

Decoding Key Differences: European vs. Chinese Pharmaceutical Projects

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China is known for its rapid and efficient execution of investment projects. But why are projects carried out so quickly? How much faster is China compared to Europe? And what enables the short processing time?

The drivers for accelerated market readiness are diverse: On the one hand, there is intense competition in China, along with high demand from both the expanding market and investors. On the other hand, the centralized government itself sets ambitious time frames for projects of economic significance but also provides favorable conditions, such as less stringent regulatory guidelines.

In China, the duration of an investment project for a typical filling facility, from definition to start manufacturing, is approximately 2.5 years, whereas in Europe, it typically takes up to 4 years. The Chinese achieved an impressive feat with the realization of the world's first COVID vaccine factory in just 10 months, from kick-off to the first vaccine dose.

This speed is only possible through an iterative, goal-oriented project execution following Pareto principles, with early integration of equipment suppliers and a design freeze after the conceptual design. Another fundamental requirement is significantly shorter delivery times for process equipment from Chinese manufacturers.

However, the Chinese approach also carries risks. Unfortunate decisions in early project phases or unexpected discoveries in parallel process development can have a dramatic impact on the project timeline.

What can Europe benefit from China? The key factors for accelerating project execution include short decision-making processes, early equipment definition and ordering, design freeze after the conceptual design, and the judicious use of controlling activities.