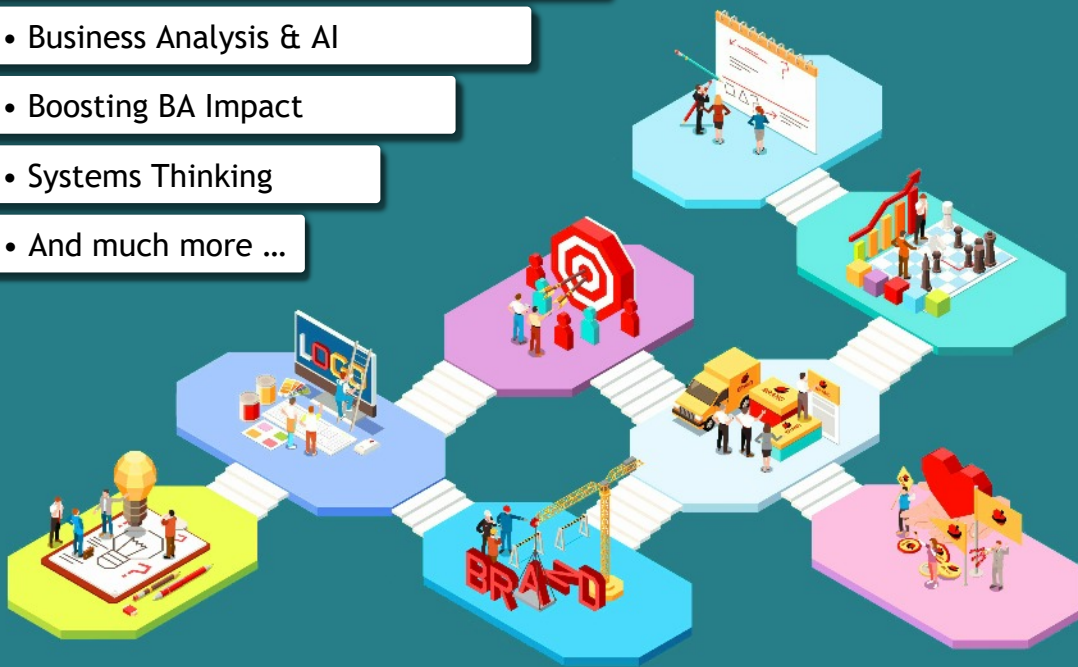# BA DIGEST

- Red Teaming Your Solutions

- Business Analysis & AI

- Boosting BA Impact

- Systems Thinking

- And much more ...

Your regular round-up of useful BA content

B.

Welcome

Happy New Year! Welcome to the Q1 2024 edition of BA Digest.

January (or "planuary" as some people like to call it) is often a month where people reflect on the previous year, and start to think about their professional and personal development for the forthcoming year. As usual, we have a diverse range of articles from authors all around the world, I hope that the topics in this edition will trigger some thoughts about areas that you might want to delve deeper into.

Talking of professional development, I was 'doom scrolling' on one of those time-sucking social media websites the other day and saw a motivational meme. I usually ignore these as they tend to be full of false platitudes about how you can make a million dollars without actually doing any work, but this one really stuck with me. It simply said:

"Be brave enough to suck at something".

This really resonated with me. Sometimes, a BA comfort zone combined with the seemingly ubiquitous impostor syndrome that many of us feel, means that it seems terrifying to try anything new. And the reality is that you (or I) probably won't suck anywhere near as much as we think we might! And there's a whole supportive community out there that has our backs.

So why not make 2024 the year when you, me, all of us do that scary but rewarding thing (whatever it is)? There's one life, with no return and no deposit, and at risk of sounding like one of those motivational memes that I criticised: If not now, then when?

This pep talk isn't entirely without purpose either. I wanted to remind you that BA Digest is an open access journal, with an open submission process. We're always looking for authors and you don't have to be a professional writer (whatever that means). If you're interested, you can find out more at: badigest.link/write.

Finally, as always, a massive thank you to the authors who have so generously allowed us to publish their work. We couldn't publish BA Digest without you. Also, thank you to our advertisers. It is the advertisers who enable us to keep BA Digest free, so please do support them and check out their services.

Until next time,

Adrian

Adrian Reed

Editor-In-Chief, BA Digest
Principal Consultant, Blackmetric

Contents

The Balanced BA:
How to Keep Your Head When All about You Are Losing Theirs and Blaming It on You

Karen Newnham

As a BA you need to stay as objective as possible to deliver the best outcomes possible for a range of stakeholders. It is always a balancing act, but delivering only what a few people want and ignoring the rest rarely results in good outcomes.

But as you strive to stay objective and balance different viewpoints, stakeholders and team members may unwittingly pull you off course and towards *their* particular favoured outcome. And on top of this, your own internal values and unconscious biases are likely to influence your efforts—how do you stay in balance?

The Will of the People

There are many categories of stakeholder that we as BAs seek to understand, including:

- The customers who will use the solution.

- The people who are paying for the solution.

- The board members who expect the outcome to enable wider strategy.

- The colleagues who will operate the solution.

- The team who delivers the solution.

- …And usually many more besides

All of these people have their own perspectives, values, beliefs and motivations. The business analyst needs to understand each perspective and consider them against each other. This helps to synthesise all the differing needs into a solution that delivers a balance of the best outcomes for all.

Effort is required day after day after day to keep needs in check because every advancement towards delivery will bring new information. This new information will be viewed differently by each set of stakeholders. Constant discussion, analysis, negotiation and decision-making is required to ensure the delivery stays on track.

This balancing act is definitely more complex than just 'writing requirements' but the extra effort will pay off in a better solution for everyone. It is also the ethical choice as some voices are stronger than others and some struggle to be heard. A BA can balance out these voices.

If you think this sounds hard, it is! What helps is to understand some of the key barriers so you can act mindfully.

Under the Sea

There's a parable where a fish passes another fish and asks "how's the water?". The other fish responds "what's water?". The point being that fish spend all of their life in water, and it's easy to ignore an environment that completely surrounds you.

Just like a fish, there's a danger that we'll take for granted the environment we operate in. Whether we work in a digital team, change team or somewhere else our environment will have an impact on our perspective.

If you are situated in a digital or IT department there is going to be lots of focus on the effort required to deploy and maintain technical infrastructure. Cybersecurity, integration and storage costs will also be key considerations. These aspects are important but always need to be considered within the wider business context and challenges.

Equally, a BA situated within an operational function will see day to day evidence of the challenges colleagues face from customers, processes and technology. Again these will be important challenges to overcome but may not be as business critical as they seem when put into context. An example of this is a retail call centre where an issue may create lots of impact locally but when the number of customers affected are compared to the overall customer base the issue is less significant.

Where Did You Get That Hat?

Holding more than one role as a BA can be a very common and very appealing position. Managers seemingly get more value and business analysts can broaden their scope and career options.

However, the hats you wear—product owner, subject matter expert, developer—also have an impact on your ability to stay in balance. Your knowledge base and the different objectives that come with other roles will cause you to see things through different lenses that will impact your ability to be objective.

Where Is My Mind?

All people suffer from unconscious biases and consider things through the lens of their values and beliefs. BA's are no different in this respect.

This is what makes it impossible for a human being to be truly objective when solely trusting their own judgement. Many recruitment departments advocate the use of interview panels for this very reason.

Get the Balance Right

Simply being aware of the main pitfalls above is a great start in keeping a balanced view.

Using some simple questions to check your work can also be effective

- What if the opposite is true?

- What am I missing?

- Who would have a different view and why?

You can also use the wider team around you to check your objectivity. Find those people who will review your work critically and bring a different (maybe under-represented) view. Do the same for them. Just remember everyone brings their own biases too so look to people who don't have an interest in the area you are working in to minimise this impact.

Being more mindful and introspective in your work requires constant effort. But the effort is worth it as you will have delivered a better quality of outcome for stakeholders.

Have conversations with the delivery team about what the benefit of being balanced and objective brings and what is needed to maintain this view so they understand the time and space you require and what is required of them.

Finally it is good to remember that in our role as BA's being objective and 'balanced' is something we should always be aiming for but as a human being we are perfectly imperfect and that's ok too.

Karen Newnham loves to speak to Business Analysts both old and new to help move the profession forward so it can continue to be a rewarding career. You can reach her here www.linkedin.com/in/karen-newnham-562030144

Just a Minute… Meetings Run by a Neurodivergent BA
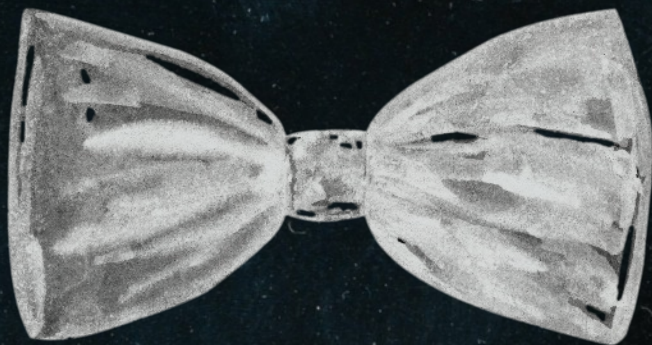
Thomas Bowskill

I'm neurodivergent (autistic, dyslexic) and my mind can be very dysregulated. To function in the workplace as a business analyst, I've developed habits and techniques to stay afloat and adapt to my limitations. Minutes, and sticking to an agenda, was a huge struggle for me to overcome initially, but over the years I've grown very good at this—to a point where, despite my struggles, I'm considered well-organised.

This journey of learning to do such a basic thing right has really opened my eyes to the fact that companies are often so focused on saving time, that they end up wasting people's time by not putting enough effort into important meetings. So, here's my thoughts as to how it might help to be a bit more on the spectrum when it comes to meetings…

The Bowtie Meeting Approach & the BA Mentality

A while ago, to learn how to make my meetings less chaotic, I stumbled across the 'bowtie meeting' concept, which suggests that an effective meeting needs 30% of the time in preparation, 40% in hosting, and the final 30% on the write-up. The business analyst mentality slots nicely with this: we're charged with ensuring the right problems are solved in the right way—most BAs with experience know all too well how a rushed or ill-prepared conversation can lead to expensive reversals in live systems and processes. The issue was this didn't come naturally to me, and I spend way more than 30% preparing.
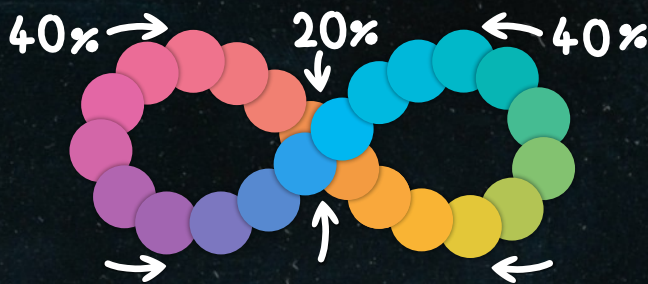
The Autistic Bow Tie

Communication can be a problem for me, as I live in a constant maelstrom of thought. Like many autistic folk, I have guide rails and rules to help me navigate this and communicate effectively. (As a side note: the view of autistics as rigid, rule-based, and inflexible by nature can be a misconception—adapting to translate your thoughts requires you to follow rules that don't come naturally. Personally, my natural communication state is a debilitating level of chaos that needs to be shackled to make sense).

