

Leveraging Business-IT Collaboration: Effective Design and Challenges of the IT Business Partner Role

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Abstract—The IT Business Partner (ITBP) role is increasingly adopted to bridge the gap between business and IT and foster strategic alignment. Even though organizations still struggle with implementing an effective collaboration between business and IT, the design of this role and the challenges it faces remain underexplored. This study is the first scientific paper to examine the ITBP. Through a case study and expert interviews, it derives eleven key tasks, with relationship management and advice at its core, and 14 required skills for effectiveness. It identifies challenges of the ITBP role, such as organizational integration, skill gaps and a lack of strategic focus. This study contributes to the field by offering a comprehensive understanding of the ITBP's design and role for business IT alignment. It provides organizations with guidance on the implementation and skill development of the ITBP role. Future research should validate findings and further explore the role's effectiveness.

Index Terms— IT business partner, business relationship manager, IT role design, tasks, skills, challenges, business-IT alignment.

I. INTRODUCTION

IN TIMES of digital transformation, it becomes a competitive advantage to work in an integrated way and align the business and information technology (IT) mindsets across the organization [1]. However, a survey reveals that only 30% of the 114 responding managers perceive their collaboration between business and IT units as adequate [2]. The majority struggles with IT optimization decisions and highlights a poor and complex collaboration process. To improve collaboration between business and IT, companies implement interface roles like IT Business Partner (ITBP), Business Analyst, and similar positions. In 2018, Gartner Inc. introduces such a role highlighting its importance for alignment and value creation [3].

Literature recognizes the importance of these interface functions for business-IT alignment (BITA) and to establish relational mechanisms [4], [5]. IT management frameworks such as Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL)

and Technology Business Management (TBM) mention a Business Relationship Manager (BRM) as a relevant role to build a strong relationship between the IT organization and the business units [6], [7]. Even though the role becomes increasingly important, and organizations still struggle to implement it effectively, to our knowledge, there is no academic, peer-reviewed in-depth study that examines this role at the interface between business and IT and its contribution to bringing business and IT closer together. The objective of this paper is, therefore, to provide a detailed understanding of the ITBP role, including its role design, key tasks, required skills, and challenges. To address this, we pose two research questions (RQ): (1) *How can organizations design the interface role of the IT Business Partner for effective business-IT collaboration?* and (2) *What practical challenges does the IT Business Partner face in organizations?* By answering these questions, we expand the theoretical knowledge about the interface role and its impact on business-IT alignment. Additionally, we provide practical support in designing the role and selecting individuals with the relevant skills to fulfil it.

The article is structured as follows: the second section examines the theoretical background on collaboration between business and IT and the ITBP role. We then outline our methodological approach triangulating a case study and expert interviews for an in-depth, practical study. Section four presents the findings, followed by a discussion of the results in the context of successful implementation within organizations. Finally, we conclude with the study's limitations and offer an outlook for future research.

II. BACKGROUND AND RELATED WORK

Effective collaboration between the business and the IT department is the basis for achieving added value through IT [4]. Thus, we first introduce research on this collaboration. Then, we examine roles at the interface and the ITBP role with its “mission to increase business value” [3].

A. Business-IT Collaboration

The collaboration between business and IT has been a central focus of research for decades, as organizations strive to bridge the gap between strategic goals and technological implementation by aligning the two disciplines [1], [8]. A foundational framework for understanding this relationship is the Strategic Alignment Model (SAM) introduced by [9]: it describes alignment as the dynamic interplay between strategic and operational levels and the functional integration of business and IT domains. Notably, alignment is not a static state but an ongoing process requiring continuous communication, mutual understanding, and shared objectives [10]. A higher degree of maturity in this alignment directly contributes to improved organizational performance, innovative ability, and competitive advantage [8]. According to Luftman's maturity model [11], strong Business-IT partnerships and effective communication are enablers of alignment. Fostering such a partnership requires, among other things, building trust through a shared understanding of the value of IT and shared goals and risks. The *COBIT 2019* framework also highlights that one IT Governance and Management objective for organizations are managed relationships (APO08) in order to create improved outcomes, mutual trust and effective use of resources [12]. While a former study shows that in traditional organizations roles from business and IT at different hierarchical levels (including top-, middle-, lower-level management and non-management level) are involved in strategic alignment [13], COBIT mentions the necessity to implement a role that manages these business-IT relations. An interface role, such as the ITBP, may foster this partnership acting as a bridge between business and IT departments, ensuring that both sides understand each other's needs and priorities [5].

