



# Enhancing MSLs Competence

————— MEDICAL SERIES —————

## Benchmarking Study

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Smart Pharma carried out a benchmarking study regarding MSLS' best practices, the key outcomes of which are shared in this position paper

# Objective

- Identify MSLS best practices, with a focus on:
  - Their **activities** (roles and responsibilities) from both a **quantitative** and **qualitative** perspective
  - The **planning, monitoring** and **assessment** of their activity
  - Their degree of **coordination** with other departments (e.g., marketing, sales forces)
  - The way they maintain **regular interactions** with **KOLs**
  - Possible **evolutions** of their role

# method

- **Smart Pharma Consulting in-house knowledge:**
  - Previous projects related to MSLS' activity
  - Position paper published in 2017 on MSLS
- **External interviews with 7 experts...**
  - 4 MSL Managers
  - 2 Franchise Medical Heads
  - 1 Deputy Medical Director
- **... from 4 pharmaceutical companies:**

abbvie

 Bristol Myers Squibb™ NOVARTIS

## The activity of MSLs, medical field teams dedicated to scientific communication, is divided into 3 main categories: reactive, proactive and internal activities

### MSLs' activities segmentation

- MSLs are one of pharma companies' **field teams** dedicated to enhance the **full exchange of scientific information** with HCPs, especially with KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders)...
- ... and to **build strong relationships and partnerships** with them
- MSLs have a **major role** in medical expertise and their activities are divided into **3 main categories**:

**1**

#### Reactive activities

- Reactive activities are carried out following a specific request from a KOL
- This is the core activity of MSLs

**2**

#### Proactive activities

- Proactive activities of MSLs are more restricted and correspond to cooperative projects between KOLs and pharma companies

**3**

#### Internal activities

- Internal activities are divided into 3 categories:
  - Personal development
  - Internal interactions
  - Administrative tasks

## Reactive interactions are MSLs’ core activity and consist in responding to requests for information from KOLs, supporting Investigator-Initiated Studies (IIS) and Early Access Programs (EAP)

### MSLs’ reactive activities

**1**

#### Reactive activities

Provision of scientific information

- MSLs provide medical information to KOLs upon request (e.g., new clinical data, off-label use)
- The interaction can be remote, face-to-face or through medical staff

IIS

- MSLs respond (positively or not depending on the medical strategy) to requests for collaboration on investigator-initiated studies
- Decisions are more and more made at global level

EAP

- MSLs also accompany expert centers during Early Access Programs (e.g., information on the set-up and eligibility of patients)

#### Comments from experts interviewed

- “This represents the major part of the activity but the repartition between the reactive actions is extremely variable according to the product life-cycle”*
- “The reactive activity represents about 75% of the MSL actions”*
- “Although it is the result of a request from the KOL, the interaction is not top-down, it is really a discussion that allows MSL to gather insights (e.g., potential new indications)”*
- “EAPs support can represent up to 90% of the activity during the first 6 months of the program's launch”*

Sources: Interviews with 7 experts from 4 pharmaceutical companies (AbbVie, BMS, Novartis, Pfizer) – Smart Pharma Consulting analyses

**Proactive activities correspond to the organization of medical events (e.g., ad boards, congresses, symposiums) and the follow-up of phase I, II, III clinical trials and RWE studies**

**MSLs' proactive activities**

<p><b>2</b></p>	<p><b>Proactive activities</b></p>
<p><u><b>Medical events organization</b></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ MSLs participate in the organization of medical events such as ad boards, congresses, symposiums, staff meetings, other medical meetings at local or region levels</li> </ul>	
<p><u><b>Clinical studies</b></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ MSLs are also involved in the execution of phase I, II and III studies, from selection of investigation centers to the follow-up of the implementation</li> </ul>	
<p><u><b>RWE</b></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ More recently, MSLs have also participated in Real World Evidence studies (RWE), especially in implementation and data collection</li> </ul>	