So, as I started to learn about the bow tie meeting method, I realised both how valuable it was as a technique, but also the sheer amount of effort I needed to put into preparation. For a mind that can pinball around multiple thoughts, it was quite an exercise to learn how to structure my thoughts into an intelligible order, but one that really enabled me to have useful meetings. My agendas might be a bit meticulous and wordy, but they are guide rails that have become invaluable to me.

The next neurodivergent challenge came in the form of my dyslexia and atrocious working memory. I can forget conversations minutes ago if I haven't kept notes, but if written down I have strong recall. In meetings, the danger for me is getting too far behind in my notes. Fortunately, having meticulous agendas often reduces what I need to write down, so my large area of focus is pacing the conversation—that's something easily done through paraphrasing (a great tool to reaffirming understanding) or, if you're me, throwing in a few quips.

When I've navigated the meeting itself, then comes the write-up. Autism pops up again, with me needing to go through a very methodical summary of who said what and when. I find if I do anything else it becomes confusing to others; it's verbose, often with too much detail, but it works. It really is an effort of translation, which is often why the 30/40/30 bow tie will be 40/20/40 by the time I've finished. It's what I mean about the autistic bowtie: my 40/20/40 approach to planning, hosting, and summarising—it fits in nice and snug with the neurodiversity infinity loop!

The Case for Respecting Minutes More

While draining to me, I find running my meetings any other way would be a waste of time. And avoiding that waste of time is really my point here. Because planning, chairing, and writing up conversations is a necessary pain for me,

I've grown to respect the value the process brings. An ineffective half hour meeting with eight people wastes four hours. If I invest time to bow tie it, I might spend 1-2 hours extra time but will have chaired a meeting that served a purpose—it saves time.

Through setting agendas, you're teeing people up for what to talk about and creating useful guide-points for the conversation (although in my case, the exercise I must constantly practise is not creating too much of a script). People get to think ahead of the meeting, which often leads to a richer discussion, with fewer things overlooked—and, sometimes, actions completed in advance.

Once you've planned, held, and summarised the conversation through minutes, you've likely crystallised your understanding, as well as those involved (assuming they read the digest!). When people need reminding or updating, you've got those notes to hand. It can be weeks, months and even years from when we last discussed a topic, but in most cases I can point back to that conversation and say, 'is this still how we see things?'—a valuable way to prevent meetings repeating previously-covered ground.

Having minutes also makes you realise where things aren't moving. It's hard to escape the fact that you've not done something when the minutes from the previous call are staring you in the face. The negative patterns and missed outcomes emerge when they're written down, which I find a great motivator to

taking action—awkward at times, yet beneficial. I have "Too Long; Didn't Read" (TLDR) sections in all my minutes, and I often review these to refresh my memory.

Importantly, I've found these benefits culminate in higher levels of participation from stakeholders who know their time isn't being wasted. Meetings become valuable and productive, and from this you gain an understanding of the effort required and whether you really have the capacity to chair them (or if you even needed them in the first place). If I fail to bow tie a meeting, it's often a sign that I've over-committed or the meeting holds little value—both are useful to reflect on.

Thoughts in Summary

A lot of this is obvious stuff, yet we still seem to live out this fallacy that we can be underprepared for most of our meetings yet still get value from them. Really, we should evaluate whether the meeting is really needed, and, if it is, then focus on getting the bow tie sorted out.

Even with my neurodivergent nature making this harder, I still feels that I save time when I add minutes!

Thomas is a neurodivergent BA in the financial services sector, leading a team of BAs across a broad range of business areas. His special interests are board games and business analysis. He has two children, three cats and three chickens. Connect to him on
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BA Apprenticeship - Starting a New Career
Tim Clark

"As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a business analyst…"

When preparing for adulthood we often find ourselves taking twists and turns in life that we may not have expected. My career path certainly hasn't been one I could have predicted when I was straight out of sixth form and doing admin for a bank. Some people have a clear vocation in mind from a young age—I have friends who became teachers, engineers and even a doctor. They had the benefit of knowing what they wanted and exactly what they needed to study to get there. For the rest of us, things often take a more indirect path to find something that suits our skills and interests.

My first introduction to project work happened shortly after I started my professional career. Individual Savings Accounts (ISAs) are a tax-free savings product in the UK. Since only a certain amount can be contributed each year, there are times when customers are keen to make urgent additional deposits. ISA season was approaching and accordingly there was a big push to administer customers' requests and amendments. I immediately enjoyed the cyclical nature of change, providing an opportunity to implement new ideas, process improvements or survive seasons of particular work. It's a chance to look back and see what you have accomplished, as well as what you could have done differently for next time. It was clear this was something that interested me, even if I didn't exactly know what I was going to do. I often found myself looking at a process and thinking "how can this be done better?".

This mindset was something that followed me around for a further 10 years. From job to job (and country to country, but that's a whole other story), I dived in and grabbed every opportunity to assess the situation and see what can be improved. All this whilst not even knowing business analysis existed. From building my own list of requirements to

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drawing crude process maps in Microsoft's basic paint package, product owners humoured me as I joined sprint meetings and threw mislabelled Jira tickets into the wrong backlogs.

As time went on the stars aligned and an opportunity for an apprenticeship BA role became available. I was contacted as a potential candidate. The more I learned the more I knew this was something I should look at further, and after I was selected it really felt like fate had finally pulled me in the direction I had been destined for. You can find out more information about the government recognised business analysis apprenticeship scheme on the UK Government website or the Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education website. You'll also find information on Assist KD's website.

Since beginning life as a junior business analyst, I have finally been able to put into practice the initiatives that I've carried around with me for some time. I'll never forget a meeting with a colleague when we were mapping user stories to the list of requirements we had for the development of a new system. "It's like a game" I said, as I noted what we had against what we still needed. "Kind of, I would say it's more like a puzzle." It was that conversation which really enabled me to see the value that I can bring when working on projects; working to not only put the pieces together, but to actually help create the pieces themselves from scratch.

To anyone who may have not yet started their BA journey, all I can say is how grateful I am to have had the opportunity to join such a fulfilling vocation. The skills I have learnt are incredibly useful, improving not only my professional life but also my personal one too. Recently I helped my mum renovate her bathroom, and it was incredibly satisfying helping her to lay out her main requirements, and not get bogged down on solutions she might not actually need. It saved a huge amount of time, money and stress.

I am also constantly learning more about the wider community, and it's great to be in a career where I can meet passionate and likeminded professionals both on and off-line at one of the many events organised in the UK for BAs. The IIBA (including the IIBA UK chapter) in particular are absolutely stellar at creating a full calendar of learning opportunities, and the topics are always very engaging.

Business analysis comes in many different shapes and sizes, and I am yet to fully discover the nuances of the various roles I could specialise in. But I do know that whatever happens, I'm looking forward to it. I'm sure I have barely scraped the surface of what I'm going to learn, and I'm sure I'll look back one day and smile at where it all began. In many ways, I already am.

Tim is a junior business analyst currently working for Close Brothers. Upon completion of his apprenticeship, he will graduate as a BA in Spring 2024. To stay up to date on his journey, or to contact him directly you can connect with him on LinkedIn
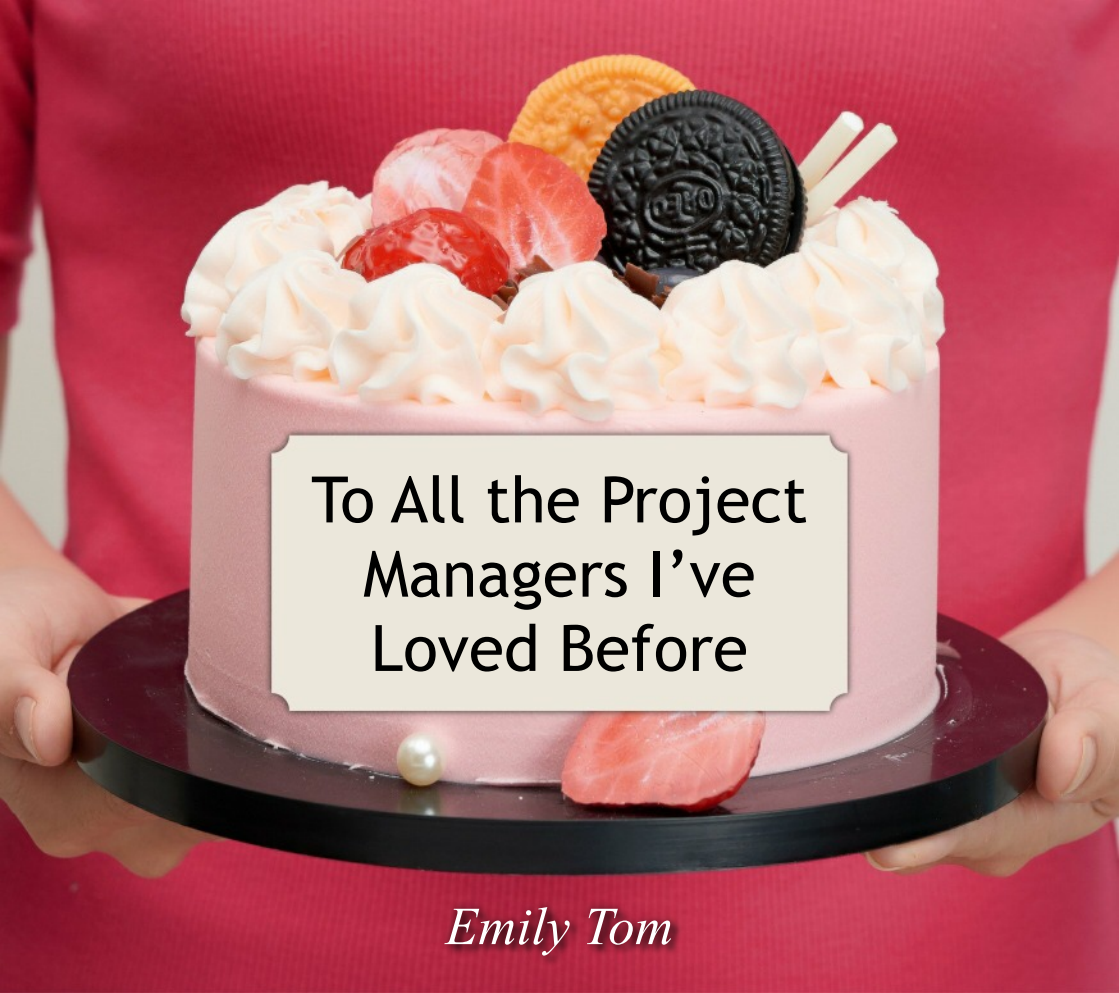
To All the Project Managers I've Loved Before

Emily Tom

I apologise if this evokes the Julio Iglesias "To All the Girls I Loved Before" earworm!

But I want to pay tribute to all the amazing project managers (PM) and team leaders who've made a difference in my work life. A great PM can make all the difference in team morale and success.

What Makes a Great PM?

Over the past 20 years, I've worked with many PMs—great ones, average ones and horrible ones. I'm immensely grateful for the great ones, and their names automatically pop into my head when I think of the people that I want to work with.

