BA DIGEST

- When Does Business Analysis Start?

- 7 Steps to a Successful BA Career

- Putting on the Brakes

- Product Usership

- And much more ...

Your regular round-up of useful BA content from around the web

Welcome

Welcome to the Q3 edition of #BADigest magazine. Wherever you are in the world, I hope you and your family, friends and colleagues are safe and well. In the UK, we appear to be settling down into what might soon become one of a number of emerging "next normals", however what is "normal" for one country and context may be very different for another.

One thing that the pandemic has taught us is that adaptability is crucial for survival. This isn't news, but as a professional community we must remind ourselves that we will need to adapt too. It would be easy to work as outsiders, "prescribing" change on others. Yet ethically we ought to get to understand the perspectives of those impacted. We need to make sure that we're at the top of our game, and know the relevant tools and techniques.

As ever, BA Digest includes a range of articles including some on ideas at the edges of business analysis. These ideas—those at the fringe—are the ideas that I truly believe will enable us to better practice our craft, adapt and co-create change in an ethical way.

I hope you find them useful! If you do, please help spread the word by passing a copy of this magazine on to your colleagues and encouraging them to sign up to receive their own free copy at www.badigest.co.uk.

Thanks! Until next time,

Adrian

Adrian Reed

Principal Consultant, Blackmetric

Editor of BA Digest

PS: If you have an idea for an article that you'd like to share in BA Digest, please do get in touch. You can submit your idea at overto.link/write@digest

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The Power to Change the Digital World: Business Analysis, Empathy and Ethics

Rachel Drinkwater

In his excellent book 'The Rise of the Humans', Dave Coplin expounds that technology is neither good, nor bad. It is simply an amplifier of whatever we, as society and individuals, choose to use it for.

And we're using it for everything. We live in an increasingly digital world. Even before the pandemic, we shopped, socialised, played games, took courses, did our banking and so much more online, all of which relies upon digital tools. Traditionally low-tech industries became digitally disrupted, further increasing our exposure to digital products and experiences. Fifteen years ago, a taxi company wouldn't need an IT or Digital department. They would barely need a single IT professional. They might have a basic database or scheduling tool to manage their customers, drivers and allocate one to the other, but that would likely only be used by one or two people in the organisation. Back then, it would have been laughable to think that what is essentially a taxi service would not only be a significant employer of IT and Digital professionals, but that half of their product would be a smartphone app. Indeed, in 2006, we didn't even know what a smartphone app was! I'm of course referring to Uber, but as more and more industries have become digitally disrupted, many companies now have a customer-facing digital product offering in addition to their core product or service - and many more now offer their digital experience as a part of that core product - be that a device, app or website.

As IT professionals and business analysts, this digital transformation of society has changed and shaped our roles, bringing us closer to customer-facing tools and products. This has subsequently increased the potential for

our work to impact individuals and society, as Coplin says, for good or for bad. That's a lot of power to hold and in the words of the great Stan Lee, 'with great power comes great responsibility'.

Driven by the ever-changing trends online, and competitive technology markets, the pace of digital product development is necessarily fast and product-to-market time is often short. This however introduces a risk to our society. It seems that barely a week goes by when an organisation is not in the news for breaching users' privacy, losing user data, skirting along the edges of regulation around ethics or not 'doing the right thing', with tech giants and digital disruptors often being in the spotlight.

It's not just the tech giants though; many digital products and experiences are designed to capture attention, engage users and invoke some kind of action - usually conversion to sales or brand engagement. We live in an age where some say the scarcest resource is attention (a great book on this is *The Attention Economy* by Thomas Davenport & John Beck) and subsequently, everyone is vying for their slice of the attention pie. Many of the techniques used to do this are souped-up versions of traditional sales and marketing techniques, exploiting psychological and neurological processes of the human brain.

Numerous studies and experts in these areas have concluded that these approaches can be detrimental to the health and wellbeing of users. Techniques such as Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), using amygdala-hijacking messages such as 'Hurry, only 2 left!' and the constant barrage of notifications and pop-ups trigger stress responses and hormones in users, reducing their ability to make rational informed decisions and in some cases, contributing to stress-related mental health issues. A heady, addictive cocktail of dopamine and oxytocin triggered by the nature of social platforms can lead to damaging patterns of device use, such as habitual device checking and smartphone addiction.

