

## How does a business partner controller work? Study based on market practices

Como atua um controller business partner? Estudo baseado em práticas do mercado

¿Cómo se desempeña un controller business partner? Estudio basado en prácticas de mercado


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### Abstract

This study aims to understand the way business partner controllers work. The research gap to be filled derives from the debate on the transformation of the traditional controller into a business partner. This study seeks to reveal whether the new activities reinforce the traditional model or whether it is indeed possible to identify a new professional profile, and, if so, what differentiates it from the former one. The practical contribution lies in the empirical evidence on how BP controllers operate and the theoretical contribution reinforces Weber's study (2011) on the stages of controllership. Seven business partner professionals were interviewed, based on a semi-structured script. The active participation of the professionals in the earnings of the organizations was identified, through their interactions with the operational and business areas, acting as interlocutors to identify opportunities and risks in decisions. Skills and competences such as communication, critical thinking, a holistic vision, and alliance building all stand out.

**Keywords:** Controllership; Business partner; Skills; Controller tasks

### Resumo

Este estudo tem como objetivo conhecer a forma de atuação de *controllers* considerados *Business Partners*. A lacuna a preencher vem do debate sobre a transformação do *controller* tradicional em *business partner*, e procura evidenciar se as novas atuações reforçam o modelo tradicional, ou se de fato é possível identificar um novo perfil de profissional; caso confirmado, o que o diferencia do primeiro perfil. A contribuição prática traz evidências sobre a forma de atuação dos *controllers BP*, e a contribuição teórica reforça o estudo de Weber (2011) sobre os estágios da controladoria. Sete profissionais *business partners* foram entrevistados, tendo como base um roteiro semiestruturado. Identificou-se a participação ativa dos profissionais nos ganhos das organizações, interagindo com as áreas operacionais e de negócios, e atuando como interlocutores para identificar oportunidades e riscos nas decisões. Destacam-se habilidades e competências como comunicação, senso crítico, visão holística, e construção de alianças.

**Palavras-chave:** Controladoria; *Business partner*; Habilidades; Atividades do *controller*

### Resumen

Este estudio tiene como objetivo comprender el desempeño de los controladores considerados Business Partner. El vacío a cubrir surge del debate sobre la transformación del controlador tradicional en socio comercial, y busca resaltar si las nuevas acciones refuerzan el modelo tradicional, o si efectivamente es posible identificar un nuevo perfil profesional, y si se confirma, lo que difiere del primero. La contribución

práctica aporta evidencia empírica sobre cómo operan los controladores BP y la teórica refuerza el estudio de Weber (2011) sobre las etapas de la controladuría. Se entrevistó siete profesionales business partner, en base a un guion semiestructurado. Se identificó la participación activa de los profesionales en las ganancias de las organizaciones, interactuando con las áreas operativas y de negocios, actuando como interlocutores para identificar oportunidades y riesgos en las decisiones. Destacan habilidades y competencias como la comunicación, el sentido crítico, la visión holística y la construcción de alianzas.

**Palabras clave:** Controladuría; Business partner; Competencias; Actividades del controller

## 1 Introduction

Accounting professional associations recognize that there is a demand for redefining the functions of finance and accounting specialists, making them strategic and operational partners, who provide critical information for decision making and, as a result, make organizations more reliable and better managed (ACCA, 2020; CGMA, 2018; IFAC, 2019).

This new profile of controller is called a “business partner” in the academic business literature (Arenales, 2016; Goretzki, 2013; IFAC, 2019; Rieg, 2018), and in order to study it, it is necessary to discuss controllership as a management unit, including the role of the controller and their way of working in organizations. Previous Brazilian studies on the role of controllership suggest that its mission is to optimize the economic results of an organization (Borges, Gil, & Parisi, 2005). However, as that result depends on the action of various areas, controllership can be seen as “co-responsible, together with the managers of the other organizational functions and units, for optimizing the economic result” (Borinelli, 2006, p. 201, our translation).

However, despite these studies being mostly normative, there is no consensus in the literature on the functions of the controller, although articles indicate recurring functions such as the accounting one and those of planning and control (Borinelli & Souza, 2009; Willson, Roehl-Anderson, & Bragg, 1999). The controller's participation in other functions is also discussed, such as in the strategic management of information technology (Borges *et al.*, 2005), or in measuring risk (Beuren, Fachini, & Nascimento, 2010). Other studies suggest changes in the controller's functions, whose activities have become more business-focused, incorporating tasks such as strategy development, systems, organizational redesign, and change management (Burns & Baldvinsdottir, 2005).

For some authors, there has been a change in the scope of the controllership area and, consequently, in that of the controller. The paper by Graham, Davey-Evans, and Toon (2012) suggests that the controller's functions have not changed, but instead have been extended, incorporating elements in a future vision focused on business management. This idea supports Weber's (2011) study, which identified the extension of activities from “beancounter” to “business partner,” as the controller works in the information systems management and planning areas, maintaining traditional accounting tasks. However, the activities performed by this professional go far beyond labels, as they have become more complex and dynamic, depending of contingent factors that include the organizational structure and affiliation with other companies, which directly affect tasks and interactions with areas of the organization (Rieg, 2018).

Much is discussed about the controller's effective participation in decision making (Arenales, 2016; Burns & Baldvinsdottir, 2005; Graham *et al.*, 2012) and in the demands of organizations that face an increasingly innovative, competitive, dynamic, and technological business environment. This leads the controller to progress from the stage of mere data provider to becoming deeply involved in analytical processes that are complementary to their traditional functions (Szukits, 2019). This transition of functions and the greater involvement of the area are based on the premise that the controller has a general (end-to-end) vision of the organization and a full understanding of the business, which enables them to influence the way the organization creates and preserves value (CGMA, 2018).

It is within this context that the research question of this study arises: **How do business partner controllers work in organizations that adopt that profile?**

To answer the research question, the study aims to understand the day-to-day of professionals considered to be business partners, identifying the functions attributed to them, the way they are carried out, and their adherence to the existing literature, indicating the common skills and competences of these professionals and analyzing their activities, characteristics, and attitudes, in each stage defined by Weber (2011).

The study is warranted as it adds value to the discussions on the functions of the controller, between the literature and praxis (Borinelli, 2006; Lunkes *et al.*, 2009; Beuren *et al.*, 2010; Weber, 2011). Studies point to the transformation of the controller from “beancounter” into “business partner” (Weber, 2011; Rieg, 2018); however, this change could merely mean that new roles have been associated with the professional, since with the adoption of technological solutions it is easier to produce data, and as a result controllers may remain in the role of data providers, with another level of depth (Szukits, 2019). It could also mean that the professionals have in fact adopted a new posture in the face of the challenges presented by companies, and new perspectives in the search for solutions.