<p>Comments from experts interviewed</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>“MSLs are mostly involved in regional events, whereas headquarters medical team takes the lead for national events”</i></li> <li>▪ <i>“MSLs are actively involved in medical education events re. improving patient care, treatments, etc.”</i></li> <li>▪ <i>“RWE is a historical activity for us with MSLs setting up and then relaying to the CRA<sup>1</sup> or a CRO<sup>2</sup>”</i></li> <li>▪ <i>“MSLs are involved in RWE studies, while for phase I to III clinical studies their contribution is limited to centers identification”</i></li> <li>▪ <i>“Our MSLs are involved in clinical studies”</i></li> </ul>

Sources: Interviews with 7 experts from 4 pharmaceutical companies (AbbVie, BMS, Novartis, Pfizer) – Smart Pharma Consulting analyses

<sup>1</sup> Clinical Research Associate – <sup>2</sup> Contract Research Organization

The internal activities of MSLs include their personal development, essential to their activity, the sharing of insights with other departments, as well as the associated administrative tasks

## MSLs' internal activities

3

### Internal activities

#### Personal development

- Personal development is an important activity for MSLs who must continuously update their scientific knowledge and soft skills (e.g., communication, project organization)

#### Internal interactions

- Internal interactions are essential to share the insights gathered in the field activity after analysis and synthesis
- Depending on pharmaceutical companies, MSLs can participate in the training of med reps

#### Administrative tasks

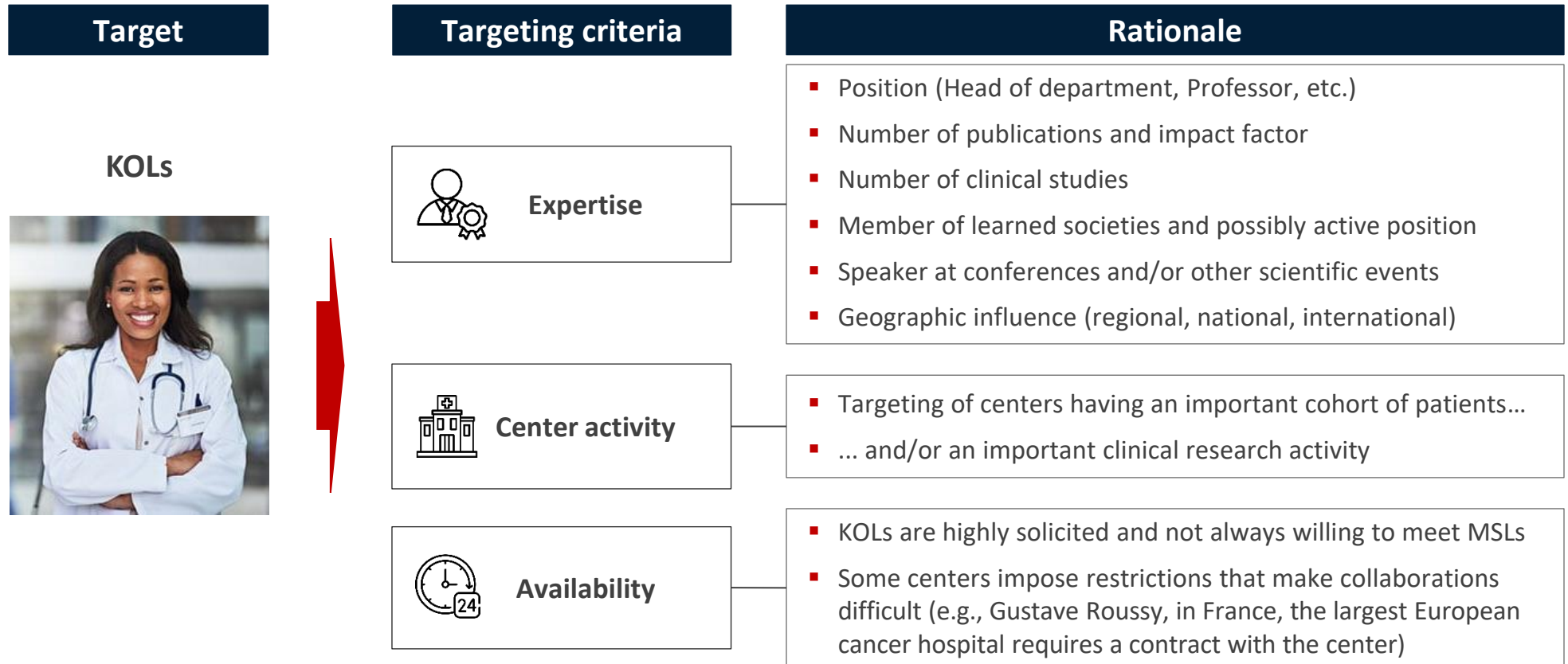
- Administrative tasks represent a significant part of MSLs' daily activity (e.g., planning of interactions with KOLs, filing information in the CRM software)

