

The Power of Data

Alliance Management Teams Can Maximize Their Influence and Impact by Leveraging AI, Automation, and Advanced Analytics, If They Have a Key Ingredient: Quality Data

By Louis Rinfret, PhD

We often speak about the importance of exercising influence in alliance management—as in, "Alliance managers need to influence without authority." That is likely to continue to be true. But what if there was a resource that could lend alliance professionals some of that authority and thus strengthen their influence?



In fact, there is: it's your alliance *data*. Data is one of the essential building blocks that make up a strong alliance management function, contributing to improved alliance operations, supporting clearer communication and stakeholder engagement, and promoting better, faster decision making. Having quality, consistent data at your fingertips underpins the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), automation, and advanced analytics, all in the service of better collaboration, improved alignment, higher-level strategic insights—and most important, more optimal alliance outcomes.

But what data should you have? Where does it reside? And how can you make it work for you and your alliances?

We Need This Information Now—but Where Is It?

For many alliance leaders and their teams, the answers to those questions can be hard to come by. And while data *should be* an essential element of

any alliance management function, it often isn't. Why? Because one of the challenges alliance managers face is that in many cases, crucial alliance data remains patchy and unstructured—residing in emails, spreadsheets, contracts, meeting minutes, personal notes, or even in people's memories—and is often scattered piecemeal throughout an organization. This makes it harder to gather and organize relevant alliance data, raising the potential danger that important decisions, risks, opportunities, or obligations either are not optimally addressed and managed—or are missed altogether.

In addition, lacking a central repository for alliance data and an effective system for organizing it and reporting out can result in a profusion of discrete, ad hoc requests for information and "status reports"—and thus lead to inefficient stakeholder engagement, suboptimized decision making, and too much of alliance managers' time devoted to what should be routine (i.e., automated) activities. Finally, the more consequential alliances are to an organization's bottom line, and the bigger and more complex they become, the greater the need to manage alliances strategically at scale—which can't be achieved efficiently with a scattershot, disorganized approach to data and information.

Using Data Strategically and Operationally to Address Alliance Management Goals, Tasks, and Challenges

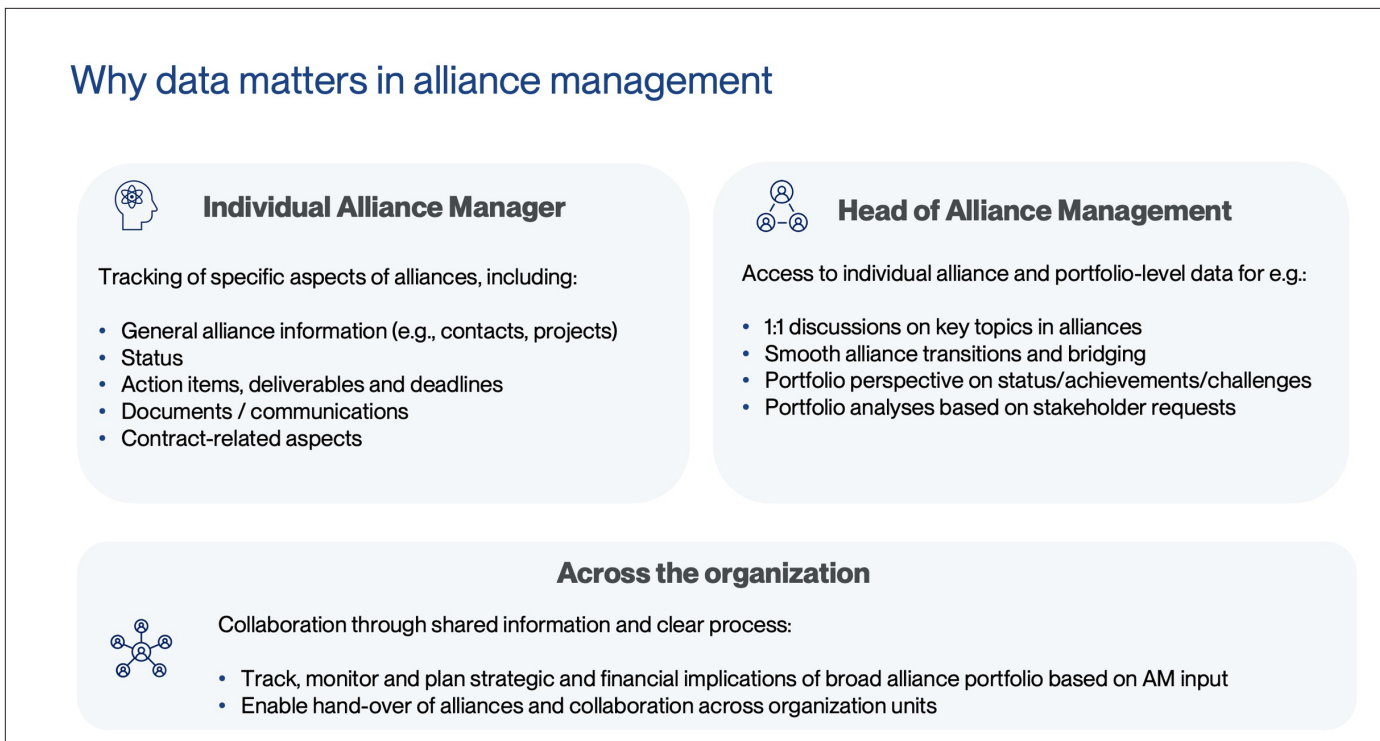
The process of systematizing and optimizing the management of alliances represents an ongoing challenge for the profession, with many bumps in the road. Nowhere is this more true than in the organization of key alliance data and the effort to leverage it both strategically and operationally.

