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# Two Roles, One Vision: *Clarifying BRM and Product Roles in Modern IT*

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## Do We Need Both? Clarifying the BRM and Product Roles in Technology Functions

A 2025 McKinsey Global Survey<sup>1</sup> reveals that 92% of companies plan to increase AI investments over the next three years, yet only 1% believe their digital transformations are mature. This stark gap highlights the complexity of aligning ambitious AI-driven strategies with effective execution, creating a critical need for clear roles like Business Relationship Managers (BRMs or Technology Business Partners) and Product Owners (POs). These roles bridge strategic intent with tangible results, ensuring AI initiatives deliver measurable value. To support these transformations, Technology functions are increasingly adopting product-centric delivery models, making roles like Product Manager and Product Owner more common, while also investing in Business Relationship Management as a strategic discipline to align business and technology goals.

And that's where the friction begins.

Do we really need both roles? Aren't they doing the same thing—talking with business partners and ensuring value delivery?

It's a fair question. But in most cases, it stems from unclear role design, not actual redundancy. When left unaddressed, this ambiguity can cause confusion, overlap, and tension. However, with intentional design, Business Partners (BPs) and Product Owners (POs) can form a powerful partnership— one that drives both value creation and strategic alignment.

### The Root of the Role Confusion

**Note:**

In the remainder of this article, we will use **PO** to refer to the Product Owner/Product Manager role, and **BP** for the Technology Business Partner (often called the BRM role). "BRM" refers to the competencies of building and nurturing relationships across the organization.

At first glance, BPs and POs appear to share similar responsibilities. Both engage with stakeholders, advocate for value, and act as connectors across different parts of the organization. However, they approach these activities from very different perspectives.

POs are primarily focused on delivering successful products and services. Their role centers around managing product backlogs, engaging users, prioritizing features, and ensuring iterative delivery that meets evolving needs.

In contrast, BPs are strategic relationship managers. Their responsibility is to ensure that business and Technology sides of the organization are converged—not only in the delivery of projects or features, but in achieving long-term strategic results.

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The challenge often arises when these roles are introduced independently by different functions within the organization. Over time, their responsibilities begin to overlap. Both may attend the same meetings, speak with the same stakeholders, and even claim ownership of value delivery.

Without clear definition and intentional design, this overlap can lead to confusion, friction, and eventually a breakdown in collaboration. Instead of working in partnership, the roles may compete for influence, causing disengagement or duplication of efforts.

## The Organizational Challenge

When role clarity is lacking, the entire system suffers. Stakeholders become uncertain about whom to approach for specific needs, often resulting in misdirected conversations and delays. POs can find themselves pulled into strategic discussions beyond their scope, while BPs may be excluded from product-focused dialogues that directly impact results.

This lack of ownership leads to frustration among leaders, with responsibilities duplicated or neglected. More critically, opportunities are missed: One role may focus deeply on backlog delivery, while the other tracks long-term value—but without coordination, neither sees the full picture.

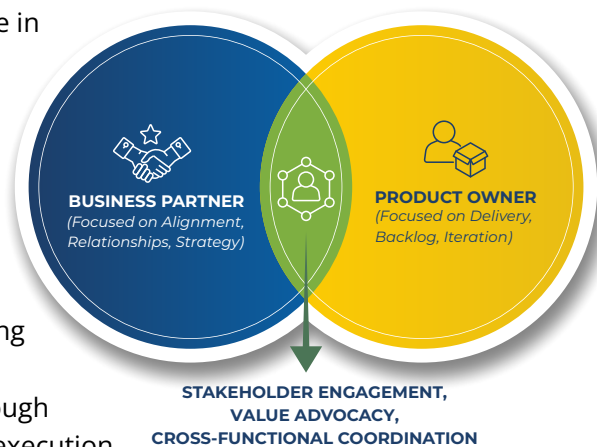
## The Solution: Intentional Role Design

Rather than ask "Do we need both roles?", pose a better question:

***What distinct capabilities do we need to deliver value AND drive strategic alignment—and how do we intentionally design our roles to support that?***

## Clarify the Core Purpose of Each Role

Begin by defining what each role is responsible for—not just their day-to-day tasks, but their core purpose in driving organizational value. For Technology Business Partners (BPs), this means leveraging the Business Relationship Management (BRM) discipline, as defined by the BRM Institute, to drive value, build strategic partnerships, and foster organizational convergence. BPs use frameworks like the BRM Capability Model to align business and Technology strategies, ensuring long-term impact. For Product Owners (POs), the focus is on delivering tangible product value through effective backlog management and user-centric execution.



