Data-Smart Project Management: Using Data Practically in Pharma

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PMINJ Guest Speaker
November 2025

Abstract

Life science projects are becoming increasingly data driven, however it's also important to understand the real world challenges project managers often face when that the data isn't complete. Sometimes the data metrics may not be very clear or aligned across stakeholders.

Misalignment drivers can include:

- Different timing (historical vs. future-looking)
- Different assumptions (contract win probability, coverage tiering)
- Different audience: operational vs. leadership

So how can we mitigate this risk when leading a project & ensure you're telling the correct story for your stakeholders?

Using a real-world case study, Hannah Javed will share her experiences, lessons learned and best practices for handling project data, such as dashboards, gross to net forecasts, and payer data, from different portals have become conflicted.

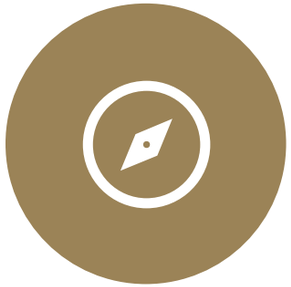
Objectives

- Understand how to use data thoughtfully and understand that if data is not translated properly, it can cause misalignment.
- The 4 roles of a data-smart project management

Modern Reality:
Even the right data can tell the wrong story

Life Science projects increasingly data-driven

Data informs everything from launch planning to payer contracting to Gross-to-Net Forecasting



Dashboards, portals, excel models have become the project manager's compass

But what happens when the compass points in *two directions at once*?

Level Set:
What is Market Access Data & Why It's Complex

Background:

- Market Access is how patients get medicines – through payers, PBMs, & health plans that decide *what's covered & at what cost*
- Every decision (pricing, coverage, rebate) flows into a chain of data sources

Complexity of Data:

- Payer Portals: show formulary coverage, prior authorization data, tiers of coverage
- Gross-to-Net (GtN) Models: forecast revenue after rebates and discounts
- Claims Data: shows what's happening in the market

Challenge:

- These sources don't always speak the same language
- Updates can occur on a different cadence, use different assumptions and serve different stakeholders

Poll Question 1

When project data doesn’t match across teams, what’s your first instinct?

A. Assume someone’s data is wrong
B. Try to reconcile
C. Escalate for clarification
D. Look for context – timing, assumptions, and audience

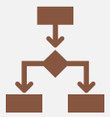
Discussion: Most teams jump straight to reconciling numbers, but the real answer usually lives in the assumptions, not always the math

The Core Challenge:

The hardest part isn't finding data– it's agreeing on which data matters

Market access projects pull data from many places – GTN models, payer portals, and IQVIA & Claims feeds

Timing, assumptions, and ownership vary across teams



As project leads, we're accountable for "one story" – even when the data tells multiple

Misalignment: 3 Common Drivers

Driver	Example in Payer Projects	Result
Timing	Finance uses quarterly Gross-to-Net metrics ; Access Analytics team pulls current month rebate data	Misaligned base case for business planning and decision making
Assumptions	Coverage tiers, win probabilities or forecast baselines differ (primary when analyze contract values)	Conflicting volume projections that impact sales metrics
Audience	Operational dashboards vs leadership summaries	Storylines diverge, Priorities blur

Case Study #1: GtN Forecast Gap

Key Takeaway: Don't chase precision– build alignment around *what's changing and why*

Scenario:

- GtN forecast and payer pull-through model differed for a product's Commercial line of business

Root Cause:

- GtN used a Q2 baseline; Access Analytics used updated portal data with lagging adjustments

Impact:

- Leadership questioned reporting credibility; cross-functional confidence can potentially decline → lower stakeholder collaboration/buy-in

Resolution:

- Facilitated a "data summit" with Finance, Market Access, & Analytics
- Defined a unified refresh cadence & shared assumption log
- Reframed dashboard commentary around *directional trends*, not point accuracy

Case Study #2: Payer Portal Metrics

Key Takeaway: Always clarify *data freshness & validation source* before storytelling

Scenario:

- National payer portal showed “open access”, while field feedback suggested high access barriers (prior authorizations)

Root Cause:

- Portal hadn’t updated formulary data post-contract renewal

Impact:

- Field and leadership messaging diverged; access wins overstated in quarterly business review meetings

Resolution:

- Create a “data validation workflow” that pairs your data feed with field intelligence (engage stakeholders proactively)
- Flag data age and reliability on each slide (“As of XX date”)
- Pre-align stakeholders with a verification status prior to submitting metrics

Poll Question 2

When data starts to get messy, which of the 4 roles do you naturally step into first?

A. Interpreters – Translate numbers into business meaning

B. Connector – Bringing people together to align assumptions

C. Challenger – Question the inputs & push for validation

D. Storyteller – Focus on shaping the narrative for the audience

Discussion: In reality, great project managers flex across all four roles. The key is knowing which one your project *needs most* in the moment

4 Roles of a Data-Smart PM

Key Takeaway: Ensuring the project is delivered with accuracy midst data challenged

Role	What it Means	In Real-Life
Interpreter	Translate metrics in business relevance	Finance flags a risk of gross-to-net erosion that can impact business profitability → Margin risk narrative
Connector	Link teams using different data lenses	Align Access, Finance, Insights, & other stakeholders on shared source and view
Challenger	Test assumptions before socializing data	Ask key questions early on (“what’s driving this variance?”)
Storyteller	Tailor message to audience context	Executive view=“So What” / Ops view=“what now”

Poll Question 3

How Data-Smart Is Your Project Culture?

