Digitalize processes and **speed up** development projects

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Collaboration Tool Facilitates Communication

In expert talk, Dr. Torsten Eckardt, Senior Manager PMO and Innovation at Hermes Arzneimittel GmbH, tells DIGITAL PROCESS INDUSTRY editors how the use of agile planning and collaboration software can contribute to the planning of development projects and to the optimization of decision-making processes in the current pandemic situation when project team members are working at different locations.

You already plan your development and organizational projects with a classical project management software. Now you have implemented an agile planning tool which serves to optimize processes during the pandemic situation. What could be a pos-

Amidst the market entry of technology groups like Google, Amazon, Facebook, IBM, and Apple, which want to change the business model of the pharmaceutical and health sector, the classical pharmaceutical sector has come under pressure for change. Innovation processes must be optimized and flexible structures must be established. The digitalization of production processes, and also of information and decision making processes in particular, is an important milestone on the way to a strong market position.

Numerous companies in the pharmaceutical sector are still at the beginning of their digitalization process. Others rely on agile tools on the path they pursue, as the following example will show. Especially in the present corona pandemic crisis situation, coordination and decision processes which are not digitally supported present companies with problems. Instead of coordinating in person, teams now increasingly have to coordinate their work in virtual meetings. Information must be manageable in a flexible way and it must be easily accessible in a central board to all persons involved instead of being set out in phone calls, on paper, or in a local file. But even after this pandemic situation has been overcome, the digitalization of information

and decision making processes will continue to gain in importance since members or decision makers who are to be included in the information process are often geographically dispersed or work from home.

In such times, the management of virtual teams and the informing of stakeholders pose a huge challenge. How does spatially

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and chronologically dispersed communication work? How can managers make sure that employees who work at home are up-to-date in terms of their projects, tasks, and communication with colleagues and customers? How can digital change succeed and how can internal resistances of employees be overcome?

DR. TORSTEN ECKARDT, Senior Manager PMO and Innovation at Hermes Arzneimittel
Image source: all Planta

sible benefit of these tools once the pandemic situation has been overcome?

Torsten Eckardt: We have implemented PLANTA project in 2014, ahead of the pandemic situation, in order to be able to better manage and prioritize our development projects, basic load projects, and organizational projects in a software-aided manner. Both detailed planning of projects and overview of available resources have been optimized that way. We are now able to develop new products faster and with greater cost efficiency. We plan 75 percent of our projects with PLANTA project. We have now implemented the agile planning tool PLANTA pulse by the same manufacturer and are increasingly employing it in project management in order to enhance collaboration in our strategy and development projects. In the current pandemic situation, this tool is particularly suitable
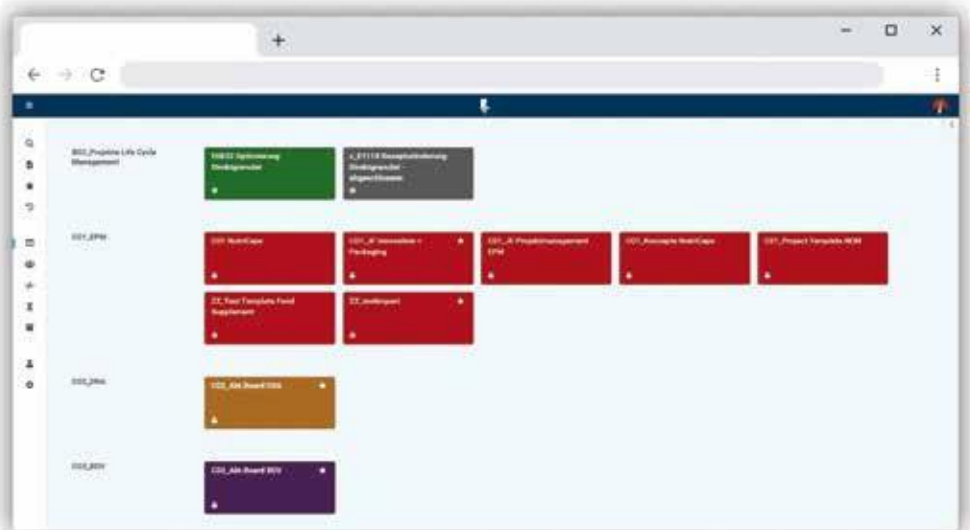

The new planning method comes with greater speed and increased actuality of information for all project team members.

creased actuality of information for all project team members. One cannot rely on everybody to have received the current information - the human factor: Writing in a Kanban board does not substitute personal communication. Some people still have to get used to the fact that they can keep themselves up-to-date via the board. All persons involved in the project benefit from frequent update meetings via PLANTA pulse. If one has not worked agilely before, the new planning method will not be easy. However, one quickly gets used to it in practice.

"Everyone wants to work agilely. However, it is difficult to change previously established rigid ways of communication and the communication culture that goes along with it."

for web-based (mobile) monitoring of strategic projects in which the substantial team members work at different locations. We plan 25 percent of our projects with PLANTA pulse.

Both tools offer major benefits - also beyond the crisis situation: more transparency and greater speed in project planning as well as better informational content, the actuality of information is the same for all project team members.

What problems go along with the integration of an agile planning tool if planning was merely done in a classical way before and how did you solve these problems?

Torsten Eckardt: The new planning method comes with greater speed and in-

Which knowledge/skills should one have in order to implement the agile planning method? What requirements must be met by employees and colleagues who are to work with this method?

Torsten Eckardt: I manage the project management office as a PLANTA pulse system owner and administrator. The advantage here is that everything remains in one hand and new boards are created in line with a clear structure. What I brought in was a basic training in the area of project management. The new tool demands more individual flexibility and responsibility from team members who work with it. The commitment is good. Everybody wants to work agilely but it still remains difficult to change previously established rigid communication paths.

What role does the company management play in the success story of the new planning tool?

Torsten Eckardt: It plays a particularly central and supporting role. By promoting the new planning concept, it contributes to the success of implementation. The company management is highly motivated since it can now get a much quicker overview of the status of projects. All persons involved are seamlessly provided with information and decision-making processes are accelerated that way.

Further questions …..

What are collaboration tools?

Collaboration tools facilitate agile task planning in so-called Kanban boards and contribute significantly to the improvement of communication and of coordination processes, especially in dispersed project teams. If the company already employs classical project management software, some of these tools can be reintegrated in the existing project planning as a hybrid solution. Used agilely only, a collaboration tool facilitates communication among team members and enables them to set out virtual coordination results and tasks centrally for every team member. Changes and progress in tasks become immediately visible, the team members are linked perfectly to one another and everyone is up-to-date, even if they get online at different times and from different locations.