The practical contribution lies in the empirical evidence about the way controllers work in company management, when performing the role of business partner, as well as highlighting information technology and soft skills as elements that are relevant to their performance. The theoretical contribution seeks to confirm the stages model proposed by Weber (2011), by relating it with the practices adopted by the business partner in companies; however, it adds a bias to the discussions, showing that the stages are not mutually exclusive, but cumulative. The study is useful for disseminating this knowledge among the current professionals and future controllers, making it more relevant for society, as new articles on the current stages are published.

## 2 Literature Review

According to the literature, functions normally attributed to controllership and to controllers include monitoring and assessing the planning and budget process, providing support to management, as well as developing and managing the management information system (Borinelli, 2006). Apparently, an influence in operational decisions is more common to controllers, and even expected, given that it is an important part of their work (ten Rouwelaar, Bots, & De Loo, 2018), especially in presenting and analyzing information, as well as in recommending actions to be taken; however, less participation in the execution of operational plans is perceived. The professional is also less involved in long-term strategic decisions (Vargas & Beuren, 2012).

Graham *et al.* (2012) indicate that traditional activities, considered fiduciary and operational, still occupy 88% of the controller's time. The authors identified roles and tasks that show a more complex world, with opposing forces that require different skill sets. The traditional tasks still predominate, but the position has become more complex. For Weber (2011), controllership acts in both the planning and information systems management area, and in traditional accounting tasks; and it is more effective when it acts as a "business partner," without abandoning the role of "beancounter."

Weber (2011) uses the term "beancounter" as a synonym for accountant, and differentiates the accountant from the controller by the way they both relate with information. In his view, the accountant is limited to providing information, and the controller ensures that this is used appropriately by management. Accountants (beancounters) are "manufacturers of data" and controllers are "sellers of data." The controller may treat information as a simple handover to management, or use it in order to influence decision making, which implies different forms of interaction between the professional and the organization's management.

One facilitating agent in the process of change of the professional is the use of information technology. This acts as a normative conductor, broadening the capacity to obtain data that will help in the interaction with the operation, driving the role of the business partner (Karlsson, Hersinger, & Kurkkio, 2019); however, this does not imply the disappearance of their role of data provider, but merely that the professional can advance and become more deeply involved in analytical processes, complementing their traditional functions (Szukits, 2019). Studies indicate that both types of professional can coexist in an organization and complement each other as hybrid controllers (Burns & Baldvinsdottir, 2005; Szukits, 2019; ten Rouwelaar *et al.*, 2018).

As knowledge is accumulated, controllers start to influence management with regard to content; that is, by acquiring in-depth knowledge of the company's business model, as well as of the market it operates in, it is possible to offer a critical opinion and dissuade management, when necessary. This is the stage Weber (2011) calls "co-manager." In turn, controllers acting as business partners actively participate in decision making together with the other managers, and they act in a strategic way, managing the information system, elaborating the strategic plan, monitoring and controlling deviations, among other functions (Weber, 2011).

The concept of business partner, for a professional who actively participates in decision making, as well as in elaborating the organization's strategy together with senior management, does not yet appear to be very widespread in the Brazilian labor market, as indicated in the study by Wiggers, Souza, and Lunkes (2015) of 213 companies, of which only five demanded controllers with the exclusive functions of that profile. In the group that mixed multiple functions (the concepts of beancounter and business partner) the supply was much greater. This shows that the controller's functions are undergoing a transformation process, and it is already possible to perceive that those professionals who are more than just beancounters are more highly valued, thus receiving better salaries.

In companies where the role of business partner controller is widespread, the professional is responsible, together with senior management, for the economic result and, among other functions, takes a critical view to proactively challenge decisions and, in some cases, act as "devil's advocate" (Arenales, 2016). Managers value those professionals who adopt an external perspective, making suggestions to reflect on, who have a long-term vision, and who interfere when they perceive that management is not acting appropriately (Goretzki, 2013).

The organizational culture is one factor to consider when seeking to transform the role of controllership. It is not enough for the professional to assume a proactive attitude, seeking to transmit information in an intelligible way to the company's internal audience. The process of change should be built with the integration of areas, in order to attenuate conflicts and minimize resistance, so that the departments involved are able to better absorb the changes in routines (Espejo & Eggert, 2017).

Adopting a business partner controllership represents a paradigm shift and may be resisted, along with the implementation of changes in management practices. As main factors in inducing innovation and maintaining management control practices, Oyadomari, Mendonça, Cardoso, and Dutra-de-Lima (2013) suggest an organizational culture in which innovation is valued, such as through the demand for innovation due to performance problems of the controllership area or the company itself, and where there is support from senior management to stimulate the innovative process. The habituality and satisfaction of senior management with the existing practices have been pointed to as important factors for them being maintained. It is possible to observe in this study how much support from senior management is a determinant in promoting innovations and maintaining the organization at a stable level, without alterations in the current model.

The question arises of whether one day there will be a consensus on the functions and activities of the controller, considering that there is one group of activities that are characteristic of the area – the so-called “traditional” ones – and other specific ones for each business. The controller should know the company’s business model in depth and communicate with management, in order to produce relevant information for decision making. However, the relevance of the information varies for each company. Occasional information requested from controllers often departs from the usual data, as it refers to new operations. The demand can arise from a new project, or from a new operation, and at that moment the controller will need to adopt a multifunctional attitude, developing skills that go beyond the basic ones.

### 3 Research Method

This study is descriptive and its primary objective was “the description of the characteristics of a particular population or phenomenon, or the establishment of relationships between variables” (Gil, 2002, p. 42, own translation). This strategy enabled a better understanding of the functions of controllership and of the controller, together with the studies on the evolution of the business partner profile, which was the theoretical framework adopted in this study, and its relationship with the results obtained, with regard to the activities performed by the business partner.

So that the data collection was able to achieve the proposed objectives, we decided to use the structured interview as our methodology, whose script was based on the theoretical framework, enabling an objective conversation and extracting from the participants their perceptions in relation to the events being discussed. The study used a qualitative approach, which enabled connections to be established with the main goal of describing, explaining, and interpreting a particular phenomenon (Martins & Theóphilo, 2016).