### Comments from experts interviewed

- “Personal development accounts for about 10-15% of MSLs' activity, but much of it is included in daily activities (e.g., conferences and congresses)”*
- “MSLs can act as a one-time referent to med reps but we have a Training department independent from the Medical department”*
- “MSLs complain they don't have enough time for their personal development”*
- “Interactions between MSLs and med reps and/or the headquarters team are important to have a complete knowledge of each expert center (e.g., change of position of a KOL within the center)”*

**KOLs, main target and privileged interlocutors of MSLs, are targeted and segmented based on their expertise, the activity of the center where they operate and their availability to collaborate**

**MSLs' target segmentation**



Sources: Interviews with 7 experts from 4 pharmaceutical companies (AbbVie, BMS, Novartis, Pfizer) – Smart Pharma Consulting analyses

## MSLs' activity is strongly regulated with the obligation to have non-promotional speeches and to document the reactive aspect of their interactions

### MSLs' compliance rules

#### Compliance of interactions<sup>1</sup>

##### Non-promotional

- MSLs' scientific communication **cannot promote the company's product** and they must **disseminate messages** in an **objective manner**

##### Traceability of reactive interactions

- The reactivity of interactions must be **documented in the CRM** (e.g., request by email from physicians, solicitation by a med rep)
- In the case of an unexpected request (e.g., question during a congress), a summary e-mail is sent afterwards
- The MSL can introduce himself proactively for his **first meeting**, in order to make himself known to KOLs

#### Comments from experts interviewed

- “There are regular internal audits and audits carried out by authorities on the respect of compliance rules by MSLs (interviews, verification of supports, etc.)”*
- “It is very strict, when MSLs communicate on off-label use, it must absolutely be documented”*
- “Lots of very strict procedures, proactive activities are only done under contract”*
- “We use Veeva software for events and Interact for contacts”*
- “We use Links as our CRM”*

Sources: Interviews with 7 experts from 4 pharmaceutical companies (AbbVie, BMS, Novartis, Pfizer) – Smart Pharma Consulting analyses

<sup>1</sup> These rules are becoming progressively similar and stricter across European countries



MSLs acting mainly on demand, no frequency objective is defined, and activity is enhanced by the added-value of interactions, sales force involvement and digital communication channels

MSLs' frequency of interactions



**Objective of interactions**

As most MSLs interactions are performed in a reactive way, **no interaction objective is defined by Medical teams**

How to maintain interactions



**Added-value content**

- Since **KOLs have little time to spare**, it is important to ensure the **quality of interactions...**
- ... and propose a large range of **high value-added** collaborations

**Sales force involvement**

- The **involvement level of sales force** impacts the activity of MSLs by being a **vector of solicitations from KOLs**