B. Roles at the interface between Business and IT

The critical role of fostering collaboration between business and IT, driving innovation, and achieving business goals through technology solutions may be referred to as an "IT business partner" or "IT business relationship manager" [14], [15], [16]. Reference [17] call this role a "boundary spanner": the role acts as a translator, mediator and aligner between business and IT, as well as a motivator for both sides and a representative of IT to business and vice versa. Reference [18] describes how organizations structure this role in IT business partner organizations to foster business-IT collaboration and communication. Reference [16] emphasizes the overlap with other roles and gives an overview about three main tasks of the ITBP: close collaboration, network maintenance and continuous integration of IT into the business units. While, to our knowledge, except for two German articles [16], [18], academic peer-reviewed literature does not outline the role of the ITBP, several IT management frameworks mention its necessity for organizations: TBM introduces a BRM acting like an account manager responsible for the business, understanding their plans and proposing solutions. They should be able to communicate the business value of IT and therefore, require knowledge about the portfolio, service costs, and business

consumption. To that end, they work closely together with other IT roles such as service owners or EAs [7]. ITIL mentions, besides fostering collaboration, main tasks of an ITBP such as demand management, stakeholder management and support in service management when it comes to service level agreements (SLAs) and the strategic optimization of IT services [6]. The *Skill Framework for the Information Age* (SFIA) states a business analysis role with a more operative focus responsible for investigating operational issues and finding new business solutions [19]. Other frameworks such as COBIT 2019, the scaled agile framework (SAFe) and The Open Group Architecture Framework (TOGAF) do not explicitly mention the ITBP role. Yet, they stress the importance of business-IT alignment, stakeholder engagement and value delivery [20] as well as relationship management, coordination, and communication with the business [12]. While there are various terms for describing the interface role, we use ITBP in this paper while encompassing relevant literature for both.

The design of interface roles between business and IT varies from company to company. ITBPs are typically positioned at the middle management level but can also hold higher positions such as directors [14]. Existing literature shows that interface roles can be part of the IT department [21] or they can also be located in dedicated digitalization or innovation departments or directly in the business units [22]. The role of the ITBP can be performed as a primary or secondary occupation. If it is the primary occupation, the employees are often organizationally grouped into an IT Business Partner Organization (ITBPO) [18], [23]. If the function of an ITBP is performed as a secondary occupation, ITBP tasks are embedded into other roles. For example, architects or demand managers often act as ITBPs. Architects are considered a critical function for successful BITA, as they shape an organization's IT landscape [24]. Thus, [24] mentions business or domain architects, who primarily represent individual functions or processes in this landscape. Demand managers can also improve the relationship between business and IT by implementing strategic planning and portfolio management [25], thus overlapping with classic ITBP roles. Related to the collaboration between business and IT the SFIA names stakeholder relationship management as a relevant competency in the information age. It describes the skill to "systematically analyze, manage and influence stakeholder relationships to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes through structured engagement" [19]. However, the mentioned literature neither give insights into the design and implementation of the ITBP role, nor about the challenges ITBPs face in their daily business.

III. METHODOLOGY

As the design of roles in organizations is influenced by the context, earlier research on interface roles between business and IT applied qualitative methods such as expert interviews in an exploratory study [17] or case study research [26]. We answer our research questions by applying a triangulation of these methods and data from various sources, which enriches

insights and the validity of findings [27]. We triangulate a parallel approach of one case study and expert interviews. The case study enables research of a phenomenon in its real-world context [28] such as to explore ITBP implementation in-depth in a specific organizational context. Expert interviews lead to a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon in practice [29].

A. Case Study

We follow case study research guidelines to design our study and to select our case [28], [30]. Our case was an international consumer goods company with a size of about 30.000 employees, a central IT department and a dedicated IT governance department. The central IT department provides services for the twelve international business divisions (i.e. legal entities differentiated by product line and region) and other central functions (e.g., HR, procurement or finance). We chose this single-case design for two reasons: First, our company reflects a common case [28], as it is representative of large, globally active production companies with central IT structures and therefore has a high transferability to similar contexts. Second, through an existing and trusting relationship between the researchers and the company, the case study could benefit from access to internal information as well as open and honest discussions with the participants.

For the alignment between business and IT, the company established an ITBPO within the IT department. In order to study the ITBP role in depth and enhance the insights, we focused on multiple units of analysis [28], as the ITBPO consists of one leading ITBP and five ITBPs at different locations. Each of the five ITBPs is responsible for partnering one or more business divisions. Furthermore, the organization employs two EAs to strategically plan and align the enterprise target landscape with the business. For the delimitation of the ITBP role with its tasks and required skills, we included a review of the EA role in our study. We could accompany the case for 1.5 years from June 2023 to December 2024.