Their top characteristics that I value the most are:

Humility: they didn't assume they knew the solution subject matter better than any of the team members. That's why they built a team of people who had the

talent, knowledge and skills necessary to implement the solution. They didn't show a hint of condescension when communicating with team members. They provided team leadership without micromanaging.

Skill: they knew how to plan the work and work the plan. They knew how to use project management tools (e.g. MS Project™) effectively and not just treat the tools as a checklist of 'to-do's. They practised project management throughout the length of the project, not just at the beginning to set up the project plan. They could see when there was trouble on the horizon and then take corrective action to get the project back on track.

Team building: they recognised the diversity of team members and played to their strengths. They helped elevate each team member's skills so that each of us could learn and grow. They made time for each of us, tailoring their management and communication style so that each of us felt valued. They provided direction on roles and responsibilities so that our team could work in harmony. While they led the team through the project, they didn't view themselves as any more important than the rest of the team members. They were a team player!

Integrity: they followed through on their commitments to the team. If our team was struggling with any issues, they made all possible efforts to remove the obstacles. They admitted their own mistakes and we all learned from those mistakes.

Always learning: As business analysts, we talk about the importance of continuous learning, and we should expect the same of our PMs too. The great PMs in my life *were* always learning. They learned enough about the project scope and the work needed to implement the solution so that they were effective PMs. They learned enough to be able to speak intelligently with stakeholders outside of our team about the progress of our project. They knew enough to be able to defend our time budgets—and enough to know when to call a team member's bluff when a task was overestimated.

The Sad Truth

My observation (based on my own experiences) is that unfortunately the horrible PMs outnumber the great PMs by a huge margin. Being a business analyst, I've thought about some root causes and how we can help them. Maybe the seemingly horrible PM lacks the necessary project management training. Or maybe they lack the self-esteem to ask for feedback and help (in order to improve). Or they are complacent. We know that the "that's the way we've always done it." mentality can be very costly to a project. Whatever the reason, team members should recognise where a PM is struggling and help them overcome the struggles. We should be team players too!

After all, the PM is also one of the business analyst's stakeholders (think inner circle of the Stakeholder Onion Diagram). We can work to find out why

the PM is having difficulties, do some root cause analysis and help align the team toward success. The PM-BA relationship is key to the team's success. Someone once explained this with the analogy: the PM is the captain of the ship and the BA is the navigator. The BA sets the course for where the team needs to go in order to come up with the solution and we can tell the PM where there are obstacles on the horizon. The PM is still responsible for overseeing the team and taking care of our well-being.

Appreciation

I hope that most of us get to work with great PMs (and team leaders). We can do our part to help them improve by providing helpful feedback. So, to all the PMs I've loved before, thank you for being part of the team and always working on those great characteristics.

Emily Tom, CBAP is an independent consultant based in Ottawa, Canada. She is an aspiring writer and speaker and is passionate about promoting the business analysis profession. She supports fellow business analysts in their careers through knowledge sharing and mentorship.

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Red Teaming Your Solutions

Anton Oosthuizen

The concept of Red Teams comes from the military where a team is selected with the very specific purpose of finding flaws in a proposed operation—what could go wrong, what can be done differently/better? Impaired decision-making caused by cognitive errors such as groupthink and/or confirmation bias is the primary focus of these exercises. One way the concept has infiltrated the IT sector is under the guise of penetration ('pen') testing where infrastructure security vulnerabilities are targeted.

For me it has always been natural to question a solution but it is frowned upon if the interrogation goes beyond the normal 'why'. Often it is seen as being negative because the BA should

be looking for solutions and not issues, right? And once there is a solution, why trample on somebody's feelings (shame) by pulling it apart?

So the concept is very simple really—either at initial idea stage, during development, or even once a solution is 'penned', let the wolves loose on it and see if it stands up to scrutiny. Have colleagues deliberately look for potential flaws and push the solution to its limits. Simple enough yes but do not be deceived because doing it right is not that simple, or easy. How do we conduct these sessions successfully?

Put on Those Thinking Caps

Red teaming engages two crucial thinking skills—critical and sustainable. It is of the utmost importance that participants are allowed to be critical in every way possible. Those who understand critical thinking will know that not all ideas that emerge from critical thinking are always good but heck, those that are good, are very good. In addition, critique must be able to stand on its own, so it must be sustainable. Sustainable thinking is about the long term and interconnectedness. It is easy to pull something apart in the here and now but what will it look like in a few months time?

Set Common Goals

Yes, really getting in there and ripping somebody's ideas apart can be as brutal as it sounds and when there are no common goals or agreement, all the bleeding will be for nothing. It's important to have common goals and a sense of purpose. However, having these common goals does not mean there are clear instructions on how to get there because that could defeat the purpose. The whole idea is to look in the nooks and crannies and take actions you would not normally expect. It isn't something that can be prescribed in advance.

Be Kind

It is sad that this has to be said but if there are two things we can be sure about it is this: somebody is bound to be offended and somebody is bound to offend. Common goals might help everybody understand that it is not personal, it should never be personal. The way something is communicated could change from critique to a personal attack in a flash. Attack the solution, not the person. Accept criticism without being offended. The chances that you are one of the few perfect people in the world is slim, so accept the fact that there might be different/better ways of doing something.

It Remains a Single Team

Sure, the idea behind Red Teaming is to have two sides, adversaries if you like, but in the end, it is the same team working towards the same objective—to provide the best possible solution and maximise value. Humans (some more than others) are competitive by nature but remember that being **like** the adversary is **not** the same as **being** the adversary. Did I remember to say **be kind**?

The Right Team

This is not a self-managing, self-healing, self-everything Scrum team, this is real. So having strong leadership is very important. We do not need managers, Product Owners (POs) or "scrummies" but leaders. The last thing we want are complaining sessions or 'he said/she said'. If there is one thing we must learn from the origins of this technique it is that members of these teams are selected not because of their title, position or seniority, but because of their leadership skills and therefore emotional maturity.

In addition, here are some side notes that may prove helpful to those considering Red Teaming:

- We should not confuse Red Teaming with focus groups. Focus groups are great but it is like asking your partner if you 'look fat in this'. Red Teaming does not care what your partner thinks about it, it will tell you the truth, not what you want to hear.

- It goes by different names so don't be fixated on that. I once worked in an organisation where they used to 'war room' a proposal.

- The need to engage in this type of activity increases as the complexity and risk of the project increases.

Like most thing there are the "do's" and the "do nots". What should we not do?

Do Not Try This at Home!

- Do not provide 'leading' instructions. Your intention with a solution might be one thing but your 'adversary' might see it differently and this is what you want to highlight.

- Do not make assumptions. Findings should be based on fact. Any assumptions should be tested to verify the outcome.

- Use comparisons with care. We should never neglect to learn from the past, or present, but we need to recognise the dangers of cognitive biases and deal with them accordingly.

However, **beware**! Red Teaming is not for the faint hearted and without the right groundwork, it can come across as one group attacking another. I cannot stress this enough—Everybody on both 'sides' must be on the same page regarding the objective.

If you are willing to put in the time and effort and put your solutions through the ringer **before** it becomes **'the'** solution the end result will be robust and sustainable.

Anton Oosthuizen has been working in the program management and business analysis disciplines for more than 20 years covering landscapes ranging from IT, Banking, Insurance to Airport Management. He is a certified project manager, business analyst, agile practitioner and product owner.

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A Business Analyst's Response to AI When Capturing Requirements

Kitty Hung

During the panel discussion session at the BA Conference Europe 2023 on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Generative AI (GenAI) Ethics and Cybersecurity, the audience was keen to know how AI and GenAI might impact the way they work. AI alters the landscape for any user of digital technology, and therefore it follows that Business Analysts (BAs) must respond to this challenge (and opportunity) by adapting some of the methods used when capturing requirements for systems. We will face a new vernacular of AI related terminology to translate for our clients and must help our clients stay secure and resilient in an increasingly complex and dynamic landscape, enabling them to take on the opportunity alongside the challenge.

AI Literacy for Functional and Non-functional Requirements

AI refers to the ability of machines to imitate and perform tasks that have historically required human intelligence. It's a branch of computer science that focuses on creating intelligent systems capable of learning, reasoning, and making decisions. AI enables machines

to analyse and interpret data, recognise patterns, solve problems, and even interact with humans.

BAs, together with other professionals at every level, need to build up their AI literacy to be able to understand the capabilities of AI and how this can impact on requirements. As BAs, we capture functional requirements to help our clients understand what their systems or operations should do, and non-functional requirements to describe how or how well they should do it. Functional requirements open multiple opportunities for use of AI, appropriate to the use case of the system or operational process under review. As BAs, we should be aware of key terminology and concepts within AI and their implications. This includes maintaining our level of awareness as we undergo the rapid evolution of this new technology.

Maintaining Ethical AI

Alongside traditional functional requirements analysis, the BA role could extend to include advising clients on reviewing the ethical implications of AI, ensuring they are aware of new ways in which information generated by AI could breach guidelines, such as data protection legislation (e.g. GDPR). If using AI algorithms as the basis for decision-making they should also be prepared to identify and mitigate potential bias.

At my company, AtkinsRéalis, our BAs work closely with our special AI Strategy Group (AISG) which is embedded within our data intelligence workstream. Our AISG has defined a repeatable methodology for assessing AI ethical risk, a four-phase approach of discovery, design, validation and refinement, and recommendation, that ensures transparency, visibility and public empowerment in AI research and development (R&D) processes. This approach encourages the use of user feedback and research findings to shape the development of selected models. We blend research, industry best practice, and practical knowledge to strengthen models and mitigate perceived risks.

Our BAs also support the development of a data and AI ethics framework, a forward-thinking solution that keeps track of ethical initiatives and informs strategy and policy development, as well as day-to-day and AI solution development. This innovative framework consists of an ethical landscape assessment, an ethical solution delivery assessment and an ethical heatmap. The ethical landscape assessment identifies a unique baseline level of ethical salience for an organisation, capturing its ethical priorities and setting a clear ethical benchmark.

Evolving Regulation and Best Practice

BAs also need to stay abreast of evolving regulatory requirements, industry standards and guidelines related to AI, through research, training and participation in relevant professional events. Regulation is likely to remain somewhat reactive to the fast pace of

change within AI development. For example, while AI generated images and videos of celebrities, known as 'deepfakes', were hitting the news headlines in 2014 and 2015, the first US federal law regarding these was enacted in 2019. Since then, regulation has progressed in Europe and the US, and the EU AI Act may become the template for the first global comprehensive legislation, identifying AI considerations from CV sweeping to scoring mechanisms.

Aside from ethically-targeted regulation, cybersecurity is likely to be another hotly developing focus area. BAs should ensure they deliver their non-functional requirements to preserve cybersecurity, to control and countermeasure the AI enabled cyberattacks covering intrusion detection and response, the deployment of AI-enhanced firewalls, integrated AI-powered threat intelligence feeds and the organisation's incident response plan to address AI related security incidents. AI can offer cybersecurity benefits however, through being used to explore the potential for enhancing the organisation's security posture through tasks such as anomaly detection, predictive analytics and automated incident responses.

Advocating for AI

Despite these cautions, BAs may find themselves taking on a role as AI advocate, highlighting where systems or operations can now run rather than walk thanks to the additional computational power AI offers. We are adept at considering functional and non-

functional requirements with an 'art of the possible' in mind, and now that possibility horizon is wider than ever. BAs' capability to bridge the gap between business operations' professionals and technical experts will be key to taking forward AI's best factors, while preparing against elements of risk. As BAs, we should take the opportunity to skill up and lead our clients to their best outcomes.