Another area of concern is unintended impacts and uses of technology - those cases where technology is used by an unintended audience, where it is misused, where groups of people are excluded from using technology or where bias is unintentionally built into digital products. No social media platform is designed with the intent that children would use it for 'sexting'. No digital product provider would actively build a solution that profiteers from a terrorist attack through AI-driven surge pricing. No photo gallery would be intentionally built not to recognise dark skin tones. But these are all situations that have arisen, causing distress and harm to users - and each of these cases could possibly have been preempted and therefore avoided with more analysis, wider user research, by introducing greater diversity in the personas used to map customer journeys and by investing the time in mapping out potential 'unhappy paths' through the user and customer journeys. For those who need more convincing about 'doing the right thing', each of these cases and numerous others have been widely covered by the media, with detrimental effects to

company reputation and brand confidence.

As business analysts, we are well-placed to challenge. We have the power and therefore I would argue, the responsibility, to push for ethical practice and ethical product design, to use our toolkit to carry out more thorough customer and user journey analysis, impact analysis, risk analysis and to use empathy to truly understand our customers and users. The more empathy we employ, the wider the range of stakeholders and users we speak to and the more diverse our personas, the more accessible and inclusive our digital experiences will be.

We will never identify every single 'unhappy path' and niche scenario, but the more time we invest upfront, the more chance we have of identifying unintended use patterns and 'unhappy paths', of building in accessibility and diversity and avoiding bias. We can help to protect our organisations from making these errors and contribute to a safer, more ethical, inclusive digital world, where we can leverage the many, many benefits of technology, whilst mitigating against potential negative impacts.

Rachel Drinkwater is a Senior Business Analyst. You can connect with her on LinkedIN.

For more information on this subject see Rachel's recent webinar: The Power to Change the Digital World: Business Analysis, Empathy and Ethics

Legislative Agility, E-scooters and Organisational Change

Adrian Reed

In recent years, it seems that many organisations have become blindsided into maximising the speed of technological change. Being able to get technological innovations to the consumer quickly is of crucial importance, but in some cases it appears that technology is moving much faster than the rest of the organisation. Put differently, whereas once technology was seen as 'the bottleneck', this really doesn't have to be the case today, and other parts of the wider organisational architecture and business context appear to be the things that are slower to adapt.

One illustration of this phenomenon is the electric scooter. Where I live, in Portsmouth (on the south coast of the UK), these things are *ubiquitous*. You can't walk more than a few hundred metres down a sidewalk without one whizzing past you. The *technology* is very well-established now, however the *legislation, regulation* and (arguably) enforcement are lagging behind. You see, technically speaking, it is

illegal to use privately owned electric scooters in public spaces. Or, it is *probably* illegal, unless they fulfil the requirements of a motor vehicle (car/motorbike), have the necessary lights and mandatory safety equipment and are insured and the relevant vehicle excise duty ('road tax') has been paid.

This creates a bizarre situation where it is legal to *sell* an electric scooter, it just isn't legal to *use* one, unless you are using it on private land. To confuse things further, certain local councils (municipalities) have created bylaws allowing e-scooter rental schemes to be deemed legal. Meaning you can ride a *rental scooter* on the road (but not the sidewalk), but you can't ride a *privately owned scooter* on the road *or* the sidewalk. Confused? I'm not surprised!

Why Don't We Talk About 'Legislative Agility'?

This illustrates a situation where the pace of change of the technology (the e-scooter), the processes to sell them and appetite for people to use them has far outpaced the speed of:

- Legislation that allows/disallows it

- Regulation that might impose certain safety features to be included by default

- Commercial products that offer third-party liability insurance and so forth for these types of scooters

- The ability (or appetite) for the police to control or govern the e-scooters

No Cycling or e-scooting…
(Southsea, UK)

Of course, this article *isn't* intended to debate the pros and cons of e-scooters. **However the patterns above exist in *organisational* settings too.** How often have you seen a situation where the technology and processes can change quickly, but the *governance* is a chain around its neck? Where an organisation *can't* do what it needs to do because there's a restricted 'approved suppliers list' (even though no documentation exists to substantiate *why* those suppliers were chosen, or *when* they will be reviewed)? Or where an organisation

demands 'agile change' but then restricts the delivery team's autonomy by defining a scope, timeline and budget *long before* any understanding of the underlying opportunity of problematic situation is understood?

