

Business Manager: Technical or commercial profile?

Frédéric Le Pennec · 12 March 2025



Should we recruit a Business Manager with a commercial or technical profile? This article compares the strengths and limits of each path and shows why learning ability remains the true factor of success.

The profession of a Business Manager in an ESN or a consulting and engineering company requires a skillful balance between commercial skills, team management, and understanding the client's technical challenges. But when it comes to recruiting a BM, a common question arises: is it better to prioritize a commercial or technical profile?

The Business Manager from a business school: often complicated beginnings

Many Business Managers start their careers after business school without necessarily having field sales experience. They arrive with theoretical bases in negotiation, account management, or commercial strategy, but the reality of the job is quite different from what they learned in class.

Their advantage is that they are generally comfortable in human relations and dare to approach clients without too many barriers. They quickly understand the workings of business and know how to project themselves into development strategies.

But where it gets complicated is in the technical dimension. A BM who does not understand the business of their clients or their consultants risks limiting themselves to selling "catalog skills" without grasping the real issues of the projects. However, most of a Business Manager's counterparts are operational professionals or technical experts, rarely pure buyers. They expect in-depth discussions, not just commercial talk. Without this credibility, it becomes difficult to establish a long-term trust relationship.

The technically inclined Business Manager: an underutilized advantage

On the other hand, there are those from a technical background: engineers, developers, project managers... These profiles are sometimes underestimated for the BM position because they do not have the image of a "natural salesperson." Yet, they have a key asset: they instinctively understand the clients' needs and speak the same language as the consultants.

This ability to ask pertinent questions, analyze a project, and anticipate difficulties gives them real legitimacy with technical counterparts. While a BM from a business school will spend months learning the basics, a technical profile starts with a head start.

The downside? These are often profiles that do not have a numbers-driven culture or the habit of negotiating. Prospecting and follow-up sales can seem artificial or uncomfortable to them. But contrary to what one might think, those skills can be learned relatively quickly, especially if the motivation is there.

So, who is best suited to succeed?

There is obviously no absolute answer. A good Business Manager must be able to open doors, develop a network, and understand the expectations of clients and consultants.

But if it had to be decided, technical profiles have a major advantage: their ability to quickly establish a trust relationship with counterparts by speaking their language, showing genuine interest, and understanding their issues. Of course, it requires effort to develop commercial reflexes, but it's a skill that can be acquired with practice and common sense.

In reality, the key to success is not so much linked to the background as to the ability to learn. A technical BM who trains in commerce or a commercial BM who makes an effort to understand technical aspects will always have an edge over those who remain locked in their certainties.