User and Employee Training

AI, and in particular GenAI, are emerging technologies. It is necessary to raise awareness amongst users and employees about the implication of AI and GenAI on cybersecurity and the role they play in protecting sensitive data and systems. Through education and training, they can avoid falling into the traps of AI-generated forged documentation, synthetic sound and voice, and deepfake images and videos generated by AI. When capturing requirements, BAs should ensure user and employee AI and GenAI cybersecurity training is on the list – it is key to overcoming the challenges and maximising the benefits of AI to organisations.

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Shake Things Up: A 90 Day Plan for Boosting Your Impact as a BA

James Compton

It was late February 2010. We were just coming out of winter into spring, and in a couple of weeks I was going to spring into a new phase in my business analysis career.

I was going to enter the world of freelancing.

I was feeling nervous. In my recent 3-year stint at my previous employer I'd got used to a familiar and comfortable environment. But now I was uplevelling my professionalism and I felt the pressure.

How would I make my mark and crush this new contracting lifestyle?

I reflected on my previous 10 years' experience spanning multiple roles and I noticed there was a pattern that worked well. So, I codified my 'first 90 days' so that I could be consciously impactful— and I was ready to rock.

This was one of the most powerful moments in my career.

This codification didn't just give me a framework to go into a new project, create impact and leave an indelible

mark. It shifted me into a new sense of who I was as a BA. I used the word 'consultant' because that's how I now saw myself: an advisor, a facilitator, a shaper, and someone who was autonomous.

So, in this article I'm going to briskly walk you through my first 90 days—or what I call 'The 90 Day Consultant Framework'.

Why 90 Days?

Before we get into the 90-day consultant framework, you might be thinking "what is the significance of '90 Days'?" Why not 60, or 30, or even 2 weeks?

In my experience the first 3 months is where you can potentially make the most impact. An opportunity to position yourself as a trusted expert within a project. To position yourself as a key player, it's necessary to:

- Become familiar with the domain.

- Build strategic relationships and establish trust.

- Work through chaos and organise stakeholders and ideas to create light bulb moments.

- Gain agreement on scope.

- And ultimately—produce high impact deliverables and outcomes.

Another reason for three months is that this tends to be the probation period for many permanent employees in the UK. So, 90 days it is.

Why Do I Have 90 Days to Prove Myself?

Starting a new role can create a lot of stress and imposter syndrome. Many BAs tell me that they feel they need to prove themselves. And I tell them: "be mindful of how you think about that."

Thinking that way could create a disempowering and fear-based mindset. It could make you feel insecure about yourself. And worst of all it could impel you to overextend yourself just to "make sure you're showing you're capable." Shifting to a more positive mindset will yield benefits.

After all – you've been hired by the company, and, assuming you were honest in the interview, that means you've already proven your credibility to the interviewers. The next crucial thing to focus on is establishing yourself as a pivotal player and creating positive impact in your first 90 days.

So how do you create this impact? What are the steps that you need to take? What do you do at each stage?

Enter the '90 Day Consultant Framework'

I call this a 'consultant framework' because it's designed to create a powerful persona of being a BA expert and to raise your profile.

There are 9 aspects to this framework.

- **1. Run: One step ahead:** Develop awareness of what your stakeholders

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know now, and always remain one step ahead to always anticipate and advise of the next move. This will make you a trusted advisor.

- **2. View: Become a co-pilot:** See yourself more as a partner for a project/programme manager or your boss. This will create mutual respect and will avoid micromanagement.

- **3. Free: Be the business ambassador:** Navigate the business and free them from the confusion and complexities of projects—there's a lot of leadership skill in this.

- **4. Score: Know the politics:** Not avoiding politics, but rather seeing how it's impacting things helps you navigate and maintain a realistic perspective on where things are headed. That helps balance your emotional investment in outcomes.

- **5. Alive: Build frameworks:** Transform complex information that can drown your audience into structured frameworks to create clarity. This is a big reputation booster.

- **6. Fix: Listen more, speak concisely:** Listening is what we do well. Going more deeply into this will enable you to fix the real problems that exist under the surface. Replaying it back in clear, crisp terms will help stakeholders feel heard.

- **7. Brethren: Control meetings:** So many meetings lack basic control, so free your participants from time-wasting meandering meetings where no clear actions are agreed. Empower the attendees through structured use of tools and techniques.

- **8. Fate: Make yourself dispensable:** This may be hard to wrap your head around! It's the key to maintaining variety and keeping fresh by always thinking about your next career step.

- **9. Sign: Seek variety:** Always be on the lookout for the next opportunity so that you resist comfort and security. This keeps you in a growth-oriented frame of mind.

But I Want Job Stability. Constantly Seeking Variety Sounds Tiring.

I'm not saying every three months you need to go onto the next project. What you're doing is being commercial and opening new possibilities for yourself. Even taking small steps to network internally and externally will open your mind to new ideas, and make you feel even more stable—as you'll see that your skills are always in demand. Often, job stability is a result of a fearful mindset that 'maybe I won't be able to find another role'.

Seeking variety prevents stagnation, but it doesn't mean you're undergoing constant change.

That's a Wrap

So here we are: 90 days, a big impact, your feet under the table, and a good reputation with your stakeholder community. Even if you're not starting a new role any time soon you can take any of the elements from the "Consultant Framework" and deepen them to inject fresh enthusiasm and new ideas into what you're working on now.

So, What Happened in My First 90 Days in My Freelance Role?

The first 90 days went exactly as planned! Because I'd codified my framework, my anxiety reduced, and I created some of the best work in my career. It's that shift into a more consultant, independent type mindset that built a self-confident image and unlocked new creativity within me—and that was felt strongly within my team and client.

James is a BA consultant and coach. He focuses on deepening self-confidence for mid-career BAs who are looking to unlock potential.

Being a framework fan, he's developed a self-assessment framework that creates a unique insight into your confidence which you can try out here: confidentsage.com/scorecard

The Business Analyst Mentorship Life Cycle: A Strategic Approach

Christelle Govender

Introduction

Within the dynamic realm of business analysis, mentorship emerges as a valuable guide for hopeful practitioners navigating through complex skill sets and scenarios. It is often said that an excellent mentor can prove more informative than formal education and more valuable than hard currency. In the previous article, we examined how critical mentoring relationships are in transferring knowledge to aspiring analysts while creating diverse learning opportunities. Now, let us explore crafting intentional mentoring programmes using strategic methodologies with similarities to the software development life cycle—a familiar territory for many business analysts.

Like the process of designing and building software, developing an impactful mentorship programme involves following a methodical and progressive approach. It is interesting to note that many business analysts are well-versed in these types of methodologies— for example, various software or product development life cycles—but may not have considered applying them in their mentoring initiatives. By exploring how this mentorship development life cycle functions similarly to software creation stages, we can uncover its organised and tactical framework for nurturing upcoming generations of business analysts.

Linking to the Product Development Cycle

The mentorship development life cycle closely parallels the product development cycle, providing business analysts with a structured framework for cultivating professionals. Both cycles begin by defining a problem or concept and moving on to designing a solution, whether it's a mentorship programme or a product. Attracting the right contributors and forming connections align in both scenarios, emphasising the importance of assembling effective teams.

The guidance through the process and iterative nature of both cycles involves

continuous refinement based on feedback and changing circumstances. The final stages focus on measuring impact and evaluation, highlighting the importance of key metrics for success. Recognizing these parallels allows business analysts to leverage their existing knowledge to architect mentorship programmes that bridge knowledge gaps and foster a thriving professional community.

Linking the mentorship life cycle to a product development life cycle offers significant benefits for business analysts. By drawing parallels between these two cycles, professionals can leverage their familiarity with product development methodologies to enhance the structure and effectiveness of mentorship programmes.

Defining the Business Problem

The demand for business analysts is growing, but the influx of individuals choosing this career path isn't keeping pace. The complex interplay of certifications and experience makes mentorship an increasingly vital means of cultivating and enriching business analysts. The heart of mentorship lies in knowledge transfer, benefiting both mentees and mentors and ultimately, the organisations they are part of.

Business Value of Mentorship

Mentorship yields tangible benefits for organisations, including increased employee loyalty, reduced turnover, a skilled workforce, and enhanced company culture. It is the soil in which professional growth blossoms, fostering an environment where employees thrive, much like flowers flourishing in enriched soil rather than a mere vase.

Understanding Personas

To effectively design a mentorship programme, we introduce two personas: Finley, an aspiring business analyst, and Ash, a seasoned Senior Business Analyst. While these personas are specific, they represent archetypes that can vary in age, experience, and background. The common thread is the desire to learn and share knowledge.

User Stories

Crafting user stories is essential for guiding the development of a mentorship programme. Whether from the perspective of a seasoned business analyst wanting to contribute or an aspiring BA seeking experience, user stories must focus on adding value to all participants, including the organisation.

The Mentorship Development Life Cycle

Much like the software development life cycle, a mentorship programme undergoes various stages.

1. Define and Design:

- Clarify the purpose and goals of the mentorship programme.

- Identify the target audience, considering factors like experience and department.
- Determine the programme's duration and measurement criteria.

2. Attract:

- Clearly define the roles of mentors and mentees.
- Develop mentoring best practices.
- Attract mentors and mentees based on the programme's goals.

3. Connect:

- Match mentors and mentees based on user profiles, considering factors like gender, education, interests, and location.
- Choose a matching method (self-matching, admin matching, or intelligent matching).

4. Guide:

- Ensure programme goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART).
- Provide relevant resources and keep content bite-sized.
- Establish a formal check-in process for ongoing support.

5. Measure:

- Track individual and programme-level metrics.
- Conduct regular surveys to gather feedback and identify areas for improvement.

- Assess the success of mentorship connections and their impact on organisational goals.

Conclusion

In the business analysis mentorship life cycle, we find a strategic approach akin to product development. By defining the problem, understanding the value, creating personas, writing user stories, and following a structured development life cycle, organisations can foster an environment where mentorship becomes a powerful tool for professional growth, employee engagement, and organisational success. As the great Maya Angelou once said, "In order to be a mentor, and an effective one, one must care. You must care. You don't have to know how many square miles are in Idaho, you don't need to know what is the chemical makeup of chemistry, or of blood or water. Know what you know and care about the person, care about what you know and care about the person you're sharing with." In the intricate dance of mentorship, business analysts can find not only a pathway to success but a community where knowledge flows seamlessly, enriching everyone involved.

Christelle Govender is a confident, result-driven professional. Specialising in business analysis, project management, agile methodologies, and more, she excels in attracting top-tier talent and creating high-performing cultures. Christelle is an IIBA-SA volunteer, track chair at the South African BA Summit 2022 and 2023, published author and conference speaker.

Reading the Signs
Nick de Voil

In this series, we've been examining a key function of the business analyst: facilitating the collective thought processes of stakeholders in an organisation. In Group Construct Analysis (GCA), the basic building block is a *construct*. In this article we look at some ways to extend constructs.