For the data collection, different sources of evidence, mainly documents, interviews, and focus groups are used [28] (see Fig 1). We reviewed the overall organizational structure and IT operating model to set up the case. The role descriptions served as the basis for the analysis of the ITBP role. We observed meetings between ITBPs and their business counterparts, to understand current interaction and derive responsibilities and skills. We further conducted note-based semi-structured interviews with the ITBPs and EAs to understand their perception of their tasks based on their specific challenges within their individual location. The workshop with the stakeholders aligned different views, the understanding of their role, responsibilities and skills and challenges throughout the whole organization.

B. Expert Interviews

We carried out seven expert interviews to broaden the insights on the ITBP role in different organizational contexts. The interviews were semi-structured to have the opportunity to ask more detailed follow-up questions during the conver-

sation [29], [31]. We chose interviewees considering the following criteria: First, the interviewees needed to have specific knowledge about the ITBP role due to performing it, being responsible for an ITBPO or ITBPs in an organization or having experienced it from an external perspective. Second, they needed to be able to consider the overall perspective of the role in terms of practical implementation within organizations. Therefore, we chose ITBPs with several years of experience and managers that were leading ITBPs. Third, we wanted to cover a broad spectrum of organizational contexts in the interviews to get as complete a perspective on the ITBP role as possible. Therefore, the interviewees have various backgrounds coming from different industries, organizational sizes, and digital maturities. All interviewees were already part of the network of the research team. Table I shows an overview of all interviewees (I) (chronological listing based on the date of the interview). The guiding questions that were used during the interviews are:

1. Why do you implement an interface role between business and IT?
2. How do you integrate the role in the company?
3. What are the main tasks of the ITBP? Are other tasks performed additionally?
4. What are the skills required to be an ITBP?
5. What challenges do you observe for an ITBP?

TABLE I. OVERVIEW INTERVIEWEES AND GUIDING QUESTIONS

ID	Function	Industry	# of Employees (EMP)
I1	CIO	Equipment Manufacturing	~3.500 EMP
I2	CIO	Transportation and Logistics	~6.500 EMP
I3	IT Business Partner	Consumer Goods	~1.500 EMP
I4	CEO	IT Consultancy	50 EMP
I5	TBM Consultant	Free Lancer in TBM Consulting	-
I6	IT Business Partner	Medical Technology	~9.400 EMP
I7	IT Business Partner	Retail	~99.000 EMP

The interviews were performed between October 2024 and February 2025 by the first author via Microsoft Teams in German or English. For data collection, they were either recorded and transcribed during the sessions using Microsoft Copilot or notes were taken. After the interview phase, we proofread and anonymized the automatic transcripts of all interviews and summarized notes.

C. Data Analysis

The triangulation of qualitative methods with parallel set up and data collection in case study and expert interview was then followed by a data analysis. This overall methodology is displayed in Fig 1. For our overall data analysis, we conducted qualitative coding [32]. This entailed the assignment of respective codes to the data in three iterations, in accordance with the guidelines for open and selective coding. The first coding was conducted by the first author. In two further iterations, the research team, comprising four researchers, undertook a review and adjustment of the codes to derive tasks