The irony is that those in charge of the *governance* are often the very people telling those that deliver change to "just do it" and "deliver it quicker". This isn't to criticise them in any way (it's a completely understandable perspective to take), it is just to highlight the contradiction, and to suggest that this contradiction needs calling out.

Agility Is About Synchronicity

There's an old adage in manufacturing that there is no point in consistently manufacturing faster than you can sell, otherwise you just create inventory that might never be needed. Keeping things 'in sync' whilst listening out for changes in the environment and building in slack is important. If we want agility in our organisations, surely this synchronicity is important too? So much has been written and discussed about how to deliver *technical change* more efficiently and effectively…. and *some* of that has even worked . Perhaps now it is even more important for us as a community of change practitioners to step back, zoom out and move the debate away from the speed of the tech.

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When Does Business Analysis Start?

Yulia Kosarenko

When does business analysis start? Does it start when the project scope is approved? When the next available analyst gets assigned to the project and is given the project scope to develop into requirements? When they get a list of business stakeholders to interview?

While a more prescriptive approach gives the project manager more control over the scope of analysis, it can be too simplistic and lead to inferior outcomes. The viability of this approach depends on the high-level analysis undertaken to define the required change and its scope.

Let's explore two alternative scenarios for the project initiation.

Scenario A

Preliminary analysis was limited to capturing the project sponsor's view of the business problem.

The objective of the initiative is to fix the stakeholder issue and make them happy. The sponsor outlines their preferred solution, and the project is initiated to execute their vision. The expectation for a business analyst will be to capture what could be best described as "stakeholder specs".

This is also a scenario where things can go wrong. One person's or one department's view is not complete and may be biased. The stakeholder's preferred solution is to minimise their pain points. This provides quick gains but does not necessarily address the root cause. That might require more effort.

Experienced business analysts treat the sponsor's problem description as a guideline and an approximation. At

project initiation, it outlines what needs to be addressed or what is no longer acceptable, but not necessarily what needs to change. This is what business analysis is for.

In this case, a business analyst could recommend a root cause analysis workshop. Capturing one (or often multiple) causes will help see alternative approaches to solving stakeholder problems. As a by-product of such exercise, the BA can capture a context model to identify other impacted groups and processes.

As a result, the scope and stakeholder list may need to be amended, but this approach is more likely to lead to a holistic solution. Needless to say, this works better in mature organisations that understand and support the role of the business analyst.

Scenario B

Project scope and impacted stakeholders were defined through strategic analysis and business architecture activities.

With this approach, the project scope is an integral part of a broader enterprise roadmap. The context of the change is clearer. Business architecture activities will identify impacted business capabilities, functions, processes, and business services. The goal of the project can be tied to the strategic objectives which in turn helps with requirements prioritisation.

With high-level analysis already completed by a business architect, the business analysis activities can build upon a solid foundation:

- Refer to the context model to plan requirements analysis for all impacted components

- Identify stakeholders for all impacted business functions

- Refer to identified user roles and business services to create user journeys, story maps, or business use cases

- Refer to strategic objectives when assigning business value to user stories

- Discover compliance, regulatory and audit requirements

- Analyse how the change will impact each business capability to help plan change management and implementation activities

With this approach, we can say that business analysis starts with business architecture.