Indirection

When my daughter Marie Claire was fourteen, she persuaded me and her mother to get her a dog. Twelve years later, our daughter now lives in another country—but Lola the Schnauzer is decidedly still here. When Marie Claire calls us on FaceTime or WhatsApp, Lola becomes confused. She can hear her owner's voice, but can't see her. It doesn't matter how often we show her the computer or phone: she can't grasp that the moving image on the screen is a *representation* of the person she can hear speaking. The idea is beyond her.

Naturally, Marie Claire has no such trouble. That's because she's a human being. If there's one thing that people are good at, it's making and using

representations—*signs* that refer to something other than themselves (what software developers call *indirection*). Literary theorist Kenneth Burke defined the human being as the "symbol-using animal" for this reason.

We use signs by layering them on top of each other, creating representations of representations. There seems to be no limit to the number of layers we can create. To take language-based signs as an example: a phrase is a sign, each word within the phrase is a sign, and each letter within each word is also a sign. The original speaker can utter the phrase for the first time, a second speaker can report this, a third speaker can comment on it etc.

Scientist and philosopher C.S. Peirce founded the discipline of *semiotics*, the study of signs. He identified three types of sign:

Symbol: a sign whose relationship to the referent (i.e. the construct being represented) is purely a matter of convention. For example, there's no particular reason why the idea of a dog should be represented by the visual sign consisting of the three symbols *D O G*, or by the auditory sign we produce in saying the word "dog". We could just as well say or write *chien, Hund, σκύλος, собака, कुत्ता,* بلك. We use "dog" because we're English speakers addressing other English speakers. The elements of a UML or BPMN systems modelling diagram are another sort of conventional symbol.

Icon: a sign that somehow resembles the referent. Sometimes, a symbol starts life

as an icon, but over the course of time its users forget its original meaning and start to see it purely symbolically (see article 10). For example, the letter *O* in *dog*, *σκύλος* and *собака* was originally a picture of an eye when first incorporated into the Phoenician alphabet on which the Latin, Greek and Cyrillic ones are based. The same applies to some UML elements.

Index: a sign that logically suggests the referent. For example, if I hear from the street a barking noise inside a house, or see a sign saying, "beware of the dog", I can assume there's a dog inside. On entering the house, the presence of a doggy smell or mysterious formless squeaky toys on the floor would reinforce that assumption.

Business analysts are alert to symbols, icons and indices.

> All the information we elicit is mediated through signs

When we hear a new piece of terminology, see a new tool, document or diagram, or come across some other clue that there's something relevant we don't know about, we note the sign and try to find out about its referent. We try to be careful and precise in our own use of signs, and we don't get a construct confused with its sign.

Signs aren't just a neutral matter of objective fact. When a stakeholder wants to refer to something, they can choose what sign to employ. The choice that they make tells us something about their construct system. In a sense, it tells us what language they speak (see article 1).

Of the three types of sign, indices are the most troublesome, because they're sometimes subtle. A stakeholder might believe that they've indicated something by using a particular sign, but we fail to pick up on it and interpret it correctly. The reverse is also true: we can think we've made something clear when we really haven't.

Coalition

The use of a sign to represent something else is powerful in itself—but there's more. Human beings are also able to *coalesce* multiple constructs together into a single group. Reification, as discussed in article 10, sometimes involves this kind of grouping. Without the ability to encapsulate coalitions of constructs, no scientific or creative progress could ever be made. As the mathematician and philosopher A.N. Whitehead said, "Civilization advances by extending the number of important operations which we can perform without thinking about them". Coalitions of constructs are a crucial element of GCA.

In his psychotherapy work, George Kelly (see article 1) noticed some anti-patterns in the way that people use constructs, including:

Constellatory constructs: A constellatory construct is one where the thinker assumes facts and adopts a particular attitude to those facts purely on the basis of one piece of knowledge. This is the basic mechanism behind stereotyping and prejudice.

Pre-emptive constructs: sometimes an individual (or group, in the case of GCA) assumes that, once you've assigned something to a category, you've said all that there is to say about it. In an extreme form of this, the thinker is unable to stretch their imagination very far beyond the sign itself; they believe they have said something meaningful simply by naming a construct. People are often unwilling to unpack a pre-emptive construct and discuss its meaning: when you hear someone try to close down a discussion by saying "end of!" or "that's just semantics", it's very likely that's what is happening. This problem is widespread in social media usage and especially in discussion of politics and religion—probably because these topics involve core constructs which are intertwined with individual and group identities (see article 7) and people fear these being challenged.

When talking with stakeholders, beware of constellatory and pre-emptive thinking (evident, for example, in the use of buzzwords such as "digital transformation"). Encourage a more thoughtful and explicit exploration of the possibilities.

Showing Indirection and Coalition in Construct Maps

Arguably, the situation where one construct *stands for* (is a sign for) another construct is an elementary relationship type like the other relationship types we saw in articles 2 and 3. It can be shown in the same way:

A stands for B
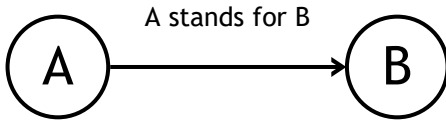
A coalition of constructs can be shown by enclosing them within a common boundary (its shape is unimportant):

A stands for B, which is a coalition including C, D & E
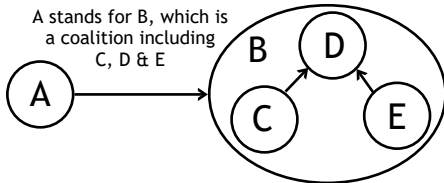
Because of the special place that signs and coalitions have in GCA, I prefer to think of these features as annotations of the diagram rather than an intrinsic part of it.

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You can read the previous articles in this series by accessing the BA Digest archive

Systems Thinking: A Primer for BAs

Araceli Higueras

I am a very curious animal and very keen to nurture my mind with learning. I am particularly fascinated by topics that overlap disciplines. Over time I have concluded that this happens because I'm interested in economies of scale and because I'm an opportunist (!).

In this article I want to bring to your attention some ideas from the systems thinking discipline that I think business analysts should know (and use). Systems thinking is a very broad discipline, in this article we will examine just a few ideas. If you are interested, I would encourage you to read more about this topic.

What Is a System?

The definition of 'system' is a hotly contested concept, even within the world of systems thinking. As BAs, most of us look after products, applications or systems that are quite 'constrained'/delimited.

For systems thinkers, the **boundaries of systems** are drawn depending on what the observer knows about, can see or wants to consider as part of the system and what they want to exclude. The choice of boundary can significantly affect the understanding and analysis of the system. Systems contain interconnected elements or components but as a whole have **a function** or **purpose for the observer** (there can be several perceived functions to the same system), behaviours, hierarchies, emergent properties, feedback loops.

Why Does Thinking about Systems Help in Business Analysis?

Most of us work within complex situations and benefit from both attention to detail and an understanding of the context in which we operate, the actors and the interrelationships. The following tips can help you to integrate systems thinking into your practice.

Holistic Understanding

Avoid focusing your analysis exclusively on individual processes or departments. Pay attention to **your organisation as a whole**, try to identify interdependencies and potential ripple effects of changes. Upstream, downstream, early life, transition services, sales, onboarding, support, short term vs long term... the whole lot.

Boundary Judgments

Since boundaries of a system are **interpreted by the observer,** it is only natural that different people might draw boundaries around systems in different ways. Business analysts can benefit from becoming aware of these perspectives and understanding the implications of these different viewpoints.

Identifying Leverage Points

When you design your work, can this holistic understanding help you find **areas where a small intervention can produce significant, system-wide effects**?

Where systems are intricate and changes in one area can reverberate in unexpected ways throughout the entire system, Donella Meadows encourages us with her work to choose carefully. Please consider the following list (ranked from least to most effective):

1. Numbers: Constants and parameters such as subsidies, taxes, and standards.

2. Buffers: The sizes of stabilising stocks relative to their flows.

3. Stock-and-Flow Structures: Physical systems and their nodes of intersection.

4. Delays: The lengths of time relative to system rates of change.

5. Balancing Feedback Loops: The strength of each piece of feedback relative to the impacts they are trying to correct.

6. Reinforcing Feedback Loops: The strength of the gain of driving loops.

7. Information Flows: The structure of who does and does not have access to information.

8. Rules: Incentives, punishments, and constraints.

9. Self-Organisation: The power to add, change, or evolve system structure.

10. Goals: The purpose or function of the system.

11. Paradigms: The mindset out of which the system arises.

12. Transcending Paradigms: Going beyond the current paradigms.

Feedback Loops and Unintended Consequences

Map out the processes and relationships within the system you're analysing. Look for places where actions or decisions lead to outcomes that, in turn, influence future actions or decisions.

If your work involves front end systems (user interfaces), you might recognise that feedback is also a very important principle in user experience design (UX). Feedback is defined by Joe Natoli as "obvious, visible, understandable reactions from the UI or the device." and is essential to convey what actions afford users when taken. (for example, when you click on a button and your device makes a noise or vibrates to let you know the action of clicking is 'doing something').

By understanding how components are interconnected, business analysts can better predict and mitigate unintended consequences of changes or interventions.

Did you know there are two types of feedback loops: reinforcing and balancing loops

Reinforcing loops amplify changes, leading to exponential growth or decline.

Balancing loops counteract changes, striving to bring the system to a desired state or equilibrium.

Feedback Delays

A very important aspect of feedback is that it might not be immediate. When it is not immediate, it can cause malfunction: **delays in feedback** can lead to overcorrections or misinterpretations of system state. Sometimes slow feedback is down to bad product or service design, but other times it is unavoidable.

My favourite example of feedback, the one I find the most relatable, is from a system between a shower tap and the hot and cold water sources. When everything works well, we can adjust how much hot or cold water we want, the tap starts flowing at the desired temperature… and we are happy. On the other hand, when we make an adjustment but the water is still too cold or too hot (and we don't realise that given time, if we 'just wait' it will reach the desired temperature), we continue to make adjustments and we just never get it right.

Feedback Quality

It's also important to ensure that the feedback being received is **accurate and relevant**. As we have already presented, misinformation can distort understanding and lead to inappropriate responses.

When you map out the processes and relationships within the system you're analysing, make sure you are using feedback **available to you** (and as timely as possible, as highlighted in the section that illustrates the harmful effects of using delayed feedback).

Integrate Feedback Channels

What happens in this interconnected world, where elements receive **multiple feedback from multiple sources**?

As a business analyst, make sure that your work includes the design systems and processes that regularly gather, interpret, and act on feedback. Part of this feedback also includes stakeholder management (not just automated metrics collection). For example, you can gather feedback in the form of regular reviews or surveys, ensuring that your organisation learns and responds from stakeholder, real user and customer feedback.

Conclusion

By embracing systems thinking, business analysts can develop a deeper understanding of the complexities and interdependencies within and beyond an organisation, leading to more informed and impactful decisions. In particular, if you start taking feedback loops into account, you can make more informed decisions, predict unintended consequences, and adapt strategies to better align with system goals.

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Looking Back on the AI Advances of 2023: Implications for Business Analysts

Patrick Giwa

2023 was a breakthrough year for Artificial Intelligence (AI), with major advances across industries. After early scepticism, it is clear AI is not just hype but has real impacts.

AI integration is becoming ubiquitous as businesses incorporate it into products and services. These advancements have significantly affected various industries and the role of business analysts.