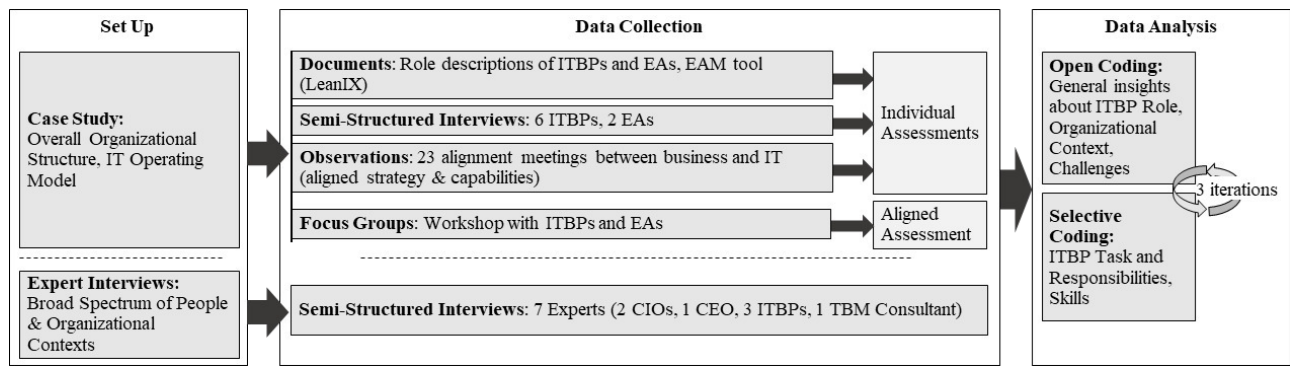


Fig 1. Methodology for Set Up, Data Collection and Data Analysis

and responsibilities as well as required skills for the role. A digital whiteboard tool was used to visualize and structure the coding process. This enabled collaborative and iterative coding of the interview data, whereby codes, categories and correlations were visually recorded, grouped and further developed. Furthermore, we identified and analyzed the challenges of the ITBP role. Table II indicates examples of the qualitative coding results.

TABLE II. EXAMPLES OF QUALITATIVE CODING

Source	Citation or Notes	Qual. Analysis (Category > Codes >> Subcodes)
I4	"Understanding depends on personal factors. People often talking about one another rather than with one another"	Challenge > Human factor >> lack of open communication >> personal factor Skills > Networking & Interpersonal Skills >> Build relationship on personal level
I6	"I give input and ideas from IT side to see how we can help and support for a given problem and how to approach the problem."	Task > Advice and Guidance Skill > Requirements Analysis, Analytical thinking
I7	"We have too many tasks for the IT business partners. And if you have too many roles at once, you no longer have the capacity."	Challenge > role's definition >> lack of task delimitation

IV. FINDINGS

The qualitative study shows that the purpose of an ITBP is always related to the alignment of business and IT. The following section presents eleven tasks with associated responsibilities and 14 skills divided into soft and hard skills to describe the role of the ITBP. Then, we outline five challenges ITBPs are facing.

A. The role of the IT Business Partner

The design of the interface role of the ITBP is "almost like a belief – you can put it in business, you can put it in IT, or you can even put it somewhere in between as a separate function, so there are different models" (I1). Our study shows different characteristics of the ITBP role in different organizational contexts. In Table III we indicate their title, their organizational integration, and their purpose as basis for answering our first RQ: (1) *How can organizations design the interface*

role of the IT Business Partner for effective business-IT collaboration?

TABLE III. CHARACTERISTICS OF IT BUSINESS PARTNERS IN DIFFERENT ORGANIZATIONAL SETTINGS

Source	Name	Organizational Integration	Purpose of the role
Case Study	IT Business Partner Manager	6 full time ITBP in the IT unit divided by business divisions with a regional focus	"Develop and maintain collaborative relationships between IT and key business stakeholders to successfully establish and maintain strategic & operational alignment"
I1	Business Engager	Planned ITBP Role in the IT unit divided by business functions	Engage with counterparts ("PMO Leads") in business focusing on alignment and bringing in the IT knowledge and process perspective
I2	Business Systems Function	3 full time ITBP in a separate digital unit in the business divided by business functions	Work closely with business counterparts within the business functions to steer demands, develop requirements and execute IT projects in collaboration with IT experts
I3	Business Analyst/ Partner	3 full time ITBP in the IT unit divided by business functions	Currently, Business Analyst with focus on demands and representation of business domain. Future goal to become a strategic partner with decision rights to support shaping the domain and consulting them strategically
I4, I5	Business Relationship Manager	I4 and I5 share experience from working in consultancy in different settings.	"In general, ITBPs are integrators between business and IT" (I4) with a main purpose to "conduct value conversations to drive partnership and IT business value" (I5)
I6	IT Business Partner	10 part time ITBPs in the IT unit divided by business functions and regions	First contact point for business in IT aiming to understand business issues, and propose and coordinate solutions to drive value of IT
I7	IT Business Partner	10 full time ITBPs in the IT unit divided by business functions	"The two main tasks are representing both the business and IT while identifying challenges and finding solutions."

Table IV presents the tasks of ITBPs derived from our triangulation, structured by tasks and the mentioned responsibilities ordered by the number of mentions. The execution of tasks and the individual responsibilities vary depending on their specific job description. However, some tasks are always

mentioned as core activities of the ITBPs, which are **relationship management** and **advice and guidance**. In addition, most ITBPs also take on (strategic) demand management. Further responsibilities were partially identified, either as part of the formal role description or as responsibilities that were overtaken by the ITBP due to a lack of clear delineation from other areas. For instance, I6 with a dual role oversees IT demand, IT project, and IT portfolio management, besides the role as ITBP. The ITBP I7 has a full-time role as ITBP but due to special expertise also supports innovation and organizational change management. The ITBPs within the case study reported engagement in IT project and IT service management activities, in addition to providing support in enterprise architecture management (EAM).