As a starting point, we sought to find in the market companies in which the controller acted as a business partner. The companies chosen were those whose professionals spoke at an event in 2019, whose main discussion was the contribution of controllership to company strategy, its role as an active agent in decision making, and its actions as a business partner. The method presents a bias, but this was needed for the research to be successful, since it was necessary to include professionals with practical experience, in order to understand their way of working. Having defined the companies, we contacted most of the professionals via LinkedIn, composing the sample with those who were willing to be interviewed about their experience in the organizations.

The interviews occurred between October and November of 2019, lasting an average of 50 minutes, and were conducted in person, virtually, or in writing, as Table 1 shows. The participants were informed that the interview would be recorded and subsequently transcribed, and that passages from their answers would be used as support for the results analysis. Everyone signed a consent form, which explained the aim of the research and the commitment to maintain confidentiality with regard to the names of the participant and company.

**Table 1:**  
**Interviewees**

<i>Interviewee</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Academic training</i>	<i>Specialization</i>	<i>Form</i>	<i>Interview duration (mins)</i>
I1	33	Business Administration	Post graduation in Finance	In person	71
I2	35	Business Administration	-	In person	116
I3	39	Business Administration	MBA in Controlling and Finance	Virtual	45
I4	45	Business Administration and Accounting	MBA in Corporate Finance	In writing	-
I5	32	Economics	Master's in Controlling	In person	36
I6	45	Accounting	MBA in Finance and Masters in Controlling	Virtual	43
I7	34	Mechanical Production Engineering	-	Virtual	52



The interviewees work in companies from various sectors and of different sizes, showing a diversity of training, and their activities are not limited to one company standard (Table 2). These aspects indicate that the BP's activities interdepend on the company type and maturity, and this is more related to the way the organization conducts business than to standards. This affirmation ratifies the literature, in which it is observed that the functions of controllership can vary in the way they are carried out, but not in the product to be delivered, and this scarcely varies between companies, independently of size or sector (Weber, 2011; Willson *et al.*, 1999).

**Table 2:**  
**Profile of the organizations in the sample**

<i>Interviewee</i>	<i>Sector</i>	<i>Time in existence (years)</i>	<i>Source of capital</i>	<i>Size</i>	<i>Controllership management unit</i>
I1	Recruitment IT	20	National	Medium	No, financial area
I2	Pharmaceuticals	40	International	Medium	Yes
I3	Food	67	National	Large	Yes
I4	Food	67	National	Large	Yes
I5	Chemical industry	+ 100	International	Large	Yes
I6	Furniture and appliances retailer	62	Open capital	Large	Yes
I7	Chemical industry	+70	International	Large	Yes

To analyze the interviews, we used the content analysis technique, which seeks to understand what lies behind the words and other realities, via messages. This technique involves four stages: organization, codification, categorization, and inference. With the aim of exploring the data robustly, the discourse analysis technique was used, aiming to identify the interviewees' references, that is, to evaluate the argumentative structure and actions associated with it. The technique involves two stages: determination of the core references, generally nouns or pronouns, and division of the text into utterances or phrases, which essentially qualify and explain the core references (Bardin, 2011).

The data analysis was based on the participants' answers. The questions were subdivided into topics and analyzed according to each interviewee's answers. Subsequently, we identified the passages of the interviews that most precisely answered the question, highlighting the main points and eliminating language vices and possible fillers, to make the answer as clear as possible.

In the organization stage of the content analysis, we systematized the initial ideas, by reading the documents produced, in this case the interview transcripts, to put together the analysis plan. We elaborated two codified and categorized tables. The first showed the business partner controller's activities in each stage of controllership, explaining the professional's interaction with the information produced, the form of presentation, and their operation. The second, subdivided into the categories "related activities," "way of working," and "skills and competences," describes in detail the behavior and execution of practices that differentiate the business partner controller from the traditional controller. The inferences are products of the interviewees' speech, based on their arguments and examples of their everyday actions.

To show the rigor employed with regard to the sampling, we used the theoretical saturation technique, which refers to the moment at which the collection of new field data does not provide any more clarification about the objects studied. The sample can then be closed, providing support for the conclusion of the study (Fontanella, Luchesi, & Ricas, 2011).

Table 3 shows the statements and their recurrence in the interviews, identifying the saturation point per category described. Many statements are common to all participants, while others were only perceived in some answers. This shows that it is possible to highlight common trends in the companies and professionals that participated in the study; however, generalization is not possible due to the particularities of each business. Considering the high level of agreement among a good portion of the interviews, we chose to close them, understanding that more interviews would not provide new concepts and findings, since saturation was reached. With this, we interrupted the new observations process and the recruitment of new participants.

**Table 3:**  
**Saturation evidence from the research**

Statement types	Interviews (recurrences)							Total recurrence
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
<b>Work of the business partner</b>								
<b>Use of technologies to produce data and elaboration of personalized reports</b>	X	X	X		X	X	X	6
<b>Making forecasts, translating complex topics into comprehensible language</b>	X	X	X		X	X	X	6

Statement types	Interviews (recurrences)							Total recurrence
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Expressing opinions in an independent and critical way, influencing management regarding decision making	X	X	X		X	X	X	6
Acting proactively, getting involved in business-related activities, participating in decision making	X	X	X		X	X	X	6
Functions of the business partner								
Activities involving the elaboration of information to support the operation and strategy	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
The business partner does not act in all the traditional activities of the controller		X	X		X	X	X	5
Working in partnership with the operation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
Acting as an interlocutor between the areas		X				X	X	3
Skills and competences								
Communication	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
Understanding the business	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
Power of persuasion			X		X	X	X	4
Intermediating in conflict situations		X	X			X		3
Technological/digital skills	X		X		X		X	4

**Note.** Adapted from Fontanella, B. J. B. *et al.* (2011) Amostragem em pesquisas qualitativas: Proposta de procedimentos para constatar saturação teórica. *Cadernos de Saúde Pública*, 27(2), p. 391.

The interview script was built based on the constructs developed in Table 4, which describe the stages of the evolution of the controller and of the functions attributed to the business partner and to the beancounter, according to the literature referenced. Besides the statements listed, other wide-ranging questions were asked to capture the interviewees' experience as much as possible. The aim was to enable the participant to be able to answer in a wide and comfortable way, within the proposed topic, leaving them free to speak about the facts that characterized their work in the organization.

