1

Introduction

*You do not need to navigate a company to a pre-defined destination you take steps –
one at a time into an unknowable future. There are not paths, no roads ahead of us.
In the final analysis, it is the walking that beats the path – it is not the path that makes
the walk*

<div align="right">Poet Machada in the 5th Discipline – Senge (1990)</div>

At the time of writing the original book, one job title that seemed to be on the
increase for people in HR was that of "Business Partner". Since our first publi-
cation in 2005, the title Business Partner has become commonplace although still
not widely introduced in all organisations. Certainly some of the challenges that
existed around that time are still significant today. We decided now was the time
to write a revised edition as the thinking and practice of Business Partnering has
moved on. Having said that, many of the themes in the original book remain
constant, particularly around the skills to develop and the challenges to overcome.
We have made the following specific additions to the book with the aim of
bringing it up to date:

- A new part on project management skills;
- A new part on thinking styles;
- A chapter with case studies based on practitioner experience;
- A resource list and recommended further reading; and
- General updates to all chapters, including recent research and information
  on the value triangle as a way of assessing your contribution to the
  business.

In this chapter, we examine the history of the role of the Business Partner and
the drivers for the changing role of HR. We also look at what it means to be
a Business Partner in broad terms and how this differs from the role of both the
internal and external consultant. We look at how thinking about Business Partner
practice has evolved since 2005 and draw on more recent research to highlight

what seems to be useful now in considering the Business Partner role. Ultimately, organisations and those of you working in HR will still need to think carefully about the drivers for any change in the way you work and what makes most sense for you in your own organisational context.

We start by looking at the title in more detail – what do the terms "Business" and "Partner" imply? – "Business" implies a level of strategic intervention, which goes beyond the individual. This differentiates a historic role of HR as being just about people and working at an operational level. It also implies that those in the role will have a good understanding of the nature of the business and therefore be in a good position to advise others in this respect. "Business" also conjures up a level of professionalism and credibility, a matter of factness, which sets people in this role apart from those in more traditional and operational HR roles.

Therefore, the role of the Business Partner includes having a good understanding of strategy and/or the ability to think strategically about the business needs. We recognise that Business Partners will not always be working at a strategic level in the organisation and come on to this later. At whatever level of working, the elements of supporting the business and helping turn strategy into action remain important aspects. "Partner" and what this title conjures up is something very different. "Partnership" implies working alongside, equal responsibility and shared skills and expertise, supporting clients within the business including providing an expert perspective when appropriate. Put these two together and you get an idea of the role of the Business Partner. Our definition from 2006 still seems relevant for this revised edition: "someone who maintains a strong connection with employees and the operational side of the business, while focusing on strategic goals and influencing through others" (Kenton & Yarnall, 2006).

A little of the history of business partnering

Dave Ulrich has long championed the role of strategic Business Partner, linking it to a business imperative for a more pro-active approach from HR with less reliance on operational expertise.

Ulrich's thinking (1997) was that HR needed to transform itself with a focus on adding value through four key roles, each of which needed to work as a "Business Partner" with a specific outcome or deliverable in focus (Figure 1.1).

Ulrich described the four roles as follows:

■ Strategic Partners – with a focus on strategy execution and meeting customer needs through aligning HR priorities;
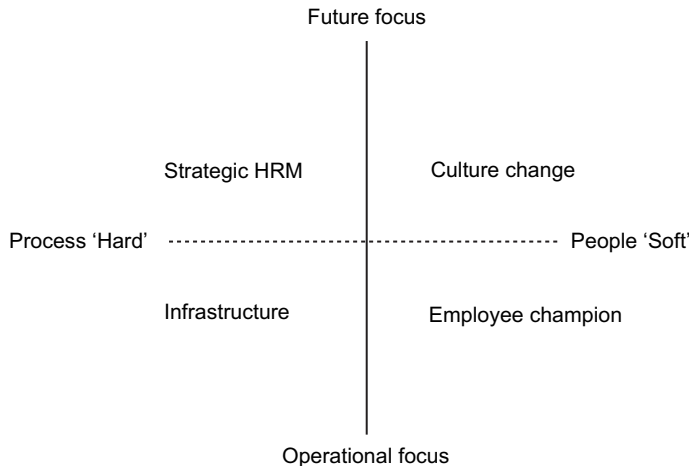
Figure 1.1 Ulrich's matrix.

