

Taxol®: An Example of "Fast-Track" Drug Development

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SYNOPSIS

This case describes a synergistic partnership between the drug manufacturer Bristol-Myers Squibb and the National Cancer Institute (NCI). The partnership's purpose was to develop a new cancer drug called Taxol® from the Pacific Yew tree (*Taxus Brevifolia*), to gain approval of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and to produce a sufficient amount of the drug in an extraordinarily short amount of time. This challenging project achieved its time goal remarkably well thanks to factors such as a close and good relationship with the project stakeholders (FDA and NCI) and cross-functional teams. The case describes the brief story of Taxol®'s initial development, its success, and its shortcomings.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

From reading and discussing this case, the students will gain a further understanding of:

- the importance of having a clear goal in a project
- the responsibilities of the project manager
- the pros and cons of being a part of a successful team
- the synergy gained through a partnership
- the impact of clear and wide support from upper management.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND POSSIBLE ANSWERS

1. What was the initial objective(s) of the project? What was the main reason for the achievement of this objective(s)?
 - a. The main goal was clearly to increase the supply of Taxol® so that the National Cancer Institute (NCI) could establish treatment referral centers to provide Taxol® therapy for appropriate patients until the new drug application was approved.
 - b. The reasons this was achieved were: the clear goal, the support of upper management and all of the company making this project the top priority.

open line of communication due to the clear prioritization, and the profitable association between the NCI and Bristol-Myers Squib.

2. Bristol Myers and the NCI worked together to get Taxol® accepted quickly. How is this stakeholder relationship going to affect the long-term aspects of other related projects?
 - a. This close relationship with NCI, essentially making it a stakeholder in the project, should enable Bristol-Myers to clearly communicate its tie with cancer patients. Long term, this relationship should allow the company access to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for other projects involving testing and development in the same area.
3. List a few characteristics of the described project manager's role which you would consider important.
 - a. Arbitrator—Able to solve conflict using creativity.
 - b. Liaison—Work with the FDA on the new drug application.
 - c. Activities Coordinator—Assign and monitor the scheduled activities.
 - d. Facilitator—Make sure that there are no impediments to project tasks. Additional information on the roles of the project manager are described in Chapter 16, Project Leadership, *Project Management: Strategic Design and Implementation*, 2nd ed., by Cleland.
4. After the new drug application had been passed, how would the project manager's job change?
 - a. The project manager would no longer be a stress manager, but would remain as all of the other discussed roles. The project basically will begin a new life-cycle, given its new objectives, etc. The project life-cycle, as discussed in Chapter 11, Project Leadership, *Project Management: Strategic Design and Implementation*, 2nd ed., by Cleland, defines many of the roles of the project manager.
5. When working on the development of Taxol®, how should the project manager have managed and motivated project team members?
 - a. It is described that the project manager tried to foster a "sense of pride" in the project from project team members. This was done through stressing the importance of the work as exemplified by the recognition of the Taxol® work as the priority in the company. The project manager should be conscious of the management of self as described by Cleland in *Project Management* (p. 346) and thus stress the importance and excitement of the work.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION POINTS:

This case comments on the issue of being part of the "star" project in the company. Some of the implications not covered in the case include such challenges as how to deal with former coworkers after joining a highly visible project.

Have the students discuss the pros and cons of such status or success.

The discussion could begin with the responsibility for doing a good job and taking on new responsibilities, and dealing with possibly uncomfortable situations brought about by this success (envy of coworkers, power conflicts, etc.).

Discuss →