Our analysis has identified some of the key goals, tasks, and challenges of alliance management as practiced in the biopharma industry. Experience has also shown us that having quality alliance data—structured, organized, and readily accessible to those who need it—is critical to achieving these goals, getting tasks done, and overcoming common biopharma alliance challenges.

Goals:

The *goals* of Biopharma alliance management include:

1. **Maximizing Value Creation:** Alliance teams aim to leverage combined resources, expertise, and networks to deliver products or services that surpass what a single entity could achieve alone.



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2. **Minimizing Risks:** Managing business, human, and legal risks is essential to safeguard the alliance's value and reputation.
3. **Ensuring Operational Efficiency:** Despite inherent inefficiencies, teams strive to streamline processes and maintain productivity.

Tasks:

In order to accomplish these goals, certain tasks must be part of any effective alliance practice. These include:

1. **Strategic Alignment:** Aligning the goals of all partners to ensure a unified direction.
2. **Risk Management:** Addressing business risks, legal uncertainties, and human dynamics proactively.
3. **Governance:** Establishing and maintaining frameworks for decision making, dispute resolution, and progress monitoring.
4. **Communication and Coordination:** Facilitating seamless interaction among stakeholders to prevent misalignment and inefficiencies.

Challenges:

And the *challenges*? As alliance managers know, there are many. And the challenges grow as the number and different types of alliances proliferate and become more complex. They include:

1. **Inherent Inefficiencies:** Alliances require coordination that often slows decision making compared to in-house projects. These may stem from complex governance structures, contractual ambiguity, and competing strategic priorities.
2. **Divergent Priorities:** Partners may have conflicting objectives or operational styles, complicating collaboration with ongoing uncertainty and possible changes.
3. **Human Risk:** Personality clashes, trust deficits, and organizational politics can amplify alliance risks exponentially.
4. **Resource Constraints:** Balancing alliance project demands with limited time, budget, and staff.



The Shift from Tactical and Reactive to Strategic and Influential

To overcome these challenges and deliver the value senior leaders expect from increasingly complex collaborations, alliance managers need a paradigm shift from being tactical and reactive to being more strategic and influential. Having good data—and making sure it is efficiently organized, structured, and accessible to those who need it—is the crux of this transition.

Without a systematic approach, alliance managers must devote excessive time and energy to what are essentially administrative tasks rather than engaging in higher-level, more strategic and impactful activities. Add to this the relatively high turnover rate in alliance management teams, which further imperils the continuity of alliance knowledge and institutional memory, and we can see that the situation is far from ideal.