TABLE IV. TASKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF IT BUSINESS PARTNERS

Task	Responsibilities	CS	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6	I7
Relationship Management	- Primary business contact and relationship development - Trust building, communication and continuous relationship improvement - Stakeholder engagement, feedback and personalized involvement - Strategic collaboration, integration and alignment of business and IT	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Advice and Guidance	- IT input, ideation, and innovation advisory - Proactive consultancy and orchestration of IT ideas, demands and projects - Value conversations and strategic guidance	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
(Strategic) Demand Management	- Idea-to-demand support and derivation, synergies identification - Demand preparation and management (Initial) Requirements analysis	x	x	x	x			x	x
IT Project Management	- Facilitation of technical solutions, support project implementations - Proof of concept support for technical solutions - Strategic Project Management and Implementation Coordination	x		x	x			x	x
IT Portfolio Management	- Strategic domain planning, resource identification - IT project portfolio accountability	x		x	x			x	x
Enterprise Architecture Management	- Solution architecture coordination - IT landscape modeling and target planning support	x			x			x	x
IT Cost Management	- Cost savings identification and efficiency improvement - Budget management	x				x	x		
IT Service Management	- Major incident management - SLA definition and monitoring for IT services	x					x		
IT Governance, Risk and	Business requirement alignment with regulations & IT security	x							x

Compliance	- IT governance and audit compliance assurance - Education and training on IT policies and procedures								
Org. Change Management	Organizational change management support								x
Innovation Management	Ideation and business innovation enablement								x

To perform these tasks, ITBPs require skills that are crucial for success. Table V describes these skills, however, “above all, IT Business Partners must be generalists. They should have knowledge across various domains but do not need to master them in detail” (I7).

TABLE V. SKILL MAP OF AN IT BUSINESS PARTNER

	Skill	Ability to...
Soft Skills	Discussion Skills	...conduct eye-level discussions with business leaders (CS,I3,I7), advise and consult on IT solutions and business processes (CS,I1,I6,I7), and use mediation skills (CS,I7).
	Leadership Skills	...think strategically and conceptually (CS,I7), support and make informed decisions (I3), and lead people effectively (CS,I6,I7).
	Communication Skills	...communicate, present, and interact with stakeholders on all hierarchical levels and different languages (CS,I6,I5), speak a “common language” with the business (I4,I7), and foster business-IT talkability (I1,I2,I3).
	Team Understanding	...understand team structures and individual roles within teams (I7,CS), identify the relevant stakeholders for strategic conversations (CS), comprehend team dynamics (I7), and establish understanding for each other (cultivate an exchange culture) (I2).
	Networking & Interpersonal Skills	...build relationships (also on a personal level) (CS,I7), become a trusted partner (CS), and bring people together (CS,I6).
	Analytical Thinking	...collect and analyze the relevant data (I2,I3), develop informed solutions to solve problems (CS), and pay attention to details to prevent errors and inconsistencies (CS).
Hard Skills	Flexibility	...adapt to change (CS), react resiliently (CS,I7), and operate creatively within dynamic environments (I3,I7).
	Business Acumen	...understand the business model and strategy (CS), understand business capabilities (CS,I3,I6,I7), and comprehend business processes in detail as well as in their broader context (I3,I6,I7).
	IT & Data Literacy	...understand and maintain consistent data and data relationships (I3,I2), understand technologies and digital solutions (CS,I1,I6,I7), and use IT tools (for project management, architecture, etc.) (CS,I7).
	Requirements Analysis	...understand and translate requirements of business and IT stakeholders (I3), propose adequate IT solutions (I7), and leverage technology and its manifold use (I3).
	Project Management	...plan and manage projects (CS,I7), identify risks and manage major incidents (CS), and track and report on progress (CS,I6).
	Strategic Management	...comprehend strategic perspectives and demands (CS, I7), develop long-term goals and objectives (CS), and align projects with overarching strategic directions to develop a portfolio (CS,I6).
	Governance Expertise	... understand organizational decision structures and service level agreements (CS), comprehend IT

		security, legal compliance and risk regulations (including data protection) (I7), continuously improve through critical success factors and key performance indicators (CS,I4,I5), and support business value realization (CS,I4,I5).
	Enterprise Architecture Knowledge	...understand (IT) organization and (IT) processes (I1,I7), know current IT applications and the IT landscape (I7,CS), and comprehend the “big picture” and overarching correlations (I6, I7).