*

Business architecture is sometimes seen as a remote exercise at 30,000 feet that never touches "life on the ground". However, building business analysis maturity in an organisation requires incorporating business architecture as a foundation. Business architecture discipline can:

- Support strategic planning of enterprise changes

- Create a visual representation of the enterprise roadmap to identify the sequencing, dependencies and contribution of each initiative to the long-term goals

- Support projects by clear scope definitions and avoiding "orphaned" scope and gaps

- Support business analysis by providing a foundation for analysis activities and a structure for better reuse of business architecture and analysis deliverables

- Support program management by identifying dependencies, business impacts and potential collisions between initiatives

How can an organisation without a formal business architecture function achieve this? Here are two approaches:

From Within

A senior business analyst or team lead can take on business architect responsibilities. This aligns well with mentoring junior analysts and helping them identify areas for analysis. A team lead accountable for allocating BA resources can ensure that analysts working on different initiatives collaborate better and reuse analysis findings from different projects, including business rules, data flow analysis and other dependencies.

This bottom-up approach is often the most realistic way to grow strategic analysis capability in the organisation. Business architecture concepts can be introduced gradually, and the value of the activities is proven through more successful changes.

From Outside

An organisation can hire a consulting business architect or create a business architecture role under the Enterprise Architecture umbrella. This approach will work best if there is an early emphasis on a friendly and collaborative relationship with the business analysis group. While business analysts will already have invaluable knowledge about the organisation, an individual with an architectural mindset can help create the right framework for using it at the enterprise level.

The goal should be to have strategic analysis and architecture activities guide business analysis on individual projects. If both sides buy into this collaboration, the quality of business analysis will benefit.

Eventually, each organisation will find the approach that works best for them. The key benefit will stem from the recognition that project business analysis starts with strategic analysis and business architecture.

Yulia Kosarenko is the author of the book Business Analyst: a Profession and a Mindset and online course Business Analysis for Professionals Changing Careers. For business architecture consulting, connect with Yulia on LinkedIn.

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Attending a #BACommunity event is a great way to accelerate your professional development. In just an hour you can hear a different perspective on a set of topics.

You'll always find a list of upcoming community events on our website. Here's a taster.

Event	Date & Time	Link
BA Open Mic *An immersive, informal and interactive chance to discuss all things BA related*	Sep 23rd 18:30 - 19:30 (UK Time)	More Info
Everything's Relative (a fresh look at agile estimation) *With Stuart Mann*	Nov 8th 18:30 - 19:30 (UK Time)	More Info

*There will be many more events to come too,
so be sure to keep a regular eye on our website!*

Disco Lights, Hybrid Facilitation & Early BA Engagement

Adrian Reed

In college, I bought a set of disco lights. They were fairly basic by today's standards, essentially consisting of a box with four coloured bulbs that would respond to the beat, flashing in a fixed pattern. However, they helped to create a *real* party atmosphere. There's something about colourful flashing lights that just invites people to dance. Throw in cheap beer and Britpop and you've got a classic 1990s house party.

Although I bought the lights to use at my own house parties, I found that owning them had an unexpected (but positive) side effect. It meant that I got *invited* to more parties too. We could perhaps question the motivation of those inviting me (did they really value my presence, or was it just that they wanted to borrow the disco lights?), but back in those days I didn't really care: a party was a party, and once you were in the door you could

meet people, dance and have fun. And generally when people realised the lights were yours, you'd get invited to *another* party….

Although I didn't know it at the time, I'd stumbled upon a really important lesson: **Some things are seen as highly desirable, but expensive to obtain and are only used occasionally. It makes no sense for *everyone* to invest in them, but those that do will be in constant demand from a string of different people.** In this example it was disco lights—at the time they seemed *hugely* expensive (I had to save up for them), were fairly scarce (there were only a few shops you could buy them from) and it just wouldn't make sense for everyone to have their own set.

Zooming out, we could say that this pattern holds true of many other things too, including *skills and competencies.* Properly mastering a skill takes time, and nobody can be a master of everything. Skills that are essential or highly desirable can sometimes be a way of getting a 'foot in the door' with stakeholders that might not otherwise engage. This becomes interesting for those of us that practice business analysis. I'm sure we've all been in situations where stakeholders have involved us too late. Perhaps having our own (metaphorical) 'disco lights' is the way to gain earlier engagement. But what would those 'disco lights' be?

Sharpening Up Hybrid Facilitation

Facilitation is a core skill for business analysis. It is hard to imagine how any BA could function without conducting different types of facilitation amongst a community of often conflicting stakeholders. Facilitating in a virtual and hybrid environment is nothing new, I suspect many people reading this will have worked in dispersed teams for years, but the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021 have changed the expectation of what 'work' will look like.

