BUSINESS MANAGER PROFESSION

Business Manager in ESN: a role dissected… at the risk of being stripped of its meaning

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The breakdown of the Business Manager role in ESN promises more specialization, but often weakens the coherence between sales, recruitment, and management. This article analyzes the risks of this breakdown and the conditions for a more balanced model.

The role of a business manager, as originally conceived in consulting companies and IT services firms, was a hybrid, comprehensive, and demanding role. It combined three major functions: prospecting and business development, recruiting consultants, and finally, managing them once they were on a project.

This "3-in-1" model was not born out of chance or an aesthetic choice: it is based on a strong business logic, coherence in the sequence of responsibilities, and an integrated vision of developing a profit center. However, this model is increasingly being challenged today. Many companies have chosen to separate these functions, sometimes partially, sometimes radically. This transformation is not without consequences.

A role originally coherent and comprehensive

In the initial model, the business manager was involved in:

1. **Business development**: identifying opportunities, meeting decision-makers, understanding client needs.

2. **Recruitment**: searching for, selecting, and evaluating consultants linked to these needs.
3. **Consultant management**: mission follow-up, career management, retention.

These three dimensions are deeply interconnected.

- Business development needs recruitment to finalize deals.
- Recruitment makes sense when it's connected to a real client demand.
- Management feeds the business through retention, opportunity detection in the field, and showcasing skills.

A business manager mastering all three dimensions becomes a profit center leader capable of creating value at every link in the chain. They understand what they sell, know what they seek, and support the projects they start. It is this cross-functionality that adds richness and complexity to the job.

The first breach: the arrival of recruitment officers

The first step in the division is often the introduction of a recruitment officer. Initially, this role was designed as support. It frees up time for the BM so that they can focus on commercial dynamics, account management, and mission oversight.

However, gradually, what was meant to be support became a transfer. Some BMs have gradually abandoned recruitment. First the search. Then the qualification. Finally, the interview. They end up simply "raising a need": a vaguely defined job description, transmitted without context or stakes, which the recruiter has to interpret and base their search on.

The problem is that when you no longer have to perform a task, you also lose the concern to prepare it well.

The consequence: needs become less and less qualified. No longer verifying if the client is truly active on the subject. No longer delving into project stakes. No longer understanding the business expectations. And since it is no longer "their problem," the BM does not feel concerned by the fact that the proposed profiles do not pass. They even blame the recruiter for not "providing the right profiles," a convenient yet revealing expression.

Gradual loss of responsibility

By separating commercial and recruitment functions, the value chain is weakened.

The BM is no longer responsible for recruitment. The recruiter has no hand in client relationships. Each works on half of a chain that they do not completely master. Dysfunctions accumulate:

- Profiles are proposed without positive feedback from clients.
- Candidates are poorly briefed on the stakes because no one really knows them.
- Client feedbacks are imprecise, transmitted in a cascade, and often misinterpreted.

Worse yet: we get used to it. We organize around this inefficiency. Volume KPIs are set up to compensate for the lack of precision. We industrialize the search. We automate follow-up. But we forget that the success of a client/consultant match relies on a fine understanding of the need, the accuracy of the profile, and the quality of support. Not the pace.

Complete division: when the BM role becomes a phantom role

In some models, the separation is even more pronounced. Three functions are distinguished:

- **Business developers** handle prospecting but do not manage candidates or consultants.
- **Recruiters** handle candidates but have no direct link with the client.
- **Consultant managers**, often consultants themselves, follow profiles once on a mission, but without having contributed to their selection or start, and often without direct contact with the client.

Each function becomes an expert in its scope… but no one maintains an overall vision.

And above all, an insidious effect arises: **nobody follows the skills**. The consultants' expertise, core to any consulting company, becomes less and less visible. The business developer sells a profile. The recruiter looks for a keyword. The consultant manager collects a self-reported feedback from the consultant. But where is the true skills mapping? Where is the thought on trajectories? On progression? On the investment required to develop talent? Lost in the system's interstices.

Invisible (but very real) consequences

This division of roles may seem attractive on the surface: specialization, efficiency, industrialization. But its negative effects are numerous:

- **Loss of meaning for teams**: a business developer who never sees their consultants on a mission no longer perceives the impact of their work. A recruiter who does not understand the project cannot highlight the position. A consultant manager who did not contribute to recruitment is less involved.
- **Silo effect**: each profession optimizes its scope, but no one works for overall efficiency. You can "win" in sourcing but lose in conversion rate. "Work well" on paper but without actual results.
- **Deterioration of perceived quality**: on the client side and the consultant side, interlocutors are less and less able to answer fundamental questions. Clients feel it. So do consultants.
- **Risk of diluting the profession**: the role of the business manager becomes vague. They are no longer a vision bearer, not the profit center's guarantor. Just another link in the chain.

And yet, there are also benefits to specialization

Let's be fair: there are contexts where role separation can be justified.

- In very high-volume structures, where the flow of opportunities is such that a BM could not possibly manage everything alone.
- When sales cycles are long and complex, requiring strong specialization in client relations.
- When recruitment requires technical or industry expertise that is difficult to mobilize alongside a commercial function.

In these cases, provided there is careful **cross-functional collaboration**, one can benefit from specialization without losing overall coherence. But this requires clear processes, a shared language, and a real culture of cross-functionality. And above all, value-driven management, not just volume-based.

Rethinking the role: towards a balanced model?

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Rather than choosing between an integrated model and a divided model, the real question might be elsewhere: how to preserve the spirit of the business manager's original role while adapting it to today's reality?

Here are some suggestions:

- **Reaffirm BM's responsibility for need qualification**, even if they do not directly manage recruitment. It is their role to delve into the context, expectations, and stakes. And to transmit this vision.
- **Create strong pairs between BM and recruiter**, with a clear distribution but a mutual understanding of each other's constraints. A recruiter cannot work in the dark. A BM cannot simply delegate without explaining.
- **Involve BMs in consultant follow-up**, even if a consultant manager is present. The client-consultant-BM link is key for picking up weak signals, anticipating project ends, and detecting growth opportunities.
- **Reevaluate competencies as central to the commercial strategy**. Not just as a selection criterion but as a differentiation lever. It's by showcasing know-how that a sustainable offer is built.

Conclusion: a role not to be emptied of its substance

The role of business manager is demanding, but it draws strength from its cross-functionality. It is a role of value creation, not mere transmission. Breaking it down can meet rationalization logics, but if that rationalization leads to a loss of coherence, engagement, and responsibility, it becomes counterproductive.

So, should roles be divided or grouped? The answer depends on contexts. But in all cases, it is essential to preserve what makes the profession rich: the ability to connect needs, talents, and projects. To build links. To provide meaning. And to foster a virtuous, human, and performant dynamic.

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