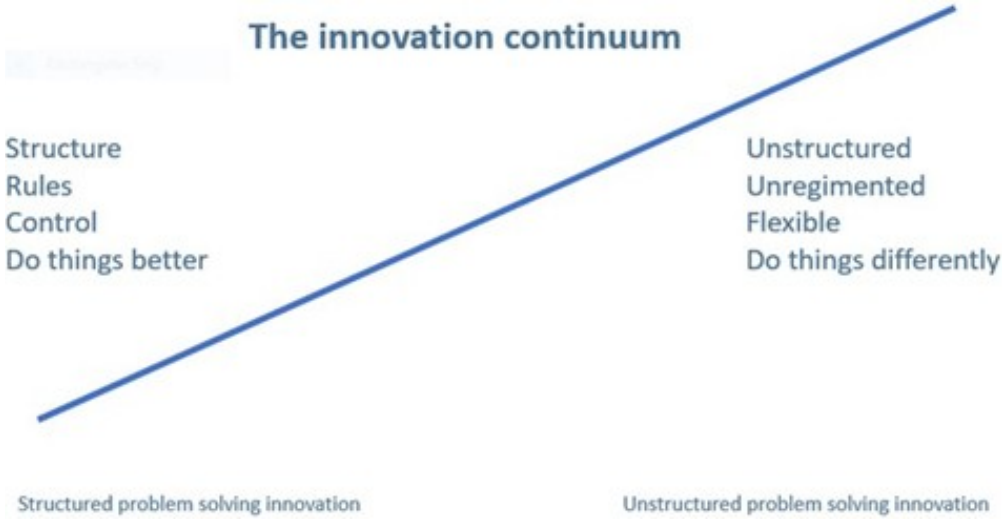
Top 10 CDMOs in mRNA Manufacturing

	Company	Core mRNA Capabilities	Key Strength
1	Lonza	mRNA synthesis, LNP formulation, GMP manufacturing	Large-scale commercial mRNA production; Moderna partnership
2	Thermo Fisher Scientific (Patheon)	RNA manufacturing, process development, fill-finish	End-to-end development and manufacturing services
3	Samsung Biologics	Advanced biologics and mRNA manufacturing expansion	Large-scale biologics infrastructure and rapid capacity expansion
4	ST Pharm	GMP mRNA synthesis and nucleic acid therapeutics	Dedicated RNA manufacturing capabilities
5	Aldevron	Plasmid DNA production and mRNA synthesis	Critical upstream supply for mRNA vaccines
6	Curia	mRNA synthesis, LNP formulation, development services	Advanced modality manufacturing expertise
7	CordenPharma	mRNA and lipid nanoparticle formulation	Integrated RNA and lipid delivery expertise
8	Recipharm	mRNA and viral vector manufacturing	Strong presence in advanced therapies
9	Evonik Industries	Lipid nanoparticle technology for mRNA delivery	Key supplier of delivery systems
10	WuXi Biologics	Nucleic acid and advanced therapy manufacturing	Integrated development platform

Source: Company announcements, industry reports on nucleic acid therapeutics manufacturing, and public disclosures (compiled by the authors).



Fundamental to this success is how well CDMO's hire and cultivate the leadership team. They'll need to foster new entrepreneurial executives who can develop and cultivate the necessary culture of outstanding service. The service oriented CDMOs are setting a clear course toward technology leadership and thus will play an even more important over the next decade; when hiring leaders, they will need to look beyond key technical competencies and lean more heavily on leadership skills such as customer intimacy. Even more, the General Management mindset has become critical for leaders to be successful in CDMOs. CDMO leadership roles in the new landscape will expose individuals to the challenges of making decisions with limited information, operating in an agile environment, and nurturing their teams to balance performance and employee retention.



Fundamental to this success is how well CDMO's hire and cultivate the leadership team. They'll need to foster new entrepreneurial executives who can develop and cultivate the necessary culture of outstanding service. The service oriented CDMOs are setting a clear course toward technology leadership and thus will play an even more important over the next decade; when hiring leaders, they will need to look beyond key technical competencies and lean more heavily on leadership skills such as customer intimacy. Even more, the General Management mindset has become critical for leaders to be successful in CDMOs. CDMO leadership roles in the new landscape will expose individuals to the challenges of making decisions with limited information, operating in an agile environment, and nurturing their teams to balance performance and employee retention.



