

Strategic Business Partner, Coach or Sparring Partner?

I was asked why I added 'sparring partner' to my tag line on LinkedIn. Some people suggested to change it to 'strategic business partner' or 'coach'. Listening to the arguments, I agree that all three roles work closely with senior leaders. However, their focus and the outcome of the cooperation are different for each of these roles.

The focus of a business partner is to align, in case of HR, people management practices with the business strategy. The outcome is a set of HR policies and people practices that support the business strategy.

A business partner differs from a coach of senior business leaders in that a coach has a dual focus: the individual's personal goals and the organization's business objectives. A coach helps the senior leader to become aware of own characteristics and how to use these to achieve personal growth and business objectives. Successful coaching leads to personal development of the senior leader and through that to business results.

The difference between a strategic business partner and a sparring partner is that sparring goes beyond one specific function like HR. A sparring partner is someone trusted who is able to actively think along with a senior leader given their business experience and understanding of the strategic context of the organization. With a sparring partner, the senior leader can reflect on challenges, can bounce off ideas and can brainstorm strategies to overcome these challenges. Successful sparring sessions lead to new insights and identification of potential business solutions.

Not all business partners are coaches and not all business partners are sparring partners.



Kristien Debounoux founded HR Roads after 30+ years of international HR experience.

HR Roads stands for successful design, guidance and implementation of strategic change processes. Our successful experiences are situated in the field of HR Strategy, Change Management and HR Consulting & Projects.

Visit our website: <https://hrroads.com> or contact kristien@hrroads.com