■ Administrative Experts – ensuring efficiency in the infrastructure; supporting
  the business and improving organisational efficiency by reengineering the HR
  function and other work processes;
■ Employee Champions – paying attention to increasing employees commitment
  and capability through listening and responding to their needs; and
■ Change Agents – delivering organisational transformation and culture
  change.

The aspirational role of the Business Partner since this model was introduced
has perhaps been to deliver strategic objectives in line with all of the above. Most
would agree that to achieve and maintain this high level of strategic intervention
is challenging. Those truly skilled in one or more of the roles can command a
high salary and with that goes a high expectation of what they can deliver.
Certainly the emerging role over the years has become more, rather than less
complex, and in our discussions with HR practitioners it would seem that people
are providing a whole host of services without neat boundaries or role distinction.
   In recognition of the mismatch between theory and practice, Ulrich and
Brockbank (2005) revised the roles previously identified and included a new role
of "HR Leader" to separate out the responsibilities of more senior HR Partners.
The model on the next page (Figure 1.2) shows the separate and connected role of
HR Leader signalling the importance of leadership throughout all roles.
   Ulrich and Brockbank emphasise the need to tailor the model to the needs of
the organisation and this would reflect our own views on the importance of
working with a model which best fits the requirements.
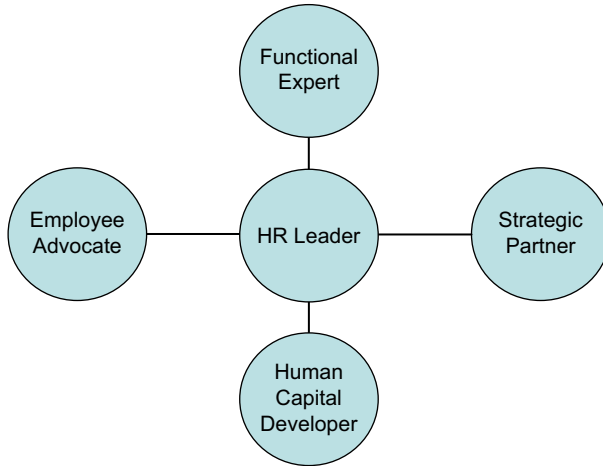
Figure 1.2 Revised partner roles.

Although Ulrich is the most quoted of authors on the topic of Business Part-
nering, many others have compared the traditional role of HR with an emerging
need for a more strategic function. The model on the next page (Table 1.1)
highlights some of the comparitors between the transactional and strategic
functions.

Traditionally, the role of HR has included a fair percentage of administrative
work, which in many organisations has now either been outsourced, substituted
for advanced IT programmes or in some way re-organised within the overall
structure of HR. The purpose of these moves has been to create a more responsive
client-centred service, which is proactive in its approach to developing the
business. In theory, these changes should also create more space for HR pro-
fessionals to work at a strategic level within the organisation. So rather than being
driven by a need within HR for greater power (although this undoubtedly is a spin
off) the changes are needed to keep apace with the fast pace of organisational life
and demands now placed on organisations.

These include legislative changes (e.g. equal opportunities legislation, Gov-
ernment modernisation agenda), financial changes and increases in mergers and
partnerships across organisations; shifts in employee expectations and needs and
increased opportunities from advanced IT capabilities.

Roffey Park Research (2009) highlights the significant factors given by their
respondents for implementing HR Business Partnering with 73% (from a research
population of 305) citing support of business strategy as a factor. Other factors
rated highly by respondents included improving organisational performance and
improving HR performance.

Table 1.1 HR Roles Compared: Transactional vs Strategic

Role of the HR Professional	Transactional Approach	Strategic Approach
Areas of interest	Recruiting, training, pay, work relations	Strategy and culture of the organisation and policy
View of the organisation	Micro	Macro
Client	Employees	Managers and the organisation as a whole
Status in the organisation	Rather weak	Rather strong
Educational requirements	Specialist in human resource management	General HR education with management experience or general manager with HR experience
Time range for activities	Short range	Medium- to long-term range
Business based on	Transactions	Change/transformations

M. Green, Public Personnel Management, Spring (2002).

Interestingly "reducing HR headcount", which those in HR might suspect as a reason for change was only mentioned by 28%.