It seems likely that for many organisations, some form of hybrid working will become seen as more normal. Some people might be in the office, some might work from home, and perhaps some in a co-working space. People might convene in offices for major meetings, but work from home at other times. This changes the expectation of what a 'meeting' or 'workshop' will look like. Will people travel to be collocated for a 2 hour meeting in future? If there is a viable alternative, this seems less likely.

With hybrid working comes *hybrid facilitation.* As well as 'fully virtual' and 'fully in-person', This involves being prepared for other situations such as:

- **Hub and spoke:** Some people are in a room, others are in their own individual location (e.g. 6 people are in an office meeting room, and 4 are connecting from home)

- **Petal:** Everyone has travelled to their local office and booked a meeting room. However, those meeting rooms need to be connected

so collaboration can take place (e.g. there are 3 local offices, each with 3 or 4 people present)

- **Mixed:** There are multiple offices, each with one or more people in a meeting room. There are also some people connecting individually (e.g. there are 3 local offices, each with 3 or 4 people present. There are also 3 people connecting individually from home)

Each of these models creates a different set of technical and facilitative challenges. As a facilitator it's important to have 'presence' and 'gravitas' and create the conditions where collaboration can happen. It's important to create an *equality of experience* so that people don't feel left out. Twenty years ago the reality of 'dialling into a meeting' often meant being an anonymous voice on a black 'spider phone' in the middle of the table who couldn't see what was happening in the meeting. That kind of inequality of experience just won't cut it in 2021, so we need to think about what tools and techniques translate well into these environments.

Fundamentally, rather than ask "how can we translate a real-world meeting into a hybrid meeting" we need to ask "how can we use our skills, tools and techniques to design an awesome hybrid meeting"

There will be things we can do in a hybrid environment that were harder in a real-world environment. Virtual whiteboards provide opportunities for synchronous collaboration that was more difficult in a physical environment (it's easy to have 20 people on a virtual whiteboard… ever tried that with a physical one?!). They can also provide real anonymity if that's required, helping to alleviate the concern that the highest paid voice will lead the conversation. Of course there are *many* considerations besides this, but I'm sure you get the gist.

Hybrid Facilitation Could Be Our "Disco Lights"

If we accept that hybrid meetings are likely to be a part of the next normal, then it stands to reason that those who can facilitate them *really well* will be in demand. It takes time to learn the skills, to evaluate the tools and techniques, and to reach a level of competency where it seems flawless. Many people will need to have basic skills in this area, but those that really hone them will be in the minority, initially at least.

Yet executives in organisations are going to *need* people who can do this. As BAs, it's a skill we'll need for our daily work, so it's something that we're likely developing anyway. Why not offer it as a more general 'service' to stakeholders? If executive stakeholders need a facilitator to help them prepare and run a strategic planning session, why not offer to help? A common challenge for BAs is being engaged too late in change. Could hybrid facilitation be part of the puzzle that gets our 'foot in the door' to earn the early engagement that we seek? Time will tell!

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Product Usership
Mark Smalley

An enduring concern of mine is whether people are actually benefitting from our efforts. We come up with these wonderful ideas for digital solutions and are rightly proud – when things go well, at least – that we have contributed to speedy delivery of something that is both fit for purpose and fit for use. Unfortunately, our definition of done is just that: *our* definition of done. Not the business owners' definition – without even thinking about what the poor users need. This article explores things from the perspective of the digital service consumer, with the intent of expanding our circle of concern, and possibly influence.

We are all familiar with how these initiatives start. Somebody has a brainwave, either triggered by concrete events in business operations, or emerging from more strategic reflections on how the organisation should succeed by differing from the competition. The next crucial step is coming up with a plausible hypothesis that if we do this, we'll achieve these outcomes. After which we roll into the non-value-adding business of specifying requirements, development and so on. I say 'non-value-adding' somewhat provocatively because the *potential* value has already been established. Everything that follows can only diminish the value by being late or

wrong. It's a bit depressing, but that's life. We are mere cogs in the corporate wheel.