Systematizing Alliance Management: Three Levels

We're all familiar with productivity tools like Excel, PowerPoint, Teams, and SharePoint—and nowadays ChatGPT—and they all have their utility. But a specialized platform and repository for alliance information and data is something else entirely. Such a platform should be fit for purpose: that is, it should support alliance management by facilitating the efficient capture, collaboration, and analysis of alliance data, all of which are crucial for optimizing alliance performance and outcomes.

There are three levels at which alliance management should be systematized and harmonized for optimal alliance outcomes. We'll take a look at each of these three levels—data, collaboration, and insights and intelligence—in turn.

Systemizing alliance management on 3 levels

System of insights

Advance insights, connecting the dots

Can we inform decision-making and drive outcomes at scale?

- Decisions backed by predictable, quality data
- AM serving as a reliable advisor to departmental stakeholders

System of collaboration

Engage and generate alignment

How do we foster alignment and agility?

- Real-time access to shared information with appropriate access control
- Generates clarity and alignment among AM team members and stakeholders

System of record

Consistent, quality data across the portfolio

Do we consistently collect the right data across our alliance portfolio?

- Defines what information is important for each tier and type of alliance
- Foundational step needed to benefit from AI, automations and insights

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Collecting the right data across your alliance portfolio

Entities

- Partners
- Contracts
- Alliance projects & assets
- Governance committees

Characteristics

- Partner types
- Partner tiers
- Regions/territories
- Alliance project types
- Therapeutic areas

Plans, activities & progress

- Key updates
- Status/health
- Timelines
- Events
- Deliverables
- Goals/milestones
- Decisions
- Issues, risks
- Payments

Documents and artifacts

- Contacts and amendments
- Emails and communications
- Presentations, agendas, minutes, other documents

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A System of Record: Do we consistently collect the right data across our portfolio?

At the most basic level—and underpinning everything else—the relevant data must be consistently, systematically collected for each type and tier of alliance across the portfolio. This is the first, most fundamental step required to benefit from automation, glean critical insights about alliances (see below), and avoid the inefficiencies associated with having patchy, scattered alliance data. A structured framework should be established to capture and manage information across the alliance portfolio with consistent terminology to ensure clarity and alignment among team members.

The kinds of data to be collected will vary depending on the number and types of alliances involved (see "Milestones achievement," opposite page), but typically include everything from information on partners, alliance contracts, and governance committees to status updates and tracking of milestones, deliverables, decisions, and payments related to specific alliances. Alliances can be further segmented by partner type, tier, geographic region, and/or therapeutic area. Finally, basic contact information for alliance team members, stakeholders, and partner counterparts should be housed digitally for easy access, along with governance committee meeting minutes, email communications, and other key documents gathered from the early stages of search and evaluation all the way through the operation and termination phases of each alliance.

In parallel, information gained from external sources can help drive better decision making and strategic planning. News about partner organizations, financial reports and analyst calls, and competitive market intelligence can be gathered, analyzed, and combined with the more fundamental data noted above to create a fuller picture of the strategic context in which alliances operate.

A System of Collaboration: How do we foster alignment and agility?

Alliances do not thrive in silos, and they cannot deliver their intended value in the absence of genuine collaboration and alignment. Efficient collaboration requires real-time access to shared information for alliance team members, relevant functional leads, and other stakeholders, with appropriate controls in place. Facilitating seamless collaboration in this way provides clarity, enables

Deriving insights from data to influence and drive outcomes

Ensuring timely achievement of alliance goals

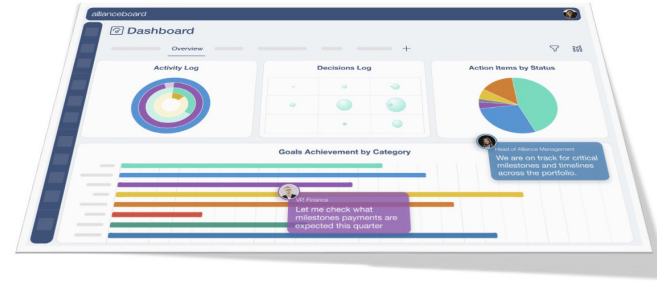
- Alliance goals from governance committees
- Governance schedule and preparation
- Decisions and deliverables to achieve goals
- Action items and contractual obligations
- Open issues, risks and mitigations

Sharing knowledge and informing decisions

- Detailed history and key communications
- Decision/issue/risk log over time

Demonstrating value and impact

- Baseline vs actual timelines
- Risks management and impact
- Health/status/KPIs
- Pipeline progression



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alignment, and promotes agility within the organization, especially in dispersed work environments.