B. Challenges of an IT Business Partner

We identified several challenges the ITBP faces that impact its effectiveness and integration within organizations. We thereby answer our RQ (2) *What practical challenges does the IT Business Partner face in organizations?* One key issue is the **human factor**, which is reflected in the lack of open, two-way communication across hierarchical levels. Instead of a meaningful dialogue, interactions are often characterized by “talking about one another rather than with one another” (I4). Furthermore, understanding the role often depends on individual perspectives and personal factors, leading to inconsistencies. While in some cases the ITBP facilitates excellent collaboration, in others he struggles to achieve alignment or discussions on eye-level (CS, I3, I6, I7).

Another significant challenge is the **role’s definition and integration within the organization**. Despite the need for a clear understanding of the ITBP’s responsibilities, its boundaries with other roles, such as EA or domain architects, project or service managers, are often blurred (CS, I2, I3, I7). This lack of clarity complicates collaboration and role alignment with business stakeholders and IT colleagues. But even if “the role is described clearly on paper, this does not lead to successful integration and acceptance automatically” (I7). Organizations face a challenge to introduce the role in a structured approach, with clear responsibilities and to distinguish it from similar roles like the product owner (I6) or demand manager (I7). Thus, the role lacks acceptance or even face competitiveness with IT colleagues (I7).

The **lack of methodological approach and organizational structure** is mentioned as another challenge for the ITBP role. The ITBPs work closely with the relevant business units, often making them feel more part of the business than part of IT or of an ITBPO, especially as explicit ITBPOs are often underrepresented or not managed at all. As a result, there is a lack of identity as an ITBP team and a lack of opportunities to share ideas with each other. But even when such an organizational structure is in place and a clear job description exists, it is a challenge to compare results and identify synergies, because “every ITBP approached it in their own way, resulting in ten different approaches” (I7).

A further difficulty lies in the **limited time for focused work and absence of strategic alignment**. ITBPs are frequently consumed by operational tasks and “firefighting” (CS), leaving little room to focus on long-term strategic initiatives (CS, I3). Urgent demands, combined with tight collaboration timeframes, often divert attention from value-driven work (I5, I6). Organizationally, the demand for IT support often exceeds the available capacity, forcing the ITBP to act as a mediator between IT and the business instead of a strategic

enabler (CS, I6). The study also showed that discussions between ITBP and the business often focus on projects and progress rather than on strategy or deriving necessary future measures from this.

Finally, **skill gaps of the ITBP** present a major obstacle. There are significant differences in maturity levels and knowledge on both sides, with business often lacking sufficient understanding of IT processes and IT stakeholders failing to adopt lean and strategic approaches to support business needs (CS, I1, I4, I5, I6). Communication skills and the ability of business-IT talkability are, therefore, critical for ITBPs where deficiencies are observed (CS, I2, I3, I4, I5, I6). In addition, ITBPs may lack leadership skills and decision-making competence to strategically support and drive decisions (CS, I3, I7). As a result, the ITBP role is not always effectively implemented, limiting its ability to drive value and organizational alignment.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings do not only show a variety of tasks and required skills of an ITBP but also challenges they face in their daily business. In the following we discuss how the design of the role may support overcoming the identified challenges. We focus on the delimitation of the role and required capacities, the opportunities for organizations to find skilled people to act as ITBP and discuss its contribution to strategic alignment.

A. Determining the Organizational Integration of an IT Business Partner

The in-depth study shows various designs of the ITBP role. One decision that a company needs to take is the organizational embedment of the ITBPs. Depending on the existing structure, an organization needs to determine whether the ITBPs support the business divisionally, functionally, or regionally. I6 stated that there were both functionally assigned ITBPs and those assigned to specific regions. In the case study, ITBPs were assigned to business divisions. Divisional ITBPs are required to know the division-specific product and the complete end-to-end operation. In a regional setting, the location-specific requirements and the cultural aspect may be addressed better. A functional allocation has the advantage of allowing the ITBP to develop domain-specific skills, enabling better business communication and leveraging synergy effects.

Another aspect is to design the ITBP role as a primary or secondary responsibility [14]. The study showed that a primary ITBP role allows for greater focus on core activities but may limit networking opportunities, requiring proactive information gathering with other IT colleagues. When an ITBP performs as a secondary role, it is often assigned to individuals in senior positions with strong networks and close business interactions through their primary task in project or portfolio management (I6). While this facilitates relationship-building, it limits the focus on partnering and strategic guidance unless specific time and capacity are allocated. However, even

full-time ITBPs face challenges in balancing their workload and ensuring a standardized approach of all ITBPs (I7). Establishing an ITBPO, aligning the way of work of all ITBPs, and following a structured methodological approach for communication between business and IT may support a clear positioning of the ITBP and the standardized sharing of information towards business and IT [33], regardless of whether the employment is full-time or part-time.