**Table 4:**  
**Constructs for elaboration of the statements**

Construct	Variable	Statement	Reference
<b>Work of the Business Partner</b>		Based on the studies of Weber (2011), the work of controllership was subdivided into four stages, which differentiate the beancounter from the business partner, and describe how the tasks are performed in the different stages.	
	Manufacturer of data	The controllership activities are related to recording and communicating information.	Weber (2011)
	Seller of data	The following form part of the controllership functions: informing management of the economic result of the areas, making forecasts, and translating complex topics into a comprehensible language.	Weber (2011)
	Co-manager	Based on a solid understanding of the business model and the operating areas of the organization, the controller expresses their opinions independently and critically, influencing management with regard to decision making.	Weber (2011); Burns and Baldvinsdottir (2005)
	Business Partner	The controller proactively gets involved in business-related activities, in order to contribute to seeking the best solutions, actively participating in decision making	Weber (2011); Burns and Baldvinsdottir (2005)
<b>Functions of the Business Partner</b>	Functions carried out	Of the activities below, which ones are carried out by the Controllership in your company? Accounts management; Treasury management; Tax management; Developing accounting policies and procedures; Internal controls/internal auditing management; Attending to external agents (auditing, public bodies); Investor relations; Providing information to the business and support areas; Planning and budget; Elaborating analytical reports to support management; Participating in strategic meetings about projects and products/services; Participating in strategic planning; Supporting risk management; Participating in decisions about mergers and acquisitions; Others (specify)	Borinelli (2006), Vargas and Beuren (2012), Wiggers <i>et al.</i> (2015); Rieg (2018)

## 4 Discussion and Results of the Study

### 4.1 Work of the Business Partner

The interview script was elaborated based on the studies of Weber (2011) and sought to understand the work of the interviewees in the four stages defined by the author, which differentiate the work of a traditional controller from that of one designated as a business partner.

When questioned about their work as “manufacturer of data,” the interviewees commented that this stage is related to the technology applied in the area that develops tools for obtaining data; that is, the organizations use systems that “produce the data,” and they work with artificial intelligence in developing “robots” that help the accounting to review and analyze the accounts. The automation of information and the use of databases that receive and organize the information obtained are at the service of the controllership, and in these organizations the professionals no longer need to engage in producing data, but instead in analyzing the data generated by the system, as described by interviewees I3 and I2.

Today, we no longer have that contingent of people who only generate data. We carried out an intervention with the technology, and the data generated by the system are compiled, organized (...) it structures dashboards that now give us outputs with the KPIs (key performance indicators) that we believe to be the most relevant (...) we no longer have that area for manual data production, it's now more automated (I3).

(...) if I were to think on the whole, I'd say that today, out of my time, 20% is operational, it's input, extracting information from the system, and most of our time is used to discuss the business (I2).

These reports form the basis for the analyses carried out by the business partner, to provide data used in decision making. However, in some cases, the professionals do not only analyze the balance sheet, since, as observed by the IFAC (2019), most of companies' value is not reflected in balance sheets, but rather in digital data that is critical for the organization's success. Thus, earnings are only part of what is taken into consideration at the time of a decision; for a more in-depth analysis, it is essential to reflect on how that result was produced, and the impact of the actions implemented.

It is noted that, even in the initial stage, the business partner's work differs in relation to the traditional controller, both in time allocation (Graham *et al.*, 2012) and in people allocation, due to the more intensive use of information technology for generating data. This shows that, despite the relevance of stage 1, it is not at the heart of the business partner's work. However, Souza, Wanderley, and Horton (2020) observed that in Brazil the controller is “even more tied to the attributions of the beancounter,” with it being inferred that the group of interviewees represented a minority with a BP profile among the professionals who work in the country.

The second stage of the Weber (2011) model is “seller of data.” The interviewees are unanimous in affirming that the language used by the business partner to communicate the informational results that come from controllership always takes account of the interlocutor, seeking an adequate understanding of the terms being discussed. This affirmation is confirmed by I6.

Providing the manager with personalized information, so that he is able to take decisions without losing a lot of time, (...) supporting the managers as a seller of data, with reliable and timely information, so that they can take the right decisions, in the right way (I6).

The business partner counts on the participation of other areas to interpret the data found and adopt the best language for presenting it, critically analyzing it and translating the impact of the actions taken throughout the periods. With this, critical thinking is evoked in their interlocutors, achieving greater engagement from everyone. I2 provides the example of their participation in this process.

(...) of course I need a lot of input from the sales team, but I help them to understand the macro, they provide me with details, (...) I had budgeted for a value with a discount, I spent more, why? Did I give the customer a bigger discount? Did I give a bigger campaign discount? Where did we breach the budget? So I'll explain to them (...), everything that was spent versus what was budgeted (...), and what's affecting the result (I2).

Graham *et al.* (2012) point out that technology use and the improvement of information systems free up more time for the professionals to focus on analyzing and interpreting information, which adds value to their activities. Using these technologies, the business partner goes on to have a future vision, ceases to be reactive, and starts to be predictive. This change of perspective is observed in the comments of I3.

Before, it was looking through the rearview mirror. So we were only reactive (...) I was able to report an event. But I couldn't find enough time for action, to (...) reverse a trend, reverse a situation. Today we're able, with the help of the technology that was implemented, (...) to be predictive (I3).

The findings of the study confirm Weber's (2011) observation regarding the level of interaction with managers, which enables the controllers to understand how they process information, that is, what is useful for their decision making. This enables them to customize their communication, so that the managers understand the impacts of what is disclosed within their operating area, and to collaborate based on a critical analysis of the data, with answers about the actions taken and their impacts on the result presented.

The interviewees' answers suggest dependence on technology to sustain the business partner's work, involving the discussion of the digital transformation of controlling practices, as addressed by Cavélius, Enderich, and Zicari (2020). Digital transformation is a characteristic of the organization as a whole and/or its business environment, not necessarily specific to controllership. The companies where the interviewees work are innovative organizations, which have already incorporated the digital transformation and, as a result, this change appears to contribute to the work of controllership as a BP, as well as "supporting the mission of adding value and challenging the business units."

In the "co-manager" stage defined by Weber (2011), the interviewees mentioned the BP's critical and challenging thinking, which helps to improve decision making. They ask assertive questions, which help the areas to reflect on a particular decision, providing the business areas with even more security. The BP's vision helps to provide financial backing and ensure that the critical points have been analyzed.

Burns and Baldvinsdottir (2005) highlight the fact that relevant commercial knowledge is needed, as well as resourcefulness when communicating their opinions and discussing the business, so that the professional can support decision making. They need to have solid knowledge about the established business model and its impact on company earnings; with this, they will have a greater chance of contributing to the organization, as affirmed by I2, I6, and I7.