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Area	Technology Business Partner	Product Owner
<b>Focus</b>	Strategic convergence Demand – Why and what to deliver Impact/Results against strategy and organization purpose	Product value delivery Supply – Best way to deliver
<b>Ownership</b>	Relationship health, overall strategy & strategic alignment, value realization	Product success, backlog prioritization, user satisfaction
<b>Relationships/ Stakeholders</b>	Business leaders, shared services, executives	Users, delivery teams, product stakeholders
<b>Value</b>	Value drivers (Value statements), Value Plans, Impact Canvas, and Impact reports Deliver to strategy Pre- and post-development value	Value items and features Deliver to user story In-development value
<b>Time Horizon</b>	Long-term (1–3 years+)	Near- to mid-term (iterations, quarters)

Importantly, each role benefits from developing an understanding of the other's perspective. BPs need to grasp, at a high level, how to demonstrate value and impact<sup>1</sup>. This helps them effectively frame and communicate the strategic contribution of initiatives. Meanwhile, POs are responsible for demonstrating value in more tangible, detailed ways—through product results user adoption, impact canvas and feedback loops. Yet, to be truly effective, they also need a solid understanding of relationship management to navigate the complex web of stakeholders involved in product development.

This mutual awareness fosters empathy, strengthens collaboration, and enhances the overall influence of both roles.



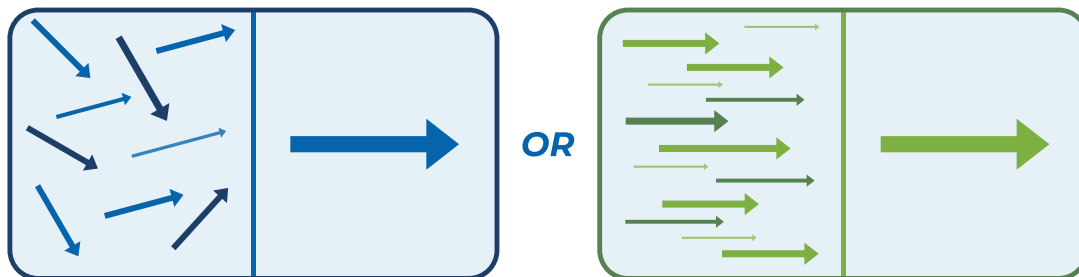
## Design the Overlap Intentionally

Consider a mid-sized tech firm where a BP and PO both attended stakeholder meetings, leading to duplicated roadmaps—one strategic and one tactical—until they implemented joint planning sessions, reducing project delays by 25%.

Some overlap between the roles is natural—and even necessary—but the key is to design that overlap with intention. For instance, both BPs and POs may participate in planning meetings. In these situations, the BP typically leads the conversation around strategic alignment, while the PO focuses on sharing and refining the product roadmap. Similarly, both may engage with end users, yet their focus differs: the PO concentrates on features and functionality, whereas the BP looks for unmet needs or emerging capabilities that tie back to broader goals.

Tools like a role clarity table can support these distinctions and help facilitate productive dialogue around responsibilities and collaboration.

## Create Shared Governance and Planning Mechanisms



**ONE ORGANIZATION, TWO ROLES, ONE DIRECTION.**

To keep the BP and PO roles aligned and working in tandem, organizations should establish collaborative governance practices. For example, quarterly value planning sessions—typically led by the BP—can help ensure alignment with broader organizational goals. These sessions might take the form of "Looking Forward / Looking Back" conversations that assess past value delivered and anticipate future needs.

