MEMBER
Spotlight

A DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION PLATFORM FOR ALLIANCE MANAGEMENT

WorkSpan says that just like accounting, sales, or marketing, the alliance management profession truly will flourish when it adopts its own 'management system of record'

By John W. DeWitt

Mayank Bawa and Amit Sinha attended the Indian Institute of Technology together, then parted ways. Many years later they reconnected—discovering that each was partnering, at different companies, to develop large, real-time data systems. And each was having a hard time managing his alliances.

"When we got together, we started talking about the importance of alliances and partners, particularly in big data, when you're trying to do things not possible for a single company alone," recalled Mayank. "That was an

Mayank Bawa

'aha' moment. I had a really hard time managing relationships because everything was manual; Amit had the same experience exactly. So we said, 'Why don't we think together what would have helped us in our previous roles?' We needed a platform that would enable partnerships to be managed, to be run, without doing everything manually."

That pivotal moment led Mayank, Amit, and Milind Joshi to co-found ASAP Corporate Member WorkSpan, a software company that has developed an alliance relationship management platform and partner network with more than 150 company members. WorkSpan's standardized platform is used by customers for managing partner relationships and solutions; its network for alliances enables joint marketing, sales, and solution initiatives through an an operational and management system that tracks performance data and activities worldwide. Today, Amit serves as the company's chief customer officer, Milind is chief technical officer, and Mayank is CEO.

Mayank recently co-presented a session at the 2018 ASAP Tech Partner Forum in San Jose, California, joining Ray Homan, vice president of business development at business software maker SAP, to describe lessons learned from SAP's deployment of WorkSpan's standardized platform for managing partner relationships and solutions involving systems integrators (SIs).

"We identified that there was no single method by which partners like SIs worked with a company like SAP to build joint solutions—everyone was trying to work with each other in an ad hoc manner," Mayank said of the SAP project, which began in early 2018 and rapidly exceeded expectations for partner adoption and use. Global systems integrators agreed to work with SAP within 90 days of starting on the program and (as of October 2018) more than 150 joint solutions have been packaged, published, and enabled for selling on the platform by SAP and its SI partners—"a 15X more impact than we had anticipated," Mayank said in my interview with him about the SAP project, which appeared in the October 2018 edition of *eSAM Plus*.

A System of Record for Alliance Management

Alliance management practice is predicated on the development, refinement, and use of a systematic approach—partnering is not just an activity, it should be a dedicated business discipline. WorkSpan seeks to digitally enable and automate the practice and discipline of alliance management.

"It's really about putting a system in place," explained Chip Rodgers, vice president of marketing and alliances at WorkSpan, arguing that alliance management as a profession requires its own "system of record" much the way sales, accounting, human resources, marketing, and other core enterprise functions enable and streamline their daily work. "You see, with both technology and with pharma companies, there's no system of record for alliances. Alliance managers are using personal productivity tools, things they have at hand, to manage everything. Which works okay, everybody can limp along that way, but at the end of the day, everything is in pockets of information, so you can't hit a button and say 'here's where we stand with different geographies' or [get a real-time update on] initiatives the company is running."

As a result, performance of even well-resourced alliances suffers—and partners at the periphery can get lost, noted Allan Adler, managing partner of Digital Bridge Partners, a consulting firm that works with technology and industrial companies—and is a WorkSpan strategic partner.

"Even in the large alliances that have a lot of collaboration resources, you see this phenomenon of great collaboration with the alliance leads and executives, but as you move further away from corporate and into the field, the sales organization doesn't know how to engage, doesn't know how to dialogue on the issues, and ends up relying on word of mouth. 'We didn't know we were partners, we didn't know we just released blah blah solution.' That kind of lazy, unscalable way of sharing information is what really riddles alliances with poor performance," said Adler, who co-presented in a July 19, 2018 ASAP Netcast Webinar with Rodgers and Cindy Zhou, vice president and principal analyst, Constellation Research.

"Collaboration is about the extended network of people who need to be in the know, and that's what we see missing. You need that deep field engagement—to

solve for that last mile. That's where the deals happen ultimately," Adler continued, saying that this underscores "the need for a system of record to keep track and manage all the activities. It's the core principal that everything comes back to: You can't connect the processes together, so you end up siloed; you can't ensure deep engagement as you move into the field; and you can't report. When you can't do those three things, you end up with chaos."

I asked Mayank about WorkSpan's relationship with Digital Bridge Partners—a partnership managed by Allan and Chip, who "wears many hats in our company including VP of alliances as well as VP of marketing," Mayank noted, before going in depth about the alliance and how it is managed on the WorkSpan system.

"Chip and Allan work together to define our joint go-to-market strategy between Digital Bridge and WorkSpan. As part of that we publish enablement tools, we develop a joint pipeline [using] WorkSpan, our own product, to create these joint solutions packages and these joint sales pipeline tracking systems. So simultaneously, both companies can bring opportunities to the same platform and give real-time updates to each other."

What have you learned from using your own system? I asked Mayank.

"I notice as we developed this partnership that a lot of people have been added to the system. I now directly have access to this system. I notice when I check out the pipeline, I see Allan from Digital Bridge Partners building deeper relationships, sharing and exchanging ideas with our product manager from within the system. Something very interesting is happening—it's not just an arm's-length relationship. The shared platform has enabled Allan to reach deeper into our company and share ideas on things that people in our company can do, aside from working with Chip," Mayank explained, adding that "I no longer have to keep calling Chip to ask, 'Where are we with our partner relationships?' When I'm on my flight back to San Francisco, I can pull it up and see, are we tracking or are we not tracking? That has been extremely beneficial to me—knowing exactly who we are engaged with and knowing where things are."

Mayank emphasized that using a digital platform for alliance management transformation isn't about eliminating human involvement, nor is it about unfettered interaction with social media. "The whole basis is not digital entities working together, but people having a relationship with each other," he explained. "Any platform or tool we put in needs to respect the roles people have and provide collaboration in a trusted environment—as opposed to making it too open. That is where social networks have enabled people to misuse those capabilities. At WorkSpan, we really take this seriously—we want to be the trusted space. We enable people to reach out, connect with each other, and share, but only with people they have invited to their projects and are actively working with on those projects at this point in time. If they are not collaborating at this point in time, by default, people will not be invited to send messages or connect with people they are not actively engaged with. That creates a sense of trust in which collaboration can happen."

Mayank, who has attended and spoken at several ASAP conferences and chapter events, acknowledged that alliance executives will need to think and work differently using a digital platform.

"Alliance teams need to bring all of their partners into a process that is defined in a systematic and particular way for their relationships, and get out of this mode of thinking that we are unique, we are special, my partnership is isolated and needs to be managed in a unique manner," Mayank said, arguing that alliance professionals need to "shift from being and thinking of each relationship as bespoke [to] spotting all the similarities and best practices that exist and can be used. That kind of a mindset will propel the impact an alliance team can have—and the impact they have on their companies." ■

Chip Rodgers

Allan Adler