Anyone who works in Controllership creates a very solid idea of the whole formation and result of the company, (...) they're often consulted on business activities at a wide variety of levels, ranging from executive meetings to clearing up basic doubts the areas have in relation to the formation of earnings (...) to taking some day-to-day decisions, (...), and also to the production of knowledge (I6).

We're very challenging (...), very critical, I don't just take a number. (...), my role is to understand what that campaign is, how much of an increase in sales it will bring, why does the company need to do that campaign? If I have a change in the sales mix, then I want them to help me understand what's changing. Why am I going to sell more of this product, or that one? Why does that all have a financial impact (I2).

We'll look at it from a financial perspective and give our advice: you should do this, not that, or if you do, in what way, or we'll do a specific region to test; anyway, that's only one example. Or we're going to hire a salesperson, or we're going to hire a third party for that new region we're developing, what are the costs, what are the risks, we're always consulted and involved (I7).

The business partner not only has a financial vision, but one of the whole business; thus, decisions are not taken based on a single viewpoint. The work done together with the operations, business, and marketing areas, among others, has greater chances of being successful, since the decisions are made by the group and not only one area. The interviewees' speech confirms that the business partner controller does not deliberate alone, but has a major influence and comprises the team that defines organizational actions.

Vargas and Beuren (2012) show the controller's participation in operational decisions, in presentations and analyses, and in recommending possible actions to be taken. The interviewees' answers indicate the controller's participation in providing information that will serve to support final decisions. The data produced and previously interpreted by the BP will be the guide and one of the factors in decisions.

Finally, despite the "decentralization" variable not being an object of this study, it can be inferred that, based on the analysis of the narratives, there is a level of decentralization of the decision-making process in the interviewees' companies that creates conditions for greater involvement of the controllership professional, as shown by Souza *et al.* (2020).

In the fourth stage, itself defined as "business partner," the interviewees affirmed that they are responsible for helping the operation to understand the impacts of the business on the result; thus, it is necessary to monitor the internal and external market. Much more than just explaining the obvious, the BP delves further into the result and knows what has happened and why, thus having greater chances of examining the trends and taking some action. They also participate in building the organization's strategies and work together with management, giving support at the point where problems actually occur, and seeking solutions. The participants give examples of how this occurs in practice.



One example: in the last planning session we opted for a much greater focus on the platform and not as a software seller. There are not very explicit financial decisions there, but behind it is a strategy that minimizes the company's risk (...). We have that mindset (...) it helps in seeing the company's future, where it should position itself in the market (I1).

I need to understand why I sold less, (...) I make a real effort to understand what's happening in the market, am I losing market share? (...) Is the market falling? (...) I like to take the answer further – it fell because it sold less and it rose because it sold more (I2).

In my case, I'm at the business every week. One week at each factory, together with the manager, talking, taking part in meetings. And providing them with that panel of indicators, where (...) we are and what (...) needs to be done to get back in line or achieve the objective (I3).

The team hadn't envisioned the impact of taxes. (...) where are we going to sell this? (...) I can potentially use my ICMS credit, which is repressed today. So, the business or the operation often doesn't have that type of vision. And we, by acting as an interlocutor between various areas, are able to give that more critical input and, (...) help in decision making. And to have a more assertive influence (I5).

There was a way (...) of allocating the seller's cost. (...) an error was identified in the system. (...) We, the business partner, raised all the cases and readapted so as to avoid more errors, we measured the impact and communicated with the customers. So, that's the way we work, we took something, identified the error, transformed what was complex into something simpler, (...) so you give the right incentives. Whoever has sold more of all the products has more profit in their result, and the rest have less, and so it's fairer, and encourages the person to sell the whole portfolio (I7).

According to Weber (2011), in this stage controllers challenge content, offer an independent opinion, remain at the managers' "eye level," cease to act in a reactive way, and assume a proactive role. The author understands that this is the final point for the evolution of the professional in the company. At this level, the work goes beyond supporting management and they themselves start to manage. The business partner controller surpasses the accountant, since besides providing information, they provide an external perspective and motivate managers to reflect (Goretzki, 2013), contributing to organizational learning (Oyadomari *et al.*, 2013).

The possibility of evolution of the controllership and the transformation of the BP controller depend not only on their own actions, but also on others mentioned in this analysis, such as information technology, decentralization, etc. However, according to the literature, the controller is also responsible for performing a proactive role in the digital transformation process and in defining the management model of organizations, contributing to creating the conditions needed for the evolution of the controllership.

This study shows that, as the evolution of the controllership professional toward business partner is perceived, the previous stages, indicated by Weber (2011) – "manufacturer of data," "seller of data," or "co-manager" – do not stop being carried out, but rather they take on a different form, since the professional will tackle them based on the holistic vision acquired throughout the process. The evolution of the business partner is not mutually exclusive, and all the stages are carried out simultaneously. Based on the interviewees' answers, Table 5 shows the main topics mentioned, describing the way the business partner controller works in organizations.

## 4.2 Functions of the business partner and their execution

Regarding the functions carried out by the business partner controller, first we identified the ones that the literature mentions as traditional of controllership (Borinelli, 2006; Vargas & Beuren, 2012; Wiggers *et al.*, 2015; Rieg, 2018), asking the interviewees whether they in fact carried out those activities.

The following functions of controllership were unanimous among all the participants: 1) providing information for the business and support areas; 2) elaborating analytical reports to support management; 3) participating in strategic meetings about projects and products/services; 4) participating in the elaboration of strategic planning; and 5) supporting risk management. Moreover, two other activities were mentioned by most of the interviewees: 6) elaborating planning and the budget; and 7) participating in decisions about mergers and acquisitions.

The controller has significant participation in operational decisions, whether by producing information as support or recommending actions (Vargas & Beuren, 2012). This study indicates that the business partner controller also participates in strategic decisions and critically analyzes decisions, as well as challenging the members of discussion groups, bringing new elements to the debate.