When appropriately housed and accessible, good data helps enable collaboration and is necessary to implement an effective alliance operating model. When alliance data is shared as the "single source of truth," it can also help team members and stakeholders self-serve and better understand the alliance situation and strategic context and agree on a plan of action to move forward. Finally, better stakeholder engagement and alignment leads to further insights in a process that feeds on itself: i.e., the data gets better over time as more information is shared and added from more sources, leading to more reliable and actionable insights.

A System of Insights: Can we inform decision making and drive outcomes at scale?

This third level, insights and intelligence, focuses on leveraging the data that is collected to inform decision making and drive strategic outcomes—at scale. It emphasizes the importance of transforming raw data into insights that enable timely and informed decisions by stakeholders. With an intelligence layer supporting decision making, much like in other business functions, alliance leaders can more effectively steer alliances toward success, connect the strategic dots, and even become trusted advisors on whom senior leadership relies.

Having better insights into alliances helps alliance leaders better tell the story of alliances, painting a picture that can be communicated up and down the organization. This story can be conveyed and segmented in a variety of ways and tailored to the specific audience (e.g., senior leaders, functional leads, etc.), including at the levels of individual alliances, portions of the alliance portfolio (e.g., therapeutic areas), or the whole portfolio while relating to partner tiers and types. In addition, predictive analytics and AI can be applied to the data at hand, providing better and faster insights and intelligence.

These insights can be gleaned at different levels of analysis—for example, at the portfolio level, for basic demographic information such as:

- How many alliances do we have in a particular geographic area within a certain business area (e.g., therapeutic area or business unit)

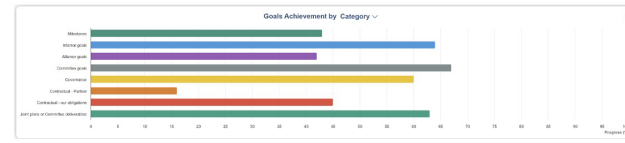
Milestones achievement

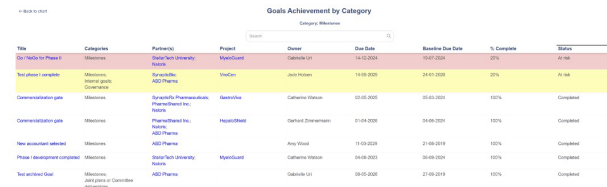
Why

- Demonstrates the alliance's ability to deliver on goals and timelines.
- Tracks progress on key development milestones, such as clinical trial completions, regulatory submissions, and product launches.

What

- Percentage of milestones achieved on time.
- Delays vs. plan and root causes.
- Impact of milestone achievements on revenue projections or market positioning.





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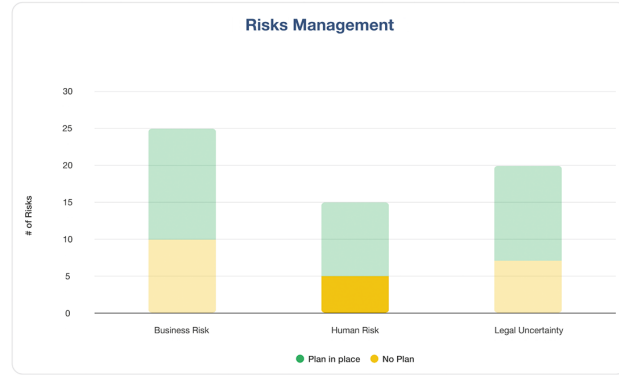
Risks management

Why

- Reflects the efficiency and effectiveness of addressing challenges and mitigating risks.
- This can help foster trust and collaboration between partners.