Chosing the right leader

Our approach is simple and practical. We combine a leader's problem-solving style with insights from a simplified Wardley Mapping, which analyzes a company's value chain and how it delivers products or services. This highlights how a leader's natural style aligns with the role's requirements. We then use the Kirton Adaption-Innovation Inventory (KAI) to assess where a candidate falls on the problem-solving spectrum. This helps predict how well they will fit within the team. At the organizational level, the C-suite shapes the company's innovation climate. A candidate's style may complement or clash with this environment—impacting motivation and retention. The ability to manage these differences relies on "coping behavior," a set of soft skills driven largely by motivation.

When a cognitive gap exists, "Bridgers" needed

A leader who moves between the two has another set of critical soft skills called "Bridging". Ultimately, if the hiring team of a CDMO knows the strategic moves the CEO anticipates, they can find the right "Move Maker" and drive the strategy forward. Remember the adage - "*Ideas are not rejected because of the quality of the idea but because of the person who originally presented it*." A person's problem-solving style is innate and cannot be changed, what can be learned and improved are coping skills.

For instance, if a business has a strategy for a very process-driven direction, the optimal leader will most likely need to be more adaptive. They will naturally focus on product improvement rather than innovation. A leader with an opposing, more innovative style could implement a culture that is more disruptive to an adaptive workforce, and as such, negatively impact productivity and staff contentment. Some of the negative impacts are decreased productivity, higher stress, and lack of buy-in and therefore increased staff turnover hence inflicting high costs due to an opportunity missed here and now.

Understanding cognitive diversity provides the hiring team with additional insights on the leader's problem-solving skill and can match the candidates' soft skills to the aspired culture the company is trying to build.



Plan the move, place the Move Maker

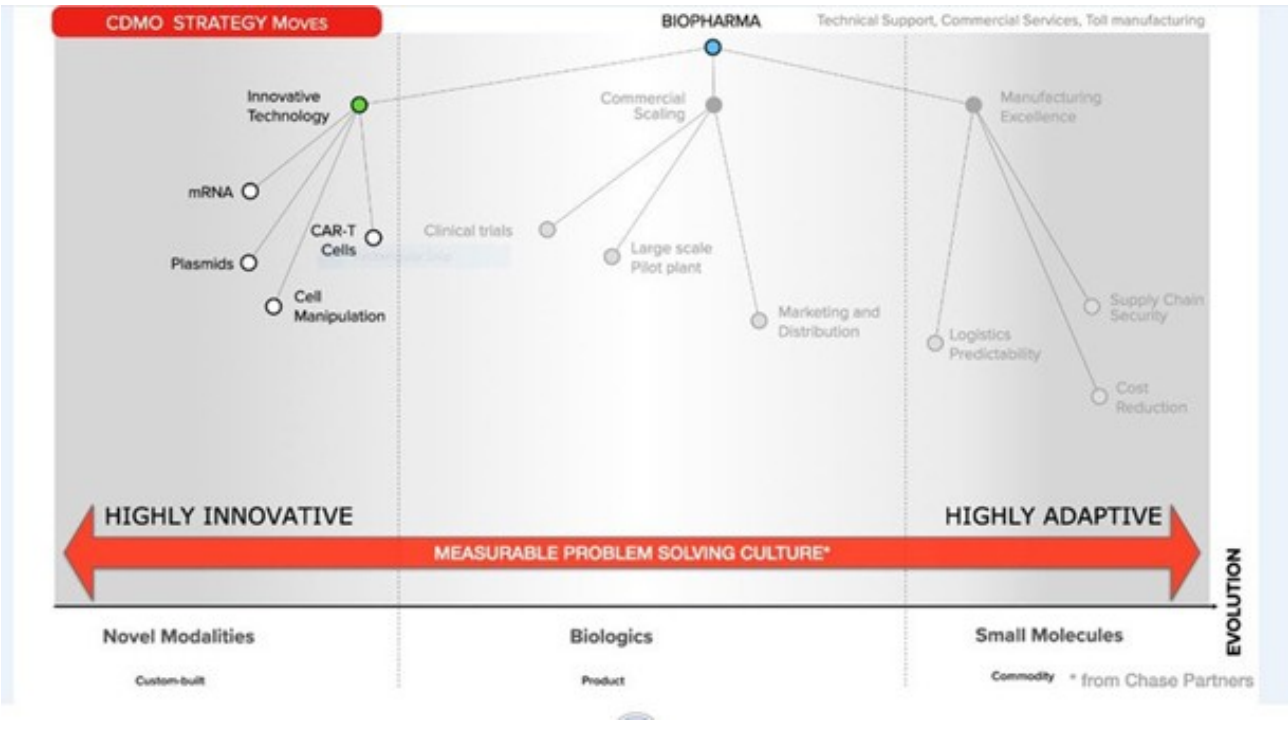
The required leadership qualities will depend on the market position aspired by the CDMO; the ideal leadership team reflects the strategy.

