How Pfizer created a frictionless drug-development project management system

By Mickey Butts

Drug discovery and development are complex. For every product like Pfizer’s breakthrough COVID-19 vaccine, the pharma giant investigates many more options that could work in clinical testing. That means it has hundreds of active projects under way at any one time. Each of those research and development projects requires a project manager to create project codes and update project status, performance metrics, user experience satisfaction, time spent on updates, and project completion.

To help manage all of this complexity, Pfizer’s digital transformation of its Snapshot project management system into an end-to-end, AI-powered automation tool that tracks hundreds of project elements. Information now flows from project managers into a data warehouse through an intuitive user interface. The data feeds into interlinked dashboards that R&D and operational leadership teams use to track project status and manage risk.

As a result, data went from static status updates that were instantly out of date to real-time data that serve as the single source of truth. Project managers are freed up to do higher-order tasks. Transparency of project risks and any issues that affect the drug delivery timeline increased substantially, enabling early intervention to prevent projects from going “off track.”

“We rolled out the new Snapshot in spring 2020 right as the COVID-19 pandemic hit and forced everyone to work from home,” says Erin Petty, portfolio director of global product development at Pfizer. “Pfizer’s reimagined R&D tool provided a mechanism for ensuring the critical project information that our people needed was readily available online in real time.”

Hundreds of users have benefited from the updated Snapshot, which is faster, easier to use, and includes mandatory form fills around completed goals, minimizing user entry errors.