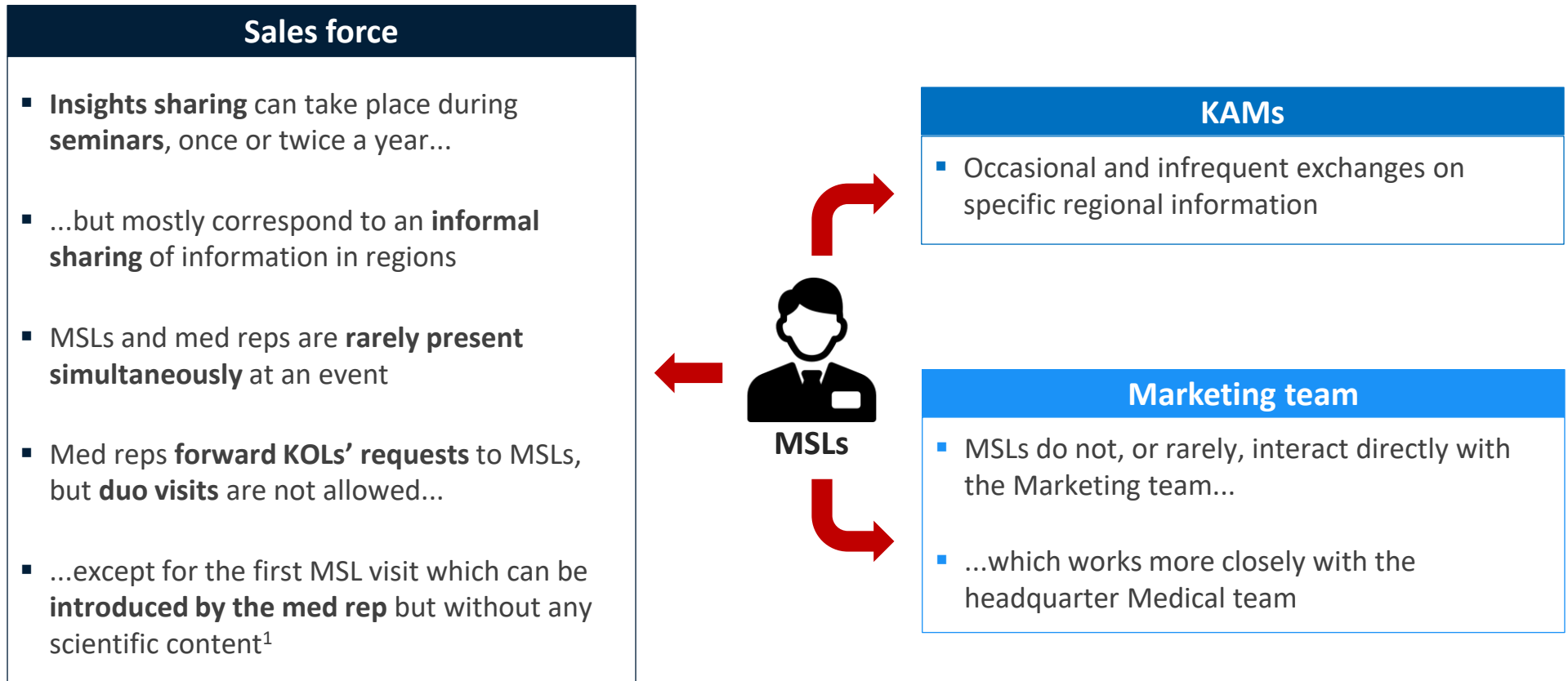
**Digital communications**

- Digital has helped **maintain relationships with KOLs** during the Covid-19 pandemic and...
- ... has **facilitated efficiency and access** to hard-to-meet HCPs

Sources: Interviews with 7 experts from 4 pharmaceutical companies (AbbVie, BMS, Novartis, Pfizer) – Smart Pharma Consulting analyses

**MSLs interact internally with med reps to share insights, during seminars or informal exchanges, but interact little or not at all with Key Account Managers (KAMs) nor the Marketing team**

**MSLs' interactions with internal departments**



Sources: Interviews with 7 experts from 4 pharmaceutical companies (AbbVie, BMS, Novartis, Pfizer) – Smart Pharma Consulting analyses

<sup>1</sup> These rules are becoming progressively similar and stricter across European countries

