Alliance leadership spotlight

Jarrod Midboe on Using alliance metrics to implement a collaborative culture

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Good results with partners today do not imply a sustainable partnering strategy. Over time, I've observed that an organization needs a solid core to ensure consistent success with partners.

Culture, while sometimes overlooked due to its conceptual vagueness, is a key pillar and it can be shaped through simple metrics and processes.

The challenge of implementing culture

If you have been in alliance management for some time, you know how to anticipate successful innovators and subject matter experts to potentially be protective of sharing a piece of their work for the opportunity to optimize a partnership.

In many cases the contributors may be right to protect these assets, unless mutual benefit is clearly illustrated.

When I was working with pharmaceutical development teams to build around a commercial asset with an alliance partner, requesting valuable perspective on process or formulation, development seemed guarded until a certain level of trust was established around the strategic objectives. Once trust had solidified, transparent communication with alliance partners resulted in noticeably improved efficiency and less need to speculate.

However, at scale, the more insular the corporate culture, the more challenging it can be to partner successfully. To sustain alliance success, intentional efforts are required to create a collaborative culture. In my experience, a fair-minded Alliance Management Program with sound metrics can (and did) re-orient a highly internalized company culture and serve as a stable runway to achieve alliance success at scale.

Keys to a collaborative corporate mindset

In this example, to achieve this collaborative culture, both partners adopted a more collaborative position with business partners and stakeholders. As the counterpart Alliance Managers, it was our role to push the key stakeholders out of their comfort zone.

I planned for risk and prepared to counter negative stakeholder perspectives such as 'there is a lot of risk in continuing investment in the alliance given the risks and delays in progress' with positive perspectives such as 'there is tremendous opportunity in pressing through adversity

due to continuing potential for impactful return on shared investment and illustrate the likelihood of success’.

This same evaluation provided me with concrete information to support productive renegotiation of the agreement terms or grounds to discontinue based on a shift in potential value, in place of basing decisions on instinct.

Either way, access to reliable metrics helped me to build trust between partners and stakeholders and move in the direction of a more collaborative mindset. The metrics themselves will be specific to your alliance, alliance goals and stakeholder objectives.

One of the metrics I used was the percentage of deliverables met on time. This helped reflect each partner's reliability and accountability in meeting agreed timelines and milestones, in a relatively short period of time, fostering trust and encouraging collaboration.

I’ve noticed across many joint initiatives that one of the biggest risks to a collaborative culture are changes to executive leadership and corporate objectives throughout the course of an alliance relationship. These changes can significantly impact that collaborative culture that you have built. To counter this, position the alliance to new stakeholder(s) as a key instrument for organizational growth, focusing on the strategic impact an alliance is intended to deliver.

To maintain and strengthen a collaborative culture amidst these shifts, it’s essential to lay a solid foundation. This starts with clear goals, strong alignment, and actionable metrics. Below is a checklist to help build and sustain that culture.

Checklist for building a collaborative culture

1. Define Your Objectives and Brand

- Define objectives early and revisit often to stay aligned and navigate differing opinions.
- Focus on shared value, emphasizing the alliance's greater purpose over individual perspectives.
- Address resistance by encouraging transparency, acknowledging risks, and aligning stakeholders on shared goals.
- Create a unique alliance brand with meaningful names or updates to foster recognition and unity.

2. Establish Key Metrics

- Set metrics that align with strategic goals and track progress against the value proposition.
- Use metrics to evaluate plans, request investments, or negotiate concessions fairly.
- Ensure metrics support realistic stakeholder goals and leverage institutional knowledge.
- Avoid biased measurements to unlock missed opportunities and enhance growth potential.

3. Put the Metrics in Action

- Track detailed team metrics and summarize them in dashboards for executives.
- Schedule recurring governance meetings to optimize plans and align with strategy.
- Encourage stakeholders to identify risks early, enabling proactive and efficient resolutions.
- Use metrics as guideposts to adapt quickly and collaboratively when challenges arise.

A sustainable collaborative culture

Building a collaborative culture and realizing shared alliance objectives can be accomplished by leveraging reliable metrics and some best practices to steer through adversity and optimize your organization's ROI in the collaboration.

A focused and flexible metrics-based approach can help drive innovation, leverage collective expertise effectively, and build resilient partnerships, ensuring sustainable success while staying adaptable to evolving challenges and opportunities.

About the alliance leadership spotlight series

The alliance leadership spotlight series is a joint initiative of The Association of Strategic Alliance Professionals (ASAP) and allianceboard. It aims to showcase Alliance Management professionals taking the lead in addressing challenges and driving alliance success - to share experiences in the alliance management community.

Visit our websites to read more stories of alliance leadership or let us know if you have a story to contribute by writing to contact@allianceboard.com.

ASAP and allianceboard are long-standing strategic partners combining state-of-the-art resources, best practices, and software to support ever-evolving collaboration models.

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