- Are you driving the company to be more innovative and agile in service to mid- size biopharmaceutical companies?
- Or are you looking to improve lean global manufacturing having made several regional acquisitions?
- Perhaps cost improvement is your priority as you prepare for a IPO?
- While the technical skills for both roles are very similar the problem-solving style needed is likely to be very different.

Consider the following t**hree strategies and the type of "Move Makers" best qualified:**

- **Scenario 1**: CDMO A works in frontier medicine favoring a more unstructured problem solving culture.
- **Scenario 2**: CDMO B is an established player in complex biologics favoring balance between unstructured & structured problem solving culture.
- **Scenario 3**: CDMO C is an established player in API & small molecules with strong structured problem solving for large scale manufacturing.

Scenario 1: CDMO A works in frontier medicine favoring a more unstructured problem solving culture



The maturity of the products/services a CDMO manufactures/offers dictates the type of leaders that are needed: a CDMO involved in cell gene therapy will definitely need to be more an "out-of-the box thinker" because tough technological choices / bets will have to be made, compared to a CDMO manufacturing small molecule drugs (eg generics) where the quality of the implementation of manufacturing excellence methodologies and existing toolboxes will make the difference.

CDMO A is often recognized as being innovative in the biopharmaceutical industry. The company has a strong track record of developing and implementing new technologies and processes to improve drug development and manufacturing. They have already developed a range of innovative technologies and platforms that it uses to support its clients' drug development efforts. CDMO A is also known for its focus on continuous improvement and innovation in its operations. CDMO A seeks to develop their Innovation team responsible for identifying new technologies and approaches to improve drug development and manufacturing.

A CEO of a leading CDMO stated "*Working with innovators (start-up companies in particular) at the stage of the clinical studies and being able to support them at these critical phases of their development, is key as this allows them to build a much sought - after customer intimacy and product understanding in anticipation of the commercial manufacturing activities.*"

Our advice for CDMO A's next "Move Maker"

Their new leadership team needs to be visionary, flexible, and collaborative. Your team should be inspired and motivated to embrace change, experiment with new ideas, and strive for continuous innovation. Leaders focusing on innovation and agility must be able to adapt to changing market conditions and emerging opportunities; the leader will prefer “unstructured innovation” or problem solving by “doing things differently”. They should be comfortable with uncertainty and able to pivot their strategies when necessary.

Scenario 2: CDMO B an established biologics player balancing structured and unstructured problem-solving



What is expected from a CDMO is to personalize the service it offers to each of its clients and a CDMO can regularly have more than 20-30 customers in each of its manufacturing sites. Agility and adaptation are therefore key values in this business and it takes years to instill this mindset, especially in factories that are newly acquired from big pharmaceutical companies.

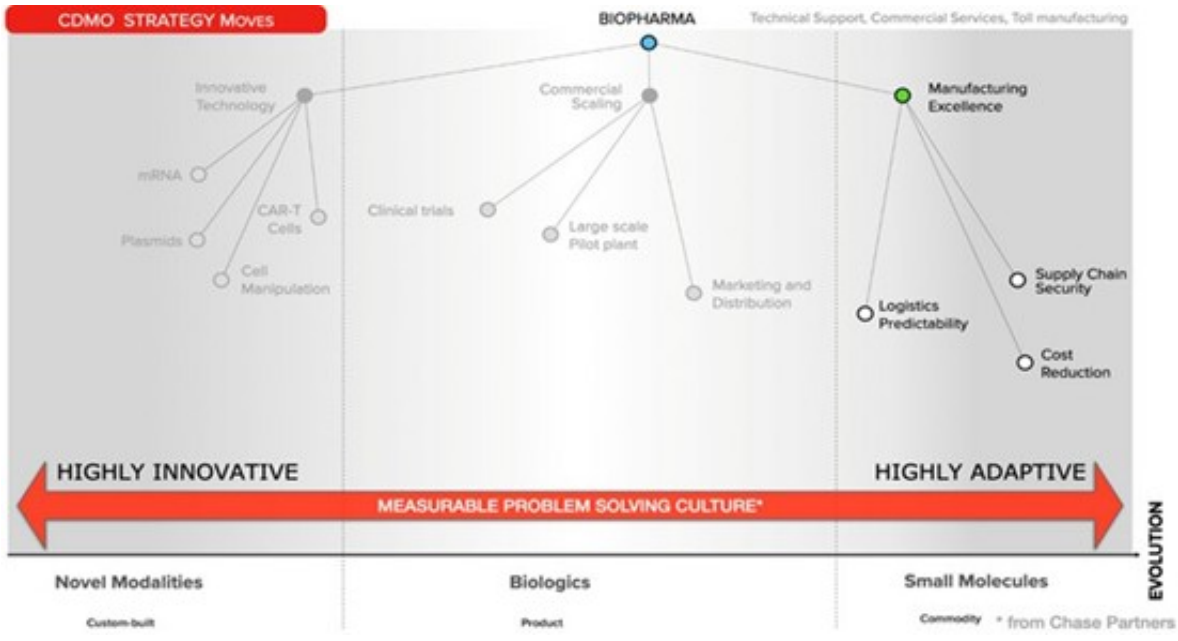
Company B is a leading CDMO specializing in biologics, including monoclonal antibodies, recombinant proteins, and other biologics. They provide services such as cell line development, process development, and cGMP manufacturing for clinical and commercial products. In terms of their culture, CDMO B has an approach which is practical and pragmatic, with a focus on delivering high-quality products and services efficiently.