Overview of AI Advancements in 2023

Generative AI

Possibly the biggest AI revelation of 2023 was generative AI. It revolutionised content creation across various mediums. Shifting from predictive AI's data-based estimations to producing original content.

Key advancements included AI-generated texts for diverse applications like website content and storybooks; image generators creating art and hyper-realistic images from text descriptions; speech generators converting text to audio in multiple languages and accents; and video generators creating realistic AI avatars.

This surge in generative AI led to the development of numerous tools, attracting substantial investments and continually evolving applications in the AI industry..

Advance AI Models

AI models—Large Language Models (LLM)—are the technology behind generative AI that makes it possible for them to understand and generate human-like text. They are very large deep-learning models that are pre-trained on vast amounts of data. In 2023, we saw the release of more advanced AI models from companies like OpenAI, Google, Anthropic, Midjourney and others.

Currently, AI models have multimodal

capabilities, which essentially allow them to blend different types of data like numeric, textual, visual or even audio data. By combining multiple forms of data, AI models can understand relationships and connections between them, creating more comprehensive and accurate outcomes.

AI Democratisation

2023 witnessed a significant democratisation of AI, marked by its widespread accessibility and diverse applications. The market saw an influx of AI tools aimed at enhancing productivity and efficiency, with ChatGPT being a standout example, attracting 100 million monthly active users rapidly.

Additionally, the release of open-source Large Language Models (LLMs), including Facebook's Lama 2, on par with OpenAI's GPT 3.5, further fueled this trend.

These developments enabled technically savvy individuals to utilise these models locally, fostering the creation of innovative applications without the limitations or oversight of major corporations.

Workplace AI

There were many organisations implementing AI in some form to their business processes and products or at least considering one of those two options.

Initially, there were concerns about AI replacing jobs, which was discussed in previous issues of the BA digest (see, for example Emily Tom's article in the Q4 2023 edition of BA Digest). Now, professionals are recognising more and more that AI is simply a tool to enable them to do better work, not replace their work.

According to McKinsey, one third of organisations surveyed are already regularly using generative AI in at least one function. The report goes on to state:

"What's more, 40 percent of those reporting AI adoption at their organisations say their companies expect to invest more in AI overall thanks to generative AI, and 28 per cent say generative AI use is already on their board's agenda."

Personalised AI

OpenAI's launch of Custom GPTs marked a significant shift in AI utility, offering specialised versions of the popular ChatGPT tailored to specific use cases.

Unlike the generic ChatGPT, these custom models bypass the need for complex prompt engineering, directly addressing individual needs. For example, a CustomGPT can be created to emulate business analyst coaching based on a senior BA's expertise, providing personalised guidance akin to having a virtual mentor.

This innovation paves the way for a variety of custom AI assistants, enabling everyday users to create tailored AI tools for their specific requirements and everyday use.

What This Means for Business Analysts

The advancements in AI will impact most industries. Here are 5 ways I think it'll impact Business Analysts.

Skill Amplification: With advancements in generative AI, business analysts can leverage new AI tools to communicate complex ideas, analyse data, and create more engaging reports and presentations.

For instance, a business analyst whose strength is not data analysis can leverage AI tools for generating, explaining and analysing spreadsheet formulas to conduct their data analysis.

Increased Value of Soft Skills: Soft skills have always been important but are going to be even more important. This is because, for the time being, this is still the advantage humans have over AI. Soft skills include empathy, communication, and presentation skills.

As AI capabilities creep into the workplace, the value and scope of the task of a business analyst will continue to increase, and soft skills will be valuable to navigate these new changes.

Career opportunities: With new technological advancement comes new business opportunities. Organisations are currently conversing on how to implement AI in some way to enhance their operations or capture new opportunities.

These solutions will need to be built and will require a business analyst to elicit, analyse and document the requirements for the development team.

Personalised Learning: The training and education industry will see a shift in learning style. There'll be a shift from the popular 1-to-many models to more 1-to-1 models.

I will be able to find resources on a topic and style of teaching I like, train a personal AI assistant on these resources and have the assistant teach me the topic in the style and format that is best for my learning abilities. Trainers will also be able to support and personalise their teaching style to the individual students at scale.

Skill leverage: With skill amplification comes skill leverage. This means that you can maximise the impact and effectiveness of your skills as a business analyst with the help of AI. There's so much value in the skills that a good business analyst possesses.

Paired with AI, you will be able to strategically apply your skills to high-value activities to reap exponential returns and impact. This opens up opportunities for business analysts who want to leverage their skills in freelancing, building businesses, or moving up the career ladder to more senior/higher-value roles.

Caution

While there is no denying that the AI innovations of 2023 have had and will continue to have many exciting

applications for business analysts, it is also crucial to approach this powerful technology with caution.

Responsible AI development and usage are critical to safeguarding against misuse and unintended consequences. As business analysts, we must carefully consider the ethical implications of implementing AI solutions and remain objective in our analyses to ensure the best possible outcome for businesses and end-users.

In Summary

The AI advancements of 2023 have considerably broadened the scope and capabilities of business analysts, who can now utilise AI tools in various everyday tasks, including strategy formulation, data analysis, and client interactions. However, it is essential to remain vigilant and ensure artificial intelligence's responsible and ethical use. 2024 will see more AI developments so buckle up for a year of exciting opportunities!

Wishing you a wonderful, productive AI year ahead.

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How Do I Know I Need a BA?

Robbie May

If a senior business executive at a small organisation aiming to expand asked you 'how do I determine when I need a business analyst?,' how would you respond?

How often do we stop to really ask ourselves 'do I need this?' compared to 'do I want this?' or 'will I find this useful?'. Are there symptoms that signal that things are moving from 'useful' to 'necessary'? And might this be relevant when answering the question as to when (and whether) a BA is needed in an organisation?

What New Boots Tell Us About "Wants", "Needs" & BAs

I recently had to buy new boots. I really did need them. My old ones have a hole in the sole, which I discovered when I had a wet foot! Clear symptoms of a wet foot led me to diagnose a clear solution of new boots. It was hard letting go of my favourite boots, but it was time for a change.

Sometimes there will be organisational challenges that, just like a wet foot led me to look for a new pair of boots, will lead to an organisation seeking a change in the way that it operates. This is where a BA can add significant value. One challenge is that people who aren't familiar with the BA role may assume we only work with business processes or IT systems. Whilst there are BA archetypes, my view is that the 3 legged stool of business analysis is people, process and IT. I've yet to see a change to one 'stool leg' not have some impact on at least one other 'stool leg'.

A business analyst is a change-agent, but any change needs management support. Like any organism, BAs and change don't thrive if the environment isn't right.

So, if you were a small or growing business considering if you **need** business analysis skills, what are the 'wet foot' symptoms you'd look out for? Here are four suggestions.

Symptom 1: Gap Between Ideas and Outcomes: Unfulfilled Expectations.

Is it clear what the expected outcome is? What problem is being addressed? Or is the organisation using a 'Field of Dreams' model? Field of Dreams is a 1989 American film where the main character, a farmer, builds a baseball field in his cornfield that attracts the ghosts of baseball legends. A key quote from the movie is 'If you build it, he will come'. Are ideas moving into delivery in the hope that 'If we build it, they will buy/use/value it'?

Do users or stakeholders say things like 'oh, I didn't know it would do that!' or 'I thought it would do or have X' where X is missing?

If yes, then the likely cause is the lack of shared understanding or managed expectations. Communication may not be happening well amongst the key stakeholders. Communication and engagement should be two way, and it's key to ensure that those key to the change are all on the same page..

This is one of the many areas BAs can add value. A BA can assist with identifying and quantifying the expected value that the implementation of an idea will deliver, and for who, and ensure that shared understanding is achieved.

Symptom 2: Ambiguity Surrounding the Impact of Implemented Changes.

In some situations, the idea and the capability may seem great, but no one can be certain whether or not the change was successful—other than management proclaiming it to be so! Is the organisation in a seemingly constant cycle of fire fighting and rework to deal with the impact of an earlier change? Organisations are comprised of and are part of systems. Individual changes in one area can have unexpected impacts elsewhere. Analysing proposed changes can be complex, especially if there isn't a systematic and holistic approach taken to the analysis.

Business analysis provides a systematic and systemic approach to expose root causes and work with colleagues to explore solution options including impact analysis, making improvement efforts (changes) more effective.

These activities enable better management of risks, issues, constraints and dependencies. During implementation a BA ensures the implementation delivers the objectives and defines measurements, so that effectiveness can be understood.

Symptom 3: Teams Deliver Lots of Features But Little Value Is Realised.

Are process steps done or software behaviours altered because 'it seemed

like a good idea' or 'someone senior asked for it'?

There is an oft quoted statistic from the Standish Group from 2002 that "64% of software features are rarely or never used". This isn't quite correct as it implies that ALL software has 64% of features that aren't used (Mike Cohn clarifies in a short blog article that these statistics are based on four internal products from four organisations, so perhaps we shouldn't draw too many conclusions, but it is a useful reminder). If you are building features and it isn't clear who for or why or users say, 'oh we never use that!', then it might be time to take a closer look at why it got delivered in the first place.

A BA will question what the potential value being sought is and how it delivers to the agreed scope or objectives. I've observed exciting technology looking for a problem to solve; no one can articulate why anyone would want to use it. If the exciting tech is truly an innovation and valuable, then the BA will work to substantiate the claim of value and help the team deliver, so that the business realises the value.

Symptom 4: Processes and Systems Don't Support Data Management Activities.

In 2017, The Economist published an article entitled 'The world's most valuable resource is no longer oil, but data' and as an organisation asset (and potentially a sizeable storage cost) it needs managing.

Legislation such as EU GDPR enhances the rights data subjects have over their data. Beyond these legal requirements, do your data management processes and systems manage data for the benefit of the organisation? Do you understand when data is no longer of value? Unlike crude oil, data does have a shelf life after which it may become a liability rather than an asset.

A BA can assist with understanding the usefulness of data and its shelf life as well as defining a solution to effectively manage it.

Needing a BA

So do you need business analysis in your organisation? If you see any of the symptoms above, the answer is likely to be yes!

A BA is not a superhero and business analysis is not a silver bullet. However, the skills and techniques can address the symptoms highlighted above and more.

A BA cannot work in a vacuum. Management will still need to support change. Change can be uncomfortable, and a BA and business analysis can expose that discomfort by exposing things that aren't as good as people believed, but the first step in making a change is to recognise that change is needed. So, is a BA the change your organisation needs?

Robbie May is a senior business analyst who has worked in New Zealand and the UK. You can connect on Linkedin at linkedin.com/in/robbiemay

BA Poems

Ray Cohen

Human Centred Design - Forever?

For years we've been using
Human centred design.
We craft user journeys,
Sapiens say they're sublime.

To uncover their needs,
We stop by and converse,
We empathise with them,
Their concerns we disperse.

We observe what they do,
What they feel and they think.
We find out their pain points,
Make a human mind link.

To represent humans
We dream up personas
(with a little assist
From nice product owners).

To top-up our knowledge
We analyse insights.
Then ideate madly
Till deep into dark nights.

We prototype options
With real human creatures,
And iterate hourly
To tune user features.

We're recognised experts
In this worthy technique,
Our humans are happy,
Our solution's unique.

But something is coming,
On the grapevine (newsflash!),
That will cause us to chuck
HCD in the trash.