**Table 5:**  
**Work of the business partner controller in each stage**

Stage	Work of the business partner controller
Manufacturer of data	Use of technology to produce information; Development of tools for obtaining data; Use of “robots” by means of artificial intelligence, creating conference mechanisms; Focus on analyzing the information produced and on the KPIs; Elaboration of personalized reports that help in decisions and focus on the business; Controllership continues as the official source, which enables the reliability of the information;
Seller of data	Communication considered from the interlocutor’s viewpoint; Translation of complex topics so that everyone fully understands; Support to managers with faithful and timely information for decision making; Interdepartmental work to improve the interpretation of data; Critical analysis of the data, with answers about the actions taken and their impacts on the results; Explanation of the results with the goal of greater engagement from the areas; Future vision, ceases to be reactive and starts to be predictive, based on the indicated trends;
Co-manager	Advisory profile; Greater understanding about the impacts of operations on results; Effective participation in internal projects to improve processes and performance; Solid knowledge of the business model and the possible effects of decisions on results; Critical and challenging thinking, raises questions that provide reflections from various viewpoints; Work in partnership with the various areas involved in the operation; Understanding the needs of the areas and making suggestions; Analyzing the risks involved in the decisions taken;
Business partner	Holistic vision of the business; Decisions taken together with the operational areas; Involvement in decisions that require some type of investment; Helping the areas in understanding the short- and long-term impacts of decisions taken; Monitoring the internal and external market and its influence on results; Identifying trends and taking or indicating actions aligned with the business; Closely monitoring the operation, where the problems really occur, so that the solutions proposed are aligned with the needs; Identifying risks or bottlenecks in the operation and possible opportunities for improvement; Continuous improvement in the management of the other areas, acting as co-responsible for the general result.

To complement the activities listed, the interviewees were asked what other functions could be added to their activities as a business partner. Almost all commented that the list already covered most of their functions, but some made additions. I1 mentioned that they observe the technological bias in the programming of people in their area, which shows the need for versatility, and primarily the importance of connecting with the technology, which aligns with the findings of Cavélius *et al.* (2020). I2, I3, and I4 described their practices: I2: “Providing information for decision making, giving support to the operation, and having answers that will be useful in the company’s decisions.” I3: “Accompanying operational meetings to inform and align senior management’s expectations.” I4: “We also work on compliance, the Code of Conduct, and the ethics channel. We also take care of tax litigation and tax theory analysis.”

Bigger companies, such as the one I5 works at, have segmented areas, such as accounting, tax, treasury, and internal controls, and the controller works in KPI management, helping in decision making and risk management. The business partner’s involvement with improving the management of other areas was mentioned: I6: “As a support, you are kind of exempt of responsibility, (...) here, if the area doesn’t achieve the goal, we’re also responsible, if the ‘guys’ don’t hit the result, we’re also penalized.” This finding is important, since, to some extent, it shows flexibility in the concept of controllability, when the maximum was “you can’t be held responsible for what you don’t manage” (Pinto, Falcão, & Lustosa, 2013). It is noted, in I6’s speech, that tying the goal of the operational areas to the performance assessment of controllership contributes to that area being even more incisive.

Complementing the activities mentioned by the interviewees, the study sought to understand how they are carried out, in order to be able to differentiate their work from the rest. Here, the interviewees spoke about their day-to-day. According to their statements, during the planning process, the BP relates the

company with the external environment, showing market trends and the impacts over the operation and the results. They base their work on partnerships with company areas, contributing to managers understanding their targets and the best way to achieve them, reviewing negotiations when necessary, all in a collaborative way and based on a lot of communication. It is noted in the speech of interviewees I5 and I7 that there has been a change in the controller's behavior, going from an area that merely accepts and records to one that challenges and does much more than use its technical skills, as the statements below indicate.

And where we actually contribute the most, or... in a different way, nowadays, is with soft skills (...) our planning process or budget is based a lot on that. (...) not only bringing (...), or discussing cold information in numbers, but, in fact, bringing elements for discussion. How do we do that? (...) A process of challenging (I5).

Did we really negotiate that? Is there anything else that was outside the contract that maybe wasn't negotiated? Sometimes shipping? So, they're things (...) there's no very standard report for, you have to get what you need from the system (I7).

The BP is always close to the operation to understand its needs, besides providing forums for debating new projects and discussing the result produced by each area of responsibility. Sharing knowledge, by carrying out training, also forms part of the BP's activities, since only people who understand the impacts of their actions on the result can engage so that their actions have the best possible effect.

According to I2, "what differentiates the BP's role a lot from the role of a traditional financial professional is (...) being able to integrate areas; if I had to say what tool we use the most here today, it's communication." On this point, I7 follows the same line, highlighting communication with the areas to question and propose improvements; however, it is necessary to know how to communicate to avoid alienating the areas, and, similarly, to obtain the desired result, that is, "knowing how to bite and whisper, because if we bite too much, [the managers] shy away, and if we whisper too quietly, not everything that needs to be done gets done, so you have to measure that."

Controllershship acts in analyzing the results and in identifying opportunities for improving management. Constant communication with information users helps it to adopt continuous innovations in the format of its presentations, and in the frequency, type, and language used (Oyadomari *et al.*, 2013).

Regarding the portfolio of tasks under the responsibility of controllers, there is barely any variation between companies, independently of the size or industrial sector (Weber, 2011). This affirmation is confirmed by the research, which listed various activities in common, carried out by the interviewees; however, what changes is the way of performing them and the importance each company attributes to them. As a counterpoint, after analyzing a sample with a predominantly traditional controller profile, Horton *et al.* (2020) affirmed that "the most important tasks included preparing financial report materials and ensuring that their companies fulfilled the financial reports requirements, as well as monitoring tax performance." These tasks are typical of accounting, and they reveal the difference in perception about the importance of the functions of the BP controller and of the traditional controller.

#### 4.3 Skills and competences of the business partner

With the aim of understanding what differentiates the work of the business partner from that of a traditional controller, questions were elaborated to encourage the participants to describe what they considered characteristics pertinent to good performance in the role. The answers were complementary, describing a participative professional and great expert on the business where they work, among other skills.

Knowing how to communicate, being curious, and knowing their business in depth will help them to act in a way that focuses more on what makes the difference in the operation, with a view passing between the financial and the business perspectives. A good business decision does not always lead to an excellent short-term result, and the business partner controller has this view. Controllershship is like a bridge that will connect the areas so that they can better understand and identify the best way to work together. The BP's day-to-day is negotiating with the other areas, and so communication and the power of persuasion are decisive for good performance, as I2 indicates.

Being curious, understanding the market you operate in, knowing how to be critical (...), having good judgement, (...) and knowing how to communicate, (...) because a badly conveyed message, (...) can cause a lot of noise, and that can have quite an impact on your work, (...) and cause unnecessary conflict between the areas (I2).

Encouraging the controller to work "in the field" motivates them to focus more on the business and the impacts caused by decisions taken. In this sense, they stop working on routine activities and adopt a "hybrid" approach; however, for that to be possible, support is needed from senior management (Burns & Baldvinsdottir, 2005).