B. Overcoming the Skill Gap in IT Business Partner Positions

The study highlights that, in addition to hard skills, soft skills are particularly relevant for the relationship-intensive role of ITBP. One of the skills emphasized is communication. This is not only essential for establishing a common understanding but is also a proven prerequisite for Business-IT Alignment [11]. Communication involves both clarity and language proficiency—often English in an international context. However, it is equally important to establish a common ground in communication, frequently referred to as a "common language" [5]. This means that an ITBP must be able to communicate fluently in both business and IT terminology, ensuring a seamless flow of information linking business stakeholders and IT colleagues. Language training might therefore be mandatory for ITBPs, and job rotation could ease the establishment of a common language to the business counterparts.

Beyond communication, other soft skills, such as understanding team dynamics, were particularly evident in the case study. It is crucial to be familiar with the corporate culture, actively engage in it, and navigate hierarchies without being discouraged by them [5], [13]. In its role as a boundary spanner [17], an ITBP must act as a connector, bringing people together and serving as a central point of coordination (I6). This skill is difficult to teach, making it essential to consider interpersonal skills during recruitment or to fill the role internally with individuals who are already well-connected and established within the organization [13].

To address the skill gap between business and IT, job descriptions for ITBPs should clearly outline the necessary competencies. When developing job descriptions, identifying key skills through profile challenges can be beneficial [19]. The

skill map outlined in Table V can support organizations in designing an effective ITBP job description. Additionally, companies can use this transparency to assess and develop the skills of current ITBPs, enabling organizations to upskill existing employees in this role. This approach allows ITBPs to "plan their professional development and career progression" [19]. It also contributes to human resource development, career planning and the provision of learning paths, which, as seen in SFIA, can be structured into different levels.

C. Focusing on Core Tasks and Strategic Business-IT Alignment

The findings illustrate that an issue for ITBPs is having to perform a variety of tasks without a clear focus. For an ITBP to fulfil their purpose to relate business and IT and strategically align both perspectives, the study shows that relationship management and advice and guidance should be the core tasks (see Fig 2). As "already for relationship management and advisory together with demand management, an ITBP needs business and IT knowledge and many interactions, there is no time for more without making mistakes" (I7). Therefore, the ITBP requires a clear mandate and capacity for these core activities, to achieve their alignment goals and being accepted by business and IT colleagues.

While demand management is often also covered by the ITBP, organizations should clearly define the transition to project, service, portfolio, or EAM. According to ITIL [6], ITBPs work closely with service owners and service level managers, which emphasizes the importance of defining the interface. TBM highlights further relations to the EAs [7]. Reference [24] mentions in this context domain architects, who support a functional business domain and align strategically with them. During the case study, the distinction in tasks and assigned business stakeholders between ITBPs and EAs was defined: The EAs take on the domain-specific alignment with business functions, whereas the ITBPs focus on alignment with business divisions. This helped to distinguish between the roles. The close interaction of the ITBP with other stakeholders emphasizes the need for internal alignment with IT colleagues to share knowledge and a clear distinction to leverage effective collaboration [33]. Other IT disciplines such as IT cost management, IT governance, organizational

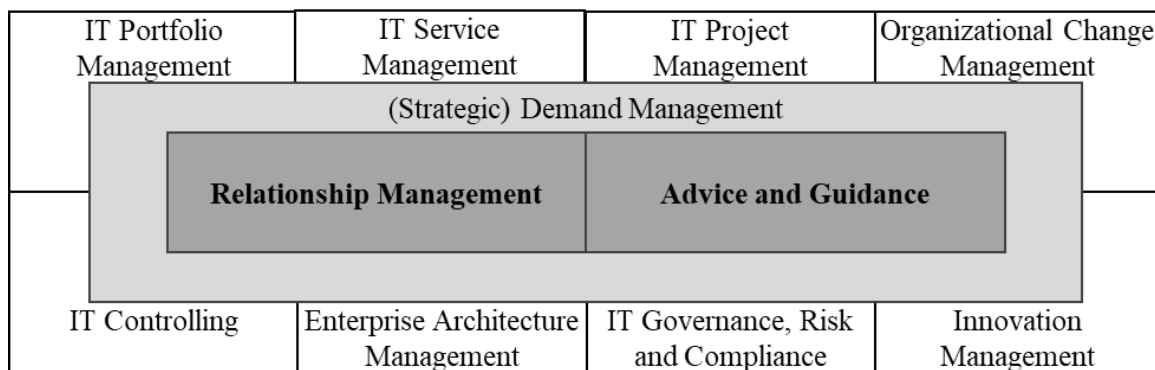


Fig 2. Core Tasks and Further Responsibilities of IT Business Partners

change, and innovation management may be used by the ITBP to gather and feedback information, but decision makers should be careful in delegating active responsibility of the ITBP in these tasks.