The good news is that we are not alone. The users are also in the same unenviable position of making a mess of it. Which they often do. Particularly when they have to work with solutions that they didn't ask for and don't understand, and have nobody to turn to for technical, functional and emotional support than their equally baffled co-workers.

What some people seem not to know, is that return on digital investment is only realised when something in the organisation increases in value. This can often be expressed in financial terms such as more sales, higher prices and/or lower costs, but it can also be the organisation's capabilities and resources such as knowledge and information that increase in value. And people's experience, of course, that enables them to act better next time.

In order for this increase in value to occur, something has to change. Someone or something has to act differently from how they previously acted, otherwise the same value is realised. Acting differently requires a decision to act differently, and this is where digital technology has a role to play. Decisions are based on information. Not in a rational sense, because all decisions are primarily emotional and are only justified afterwards in order to give us the illusion of control. But unconsciously and consciously, information plays a role in decision making. It reduces uncertainty.

It is only when people (or things) act on decisions that have been improved by information that has been derived from underlying digital solutions, that return on digital investment is realised. So, let's explore product *usership*.

We are used to talking about product owners who represent business interests in the development of software products. They ensure that the products are fit for purpose and fit for use. But having a good product is not enough for value to be realised from it – other than financial value from selling it. Value from software products (or services, depending on how you use the terms) is co-created. There is a provider who ensures that it is available for use and there is a consumer who actually uses it. It is only when the user does something useful with the product, that value is realised.

Just as product ownership is more easily said than done, the same applies to product usership.

Where the product owner struggles with the necessary skills, the authority to make decisions, the legitimacy to be taken seriously, and the time to do the work, the user also has challenges.

It is good to explore the following aspects of product usership:

- Are the users aware of what the software product can do (the functionality), do they understand it sufficiently and do they actually use it?

- Do the users understand the meaning of the data that the product exposes

to them and can they interpret it in their business or personal context? For example, does the data item 'customer' only refer to people who have actually bought something, or is a customer also someone who has registered on a website but has not yet bought anything?

- Do the users use the information (data that is useful in their context) to make better decisions? This is the function of information: to reduce uncertainty.

- Finally, do the users act on those improved decisions and realise a return on their investment by making a change to the organisation's resources? Resources are not only financial but also knowledge, physical, logical (algorithms, for example), and human competences. The organisation's reputation (goodwill) could also be regarded as a resource.

- It is often the case that users are poorly informed about software products and how to use them and the related data to actually realise value. Product usership is often the weakest link in the chain but who feels responsible for it?

I hope that this article has triggered you to think about how effectively your organisation uses digital products and services, and what you can do about it. *Usership* is one of many topics that interest me. You can find other topics in my recent book, Reflections on High-velocity IT. Most of my publications are listed on Smalley.IT. The Learning section of my website contains references to various topics that interest me, and may interested you as well.

Part of this article was originally published on LinkedIn.

Mark Smalley is a Speaker & Author of High-velocity IT. You can connect with him on LinkedIN.

Re-thinking the Problem: Did You Think Better [on Some Things] When You Were Younger?

Adrian Reed

Like most folks I know, I have a whole range of mixed memories from my years at school. Some fantastically ecstatic, others scary and traumatic, but I suppose the sum of those experiences were all 'character building'. If you had met me as a school-age child, you would have found someone who had very strong ideological views, but who so often lacked the ability to express them clearly. Some would argue that little has changed

I did fairly well at school, but was also seen as a bit feisty at times—my strong views and beliefs weren't always compatible with the power structures that existed in schools (those power structures, by the way, extend *way* beyond the teachers and *well* into

the playground). One phrase that I remember people who perceived that they had power over me told me time and time again was:

"You'll think differently when you're older"

I didn't understand that phrase at the time, and I still struggle with it now. I remember once, in middle school, I conspired with a few friends to *go on strike.* I can't remember *exactly* what my disagreement was about, I vaguely recall it was related to the fact that the teacher intended to punish the *whole* class when one or two students misbehaved. Sadly, this strike never happened—I can't remember if I was talked out of it (or coerced out of it) by a well-meaning adult.

