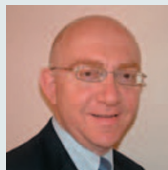


The art of partnering

As alliances become an increasingly crucial part of the biopharma landscape, our two interviewees this month discuss some of the skills that are needed to build successful partnerships and explain how they became involved in their roles in this area.



George Rahim, Ph.D.
Global Alliance
Director, Pharma
Partnering, Roche,
Welwyn, UK

Alliance managers are now common in the pharma industry, but few have as much experience as George Rahim, who became the first Global Alliance Manager at Roche when he was hired for the position in 2000. Indeed, the importance of building trust and following up a business relationship has been increasingly recognized to meet the challenge of: “ensuring that alliances between two companies are kept on track to deliver value to both parties,” says Rahim.

His current job involves managing closely the relationship between Roche and multiple biotech and pharma partners, and the skills required are varied. Communication and relationship-building skills are essential, says Rahim. “To be a good alliance manager, you need to have good people skills, and the stamina to deal with and resolve conflicts between companies, people and cultures,” he highlights.

Having a scientific background with hands-on experience of drug development is also

invaluable, as it gives the alliance manager added insight and understanding of the many difficulties, risks and challenges encountered by the collaborating teams as they progress a drug candidate through to registration and thereafter, says Rahim. He spent 15 years working as a medicinal chemist at Wellcome — which became GlaxoWellcome and then GlaxoSmithKline — and considers the application of scientific expertise to assess the value of a potential alliance and recognize potential pitfalls to be vital for his current role.

During his time as a researcher, Rahim developed an interest in working on the business side with external parties as he was involved with many interactions with universities, and so he started to seek ways to enter the area. “I got my break when I joined a business development and technology transfer consultancy as Technical Manager, where I developed many skills in business development,” he says.

This job was a good springboard to becoming involved in the business side of life science, but Rahim wanted to get back into big pharma. Thanks to a contact who moved to Roche, he heard that the company was creating a completely new position of Alliance Manager, which he landed. “The contacts that you build are important. You do not know when you will next meet again,” he says.

Rahim now manages the process of internal assessment of the opportunities brought in by the business development team of his company and the subsequent alliances, which have ranged from technology to marketed-product-based collaborations. “It is very important to be involved as early as possible during the interaction with a potential partner and during contract negotiation so you have the history of how a particular alliance was built up, and you can build trust with the partner from an early stage,” says Rahim. Keeping an open mind is also important, feels Rahim.

“In my area of alliance management, I always try to see issues from the perspective of the other side, and work hard on understanding cultural differences between two companies, especially between large pharma and biotech,” says Rahim. He also points out the importance of never making assumptions and setting clear goals on what you want to achieve and when.

Rahim advises that people who are interested in getting involved in alliance management need to have had experience of drug development and to have acquired some business development experience on the ground first. “Alliance management and the necessary people skills that go with it are not something you learn at a conference or from a book. They come from within,” he says.



Sarah Carty, Ph.D.
Associate Director
of European Business
Development,
Elan Pharmaceuticals,
Dublin, Ireland

In simple terms, business development is about striking deals on behalf of a company with partners that have synergies with your own business. According to Sarah Carty, in order to negotiate such deals successfully, several skills are needed.

First, an ability to listen to your business partners is vital. “Interpretation during negotiation and having the ability to act on your feet may not be a comfortable situation for everyone, but is an attribute that all business development negotiators have in common,” says Carty.

Constantly keeping up with new developments and refreshing your knowledge in your field is also important, Carty notes. Developing a strong network, and having good communication and people skills are therefore another must for business development executives. These skills

are also vital for the role. “Understanding what both parties need from any deal is the single most important factor in any successful long-term partnership,” emphasizes Carty.

Carty started her career in the UK, working as an R&D chemist for Zeneca, after completing her Ph.D. in physical organic chemistry at University College Dublin in 1997. Working for a multinational gave her the opportunity to get training in general management. “Within less than 2 years of working for Zeneca I realized that my interests were much broader than chemistry and making processes work in the manufacturing plant, and I wanted to expand my horizons within the pharmaceutical industry,” recalls Carty.

So, after much research, she decided to undertake an MBA with an emphasis on strategic management at the Bradford School of Management, UK. Her employer then opened the door to exploring new areas of the business by offering a 4-month secondment within the strategic acquisition team of Zeneca. “This was the key turning point for me in my career,” says Carty. On completion of the secondment she was offered a new position within the business

development team with a focus on Europe. “Within 6 months I had decided that I had found the career path for me and have never looked back since.”

She was later head-hunted to work for the Irish pharmaceutical company Elan, which gave her an opportunity to move back to her native Ireland while moving up the career ladder as she expanded the scope of her responsibilities. These currently involve the out-licensing of Elan’s drug delivery technologies, including the use of Nanocrystal Technology and other more traditional delivery methods.

Carty underlines the importance of mentors in her career. “It helps to learn a lot in a short period of time,” she explains. However, Carty doesn’t believe it is a requirement to have an MBA for a career in business development, although she admits that it provides an appreciation of the key elements required for decision making.

What keeps her interested in the job is its diversity. “The world of pharmaceuticals is ever changing and continuously challenging, with no one day ever the same,” she explains, adding: “This for me is part of the satisfaction of the role.”