What

- Average time to resolve critical issues.
- Number and types of unresolved risks or recurring issues.
- Correlation of risk resolution speed with project outcomes.



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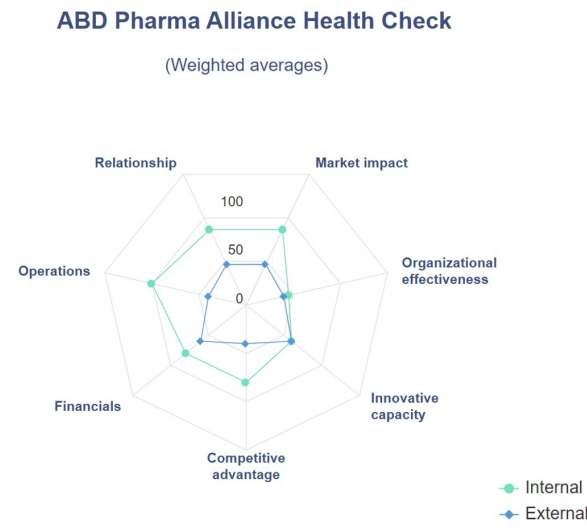
Operational collaboration metrics

Why

- Highlights the health of the working relationship and operational alignment between partners.
- A robust collaboration fosters better outcomes.

What

- Satisfaction and engagement levels across internal and external stakeholders (e.g., participation in joint governance meetings).
- Number of joint decisions made collaboratively.
- Communication effectiveness, such as frequency and quality of updates or meeting participation rates.



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- How many alliances do we have at each stage of development for each type of alliance in our portfolio?

Similarly, a segment of the portfolio—such as an individual therapeutic area or product line—may be analyzed to understand the nature and status of each segment of the portfolio. Operational information such as risks, financials, key goals, and milestones can be layered onto this basic information to further understand the portfolio or some of its segments. Finally, at the partner or individual alliance project level, both process and outcome data and information can be used to gain understanding and steer alliances efficiently:

- The history of each alliance, key events, milestones, amendments, decisions, and supporting documents and communications can be accessed and used as sources of information to understand a specific collaboration.
- Current status of operational elements including key decisions, risks and their management plans, and opportunities, as well as alliance goals and deliverables, can be seen, providing an overview of the overall health of the partnership.
- Forward-looking goals, plans, events, and meetings as well as key milestones and their dependencies can be used to support planning for and achievement of desired outcomes.

Having a clear and consistent picture of each alliance serves both to steer individual alliances effectively and efficiently and also to derive learnings and connect the dots across alliances and at the portfolio level for the head of alliance management and senior leadership.



Looking Ahead

Across the business world, more data is becoming available than ever before, along with more advanced ways of processing data to support high-quality, timely decision making. All the more reason, then, that business leaders increasingly make significant decisions leveraging insights gleaned from data, rather than merely relying on gut instinct.

For alliance management, deciding what data gets collected, where and how it is organized and stored, how it is reported out and shared, and who gets access to it is fundamental to establishing the importance of alliances and demonstrating the value they create. The enlightened use of alliance data as a "single source of truth" not only will make it easier and more efficient to manage and operationalize alliances at scale, but will help elevate the profile of the profession at a time when collaborations are becoming more critical to many organizations' pipelines and bottom-line revenues.

When organized, systematized, and made appropriately accessible, quality data can help tell the story of alliances within an organization, painting a picture of how they contribute to achieving the organization's strategic goals. With data at the ready, alliance managers and leaders can become not only trusted advisors to their executive teams, but a driving force in strategic planning and decision making going forward. Understanding the power of data—and how to collect, store, and harness it—will help strengthen the hand of alliance professionals, extending their influence across their organizations and beyond.

***Louis Rinfret**, PhD, is the founder and CEO of allianceboard, an alliance management Software-as-a-Service solution empowering alliance teams to consistently track alliance information, automate routine activities, and leverage powerful insights to drive alliance success at scale.* ■