Business Relationship Management – the role of IT as a strategic partner

Business Relationship Management is a name for what is generally referred to as the “IT business partner”. This is a role that sits between the more traditional IT organization and the broader general population in an organization, and helps translate opportunity and need to IT solutions in the most general sense.

I have held this role in various forms for a significant number of years, and over that time, heard many opinions on what it means, and how to represent value. I met Vaughan Merlyn while working at my current role, and took the Business Relationship Management training, from the BRM Institute, from him. I enjoyed the course and was aligned with the approach enough to become a trainer for my company, though we have yet to fully realize that further expansion.

The salient point in this short post is the value of the role as a strategic partner, and how that is differentiating. I have had a number of conversations with peers in what we call our business partner roles, but that represent the BRM role. I hear a lot of complaints about how they don’t want to be order takers, and how they struggle with relevance in a world where most business leaders are increasingly IT savvy. My argument back is that this is the time to truly embrace the definition of the BRM as described by the BRM institute, and seek to be defined as a strategic partner as opposed to “yet another IT gal / guy” who wants to add friction to my life.

I love the intro on this in the BRM institute:

> Designed to **bring value to an organization through the convergence of different business functions**, the business relationship manager (BRM) role is a **senior-level, strategic business partner** who shares ownership for **both business strategy and business value** results.
>
> HTTPS://BRM.INSTITUTE/THE-ROLE-OF-THE-BUSINESS-RELATIONSHIP-MANAGER/

My position is that we now have a great opportunity to capitalize on the growing appreciation for the

contributions of technology to our business processes and by taking the time to truly understand our business domain as well as the technologies relevant to not only that field, but adjacent spaces, we can become that trusted advisor that helps shape business strategy to take advantage of both current technology and by understanding risk tolerances, also bring in emerging technology where relevant to the business outcomes!

We need to have the courage to see ourselves in the BRM role as those trusted partners, but that only comes through real investment in the business goals and strategies. The ability to “work on the surface” of the relationship is gone if a BRM leader wants to be relevant. What used to be differentiating is now table stakes, as technology is often not a mystery and leaders are increasingly aware that they can gain advantages through well thought out approaches and tools. A real BRM, functioning as a strategic partner, will collaborate closely with the business teams, understand where they (Collectively) are trying to go, and in parallel, actively engage in industry research to better understand how to guide that business through the landscape of current and emerging technology options.

The strong and relevant BRM will be immersed in the business they support, and working regularly to be relevant and upgrade their technical skills, as well as building a broad and deep network of thought leaders to partner with.

This role is tougher than ever, but the opportunities are correspondingly growing at a feverish pace. I had conversations with one of our young innovators this past month, working with serverless solutions on AWS bringing data together into a Spotfire visualization, and came away so energized around opportunities across our portfolio I had trouble narrowing down on approaches to focus on – but that is the subject of another post though.

For now – as a BRM, please focus on continuous skill building and domain understanding to remain relevant, and help own a seat at the table, not sit at the edges hoping to be included.