I go to speak with the factory and understand the cost of the product, to explain to the marketing and sales team that it's no use selling only one product, because the cost of the other is much better; so, it needs to make a better sales mix (I2).

Alliances should be developed to obtain greater penetration in various areas, and with managers from different levels and with different visions. Resilience is also needed to face resistances. Arenales (2016) highlights interactional, behavioral, and communication skills; presenting arguments and justifying proposals in an assertive way, emphasizing the opportunities and benefits, as well as presenting messages in a positive way, all help to win the interlocutor's trust and build and maintain relationships with companies, as indicated by I6.

The area really has to see you as a partner, as someone that is there to maximize the company's results, as well as of that area. (...) that's fundamental, because if not you start to be seen as an auditor, and then people close themselves off to opportunities; everything that you show, they don't agree with, they become resistant (I6).

A professional who seeks to contribute effectively to the result of the operation should be, according to I1, someone who is constantly moving, seeking to understand the needs of the business, not only focusing on cutting costs. This involves being active in the day-to-day of the business, asking the right questions to arouse critical reflection, and at certain times being firm to reduce some cost that may not be generating a result, or that may negatively affect the strategy initially designed. This has to be done so that the non-financial areas involved understand the reason for the budget cut and the impacts this has on the result.

I3: "The great success of a professional who acts as a BP is having that DNA of the business they belong to. (...) that's the major differential. Liking being in the operation, experiencing the operation, and understanding the operation." I5: "Having that really good combination of analytical skills, understanding, and communication skills, whether to convince or explain. So that they can really influence decision making."

The advice of I6 is that they should continuously seek knowledge, think differently and creatively, and collaborate in improving the management of the various areas, as well as being open to feedback and criticism. They should also remain resilient and be persistent, in order to break down any resistance barriers that managers put up. And they should primarily be committed to delivering the result.

The main characteristics are (...) seeking knowledge, having resilience, having persistence, having a good relationship, and also forming part of that result, not only being someone who is there demanding results, but who is fully involved with the result of the management of the area for which you are a BP (I6).

Rieg (2018) observes that a high level of training enables the professionals to carry out complex tasks, as well as having a greater range of skills and knowledge to carry out activities. This study shows that much more than formal knowledge, a good professional needs to develop soft skills to deal with the challenges of the role, such as communicating assertively, avoiding aggressiveness, but at the same time being firm in their purpose; power of persuasion, as they will always be negotiating with various players; resilience and focus, as it will not always be possible to achieve the desired harmony in the estimated time; among so many other attributes mentioned throughout this paper. Table 6 summarizes and categorizes the main characteristics and the form of working described by the interviewees.

#### 4.4 Discussion of the results

A business partner, as the name suggests, has to be geared toward the business and be a partner; that is, they should develop an empathic attitude toward the managers of the business areas, to whom they commit to attending with a stewardship approach. As examples of the actions identified in this study, which differentiate their work in relation to the traditional controller, we can mention:

- Helping managers to understand budgetary variations, identifying the causes of the variations (diagnostic analysis), organizing data so that they can visualize (bridge analysis) those variations, and, moreover, proactively contributing to the elaboration and evaluation of action plans and corrective measures.
- Identifying the critical factors of success (Ferreira & Otley, 2009) of the business and support areas, to help the managers to elaborate the key performance indicators that reflect whether these factors are being achieved.



**Table 6:**  
**Categorization of the work of the business partner controller**

Category	Business partner controller
<b>Related activities</b>	<p>Technological bias, including programming;                      Providing information for decision making;                      Giving support to the operation, seeking answers that will be useful in the company's decisions;                      Participating in operational meetings;                      Compliance, Code of Conduct, and ethics channel;                      Transfer price and intercompany operations analysis;                      Involvement in the process of continuously improving the management of the other areas;                      Providing corporate education in finance.</p>
<b>Way of working</b>	<p>Analyzing trends and comparing with the market (external view);                      Reviewing the actions implemented and their results (positive and negative);                      Evaluating the company's critical points (expenses incurred without the expected return, business strategies, risks identified);                      Automating and reviewing the processes;                      Working in partnership with the operations/business areas to define the goals and outline plans to achieve them efficiently, as well as seeking continuous improvements in management and helping to implement them;                      Monitoring the operation, in order to ensure the estimated result, or at least anticipate possible deviations and seek ways of mitigating them;                      Weighing up negotiations with suppliers, partners, and customers in order to align the organization's strategy;                      Connecting the various areas with the aim of identifying opportunities and risks in the negotiations;                      Challenging those involved in decisions to reflect in a different way, questioning and bringing elements that are not normally taken into consideration;                      Providing forums for debate by area to understand each one's needs, debate new projects, review the results of the actions carried out, and evaluate the planned actions;                      Sharing knowledge, with the development of training;                      Monitoring the operation up close, to understand its needs and challenges;                      Organizing meetings with the participation of senior management and those responsible for the business units, to align the market trends with the planned budget and the proposed strategy.</p>
<b>Skills and competences</b>	<p>Understanding in depth the business in which the organization operates, from both an internal and external perspective, identifying the factors that impact the operation;                      Communicating assertively, avoiding aggressiveness, and at the same time being firm in their purpose;                      Having a holistic vision of the organization, seeking to understand the critical points of each area;                      Maintaining constant communication with the areas in order move easily between them all;                      Being curious, seeking knowledge internally and externally;                      Developing critical thinking, to be able to challenge their peers to reflect;                      Power of persuasion, since they will be negotiating with different players the entire time;                      Intermediating conflict situations, analyzing every viewpoint, and seeking consensus between the areas;                      Building alliances to obtain greater penetration in the various areas;                      Resilience and focus, since it will not always be possible to obtain the desired harmony in the estimated time;                      Technological and digitalization skills, thinking of new tools that will be launched;                      Working in partnership, in order to create trust and credibility;                      Committing to delivering the result, acting like an owner;                      Thinking innovatively, avoiding an expense is not always the best alternative, there are expenses and risks that are necessary for the organization's growth;                      Being open to learning, listening, accepting feedback and criticism;                      Being aware of the best form of communication; knowing what, when, and how to communicate can make the difference and lead to better results.</p>

- Identifying the tasks that need to be carried out so that the area performs well, developing indicators that measure their execution, that is, the task controls defined by the Merchant and Van der Stede (2006) model.
- Monitoring the critical environmental variables that can affect the performance of the business unit, according to the interactive model developed by Simons (1995).