**MSL's action plan is part of the overall medical strategy, but it is established, personalized and implemented regionally according to KOLs' specific needs**

### MSLs' action plan definition

*"How is MSLs' action plan established?"*

**Established  
by MSLs**

**7**

- *"The medical strategy is established and implemented by the MSL who adapts it according to the granularity and needs of his region"*
- *"Instructions from the Medical direction allow the activity to be framed in the strategy, but the MSL adapts it in the region to best meet specific needs"*
- *"The medical communication is necessarily oriented by the Medical direction, but the MSL adapts the action plan according to the regional activity"*

## MSLs' action plans are part of the same global strategy but are developed independently of sales force plans and formalized as a roadmap

### MSLs' action plan crafting

*"Is MSL action plan written?"*



- *"MSLs' action plans are written on an annual basis and are updated as the activities progress"*
- *"Once written and presented, these action plans serve as a roadmap throughout the year"*

*"Is MSLs' action plan defined in link to sales force plans?"*



- *"The strategic basis is common, but the action plans are defined in total independence"*
- *"Although they have a common goal, MSLs and med reps are two separate channels"*
- *"The timelines of the plans are different"*

**MSLs’ activity can be assessed quantitatively with field time and number of experts engaged or projects conducted and qualitatively by characterizing the nature of the interactions**

MSLs’ performance metrics (1/2)



**Activity**



**Quantitative indicators**

- MSLs’ activity can be quantified by measuring:
  - **Field time**, which is the total amount of **interactions with KOLs** (categorized by proactive / reactive, remote / face-to-face)
  - Number of **experts engaged** (contributing to clinical trials, giving lectures, etc.)
  - The number of **projects conducted** (e.g., ad boards)
  - The number of **insights collected** from interactions with KOLs

**Qualitative indicators**

- From a qualitative point of view, MSLs’ activity corresponds to:
  - The typology of **medical communication topics** (e.g., safety, off-label use)
  - The **relevance, quality** and **diversity** of the **insights** gathered (high value-added insights for the strategy)
  - The **ability to share** these **insights** in a rigorous and systematic way internally

Sources: Interviews with 7 experts from 4 pharmaceutical companies (AbbVie, BMS, Novartis, Pfizer) – Smart Pharma Consulting analyses

The impact of MSLs' activity is much more difficult to quantify and can essentially be assessed on qualitative criteria

MSLs' performance metrics (2/2)



Impact



**Quantitative indicators**

- It is **difficult to define quantitative indicators** to measure the impact of MSLs...
- ...and the pharma companies interviewed do not use those indicators to assess MSLs' impact
- Therefore, the **variable part of MSLs' remuneration is not based on quantitative objectives...**
- ...but is linked to the **follow-up of the roadmap** and to **MSLs' individual assessment** (e.g., behavior, initiatives taken)