In your organization, how often do cross-functional teams align on data *before* sharing results?

A. Always – it's part of our process

B. Sometimes – depends on the project

C. Look for context – timing, assumptions, and audience

Discussion: If you picked C, you're not alone– most misalignment happens after slides are built, not during data prep. Building a pre-alignment step saves a lot of cleanup later

Mitigating Misalignment Early

Key Takeaway: Practical Tools & Tactics – from raw data→ alignment →story-telling

Data Intake Checklist

- Validate source
- Refresh data
- Owner
- Assumptions

Assumptions Tracker

Shared living document for scenario alignment

Visual Risk Flags

Label dashboards with color coded indicators for status

Cross-Functional Readouts

Engage stakeholders for monthly data syncs to ensure the metrics align with real life

Narrative Draft Review

Test the story before finalizing slides

Strategies to Foster Cross-Team Communication and Tool Agreement

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1. Pre-Alignment Meetings

- **Purpose:** Establish shared understanding of project goals, constraints, and existing workflows.
- **Approach:** Invite representatives from each team to discuss current tools, pain points, and preferences.
- **Outcome:** Build empathy and surface early resistance before formal decisions are made.

2. Set a Cadence for Regular Check-ins

- **Purpose:** Maintain momentum and accountability.
- **Approach:** Weekly or bi-weekly syncs focused on integration progress, blockers, and feedback loops.
- **Outcome:** Prevent drift and ensure continuous alignment.

3. Utilize a Centralized Tracker

- **Purpose:** Create transparency around roles, responsibilities, and progress.
- **Approach:** Use tools like Jira, Asana, or a shared spreadsheet to document updates and ownership.
- **Outcome:** Reduce ambiguity and foster shared ownership.

Convincing Stakeholders — Especially the Difficult Ones

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Frame

Frame Tools as Risk Mitigation

- Show how aligned tools reduce duplication, missed deadlines, and compliance risks.
- Use real-world examples or past project failures to illustrate the cost of misalignment.

Pilot

Pilot First, Scale Later

- Propose a limited trial of the tool with a small group.
- Gather feedback and demonstrate early wins before full rollout.

Involve

Involve Stakeholders in Selection

- Give them a voice in the evaluation process.
- Ask: “What features are non-negotiable for your team?” This builds buy-in and reduces resistance.

Highlight

Highlight Integration and Flexibility

- Emphasize how the chosen tools integrate with existing systems.
- If possible, show how their preferred tools can still be part of the ecosystem.

Use

Use Influence Mapping

- Identify champions and blockers.
- Leverage internal advocates to sway hesitant stakeholders through peer influence.

Example of a Key Assumptions Tracker

Assumption	Rationale	Confidence Level	Impact if Wrong	Monitoring Plan	Last Reviewed	Status
Customers will prefer eco-friendly packaging	Market trends show rising demand for sustainability	Medium	High – could affect product adoption	Track customer feedback and competitor packaging	Oct 2025	Valid
Supply chain costs will remain stable	Contracts locked in for 12 months	High	Medium – could reduce margins	Review quarterly cost reports	Sep 2025	Valid
Regulatory environment will not change	No pending legislation in target markets	Low	High – could halt operations	Monitor legal updates and industry news	Oct 2025	At Risk
Team will be able to deliver MVP by Q2	Based on current velocity and scope	Medium	High – delays could impact funding	Weekly sprint reviews and burn-down charts	Nov 2025	Valid
Target audience is active on TikTok	Initial surveys and engagement metrics support this	Medium	Medium – may require channel shift	Monthly social media analytics	Nov 2025	Valid

How to Use This Tracker

- **Assumption**: What are you assuming to be true?
- **Rationale**: Why do you believe this assumption is valid?
- **Confidence Level**: High, Medium, or Low — based on evidence.
- **Impact if Wrong**: What happens if this assumption fails?
- **Monitoring Plan**: How will you track its validity?
- **Last Reviewed**: When was it last checked?
- **Status**: Valid, At Risk, Invalid — based on latest review.

Translating Data into Right Story

Key Takeaway: Create alignment and build credibility by having a clear, consistent story

Stakeholders want clarity, not complexity

Field teams want actionable insights

A data-smart PM turns confusion into common ground

Align KPIs with **end goals**, not just process milestones

Learning Objectives Recap

Key Takeaway: Data is the signal. Context is the story. Your job is to make both work together.

Use data thoughtfully—numbers without translation create noise

Recognize and address misalignment early

Apply the 4 Roles of a Data-Smart PM to drive cross-functional clarity

Build trust through transparent storytelling and context

Thank you!

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