Besides the lack of focus, the ITBP, being primarily driven by operational tasks, often tends to neglect strategic work. However, it is essential that the ITBP has sufficient capacity “to make sure that its work contributes to the strategic alignment” (I7). The Strategic Alignment Model (SAM) by [9] provides a suitable framework for illustrating how the ITBP's activities contribute to strategic alignment. According to the SAM, strategic alignment is based on a complex, multidimensional relationship between business and IT. The ITBP plays a crucial role in this process by building and maintaining **relationships**, **advising** on IT matters by proactively consulting stakeholders, and driving value-oriented discussions. Through these core activities, the ITBP triggers further responsibilities within his/her role and can contribute to strategic alignment in multiple ways through exchanges with their business counterparts: They can capture business requirements, align them with **IT governance, risk & compliance** policies and transfer the requirements into operative **demands / projects** (strategy execution). They can receive **strategic demands**, consolidate them, and derive necessary IT capabilities, IT processes, implications for the **enterprise architecture**, and the **IT portfolio** together with IT (technology transformation). They can communicate technological **innovations** and new IT capabilities and identify possible strategic application and necessary **organizational changes** together with the business (competitive potential). They can identify opportunities for the operational use of new technologies in business within **IT services** and discuss **cost saving** potential (service level). Similar considerations are discussed for the ITBPO and their impact on strategic alignment [18]. This contribution to strategic alignment underscores the critical importance of the ITBP role, as business value can only be realized through the effective alignment of IT with strategic objectives [4].

Overall, a role description of the ITBP must be the baseline to define how they operate within the organization [23]. This description first needs to determine the organizational embedment (division, function, or region) and the capacity (primary or secondary). Also, it needs to include tasks and responsibilities (e.g. following the descriptions in Table IV), give a ration about time effort for each task, and list required hard as well as soft skills. A success factor is a clear distinction to other roles and designing internal alignment mechanisms (according to the adjacent disciplines as shown in Figure 2). This role description can be used to challenge existing ITBPs or during recruitment to find suitable candidates.

VI. CONCLUSION

The role of the ITBP is increasingly being implemented in organizations to bridge the gap between business and IT, thereby driving strategic alignment. Through the triangulation of a case study and expert interviews, this study provides an

in-depth exploration of ITBP's role design and challenges. The findings reveal that the role is highly versatile, with responsibilities that vary depending on the organizational context. We identify eleven key tasks that ITBPs perform to different extents, with relationship management and advice and guidance at the core. These core tasks enable ITBPs to drive strategic business-IT alignment. To be effective in this role, 14 essential skills are identified, including communication, networking, business acumen, and IT, data, and process literacy. However, challenges such as organizational integration, skill gaps, and excessive operational workload often limit the ITBP's ability to drive the business-IT partnership and foster strategic alignment and should therefore be part of a clear role description.

This study contributes to both research and practice. From an academic perspective, the study advances research on business-IT alignment by operationalizing the role of the ITBP within organizations and contributing to the broader discourse on IT professions and their interaction with business functions. For organizations, it provides guidance on structuring the ITBP role and defining key responsibilities that support business-IT alignment. For HR professionals, the identified skill sets provide valuable insights for hiring, career development, and training initiatives for ITBPs. In addition, CIOs gain an understanding of the challenges of the role, particularly the need to allocate sufficient capacity for strategic alignment efforts.

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations. It primarily examines the ITBP role from an IT perspective, whereas its success is also influenced by organizational culture and business counterparts. Future research should include both business and IT perspectives to provide a more holistic understanding of the role. Additionally, the chosen case is a large, international company with a centralized IT department. Future studies could examine other organizational setting such as more decentralized structures or small-and-medium-sized companies for comparison and drawing conclusion based on the organizational set-ups. While this qualitative study provides in-depth insights, a follow-up quantitative study could help validate the identified challenges on a broader scale. Further research could also examine the impact of corporate culture and individual business counterparts on ITBP effectiveness, analyze different job descriptions within IT organizations, and differentiate roles based on IT-relevant tasks.

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