**Qualitative indicators**

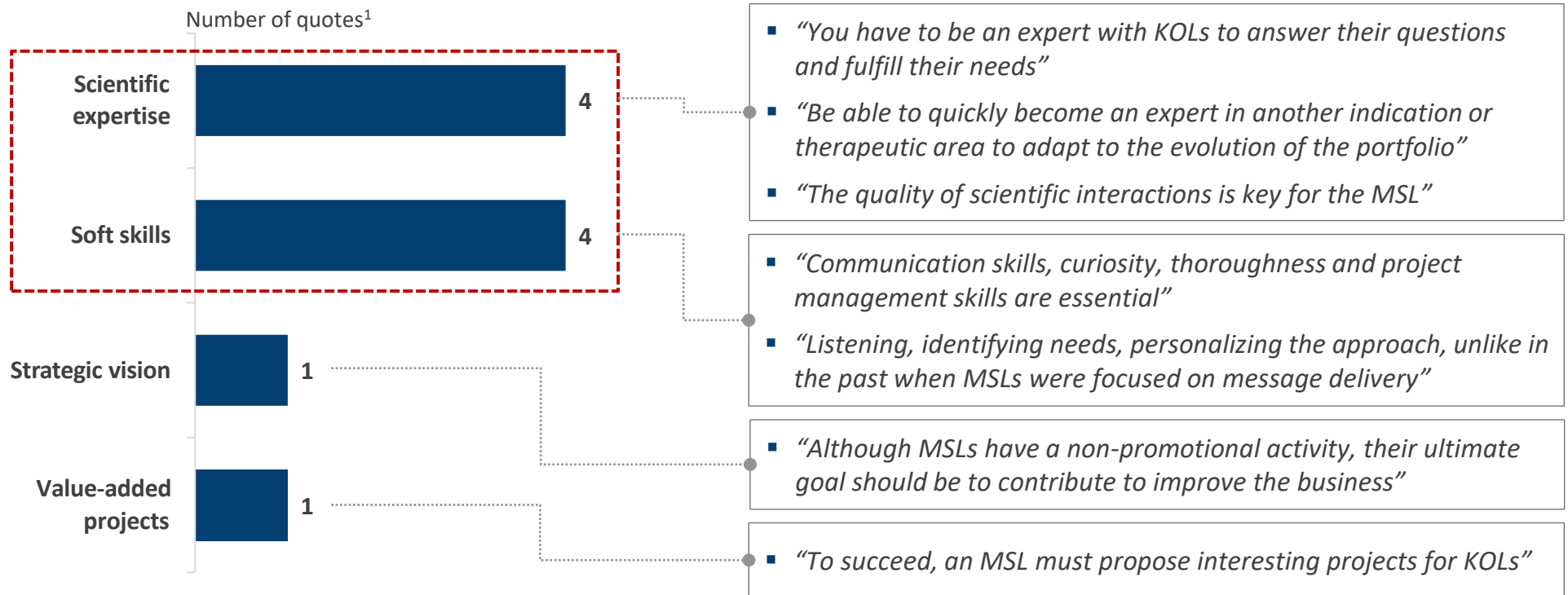
- Concerning the qualitative aspect of the impact, it is possible to evaluate:
  - The **perception of medical communication** by KOLs through a questionnaire
  - The "unlocking" of centers with whom it was not **possible to collaborate** previously
  - The **success of a project conducted** (e.g., recommendations published as a result of an Ad Board to address a given issue)

Sources: Interviews with 7 experts from 4 pharmaceutical companies (AbbVie, BMS, Novartis, Pfizer) – Smart Pharma Consulting analyses

**Scientific expertise and soft skills are the key success factors for MSLs to be a complete expert with KOLs they interact with, especially in terms of communication and project management skills**

**MSLs' key success factors**

*“What are the key success factors for MSLs?”*



Sources: Interviews with 7 experts from 4 pharmaceutical companies (AbbVie, BMS, Novartis, Pfizer) – Smart Pharma Consulting analyses

<sup>1</sup> Several answers possible

**MSLs have an increasingly important role to play within pharmaceutical companies, in a context of restricted access to HCPs and of very strict regulatory framework**

**MSLs' challenges & evolution**

**MSLs' challenges**

- Although this is **less the case than for med reps**, access to **HCPs is increasingly restricted** as they have less and less time to spare...
- ...which reinforces the need to offer **high value-added interactions** and **projects** for **KOLs**
- Especially since HCPs now have **easier access to information** through the Internet (e.g., PubMed, congresses summary, products SmPCs<sup>1</sup>)
- On the regulatory aspect, MSLs' activity is strongly **supervised and limited** by authorities...
- ...as well as more and more by **time-consuming internal procedures** to ensure compliance

**MSLs' evolution**

- MSLs have an **increasingly central role** in leading-edge therapeutic areas...
- ...and have a growing role in **Early Access Programs support** and **RWE<sup>2</sup> data generation**, that is increasingly valued in Market Access and required by health authorities
- **Digital** technologies will also impact furthermore MSLs' activity with the **flexibility** offered by the different **communication channels**...
- ...and by the development of **tools based on Artificial Intelligence** likely to transform the patient pathway (e.g., diagnostic algorithm in oncology)