What does the role involve?

We have already established that the role of Business Partner is both complex and evolving. However, most would agree that the role in theory at least is strategic in nature and has a focus on aligning HR with business strategy. In reality not all Business Partners will be working with senior managers but where the role is applied at more junior levels, challenges manifest which are discussed in more detail throughout the book.

The definition of the role depends largely on the paradigm or lens through which we view it. For example as:

- A strategic role with underpinning assumptions;
- A practice aligned with the role of the internal consultant; *or*
- A formal set of skills associated with different roles.

5

Business partnering as a strategic role

Viewed as a role: what would a strategic business partner be doing that someone in a more traditional HR role might not? and how would we notice?

Some assumptions about effective Business Partnering practice that seem to be around through our discussions with HR include:

■ Influence comes through having a seat at the Executive table;
■ Value added contributions come from intervening at a strategic level and are likely to include activities such as organisational design, talent management, strategy development and planning and organisational change; and
■ Transactional activities, e.g. hands on recruitment, maintaining services and records and performance management get in the way of successful Business Partnering.

If these assumptions are believed either explicitly or implicitly within the HR function then the journey of transformation might be a very frustrating one. The reality in organisations is that depending on the size and culture, HR may or may not have a seat on the Executive Board. HR will need to work within the reality of "what is" as well as influencing any future way of working. Part of the influencing agenda of HR may be to get into a position of influence with senior managers in the organisation. The concept of value added work goes far beyond organisational design and strategy and in our view, work continues to be needed by HR to define added value in the eyes of the external and internal customers. So-called "transactional" activities (often those most closely aligned to meeting the direct needs of people in the organisation) need to be valued as much as the more strategic elements of the HR role, so that people know the organisation cares about its people as well as the business overall. Where Business Partnering has perhaps failed in organisations is where there has been a loss of focus in relation to taking care of some of the fundamental work of HR. Having said all of that, we differentiate between strategy initiation/development and strategic thinking in Chapter 6, seeing the ability to do the latter as fundamental to the role at any level.

From this paradigm some of the activities aligned to Business Partnering practice might include:

■ Strategic planning;
■ Organisational development and design;
■ Improving organisational productivity and quality;
■ Facilitating mergers, acquisitions and partnerships;
■ Scanning the environment for new products/potential new partnerships;

- Recruitment and selection – strategy rather than implementation;
- Employee development – training/education, management development, performance appraisal, career planning, competency/talent assessment – again strategy and advice on these areas rather than carrying out the strategy;
- Compensation and benefits – reward and recognition initiatives, retirement programmes and redundancy programmes;
- HR information systems – management of;
- Overseeing Trade Union negotiations; and
- Responsibility for legal and regulatory requirements – equal opportunities policy and practice, employee record keeping.

Business partnering as a practice

How does business partner practice compare to that of a consultant?

In this introduction, we wanted to pay some attention to similarities and differences between how people do what they habitually do in the role of Business Partner compared to internal and external consultants.

Whilst most writing on consultancy draws upon the external consultant as an example, writers accept that there are particular issues faced by consultants operating from within.

It is recognised that internal consultants possess many of the skills deployed by their external counterparts (Armstrong, 1992; Duncan & Nixon, 1999; Laabs, 1997). They have the additional advantage of knowing the business – its systems, language and culture, from the inside. However, the internal consultant works within a complex contractual environment where reporting lines may be the same as that of their client. They will typically not hold budgetary or other power to enforce change and may be perceived as agents of a broader corporate agenda rather than true client helpers. As Armstrong (1997) states:

> *" Internal consultants may have just as much expertise, although as employees it may be more difficult for them to be – or to be seen to be – as independent as those from outside the organisation. They have to demonstrate that they are able to deliver truly objective advice."*

If the role of the internal consultant is to facilitate change, then particular challenges exist over and above those facing consultants from outside. The skills and attributes they bring to the role are often overlooked when line managers look for support to achieve change so internal consultants can find themselves busy

7

with mundane operational tasks whilst external consultants get the more challenging, strategic projects. This sidelining is a function of many factors: the credibility of the consultants themselves, their ability to market their offerings, the micropolitical landscape, status and value issues connected to consultancy use.