Our advice for CDMO B's next "Move Maker"

CDMO B prioritizes technology leadership, with a culture of collaboration and outstanding service. First and foremost, this CDMO will need a leader who is technically proficient and has a strong understanding of biologics manufacturing in driving technology leadership and innovation within the organization. "*CDMO leaders must build the organization to attract customers and at the same time be capable of managing both the CDMO stakeholders and customer trust*" said the Site Leader of a CDMO type B organization.

Additionally, CDMO B requires a leader who is customer-focused and can build strong relationships with clients which will help to cultivate a culture of outstanding service provision and effective partnering. Collaboration is also key, so a leader who can foster teamwork and effective communication across departments and teams can help drive innovation and productivity. Adaptability and flexibility are also important qualities, as the CDMO industry is constantly evolving, and leaders need to be able to adjust quickly to changing circumstances and new challenges.

Scenario 3 CDMO C is an established player in API & small molecules with strong structured problem solving for large scale manufacturing



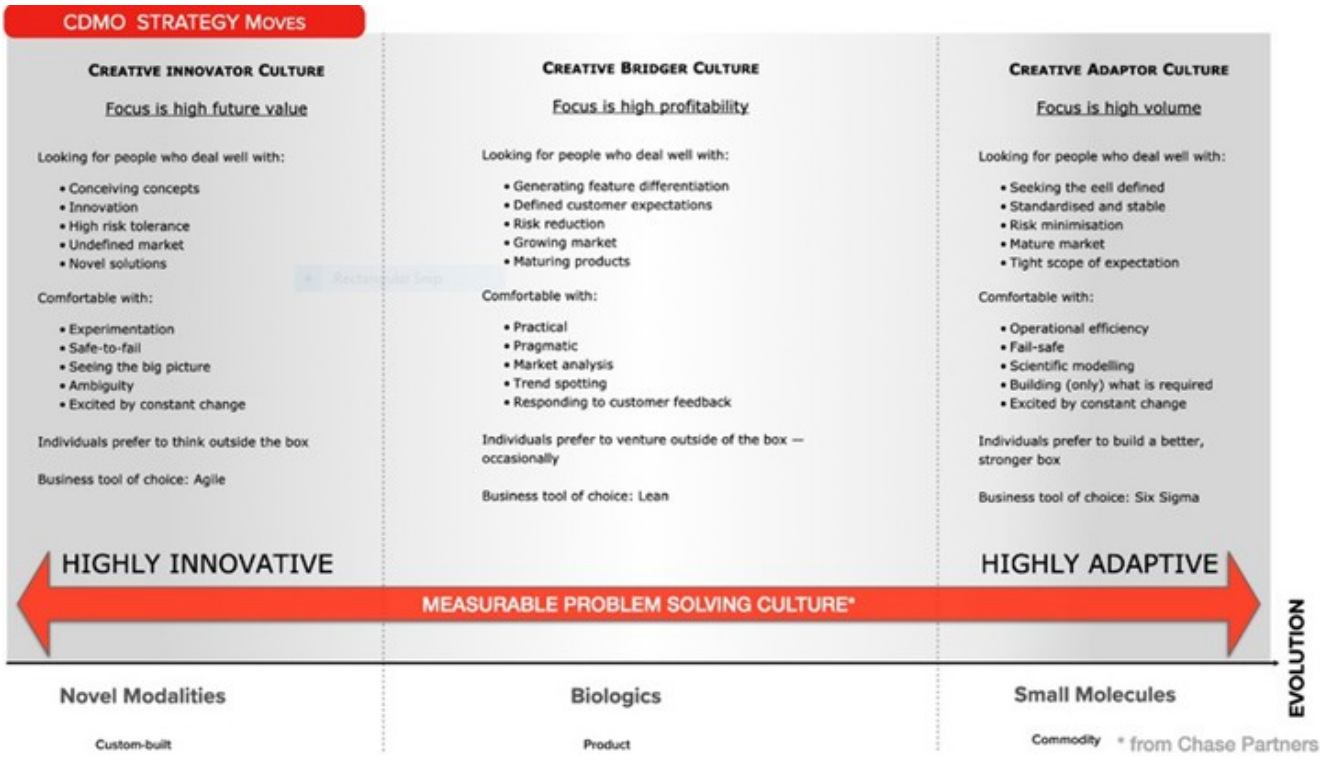
A CEO of similar company to CDMO C said "*CDMOs must add value to its customers and make their life easier so that they can focus on what they are really good at: innovating, promoting their offers, managing their sales channels. This can only be achieved by staying ahead of the crowd in the technologies that matter most, having the available manufacturing capacity and human resources to support their customers' needs and growth, and delivering on the promises made in terms of Quality / Cost / Deliveries i.e. providing a top class service.*"