Sources: Interviews with 7 experts from 4 pharmaceutical companies (AbbVie, BMS, Novartis, Pfizer) – Smart Pharma Consulting analyses

<sup>1</sup> Summary of Product Characteristics – <sup>2</sup> Real World Evidence



## MSLs' activities are quite homogeneous across Europe, although some adaptations may be required to local specificities

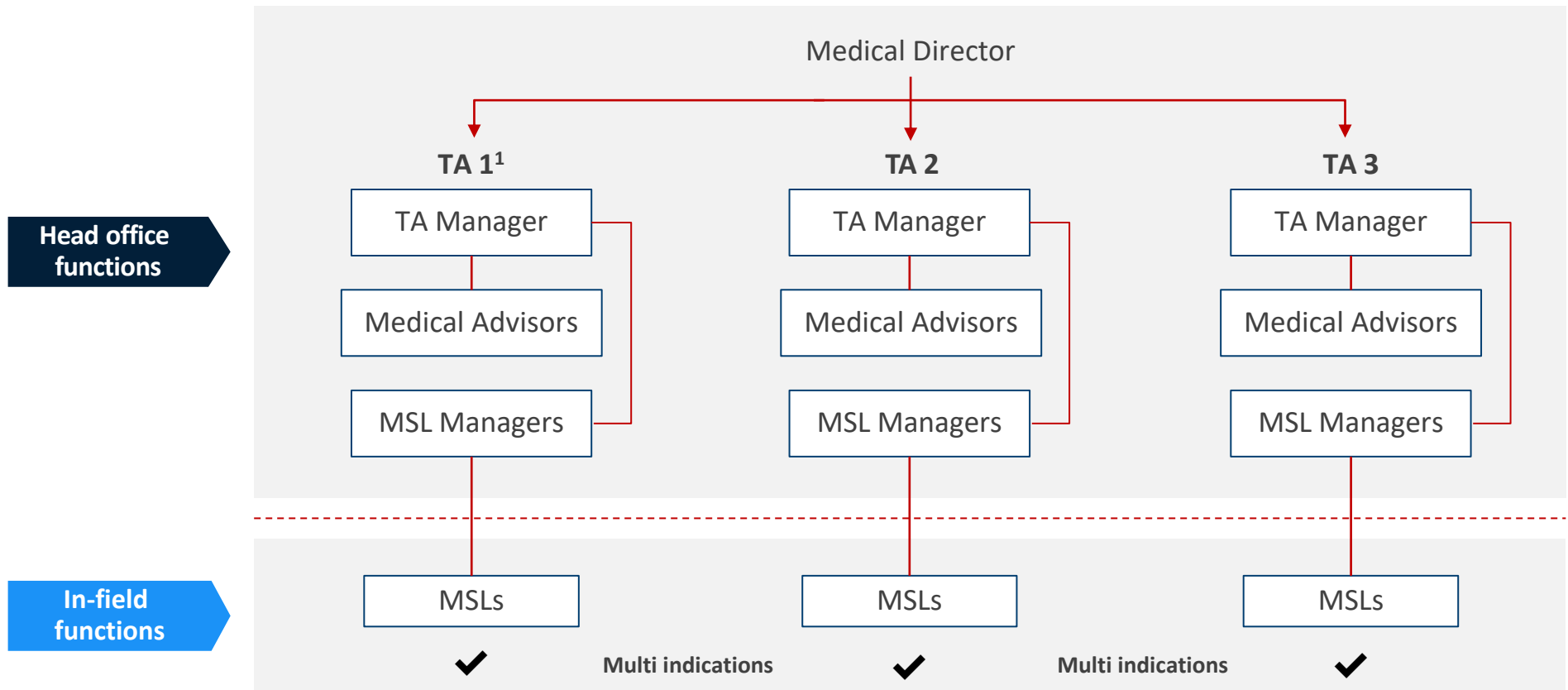
### MSLs' activities international landscape