Typically the internal consultant is drawn from one of the teams of professional service providers such as HR, IT or finance where there is a history of supporting internal customers with specific problems.

Writers agree (Laabs, 1997; Armstrong 1992; Duncan & Nixon, 1999) that the internal consultant's role is to lead and influence change through supporting clients to learn and apply new skills. In this sense, there is a tension in the internal consultant's role; how to help the client, where the best help that can be given may not be aligned to the organisation's agenda.

Block (2001) recognises these tensions, *"Because you work for the same organisation, line managers can see you as being captured by the same forces and madness that impinge on them. Thus they may be a little slower to trust you and recognise that you have something special to offer them"*.

The main differentiating factors between internal and external consultants are summarised in Table 1.2 below.

Table 1.2   Internal/External Consultants: Key Differences in Role

External	Internal
Credibility through brand status and previous experience	Credibility through history of interactions within the business
Broad business perspective – bringing new ideas	Deep organisational perspective
Limited organisation-specific knowledge, possibly at content level only – 'Not made here'	Understands its culture, language and deeper symbolic actions
Perceived as objective	Perceived as an organisational 'agent'
Special	The same
Low investment in final success	High investment in final success
Meets client's agenda	Meets corporate agenda – which may not be client's
Needs time to understand the people – may misinterpret actions and interpersonal dynamics	Knows the people, but may have preconceptions
'On the clock' – timed, expensive, rare and rationed	Free, accessible, and available

There are many similarities between the list on the right-hand side and the Business Partner role. The topic of whose agenda you are meeting is discussed in more detail throughout the book and in Chapter 4 we explore the different roles consultants might adopt and the implications for working inside the organisation.

Challenges and tensions

In Kenton and Moody's (2003) research internal consultants were asked about their biggest challenges in the role. By far the most frequently mentioned were:

■ Lack of understanding of the role within the business;
■ Lack of trust;
■ Lack of senior management support; and
■ Lack of power to action projects/proposals.

These issues also link to research and discussions around challenges for those in the role of Business Partner. For example, Roffey Park Research (2009) compares the understanding of the role by people in HR and Business Partners with that of line managers. Forty-four percent of managers included in the survey were either unclear or somewhat unclear of the roles of those in HR Business Partnering.

If we view Business Partnering as a practice, then generic competencies might lend themselves to ways of working at the different levels within HR. We have suggested some competencies that might be used for the development of roles, at the end of this chapter.

Business partnering as a formal set of skills associated with different roles

The concept of Business Partnering goes beyond changing traditional operational HR job descriptions to looking more carefully at the skills required and the capacity for individuals to influence change.

In Part 2 of this book we focus on skills which we still consider fundamental to the role of Business Partner at whatever level of the organisation this sits. These core skills include: self and organisational awareness, relationship skills, consultancy skills, thinking skills, project management skills and skills in leading and influencing change.

Links to culture and level of maturity of the organisation

As well as how we define Business Partnering, we also need to consider the level of development and culture of the organisation. We consider this a key factor if

HR is to successfully move from a more transactional role to something more strategic. This is a challenge to say the least where HR operates as a function distinct and separate from initiatives aimed at people and organisational development (OD or HRD). If the growth and placement of HR do not sit alongside our understanding of the organisation, we are bound to find frustrations and challenges – working against the prevailing culture rather than with it.

Models of the shifting HR role could helpfully take account of models of organisational development. For example, Harung and Reiber (1995) highlight some useful descriptions of organisational development, which reflect the level of maturity of an organisation.

Reactive	→	Proactive and preventive
Partial perspective	→	Holistic overview
Command and control	→	Collaboration and empowerment
Short-term perspective	→	Long-term perspective
Task oriented	→	People oriented
Ambivalent to feedback	→	Welcoming feedback
Resistance to change	→	Innovation and entrepreneurship
Conventional	→	Path finding
Significant component of struggle	→	Joyful self-expression and dynamism
Stereotype	→	Plays many roles successfully
First-order learning	→	Second order- (learning to learn)
Efficiency (doing things right)	→	Effectiveness (doing right things)
"Win-lose"	→	Towards "win"

Harung and Reiber point out that in the earlier stages of development an organisation might only demonstrate the features shown on the left-hand side of the diagram, while organisations in more advanced stages of development would more likely demonstrate those on both sides.

