

# GlaxoSmithKline: Improving Global Project Management Capability

BY JACQUI ALEXANDER

Because of its operations and organizational structure, global project management is crucial for GlaxoSmithKline. The company has implemented an extensive project management training program to ensure employees around the world have this competency.

**G**laxoSmithKline (GSK) is a research-based company with a wide portfolio of pharmaceutical products across the world. Headquartered in London, it employs more than 100,000 people in 72 countries. The company has a very clear mission: to improve the quality of human life by enabling people to do more, feel better and live longer. For GSK and its employees around the world, turning this mission into a reality requires the management of many large-scale medicine discovery and development projects that can typically run the course of a decade, involve a broad range of business units and consume vast amounts of resources.

The training programs have been working across six sites in the United Kingdom, as well as in Italy and the United States, particularly in Philadelphia and North Carolina. Plans are in place to work similarly in other European GSK centers in France and Spain, and also in Canada.

All the training workshops are face-to-face. None of them are yet run as virtual seminars or Webinars, although GSK is developing its own e-learning program.

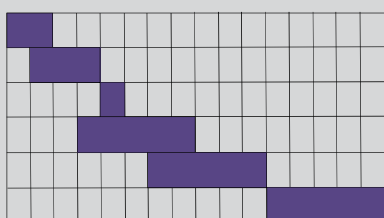
In 2006, GSK Research and Development (R&D) launched its iPlan initiative, a global program sponsored at the highest levels of management. The initiative sought to improve people capabilities and processes, enabling technologies and support services to deliver integrated project and portfolio planning. Key aspects of the approach include:

- Defining the planning process, responsibilities and key practices.
- Live piloting of the new processes, practices, work breakdown structures and IT enablers in various medicine development teams to learn, refine and confirm the effectiveness of the changes.
- Extensive project management education and development.
- Selecting and validating an enterprise project management system.
- Integrating project and clinical development planning.
- A targeted communication strategy to engage and build momentum for the change program.

To make this ambitious initiative a success and roll it out effectively throughout such an expansive orga-

Because of its operations and organizational structure, global project management is a major force in the organization. Joining up the different projects across the different workforces has to be as effective and streamlined as possible, not least in terms of enabling all the project team members to understand exactly what their colleagues and managers need, and do.

To that end, GSK has worked for the past five years to develop and implement project management training at every conceiv-



## DID YOU KNOW?

Mechanical engineer and management guru Henry Gantt (1861-1919) has been called the father of modern project management. He also developed the Gantt chart, a table of bars that depicts the progress of various elements of a project, which is used to this day.

Source: *The International Institute of Management*

nization, GSK leaders knew they would need help from experts in the delivery of large-scale performance improvement training in project management.

### Strategy

Initial meetings showed that tailoring, cooperation and internal support would be keys to GSK's strategy. In order to ensure relevance of content for its employees, GSK asked training provider ESI International to not only customize its courses to cover specific GSK topics, but also to allow company experts to work alongside the instructors and co-teach the courses.

Along with relevance, GSK leaders also understood that internal support was vital to the success of the iPlan program. The company already had executive backing. However, to ensure support among its employees throughout the organization, GSK took to recruiting internal-line champions from various business units. These champions were tasked with assuring the course material was relevant and, equally important, that it generated awareness and enthusiasm for the overall training initiative. To date, the company has 40 active line champions.

### Tactics

GSK crafted a number of courses for its employees, including an introductory program that defines the roles within a project team and how to be an effective team member, as well as a more advanced class that focuses on project planning for team members. Other course topics included accountability and practical risk management that helped participants understand the risks and opportunities inherent in drug-development projects.

For the delivery of courses, GSK used on-site training and sent instructors to locations around the world to teach classes.

### Results

With more than 1,000 GSK employees trained to date — and many more currently queuing up for courses — the company has managed to change individual behavior, particularly regarding risk management. Project team members now use a common language to identify the risks on their projects and approach risk management in a more consistent way, which is having an effect throughout the entire organization. There is a clear mandate from

To ensure support among its employees throughout the organization, GSK took to recruiting internal-line champions from various business units. These champions were tasked with assuring the course material was relevant and that it generated awareness and enthusiasm.

senior management that all new projects come with a detailed risk plan to be reviewed before a project is given the green light for large-scale development.

### Next Steps

GSK's commitment to performance improvement through training will continue. The company now has begun working on the development of a center for project management resources for the entire R&D organization. In addition, GSK leaders plan to continue reviewing employee feedback regarding individual training courses, measure progress against its many performance benchmarks and build a training program that will take project management to the next level of maturity within the R&D enterprise. **CLO**

*Jacqui Alexander is director of project management learning and change management at GlaxoSmithKline. She also is a member of the International Coach Federation and an associate member of the Association for Coaching. She can be reached at editor@CLOmedia.com.*