Souza *et al.* (2020) mention that the functions of the controller are still very aligned with those of the beancounter, more than with those of the business partner, and this is not related to company size, but rather to the decentralization of the organizational structure. In decentralized structures there is greater

proximity and interaction between areas; consequently, the controller gets more involved in the business. This study suggests that the activities that characterize the controller's work as a beancounter still prevail in Brazil.

In a study on the profile of controllers in Brazil, the United States, Europe, and China, Horton *et al.* (2020) show that the work as a business partner still occurs among a minority of professionals, independently of geographical location. They mention that accounting education is highly centered on developing accountants and financial auditors, which needs to be reviewed to develop other more management-related skills. Therefore, the results of this qualitative study should be interpreted as a contribution on the work of this small portion of the business partner profile in Brazil and should not be generalized.

The study shows that the business partner controller passes through all the stages identified by Weber (2011) in a cumulative way, that is, the stages are not mutually exclusive, but complementary. However, in passing through each stage the professional does not have a beancounter attitude, but rather takes a differentiated approach, showing the attitude of a partner in the business and greater participation in decisions. For example, when data are concerned, the beancounter is limited to merely recording them, while the business partner analyzes and translates them into language that is comprehensible for all users, so that they can be used for different operational purposes. Table 7 presents the difference in perception between the two types of professional.

**Table 7:**  
**Comparison between the activities of the beancounter and those of the business partner**

Beancounter	Business Partner
Measuring financial items	Measuring non-financial items
Recording data	Analyzing information
Focus on execution	Focus on planning
Indifference toward other departments	Interaction with other departments
Providing managers with reports	Advising managers
Process control	Improvement of the business

Note: Souza, G., H., C, Wanderley, C. A., & Horton, K. (2020). Perfil dos *controllers*: Autonomia e envolvimento dos profissionais de controladoria, *Advances in Scientific and Applied Accounting*, 13(3), p. 9.

It is observed that one of the factors that differentiate them is the way each professional deals with information. The business partner does not only use information for recording and fulfilling the accounting and tax obligations the organization is subject to, without evaluating what the data represent for the company's future, in terms of trends, changing, or maintaining the current course. Moreover, the business partner is clear that controllership cannot act in isolation from the rest of the company, since it is only with the integration and engagement of everyone that the results will be satisfactory.

Horton *et al.* (2020) present an interesting finding, by identifying the relevant participation of the controller with a hybrid profile, with both functions of the traditional profile and of a business partner. According to the authors, this is a more common profile in controllers who work globally.

Finally, regarding the profile of the professional, it was possible to identify common traits in the professionals identified, enabling them to be classified as primary characteristics for a business partner attitude within organizations, as Figure 1 shows.

## 5 Concluding Remarks

This study seeks to understand the way controllers considered as business partners work, to identify the functions that are attributed to them, the way they are carried out, and their adherence to the existing literature, as well as indicating common skills and competences among these professionals. Moreover, it aims to portray the way business partner controllers work within the stages determined by Weber (2011).

Based on the answers obtained, similar activities of the professionals are noted, but it is not possible to treat them as standard, but rather as a trend, since each organization has its own specificity in terms of size, internal structure, organizational culture, and other aspects that directly affect the form of operating. There is an evident relationship between the findings of this study and those of Weber (2011) regarding the use of information, which goes from being a mere handover to management to being able to influence the way the managers use it.

It was found that BP professionals act in all the stages proposed by Weber (2011); however, their participation aims to extract information, translate it in order to facilitate its interpretation by managers, and use it for joint decision making, always with an analytical and challenging bias. They seek positive impacts, or at least to complement decisions, based on the principle that the organization should be analyzed in a holistic way, from all perspectives, in order to ensure the best results.



**Figure 1 - Profile of the Business Partner Controller**

Regarding the functions of business partner controllers and the way they are carried out, it was possible to compare with the existing literature (Borinelli, 2006; Vargas & Beuren, 2012; Wiggers *et al.*, 2015; Rieg, 2018). Their activities, however, go further; while traditional controllership provides information, the business partner controller builds information together with the correlated areas, questioning, challenging, seeking to understand and explain the impacts caused by each action intended or carried out, confirming Weber (2011). For this to be possible, they always work up close with the operation, knowing the business model in depth and adding elements and questions that present new viewpoints to the managers.

The skills and competences observed refer to an active professional, who seeks to stay up-to-date and in tune with the company where they work. Challenging and critical thinking and a holistic vision are common elements among the interviewees, complementing what was observed by Arenales (2016) and Goretzki (2013). Assertive and careful communication, always seeking the best form and time, means the professional inspires confidence and is able to influence and persuade. Curiosity, persistence, and resilience are other skills that complement the professional's profile.

In relation to the research question – how do business partner controllers work in companies that adopt that profile? – we observed that they actively participate in the company's result, interacting with the operational and business areas, acting as an interlocutor, to identify opportunities and risks in negotiations. Communication, critical thinking, a holistic vision, and technological and digital knowledge are common skills among all the interviewees, which differentiate their results.

We showed that the business partner has an influence over the company's deliberations, normally participating in decisions together with the areas, analyzing the same situation from another, equally relevant viewpoint, which makes the opinion more complete and exposes the company to a lower level of risk. They also present opportunities that were not on the radar of the other participants, such as the use of a tax credit.

The empirical contribution of the study was to show the reality of the business partner within companies, the adversities faced in the operation, and the way they deal with these questions, which ultimately add value to their work. As a theoretical contribution, Weber's (2011) theory about the stages of controllership were proven, but we added a bias to the discussions, showing that the stages are not mutually exclusive but rather cumulative, and that the business partner professional does not act as a beancounter,

but instead uses the data produced by the latter; thus, the two professionals should continue in companies in parallel. This study can also help teaching institutions to enrich their programs, at graduate as well as postgraduate, *lato*, and *stricto sensu* levels, since it identified some abilities that are not currently content developed in these courses.

The limitation of the study relates to the number of interviewees (seven), which means the results show a limited reality, which does not enable generalization; what is true for these companies may not necessarily be true for others. However, the results contribute to organizations being aware of other practices and promoting changes in their way of working. The study makes the practices of successful companies available to professionals, which is a demand identified by Rajgopal (2020), who interviewed one professional interested in knowing the practices of high-performance companies, as the firm where he worked was a company considered as having average performance.

For future research, we suggest applying the same questionnaire in different organizations, in order to observe whether the business partner profile is related to the type of organization or to other factors, such as the professional's profile; in other words, to evaluate whether it is the organization that encourages this type of performance and if it comes from the professionals themselves, given that there is a gain in trust and personal prestige.

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## NOTES

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