In our experience, when significant change is happening in organisations, responses to change on both an individual and organisational level can vary between reactive (left-hand side) and proactive or creative (right-hand side). The temptation can be to manage or control change by taking a firmer, more entrenched stance, rather than taking a helicopter perspective and applying a more flexible and responsive approach.

Senior managers increasingly need prompts to think strategically from those with knowledge in HR to help them understand the impact of changes on the

organisation and how to best make use of the people employed to make the business a success. Part of the role of the Business Partner is to help the organisation see where it currently is, the implications that follow from the present culture and the options needed for moving to where it needs to be.

The HR function could also usefully pay attention to this when thinking about the organisation's readiness to change to support Business Partnering practice. More about this in Chapter 4.

Our view is that there will be a number of people working inside the organisation, who may be called Business Partner or HR Advisor, Change Agent, Internal Consultant or variations on these themes. Whilst the roles may differ in the level of authority and specific remit, there will be some common challenges to all. This book aims to provide useful advice and considerations for anyone in an internal consultancy position.

Background to our research approach and framework for this book

Our research for the book was carried out in the following ways:

- Informal interviews on the telephone and in person with HR practitioners;
- Gathering stories over a number of years from consultancy programmes including the Roffey Park residential programmes (Consultancy skills and HR Business Partner);
- Data from Roffey Park's Management Agenda and more recent Business Partnering Research;
- Desk research – reading and research from books and articles on consultancy, HR practice, OD and change;
- Questionnaires and interviews towards "The Role of the Internal Consultant" by Barbara Kenton and Diane Moody; and
- On-going discussions with colleagues working in a similar field.

Some of the assumptions which underpin this work are:

- Those in the role of Business Partner or aspiring to this way of working are in demanding roles and working in challenging times;
- Many people in HR working in this way are already highly skilled;
- Learning comes through sharing ideas and experiences;
- Learning can come through challenge and success;
- Noticing what works well is as helpful as noticing what does not;

■ It helps to look outside our own organisation at practice elsewhere to see what might work for our own organisations; and

■ The more Business Partners can understand the systems they are working in and with, the more effective they are likely to be.

We have adopted the model by Harung and Reiber, described earlier in this chapter, to provide a framework reflecting Business Partnership behaviours. You may want to compare this with any existing competency frameworks you have in place or use it to define new ones.

We should stress that this includes generic behaviours, more aligned to the *process* of Business Partnering. Specific behaviours for example around organisational design or talent management might need to be added in, although we would warn against making the list too long or complex.

Part 2 of this book focuses specifically on key competencies as shown below and a more detailed guide of what is covered in each chapter is outlined at the beginning of each part. For example "delivering to the business" is reflected in the chapters on key consultancy skills, managing projects and reviewing performance. In addition this competence area is covered in Part 1.

Behavioural framework for business partners

Delivering to the business

Holistic overview
■ Understands systems thinking and uses this to consider impact of interventions;
■ Understands the bigger organisational context and future vision and strategy of the company;
■ Demonstrates a good understanding of the business environment;
■ Encourages discussions which help identify things stopping the organisation from moving forward; and
■ Strategic thinker – takes a helicopter view on business needs.

Plays many roles successfully
■ Is able to flex their skill and experience to suit a wide variety of business needs;
■ Able to provide both expert advice and support and guidance appropriately; and
■ Identifies and uses appropriate specialists where boundaries of role end.

Long-term perspective
■ Avoids getter bogged down in the operational side of HR work;
■ Delegates appropriately to others;

- Keeps up to date with trends inside and outside the sector which may have business implications; and
- Helps to shape the direction of the business in line with strategic priorities.

Working alongside managers in the business

Collaboration and empowerment

- Develops good internal networks across their defined area of the business;
- Builds and maintains effective relationships with people outside their functional area;
- Engages relevant key stakeholders and sponsors;
- Actively involves others in the decision-making process; and
- Ensures that clients are confident and competent to carry on after any intervention.

