# BUSINESS RELATIONSHIP MANAGER ROLE & RESPONSIBILITIES



Within ITSM, one of the most important drivers of value from a customer's perspective is the perception of the service provider's services. How is your company delivering value? How are you managing the customer experience? How do your staff interact with customers?

A key position in many companies, the role of business relationship manager (BRM) is dedicated to monitoring customer satisfaction and understanding and relaying customer needs to the rest of the company's staff. The BRM role is tethered between the service provider and the customer at strategic and tactical levels, ensuring that the company understands the business requirements of the customer and is able to provide services that meet these needs.

Let's take an in-depth look at the BRM role.

## BRM tasks and activities

Traditionally, the BRM role is focused on the customer and how your company supports (or not) your customers' needs and expectations. A growing trend in business relationship management is to focus on other stakeholders from a customer perspective, such as special interest consumer groups, hence the term "relationship management".

According to SFIA 7, relationship management involves systematic identification, analysis, management, monitoring and improvement of stakeholder relationships in order to target and improve mutually beneficial outcomes. The European eCompetence Framework (e-CF) also describes relationship management as the role that involves maintaining regular communication with stakeholders, and addressing their needs through empathy with their environment, therefore ensuring that stakeholder needs, concerns or complaints are understood and addressed in

accordance with organizational policy.

The ITIL® framework defines some responsibilities assigned to those responsible for relationship management:

- Ensuring customers' priorities for new or changed products and services, in alignment with desired business outcomes, are effectively established and articulated.
- Ensuring conflicting stakeholder requirements are mediated appropriately.
- Handling stakeholders' complaints and escalations well through a sympathetic (yet formal) process.
- Tracking customer and technology trends that could impact customer perception and service provision.

## Skills and experience needed for BRMs

Business relationship management straddles both the IT and business world, so anyone handling this role should be reasonably fluent in both. This role is best undertaken by a senior level staff who has experience in working in front facing and support roles from both business and technology worlds. As a result, the set of competences required are mostly soft skills in nature.

Greg Layok of West Monroe Partners was quoted in CIO magazine saying that IT people must know business issues and communicate in a way that a business person can understand. In their study Closing the Technology Leadership Gap, they listed the following soft skills as most needed for IT:

- Communication
- Collaboration
- Leadership
- Understanding and solving business problems
- Emotional intelligence and empathy

Without good people skills, any business relationship manager will likely be ineffective in dealing with customers in a way that meets their needs, contributing to an overall negative perception with IT as a whole. The e-CF lists examples of required skills in relationship management which clearly indicate the need for people skills. They include the ability to:

- Deploy empathy to customer needs
- Identify potential win-win opportunities for customer and own organization
- Establish realistic expectations to support development of mutual trust
- Monitor ongoing commitments to ensure fulfilment
- Communicate both good and bad news to avoid surprises

## Organizational position

Today, it is rare to come across the job title "Business Relationship Manager", particularly in an ITSM setting. But since relating with customers and ensuring alignment from a strategic perspective is a critical responsibility, BRM responsibilities are often distributed among the following job titles:

## Product Owner

This role represents the needs of the stakeholder community—the voice of the customer—to the agile team. Connecting business and agile teams, the product owner must understand customer requirements and validate that any developed software solution meets these requirements.

- **KPI area**: Customer satisfaction achievement

## Account Manager

This account manager is the senior focal point for client sales and customer satisfaction. The mission is to build business relationships with clients to facilitate the sale of hardware, software, telecommunications, or ICT services. A successful account manager identifies opportunities and manages sourcing and delivery of products to customers, taking responsibility for achieving sales targets and maintaining profitability.

- **KPI area**: Customer satisfaction

## Service Manager

This role plans, implements, and manages solution provision. The mission of a service manager is to manage the definition of Service Level Agreements, Operational Level Agreements, contracts and Key Performance Indicators. The role provides people management of staff monitoring, reporting and fulfilling service activities, and takes mitigation action in case of non-fulfilment of agreements.

- **KPI area**: Fulfilment of service levels

## CIO

The CIO role involves the development and maintenance of information systems to generate value for the business and meet the organization's needs. A CIO's mission is to ensure the alignment of the information systems strategy with the business strategy. It provides leadership for the implementation and development of the organization's architecture and applications.

- **KPI area**: overall added value, efficiency, and effectiveness of the information system.

# Additional resources

For more information on business relationship management and other roles in IT, see these BMC Blogs:

- What Is "IT-Business Alignment"?
- ITIL Business Relationship Management Explained
- First Five IT Roles in new Organizations
- 4 Essential Leadership Qualities for CIOs
- CIO vs CTO: What's the Difference?
- The State of the CIO