It's dreaded AI that
Will do data entry.
Human Centred Design?
You're in the wrong century!

Business Rules Confusion

An interviewer for a BA role
Asked, "can you explain what business rules are?".
It rattled me, I gave a rotten response,
They bade me "goodbye", but not "au revoir".

I conducted a survey with colleagues,
Did **they** know what business rules were?
Results revealed much red-faced confusion,
The range of responses caused quite a stir.

So, reader, ask yourself, please, tell the truth,
Do **you** know what a business rule is?
Can you explain them? Can you define them?
Would you do well in a business rule quiz?

From what I've seen, although used by BAs,
Most haven't dug deep to con the techniques.
So I used my BA analysis skills
To draft some questions for business rule geeks:

Can product rules be business rules as well?
And rules to decide what screens to present?
Max lengths, field formats, characters allowed?
Or logic defining when letters are sent?
Selection criteria for a report?
Rules that drive postings to GL accounts?
Max number of failed attempts to login?
Threshold amounts to check large payments out?
Are business rules requirements, do you think?
If not, how are those concepts related?
Are calculations really business rules?
I've asked the questions, answers awaited.

I did some research, I was overwhelmed
At how much rich information exists:
I found books, courses, and specialist groups,
And business rule preachers; evangelists.

A manifesto, with ten 'articles',
And forty-one rule 'principles'. Who knew?
I saw rule types and subtypes deftly described,
Rule hierarchies, rule languages too.

I found supercharged business rule engines,
Encountered business rule management tools.
Who would have thought that such wares could be found
To design, build and maintain business rules?

Like many aspects of our BA world,
There are few standards, sites do their own thing.
We need some joined-up business rule thinking,
To reap the rewards cohesion could bring.

So what can be done, my fellow BAs,
To improve this forlorn situation?
Perhaps, as a UK prime minister said,
"Education, Education, Education"!

In Defence of Documentation

My new BA role for a startup fintech.
Been live for two years, want a system health-check.
Misunderstandings, design-led constraints.
Deluged with serious user complaints.

"Ask the BAs who worked on this".
I found only two, who recalled their frustration.
Were told not to do documentation.
"Awful way to convey information".

"Look at the code, see what it does".
I can't, I'm a BA, I needed a dev.
Most devs were new, many had fled.
Found one who's left, no recall what was said.

"Look at test cases, our source of the truth".
I seethed, disagreed, "It's **their** source I need".
Huge volumes of tests to untangle and read.
Without explanations, trust starts to recede.

"Use the test system, that will tell all".
One test environment, all on its tod.
Contained code in Dev, not yet in Prod.
Reduced functionality, data slipshod.

"Look at story acceptance criteria".
I found conflicts, vagueness, simplifications.
I found few business rules, untold obfuscations.
No evidence left of old conversations.

You've never heard such BA sighs and cries,
Analysis with blinkers over my eyes,
Could only stare forward, couldn't peer back.
No way through that knowledge cul-de-sac.

As a Business Analyst
I need documentation
So that:

… I know	the whole extent of what's there.
… I understand	what happens and where.
… I can see	how the numerous bits all connect.
… what systems **should** be doing,	it lets me detect.
… I understand	what the business expects.
… complex scenarios	no longer perplex.
… I can check	compliance with regs and laws.
… I understand	all the 'whys' and 'wherefores'.

⟵⟶

Ray has been a systems/business analyst since the 1980s! He started writing BA and data poems this year and enjoys the challenge of making amusing, celebratory, provocative or reflective poems about the work that we love. See www.thebapoet.com for some of his BA poetry. Connect with Ray at www.linkedin.com/in/ray-cohen-6011796

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My Journey to Business Analyst of the Year

Pip Hall

Those of you that came to my session at the Business Analysis Conference Europe in September 2023 heard me talk about the importance of embracing your personal and professional self at work. I discussed how the knowledge and skills you gain, and the attitudes and behaviours you display in your personal life are equally relevant in your day to day work. They are just as helpful in progressing your career as those skills one might conventionally consider to be relevant to your industry, organisation or profession. My journey into business analysis and, ultimately, to Business Analyst of the Year, demonstrates this nicely.

Early Days

I am the middle of three siblings. My dad was an outgoing, 'people' person whose career choice was the police force. My mum, equally sociable but in a quieter and more reserved manner, chose a career in banking and finance. I am extremely lucky to have inherited both dad's gregariousness and mum's reservation, allowing me to respond and adapt to people and situations as I find them. Likewise, mum's eye for details in figures and the patterns they form, combined with dad's logical and inquisitive mind, set me up well for the roles I later chose.

As a youngster, I enjoyed the intellectual challenge school gave me and I still love learning today, often experiencing a real need to stretch my brain in the same way that others feel the need to exercise, or travel, or chase adrenaline in some way. I challenge myself constantly and have a long and relatively distinguished academic career as a result, with qualifications in town planning, engineering and accounting as well as the business analysis and change management profession.

Early Career

Having followed the traditional education route, my first role in the real world was in town planning. I worked in a team responsible for designing and implementing public realm improvements in a city centre and found that I was particularly talented at bringing colleagues, subcontractors and suppliers together to ensure that schemes were well considered and delivered through collaboration. During this time, 'personal computers' were introduced into the organisation, and I developed databases to organise and manage scheme planning and progress monitoring.

Following this, I moved into transport modelling, gathering traffic data to run computer-based scenarios to determine the impact of different building developments or policies on congestion and journey times. This directly influenced decisions on whether to grant planning applications, and policy makers' decisions in developing future transport policy.

Career Choice Part #1

My first career was as a traffic signal engineer in a city. After learning each of the disciplines, I found my home in the maintenance team, managing the contractor responsible for fixing faults, and making decisions on where and when to invest in optimising vehicular and pedestrian movements. In time I progressed to leading a group of local authorities working with a single contractor to design, deliver, maintain and manage traffic lights across a large geographical area.

I found the maintenance role particularly rewarding, using both data analysis and collaboration to influence the decisions being made in my own organisation, the other local authorities, and the contractor. In the reactive and safety-driven environment I found it useful and necessary to oscillate my thinking between my 'ideal universe' (which I now know is a vision, or 'to be') and real life ('as-is'), investigating root causes of issues in contract delivery and introducing/improving processes to prevent reoccurrence.

Finding My True Passion

Whilst working in this role I was responsible for writing and procuring a new contract on behalf of the four local authorities. This reinforced my talent for, and enjoyment of, working with a team—driving collaboration between organisations, understanding and prioritising requirements, defining desired outcomes, and following and evaluating processes designed to achieve them.

This was a period of rapid personal development for me and, despite the hard work and challenges, I was happy—the collaborative teamwork, speaking with the industry, reporting to senior leaders and professional specialists in each of the local authorities and bringing them together to work as a single contracting authority all gave me a buzz, and I loved it.

Once the new contract started, I mobilised the client team and managed the delivery, quickly resuming my data analysis and relationships to plan, deliver, analyse and report on performance.

Career Choice Part #2

I fell into business analysis—as many of us do—by accident. Indeed, I had never heard of it, nor a business analyst, prior to a chance conversation with a friend in 2018. Long story short, I saw a BA role on an organisation chart we were discussing and asked what it was. Their answer was clear: it was what I did! The rest, as they say, is history. I made the move into my first BA role the same year and worked on a multi-million pound transformation programme for a central government customer.

Trading entirely on my experience, instinct, common sense and logic, I found myself immediately getting involved in all things business analysis—from requirement traceability to ITIL (Information Technology Infrastructure Library), process design to workshop facilitation, and everything in between. I was the only BA in the programme, and whilst they knew they needed a BA they did not understand the role or what to expect. This was incredibly daunting in one way—who was there to teach me? but also liberating, as they told me what they needed to achieve and left me to decide how to deliver it. My love of learning kicked in and off I went.

During this programme, I gained both my BCS qualifications (Diploma and Advanced Diploma in Business Analysis).

Subsequently I took a role as a Business As Usual (BAU) BA within a business unit (i.e., not with discrete projects) and worked across a variety of topics, including underpinning growth, expanding through acquisition, and increasing efficiency and profitability. I have also led a corporate-wide team to develop a social value strategy, founded our community of business analysis professionals, designed a corporate career path for analysis roles, and brought corporate-level transformation programmes together.

My Future…?

I am a kid in a sweet shop—I love my job, and I start each challenge with excitement and a desire to succeed, so I'm looking forward to seeing where my journey takes me.

I am absolutely sure that I will continue learning throughout my career, and I would like to impart some of my knowledge and experience to others to help them learn, grow and succeed in our profession.

Pip Hall is Business Analyst of the Year 2023. She is passionate about lifelong learning, delivering outcomes, driving continuous improvement, and challenging assumptions that hold individuals and organisations back from embracing change. You can contact her via LinkedIn: linkedin.com/in/pip-hall

Filip Hendrickx

Interviewed by Christina Lovelock

Filip is an accomplished business analyst and business architect who inspires others through his speaking, writing, training and coaching. He is president of the IIBA® Brussels Chapter and regularly travels to international conferences and events.

What would you be doing right now if we weren't having this conversation?

I would be sending out a couple of emails to get in touch with people in Chicago! I'm visiting a Chicago conference, together with a couple of other Belgian BAs, and we're going to do a tour around the local BA community, meeting people from IIBA® chapters and other organisations.

So at the conference I'm doing several

things. I have a keynote on the BA as a leader, I have a workshop on strategy execution and together with Fabrício, Jamie and Vince, a panel on thought leadership. And, I'm also scheduled for a short session on ritual descent, so it's going to be a very busy conference for me, which is fun!

Your work is quite varied, how do you explain to other people what you do?

I mainly try to inspire people in the BA space and in the broader business domain. I try to inspire people to look at things differently, to be comfortable with trying out new things. I help people outgrow the things they are used to doing, but also start doing more strategic stuff or more business-oriented stuff. You might call it strategic business analysis, product ownership or product management, it doesn't really matter. It's about learning to look at things from a business perspective and not just from the perspective of "making things work well". So it's really about inspiring people and helping people to look at things from a different angle.

You also work with Vrije Universiteit Brussel, what does that involve?

I started out by giving guest lectures on business analysis related topics. I always enjoyed staying close to a younger population, because they have a different way of looking at things and they're also digital natives, which is interesting. What are the advantages in how they use technology? What are the disadvantages? So it gives me an additional perspective. I enjoy walking around the campus, being near people, having coffee and hearing the conversations and the stress around the exams and thinking "I've been there too!". It provides the opportunity to think about how you have evolved yourself, becoming much more relaxed about these things. Giving a presentation or defending a proposal for management, it's a bit like doing an exam, which was much more uncomfortable for me 15 years ago than it is now. The whole environment, the atmosphere is very enjoyable.

Then I got the offer to present a course on information systems, strategy and management, which I found really interesting. We have a lot of freedom in defining what's in the course at the university and it's really allowing me to give students a big picture overview of information systems. We look at the technological perspective, the overarching systems perspective and business models. We think about whether technology enables or hampers business models. We look at what we need to take into account if we want to run information systems sustainably. We also consider the more strategic and long term perspective. I combine all of those viewpoints into a single course, which I find very interesting and also allows me to learn. It makes me really think about the challenge of how I fit all of this into an understandable, concise series of lectures.