People oriented

- Builds strong relationships with clients quickly;
- Able to build and maintain rapport with a wide range of people;
- Demonstrates empathy and understanding in challenging times;
- Builds trust by getting to know clients and their needs well;
- Identifies and works with the strengths of others in the team;
- Shares knowledge and information with others

Towards "win"

- Ensures that contracts are in place for specific areas of work which meet the needs of the client and the business;
- Monitors contracts at both the content and process levels;
- Clarifies the boundaries of both their role and the work to be carried out;
- Avoids creating unrealistic expectations by their clients; and
- Acts with political sensitivity towards "win" situations for individuals and the business.

Self-awareness and impact

Focused on learning

- Questions basic assumptions about self and others in order to heighten learning;
- Continually seeks self-improvement;
- Demonstrates a good awareness of strengths and areas for development;

- Uses learning as a basis for future development;
- Seeks opportunities to move out of comfort zone;
- Shares learning about the organisation and business issues with others; and
- Chooses self-development opportunities which are appropriate to needs.

Self-expression

- Actively promotes the business of the organisation through deeds and words;
- Demonstrates credibility by understanding the business and the range of issues facing managers;
- Resilient – able to cope with the day-to-day pressures;
- Able to maintain an appropriate work life balance; and
- Presents information in a confident and clear way which meets the needs of the audience.

Dynamism

- Is regarded as someone who "walks the talk";
- Acts as a role model for others in the organisation;
- Engages others by showing a real interest in them as individuals;
- Approachable and visible; and
- Brings visible energy and drive to the role.

Creating and leading change

Proactive and preventive

- Proactively seeks opportunities within the business to support strategy;
- Anticipates likely obstacles to implementing business change;
- Applies knowledge and understanding of change theory to implement changes successfully;
- Strikes an appropriate balance between achieving the business goals and managing emotional reactions to change; and
- Able to use influence to engage others in the change process.

Innovation and entrepreneurship

- Finds creative ways to work with managers, drawing on a range of methodologies to support business needs;
- Able to work independently and make strategic decisions aimed at business improvement; and
- Looks for and identifies solutions beyond the obvious.

Path finding

- Able to cope with ambiguity and complexity;
- Role models working on the edge of own comfort zones; and
- Identifies new possibilities to take the business forward and create competitive advantage.

Delivering a business-focused service

Prioritising

- Places the right priority on business needs in the light of longer term goals;
- Recognises the need to withdraw from a piece of work and moves on without impacting relationships;
- Demonstrates an understanding of the difference between urgent and important;
- Utilises business data to help shape the direction of the business; and
- Able to challenge appropriately and say no when necessary.

Utilising feedback

- Actively seeks and reviews feedback as the basis for insight and learning;
- Demonstrates learning from feedback by applying new ways of working;
- Looks for ways to improve the service of the Business Partner provision; and
- Seeks to enhance relationships and actions by thorough questioning during reviews.

Demonstrating effectiveness

- Sets appropriate measures at the start of any project;
- Ensures buy-in from the business to the evaluation process; and
- Utilises evaluation data to demonstrate the added value of interventions and the impact on business strategy.

We have included a checklist and a list of references at the end of each chapter as a resource for continuing professional development. At the end of this book you will find further resources to help with your continuing professional development.

This book aims to be a practical guide, which draws on theory rather than an academic piece, which may draw on practice. Whether or not we have struck the right balance here is for the reader to decide. We also acknowledge that we have drawn on the work of many others to bring you this book, including our own colleagues and participants on programmes.

Throughout this book we use the terms Business Partner and internal consultant intermittently as in our view the Business Partner also needs to be an internal consultant, although depending on definitions, the internal consultant will not necessarily need to be a Business Partner! We also use the terms "client", "sponsor" and stakeholders" and these terms are explored in more detail in Part 1.

We live in a time when there is so much knowledge available to us that it is hard to know where the boundaries are. This in a way parallels the challenges for the Business Partner whose role is becoming increasingly complex. We wish you luck in the challenges, but more importantly we wish you well in your role in delivering a meaningful service to your organisation and its people.

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Part 1

Shaping the Business Partnership

The transition from Operational HR to Strategic Business Partnership is a difficult one. Whether you are already working as a Business Partner and are reviewing your effectiveness, or whether your HR function is considering a move to a Partnership model, this part is likely to be of use to you. This part is aimed at helping you think through how to position the Partnership, both from an organisational perspective and as an individual working as a Partner. The chapters focus on how to position and market the Partnership, how to structure and staff the function to suit your organisation and how to target your approach towards your clients.