MSLs' activities					
Introduction to HCPs (first contact)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Invitation to congresses	✓	✓		✓	✓
Invitation to Ad boards	✓	✓		✓	✓
Proposal / Support for clinical studies	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Comments		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to private-based HCPs is difficult</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MSLs cannot be proactive for RWE studies</li> <li>Ad boards are difficult to organize in the UK (due to regulation)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MSLs can be proactive since end of 2021</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low concentration of expert centers</li> <li>Proactivity allowed for new data</li> </ul>

Sources: Smart Pharma Consulting analyses, based on interviews with Medical Teams in Europe (May 2022)

In general, MSLs report to an MSL Manager, covering multiple indications, and are the only in-field function of the Medical Affairs department of Pharma companies' affiliates

MSL Teams within Medical Affairs department – Most common structure



Sources: Interviews with 7 experts from 4 pharmaceutical companies (AbbVie, BMS, Novartis, Pfizer) – Smart Pharma Consulting analyses

<sup>1</sup> Therapeutic Area

To keep on interacting regularly with KOLs, in a context of regulatory constraints and post-Covid-19 crisis, MSLs must propose high quality content and/or co-develop highly valued projects

## Key learnings

### MSL role

- MSLs are pharma companies **in-field collaborators** dedicated to **exchange scientific information** with HCPs, especially with **KOLs** (most often for multi-indications in a specific therapeutic area)
- MSLs play a **major role in medical expertise** and their activities are split into **3 main categories**:
  - **Reactive activities** which are their core activities (e.g., response to solicitations)
  - **Proactive activities** which are done under contract (e.g., speaker partnership, ad boards participation)
  - **Internal activities** (e.g., personal development, insights sharing, administrative tasks)

### MSL activity planning & monitoring

- MSLs, who establish their **action plan** according to **regional needs and specificities**, do not have defined interaction objectives due to the reactive nature of their core activities
- MSL activity can be monitored with **quantitative indicators** (e.g., number of interactions) or **qualitative indicators** (e.g., quality of insights gathered)...
- .... but **measuring the impact** of these activities is **complicated** and **not** always **relevant** considering the regulatory constraints

### MSL challenges & evolution

- MSL activities being **non-promotional**, their reactive activities **must be documented**
- Their role being key, they must propose **high value-added content** to HCPs to maintain interactions and...
- ... strengthen their role in **RWE studies** and their use of **digital tools** that are impacting Medical Affairs

Consulting firm dedicated to the pharmaceutical sector operating in the complementary domains of strategy, management and organization

## Medical Series

- The Medical Series covers different topics related to Medical Affairs, either at Corporate or Affiliates level
- Depending on issues, Smart Pharma Consulting shares:
  - Strategic, tactical and organizational thoughts and recommendations
  - Well-documented facts and figures, including outcomes of recent benchmarking studies
  - Practical methods and tools
- Each issue is designed to be read in 15 to 20 minutes and not to exceed 24 pages

## Enhancing **MSLs Competence** Benchmarking Study

- This study based on Smart Pharma Consulting experience and a benchmarking study carried out through interviews of 7 senior executives from 4 leading pharma companies provides insights re.:
  - MSLs activities planning
  - MSLs coordination with other Pharma companies' departments
  - The way to keep regular interactions with KOLs
  - Possible evolutions of MSLs role

## Smart Pharma Consulting Editions



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  - Our teaching activities in advanced masters (ESSEC B-school, Paris Faculty of Pharmacy)
  - Training activities for pharma executives
  - The publication of articles, booklets, books and expert reports
- Our publications can be downloaded from our website:
  - 41 articles
  - 65 position papers covering the following topics:
    1. Market Insights
    2. Strategy
    3. Market Access
    4. Medical Affairs
    5. Marketing
    6. Sales Force Effectiveness
    7. Management & Trainings
- Our research activities in pharma business management and our consulting activities have shown to be highly synergistic
- We remain at your disposal to carry out consulting projects or training seminars to help you improve your operations

Best regards

Jean-Michel Peny