How do you assess the students?

I use a business case which they have to create as a group. They have evaluations

on a draft version and a final version against predefined criteria. They also have to review each other's business cases and that is part of the assessment, their *review* is graded too. How well do they do in reviewing someone else's business case? What are the criteria they are using to assess whether it's good or not? What is missing? And, what do they like?

Then there is an oral exam where they explain more detail about the business case and I can ask further questions about things we've seen on the course, that they may not have applied to the business case. If they were to apply it, what would they learn from it? How would it influence the business case? The key element is really that the business case justifies investment in an information system, or not. I always say halfway through the semester "if you come to the conclusion that it's a really bad idea, that is a very good conclusion!". Explain why you conclude that it's not a good idea to do this investment. Last year, for the first time, I had a group that actually said "We don't like this idea anymore, don't make the investment"!

What led you to business analysis?

I have become known for saying the BA acronym is for "By Accident" and I think it's true for a lot of business analysts!

I studied electronics with a specialisation in information and communication technology. My first job was as a researcher and my first project was hardware design. I found that it was fun, but not fun enough to do as a job! So, I moved into software development and architecture and I've always combined it with analysis work because we thought about our own ideas that we could develop. The context was multi-channel multimedia applications, this was way before the Internet was a big thing, way before we had smartphones! We were already thinking about these kinds of concepts. Basically doing analysis work without actually giving it that name. Then we built proof of concepts, so that led me into business analysis work without knowing it.

Later, I moved on to jobs in a commercial environment instead of a research environment. I continued as a software developer, but we always had a small team of two people doing the analysis and implementation.

I decided when changing jobs I wanted to move away from development, because I was more interested in the process *before* the decision to build software was made. Software could be part of the solution, but doesn't have to be the full solution, so that's when I moved into a formal business analysis role. That's when I discovered that business analysis was actually a thing, by then I had already been working for about 10 years!

Are there any jobs that helped you be a better business analyst?

Having a technological background as a software developer and software architect has definitely helped me for

two reasons. It makes it much easier to build a good relationship with a developer because I can still speak in Structured Query Language (SQL) with a database administrator! It will be very rusty, but I understand the concepts and I understand their concerns. And they understand when I challenge them, because I have a technical background. We can have a conversation that is based on a shared understanding and shared history. So that's one thing that is definitely helpful.

Another thing that I found very helpful is as a software developer, you need to be able to make an abstraction of things you need to understand. If you create a class diagram, what are the key information concepts? Because otherwise the software will quickly become a mess! Making that abstraction is a key skill for business analysts, making the distinction between the details (which you have to understand at some point in time) and the key concepts, whether it's information or processes or business capabilities. This helped me look at business analysis from a more strategic perspective and it helped me move into business architecture roles which I find very interesting.

Whether or not you want to become a business architect, being able to look at things with a more strategic perspective is valuable for everyone. You need to understand how your thing contributes to the overall strategy in order to make it as impactful and effective as possible.

So I think those are two elements that

have definitely helped me as a BA with the caveat that you have to be aware that technologies are only part of the solution. If you know development very well, you must try not to solve everything with software, because software is very, very expensive. That's a caveat that every developer that becomes an analyst should be aware of.

Do you feel there's been any turning points in your career or big decisions you've had to make?

I never see things as big, scary decisions. Somehow things will end up in a good way because I guess I've learned to be flexible along the way. The biggest decision probably was becoming independent, but for me it didn't really feel scary. I had a very good relationship with my employer at that time and they were willing to let me stay on the current contract as a consultant, moving from five to four days per week so that I could spend the other day developing my own business, which was mainly training and public speaking. So that allowed me to move smoothly into being independent, but still having the support of a fixed contract for at least one year.

Part of it is not being too scared of changes, but part of it is also finding ways to take on a new challenge in small steps. I am not the kind of person that would turn 180 degrees from one day to the next, which is an advantage and a disadvantage depending on how you look at it.

Who or what have been some of the big influences on your career?

There are so many! To give one specific person, it would be Chris Potts, who is from the UK and now lives in France. He is an enterprise architect who has written a couple of short business novels on enterprise architecture and I always found him very inspiring, because of the way he looks at things, the very different perspective he offers on enterprise architecture compared to many other Enterprise Architecture (EA) sources. His content always made me think differently. Also, the way that he trains and speaks in public was a source of inspiration for me to do more of that too.

You do a lot to engage with the community. Why is that important to you?

I always got a lot of energy from helping and inspiring people. I remember when I was still studying, I was also helping out others in their software development assignments, because I found it gave me energy. So if I can help people take the next step in their career or take a different look at a problem, that gives me a lot of satisfaction.

What's something that you're proud of from your career so far?

One thing is the fact that I have established some level of visibility as a public speaker globally, which is kind of a neat achievement. And the other one is with our IIBA® (Brussels) chapter. We have now won an IIBA® award for the third year in a row. It's nice to receive that appreciation publicly for the efforts that we do as a team. We support the community, support business analysts and support the profession.

So those are definitely two achievements that I'm very happy about.

Do you have a piece of advice or a piece of feedback that has stuck with you in your career?

One thing that comes to mind, and it's important for the career, but I think it's important for life in general is: favour relationships over transactions. I don't think we have to be naïve: if you spend a lot of time sharing knowledge and expertise, there is value in that and we shouldn't be afraid to ask for some kind of compensation, whether it's financial or another kind of compensation.

But at the same time, I've learned that I've never enjoyed negotiating and worrying about "am I being taken advantage of or not?" I don't know where it came from, but I read "favour relationships over transactions" and I think it really holds true. You can get the most out of a single transaction, but it will hamper your relationship in the future and that gives me comfort, for not having negotiated to the very bottom, because I know it will come back in some way in the future.

Is there something about the business analysis profession that you would change if you could?

Business analysis is still often seen as a stepping stone to something else. There's nothing wrong with that, it's perfectly fine, but it's wrong that a lot of people think the only way to move forward is to use BA as a stepping stone. So if we could make it clear that a BA-only career is equally valuable as a

career where you move from BA to product manager or business architect or project manager or whatever, I think that would be a positive change because I see a lot of people struggling with that. They don't really want to become a business architect, but they feel they have to in order to get more appreciation, or a better pay cheque at the end of the month. Ultimately, they might end up in a job they don't really like that much or aren't that good at. So I think people should be able to explore all of these things, but still be rewarded if they come back to or stay in a business analysis role, because otherwise we lose too much experience, from the BA profession and from organisations. And I think we should try to change that.

Now is your chance to give a shout out for anything you would like to share that has inspired you

I would like to mention Brainy Glue, not because of the book itself (I think it's a good book, but people can explore it themselves if they want to know more!) but because of the collaboration with Ian Richards. We found it difficult sometimes, because collaborating with anyone can be difficult and especially across distance, working virtually on a very long-term project has its challenges. We also have quite different viewpoints on certain things, but it still gives me a lot of energy if I think about the process we went through, what we've learned from it, how our perspectives merged into something that makes sense and that I think helps people. So I found writing it to be a very rewarding experience and I still have a very good

relationship with Ian as a consequence of it.

What also comes to mind is a series of conferences in the USA and Canada, the PM BA conferences, project management and business analysis conferences, run by Amy Ruddell. I got involved with those conferences through Jennifer Bedell, and got to know a different BA community. There is obviously overlap, but it's a bit of a different environment, it has a different vibe to it. It's a nice concept of about 8 conferences that rotate around the US and Canada, and one online. So that's definitely something people should check out.

Connect with Filip:
linkedin.com/in/filiphendrickx

Other ways to connect:

Find out more about BA & Beyond conference, which will next year take place in four countries: Denmark, The Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg.

Join the IIBA Brussels Chapter, weekly for the BA Café

About the interviewer:

Christina Lovelock is a BA leader, author and coach. She is active in the Business Analysis professional community and champions entry level roles. She is co-author of the BCS book Delivering Business Analysis: The BA Service Handbook. She would be delighted if you would like to connect! Linkedin.com/in/christina-lovelock

VIEWPOINTS

On social media, we posed the question
"2024 is fast approaching. What topics, themes or techniques are you planning to be reading up / sharpening up on in the new year, and why?"

As with everyone I speak to, AI is at the top of my list - improving understanding of the capabilities, opportunities and risks; how it can be used for business improvement and business analysis; and learning more about prompt engineering.

However, it's easy to get distracted by the buzz around AI, crowding out other areas for development. For me, data is still a key area of focus that all BAs should be constantly improving their confidence with. There's always more to learn in this space, and the intersect between business information needs and the technology is a great place for BAs to add value.

Chris Pyatt

In 2024, ethical AI and data governance becomes a paramount focus for business analysts. With increasing concerns about data privacy and ethical AI, being well-versed in these areas can help in compliance and reputation management. It forms the bedrock of responsible data management, encompassing adherence to privacy regulations, trust-building, bias mitigation, transparency, accountability, data integrity, security, ethical data retention, and stakeholder involvement.

This journey is one of continuous exploration. Staying current and adapting to evolving standards is essential in this dynamic technological landscape. It's not just a task; it's a commitment to keeping things honest, trustworthy, and following the rules in this ever-changing world of data and AI.

Erivan de Sena Ramos

My main objective for 2024 is to make significant strides in data analytics and utilise machine learning technology for informed decision-making within the retail industry. As a business analyst in retail, my main focus is improving customer satisfaction by exploring innovative personalisation techniques and digital innovation strategies that aim to optimise omnichannel interactions.

Christelle Govender

Hone your AI skills, else be left behind:

Use AI to perform operational tasks

Use AI as a starting point

Use AI whenever and wherever you can

Use AI to learn more about AI

Use AI as a companion

Use AI to stay abreast of the latest technologies

Use AI to chat in AI style

Use AI as a boon and not a bane

Divya Kishore

Requirements gathering—This is probably my weakest skill and my BA work has turned more into this world of recent due to business demands so I need to adapt also.

Jon S

As 2024 nears, my key focus areas include the following.

1) Understanding AI's capabilities and role it can take while appreciating the irreplaceable human skills like stakeholder engagement. I want to spend more time honing my discovery analysis skills as it is an area that I believe needs such human skills to understand business and user problems.

2) The cost of living crisis requires organisations to navigate economic and resource challenges, specifically we need to understand its impact on BAs' job attractiveness, job security and practices. I think job crafting in this dynamic environment we are in would be essential.

3) Lastly, sustainability and social responsibility are areas I want to think about more to understand how as a BA I can guide ethical and environmentally-conscious decisions.

Kay Hardy

Sometimes the current events and news can feel like a heavy emotional load. I feel like we can use our BA empathy and skills for a cause we believe in. This gives me a sense of control in our crazy, crazy world.

Emily Tom

During my journey to certification, I searched for fun and educational resources that I could utilise while relaxing and avoiding the guilt of not "studying". The only resources I found were flashcards, and this experience led me to start the drafts of my collections of puzzles. I discovered how to combine fun and learning and this is a theme I hope to continue in 2024.

Business analysis should not be confined to a formal world without flexibility. Gamification, puzzles, visualisations, storytelling, role-playing, and collaboration are a few avenues via which the journey of business analysis can be a stimulating adventure.

I hope to continue developing and exploring the soft side of Business Analysis as I tend to call it.

Are you all game?

Kafilat O. Oluwasola

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