Chapter 2 examines how Business Partnerships can position themselves to suit both the business strategy and culture. Partnerships need to begin from a starting point of assessing what they are seeking to achieve and influence before they can build their brand image and develop an appropriate marketing plan. The chapter covers how to gain an understanding of the current perceptions of the function and then work to gain clarity on the gap between those perceptions and the desired position of the function. A staged process is presented to help understand the existing client needs and the service provided and advice is given on how to promote the success of the Business Partnership Function by building on value-added case histories.

Chapter 3 examines the various options for structuring a Business Partnership Function depending on the service it chooses to deliver. It examines some of the more practical issues such as what background and qualifications do Business Partners need? How should the Business Partnership be funded? and What information systems are needed? In addition, the chapter focuses on what organisations are doing to develop and enhance the skills of their Business Partners.

Finally in Chapter 4, we cover how you position yourself as a Business Partner from an individual perspective. The chapter includes topics such as getting established with clients, creating early impressions and how to review the relationships you already have. The notion of different Business Partner roles is explored in more depth and the advantages and disadvantages of working as experts, process consultants or just a pair of hands are discussed. The chapter also presents the CONSULT framework as a way of focusing on the relevant issues when first working with a client.

Some of the key behaviours concerned with delivery to the business (outlined in Chapter 1) will be demonstrated by Business Partners in setting up and positioning themselves in the organisation. Having a holistic overview and long-term perspective are both critical to success in this area, and specific behaviours include 'seeking opportunities within the business to support strategy' and 'having an understanding of the bigger organisational context and future vision of the company'.

2

Positioning the Partnership

Over the last 10 years or so, many organisations have taken the step of making changes to the HR function through the introduction of Business Partners, either in name or principle or both. What has become clear is that definitions, understanding of the role and ways of working are many and varied.

It is unlikely that any Business Partnership can succeed unless the function has spent time analysing what it is seeking to achieve and how it can add value to the business. While this may seem obvious, it can be easy to re-brand HR without giving sufficient thought to the reasons for doing so. There is also a further step required, which is to promote the aims and benefits of the role within the business. This is a step, which, in our experience, is often neglected in organisations and can lead to a lack of understanding and even, at times, resistance from internal clients towards the new Business Partners.

For some organisations, there will be no specific launch of the Business Partnership Function. The new roles might come into existence as part of a wider change programme and may evolve through a restructuring exercise, with some Partners continuing to support old transactional roles during a transition period. For other organisations, launching the new Partnership role and communicating the changes may be the first consultancy project the new service undertakes.

Whether it is a big bang approach or a subtle transition, consideration will need to be given to what the new function is aiming to achieve and how the Business Partnership can promote the work it undertakes and the value it brings to the organisation. To do this, there is a need to understand the perceptions of the people within the organisation, the image and direction the function wants to project and the opportunities there are for developing credibility.

What are you seeking to achieve?

Positioning a Business Partnership Function is not a straightforward process. There is undoubted value in having 'inside' agents who understand what is going on, who have strong, established relationships, and who are skilled in their interventions. But there are also disadvantages in operating internally and potential consequences to launching a big bang approach to a function if the organisation is not ready for it.

As a first step, it is important to clarify your aims and understand what value you are trying to add by introducing Business Partners. Questions you might ask yourself are:

- Is it just a title change or are there pressing business needs that you hope the Partners will address?
- Why would a consultancy approach be better than other approaches in this situation? (e.g. using external consultants or continuing with the existing service).
- What was missing from previous approaches?
- If the Partnership already exists, what are the current perceptions and what needs does it currently meet?

New Business Partnerships need to be very clear about the business case for moving into this arena. If the Business Partners are not able to articulate the value they can bring, or the priorities for the Partners are unclear, then the Partnership is unlikely to be successful.

From the Business Partners we spoke to, the following were cited as business drivers for a move towards Business Partnership:

- Strategic alignment
  - to improve the alignment of people management practice with business goals
  - to help managers understand their people in the context of the organisation
- Service
  - to provide an accessible point of contact for clients
  - to improve overall service levels
- Financial
  - to provide improved services at no extra cost
  - to control burgeoning costs on externals.

Most Business Partners felt they were able to offer as good a service as or sometimes better than that of the people working externally and felt frustrated that