

## **HIMO FIGHTING AGAINST COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

Himo Fighting Pandemic Company (HFPC) is a biopharmaceutical company headquartered in South America, with revenues of \$20 billion. Due to the spread of COVID-19 throughout the world in 2020, HEPC recognized the need for an effective COVID-19 vaccine to defeat the virus. In April 2020 the company joined forces with the Gonja University (GU) to make a meaningful difference and save lives. This landmark partnership brought together world-class expertise in vaccinology with HEPC's ability to deliver a global solution at scale. HEPC's research partners at GU had demonstrated an immune response in preclinical studies and some encouraging early clinical results that provided a basis for confidence that a vaccine could be rapidly developed. HEPC's proven manufacturing capability and global supply chain would enable rapid progress from the research lab to the development of a highly effective vaccine, with a favorable safety profile that could be administered around the world. HEPC and GU pledged to provide the vaccine on a not-for-profit basis. This commitment to broad and equitable access ensured that the vaccine would be available at cost during the pandemic and accessible to low-income countries after the pandemic subsides. To be successful, HEPC would have to make every dollar count. As of July 2021, HEPC had already released 1 billion doses for supply to 170 countries.

From the moment HEPC publicly announced a vaccine partnership with GU on April 30, 2020, the process it undertook was unlike that of any other technology it had developed in the past, with vastly more uncertainty, complexity, and visibility. The uncertainties and reputation risks inherent in the vaccine project were significant. The company had to dedicate resources and top talent to the project without compromising the rest of the company's operations. It was keenly aware of the reputational risk associated with delivering a vaccine on a global scale at unprecedented speed. The risk management process would also require close, frequent contact between project and senior leadership teams.

The need to move quickly drove the project's complexity. Due to the accelerated timeline of the vaccine project, HEPC had to manage clinical trials while simultaneously ramping up manufacturing capacity. The project's complexity also increased with every new customer. The primary customers were governments seeking to immunize their populations, and each government brought its own regulatory requirements and compliance framework to the table, adding to the contracting and compliance challenges. An increased global need for the vaccine gave this project prominence unlike any other for drug development. Many countries

were demanding the supply of vaccines and therefore forced the company to work out loud on a global scale

HEPC planned to strengthen its project management capabilities to manage the increased demand for vaccines. As a way toward strengthening the project management capabilities, HEPC quickly identified three gaps that were required to be filled in the process. These gaps include 1) inadequate internal project managers experienced in vaccine development, 2) lack of well-defined project management processes fit for moving at the speed the vaccine project required, and 3) lack of an internal government contracting organization that could support the project. Before addressing these gaps, the project management infrastructure was necessary to address the unique challenges of this project. The first step was to create a project management Department (PMD). Before COVID, the HEPC's R&D unit did not have a PMD because the types of projects it managed didn't require the capabilities of a dedicated department. The vaccine project was a different story which required a strong department to manage the project. However, the main question toward the establishment of the department was the roles that a typical Project Management Department would fit HEPC.

The next challenge was to staff the PMD. Hiring externally would have taken time that the project didn't have, so Dr Robatinabi who was the Chief Executive Director of HEPC started her search internally, looking for people within her existing team of 80 project managers, as well as people outside the team with relevant experience in their careers. Drawing on her knowledge of their backgrounds and feedback from others across the company, Robatinabi staffed the vaccine team with people who had worked on government contracts or vaccine projects in the past. One person, for example, had worked for a company that helped other drug manufacturers secure government contracts, and another had worked on government contracts for a company HEPC had acquired. "The PMD put the structure and resources in place to allow the technical teams to focus on the deliverables amid great complexity, a pandemic, and under extreme pressure. One critical capability that Robatinabi couldn't find internally was project management experience in both vaccine development and government contracting. So she decided to hire from the outside, and with the cooperation of HR, was able to onboard Mr. Mchongo as a new project manager in a week, despite the challenges of recruiting during the pandemic.

The newly hired project manager, however, would have to play a different role than in a typical HEPC's R&D project whereby the project manager would often serve as a

relationship manager with the external partners, contractors, or customers, negotiating the contract with support from the project staff while also managing the project. Unfortunately, the vaccine project was too big, complex, and risky for the project manager to have such a broad role and therefore required experienced experts to focus on the key contract management roles and lead the project management team to manage contractual relationships in big projects with governments worldwide. The newly created PMD proved invaluable for easing the project manager's responsibilities in contract management, schedule and budget integration, compliance, and risk management, enabling him to focus primarily on the efforts of the project team.