On the PO side, regular product roadmap reviews provide an opportunity to track progress on feature delivery and gather meaningful feedback. Additionally, planning stakeholder engagement jointly allows the team to clarify who leads which conversations, ensuring the right message reaches the right audience at the right time.

Together, these practices build intentional coordination and minimize duplication of effort.



## Educate Stakeholders Across the Organization

Role clarity isn't just important for BPs and POs—it matters to everyone who interacts with them. Business partners, delivery teams, and executives all benefit from a clear understanding of how these roles operate.

Stakeholders need to know who to approach with product-specific questions, who to engage for strategic discussions, and how success is measured for each role. Using real-world scenarios to illustrate these dynamics makes the distinctions more tangible and reinforces their interdependence.

## Adapt Based on Organizational Maturity

In less mature organizations, it's not uncommon for BPs to take on multiple responsibilities or for POs to step into strategic territory. This flexibility can be helpful in the early stages, but as the organization grows, clearer role separation becomes essential.

It's worth assessing your current maturity by asking a few key questions: Are strategic conversations happening consistently? Is value being measured beyond just product adoption? Do stakeholders understand the boundaries and responsibilities of each role?

If the answer to any of these is unclear, it's likely time to revisit and refine your role design.

## What If One Person Has to Do Both?

In many organizations—especially smaller ones or those early in their transformation—there may simply not be enough resources to split the BP and PO roles. One person may be asked to wear both hats.

If that's the case, intentional time management and role awareness become critical. The individual must actively distinguish between their strategic and tactical responsibilities, and signal to stakeholders which hat they are wearing in each conversation.

To make this work:

- Block time on your calendar for strategic thinking, relationship-building, and impact planning—not just product execution.
- Set clear expectations with stakeholders so they understand the different dimensions of your role.
- Use frameworks like the BRM Institute's Value Optimization Framework to prioritize strategic results while managing product execution, ensuring that both roles contribute to measurable value.
- Use frameworks from 'Leading with Impact' to demonstrate high-level value, and tools from BRM to navigate complexity and build trust.

While it's challenging, this dual role can offer a unique advantage: a 360-degree view of both value creation and strategic alignment. But it only works with clear boundaries, structured prioritization, and the discipline to protect space for each role's intent.

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## Final Thought: Build Capabilities, Not Just Roles

The real question isn't whether you need both a BP and a PO. It's whether your organization has the **right capabilities**—strategic collaboration, business relationship management, and product delivery—to succeed in a complex, value-driven environment.

Critics may argue that maintaining both BP and PO roles increases costs or duplicates effort. However, organizations with intentional role design report measurable benefits, such as a 25% reduction in project delays and improved stakeholder trust, proving that the investment in both roles drives efficiency and value far beyond their cost.

BPs bring the capability to foster collaboration, shape strategic direction, and build trusted partnerships across the organization. POs, in turn, translate that strategy into tangible results, driving execution and delivering user-centered value.

When these capabilities are clearly defined, aligned, and intentionally integrated, the result is far more than functional efficiency. It's a connected organization—one that is strategically focused, operationally agile, and equipped to deliver results that truly matter.

### Recommendations:

- Don't start by choosing roles—start by identifying the results you need.
- Define clear mandates and success metrics for BPs and POs, using tools like a role clarity table to foster collaboration.
- Conduct regular cross-functional workshops to audit and refine role design as organizational maturity evolves.
- Invest in targeted skill development—strategic relationship building for POs and value delivery literacy for BPs.

***In the end, it's not the titles that drive success—it's the clarity, capability, and collaboration behind them.***

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<sup>1</sup> **The 2025 McKinsey Global Survey:** [The state of AI: How organizations are rewiring to capture value](#), March 12, 2025.

<sup>2</sup> **Lijnse, P. & Schrijver, E.** (2023). *Leading with Impact: Mastering the Art of Demonstrating Value and Impact*. Lead the Pack Consulting.