CDMO C produces small molecule programs; while the company may have implemented some innovative solutions in its operations, its focus appears to be more on lean manufacturing rather than innovation. CDMO C has a reputation for being a leader in lean manufacturing, with a focus on reducing costs, improving quality, and increasing productivity. The company has implemented a range of lean manufacturing techniques and tools, such as Six Sigma, Kaizen, and Total Productive Maintenance, to achieve these goals. CDMO C may have implemented some innovative solutions in its manufacturing processes, such as the use of automation and robotics.

Our advice for CDMO C's next "Move Maker"

The new Leader should be highly adaptive in their problem-solving style and therefore able to identify cost-saving opportunities and make strategic decisions that enhance profitability without compromising quality. For CDMO C, their next leader will prefer "structured innovation", or problem solve by "do things better". These leaders should have a relentless focus on operational efficiency, seeking ways to streamline processes, eliminate waste, and optimize resource utilization. Effective negotiation skills are crucial for leaders seeking cost improvement, as they must be able to secure favorable terms with suppliers, partners, and other stakeholders to reduce expenses and drive value for the organization.

The Hyrbid Team



Of course, CDMO are complex global organizations and could very likely choose a hybrid strategy crossing all 3 categories and therefore soft skill demand on leadership drives up dramatically. Leadership teams now need to have the ability to converge diverse teams with diverse perspectives around a common goal.

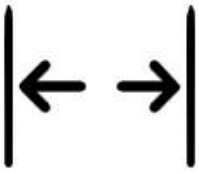
Conclusions



Understand the cognitive diversity of your current leadership team.



Clearly define and align your strategy with your hiring team.



Identify soft skill gap between your current team & hire new leader to help you hit those strategic goals.

Authors







Chase Partners LLC is an owner-based firm based in Boston and Paris and specializes in bridging the trans-Atlantic talent gap of life sciences leaders. We place executives who work across the life cycle of all sectors of development to commercialization. Chase Partners LLC is a small and nimble executive search firm addressing the C-suite and senior management in life sciences. We place a strong focus on cognitive diversity and soft skills especially those vital for success in innovation driven companies.

Jennifer Chase jennifer@chasepartners-llc.com founded Chase Partners in 2019, to focused on recruiting leaders who are driven to change patient lives through creative development and innovation. Jennifer is based in Boston. Nick Hicks nick@chasepartners-llc.com is Head of the Chase Partners, European operations based in their Paris office. He is an advanced KAI practitioner since 2007. In 1997, Jennifer's previous company placed Nick with Sanofi based in Paris. They have worked together ever since.

Dr. Jenkins iwanjenkins@theriotpoint.com has proven his expertise in the field of problem-solving leadership and how it applies to strategy, innovation and marketing. After completing a PhD in Chemistry, Iwan spent the first 20 years of his career fast tracked through techno- commercial roles in the chemical, health, Pharma and natural resources. And did so living on 3 continents.

In the 20 years, Riot Point has helped blue chip companies around the world hone their strategies, marketing and sales efforts, and mergers and acquisitions tactics. His speciality is linking strategy to culture. Through this work he has published in business and the academic press, and is chairman of the KAI Advisory Council, the body which oversees the primary psychological diagnostic tool for determining the problem-solving culture of an organisation.