

Case Study: Redesigning a Project Team System for Scalability

Managing cross-functional product development in a matrix structure, whether in drug development or technology product development, presents tremendous challenges

Background

The drug development organization of a biotech company was struggling to keep chaos at bay in the midst of a period of explosive growth: in three years the number of molecules had doubled, project teams had tripled and staff had grown by 70%. With more growth ahead, the Head of Development knew his organization clear accountabilities and a more scalable model. Senior managers concurred that roles and accountabilities were unclear, but beyond that, there was limited agreement on the root causes or the magnitude of the challenge. S&A was engaged to diagnose the situation, define recommendations, and assist in implementing a solution.

Diagnosis

S&A conducted in-depth interviews and facilitated group discussions across the organization. After the results were analyzed, the initial suspicion of “unclear roles” was replaced with a rich, well-supported diagnosis:

- New employees were largely left to figure out the organization and their roles on their own
- Different team structures were proliferating, with every team reinventing the wheel, and differences driven more by personal preferences than logic
- Cross-functional project decisions bubbled up because no one had authority at the team level
- Project management support was haphazard
- Individuals were not held accountable for team roles, so functional responsibilities were always prioritized

From the start, skeptical managers had pointed to successful teams as evidence that the problem was contained and did not merit significant change. S&A’s analysis, however, clearly proved that successes were the result of highly-capable leaders, long work hours, and well-established relationships. With the firm’s continued growth, continuing this “brute force” approach would be risky and unsustainable.

Solution

Once senior management bought into the diagnosis, S&A worked with the client to define initial recommendations. Smaller teams were then tasked with developing detailed proposals to rationalize team structures, establish a strong, empowered team leaders; create decision-making processes; and clearly define roles and responsibilities. The new system was rolled-out in a stages, allowing refinements to be incorporated before full adoption. To drive and sustain this significant change initiative, S&A facilitated planning and execution of communications, training, and continuous improvement programs.

Results

Three years after implementation, a detailed assessment of the team system identified the following benefits:

- It now takes up to one third less effort to make critical, strategic decisions
- Key activities now take weeks or months less thanks to clearly defined roles
- It takes one-third to one-half less time to launch new teams and to transition individuals across teams
- The CMO and his senior managers have more time to focus on strategy and vision and are able to effectively manage the significantly greater

Case Snapshot

Client:	Head of Drug Development
Need:	Rapid growth had led to chaos and inefficiency in product development
Project:	Redesign project teams to ensure clear accountabilities and scalability
Impact:	Improved decision-making, more effective teams, and senior management able to focus on strategic issues

Client Feedback

S&A received “exceeded expectations” ratings from the project sponsor and from the Team System Owner (hired to manage the new system mid-way through the project).

The Team System Owner said this was the most successful change effort she had ever seen and *“The system was so well set up that, after the roll-out, I became less and less necessary and I eventually worked myself out of a job.”*