I look back on this memory fondly. It's easy to think "naïve child: why were you so naughty?!". But press pause for just one moment and switch the context. Imagine you went into work tomorrow, and somebody has stolen the communal coffee jar. If the boss says "Right, all 30 of you are staying for an extra hour this evening, without pay as punishment, and you aren't allowed to leave your seat" you would probably laugh at first. If they were serious, there would likely be lawsuits and union involvement. Why? Because it's unfair to punish an innocent person for the actions of another guilty person. So isn't that *as* true for my ten-year old self as it is for my [insert-whatever-age-you-think-I-am] age self? If we put ourselves in that 'naughty' child's perspective, maybe we'd come to the same conclusion. How often are

we stuck thinking that some things are "OK" just because they've always been that way? Sometimes it's time for a fundamental re-think.

The Fantastic Mrs. Morgan: Debating for both sides

Understanding different perspectives is really important, but tricky to do. There were many fantastic teachers, and one who I really remember was Mrs. Morgan. Mrs. Morgan was Australian and (with some level of irony) was an English teacher. I learned English language and literature from her, but I also learned so much more. You see, Mrs. Morgan ran the *only* after-school club that wasn't sports based – she ran the *debating club*.

For years, me and a bunch of other misfits turned up and debated things. But Mrs. Morgan was smart: You had a week to prepare your argument *but* you didn't always get to pick your side. We'd debate all manner of controversial topics (euthanasia, legalisation of soft drugs, capital punishment) but sometimes you had to research, and construct a compelling argument for the side that you didn't agree with.

I *hated* this at the time, but in retrospect it taught me to understand—and respect—that there are multiple perspectives on a subject. We might not always agree, but that doesn't mean the other person isn't acting entirely logical from their side. This encourages empathy, but also respectful challenge. You challenge the *logic of the argument* but this isn't

dissing the person. A useful skill to have in the workplace… or so we might think.

Fast forward a few years, and after college, I spent a (thankfully brief) couple of years early in my career in a very strong office culture, where there were strong perceived power structures. It was like being back at school again— as Bowling For Soup so eloquently put it "High School Never Ends". I started challenging things, only to find out *very quickly* that this was not seen as appropriate for a "junior" member of staff. The way to get on was to shut up, sit down, and ensure that you made as much visible progress as possible. It didn't really matter what that progress was, as long as you found a way of aligning it with whatever the middle management fad was at the time, and as long as you didn't threaten the status quo. I luckily, very quickly, found a route out—and a couple of years later landed (very fortuitously) into the world of business analysis (where challenge *is* welcomed and age isn't a barrier!)

"You Thought Better [On Some Topics] When You Were Younger"

So what does all this amount to? I think there were situations where the 'raw naivety' of youth meant that we had a better take on a situation. At eighteen, I hadn't been as 'conditioned' by office politics, by national politics, and by norms and beliefs that get invisibly transferred to you as a knowledge worker.

A question I ask myself now is "What would I have thought about this when I was ten years old? Sixteen? Eighteen?". It sounds crazy, but as a thought experiment it's really useful. I find myself interpreting situations in a different way, often with far more clarity than my [insert-whatever-age-you-think-I-am-here] year old self. I find myself reigniting old enthusiasm and optimism that so easily gets beaten away in a largely "corporate" and "political" world. I also think back to Mrs Morgan's debating society days, and asking "What is the opposing or different view(s) on this?" and "How might others be experiencing or perceiving this?"

These types of techniques are so important, in my view, because many of the "Messy" problems that we solve in our organisations—and our communities— need *fundamentally different ways of thinking*. Your "legacy application" problem won't be solved by incremental changes around the edges. Our communal "climate crisis" won't be solved without fundamentally rethinking what we now take for granted. It's time to retire the tired, faded, clichéd view that people "think better just because they are older", and instead ensure that we inclusively seek perspectives of a whole range of folks to *rethink the problem*. By seeking wide participation, and by using thought experiments to expose and dampen the shackles and baggage that we all carry, we *might* be able to get closer to some of the radical solutions that our organisations and our communities need.

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OKRs: Is This the Holy Grail for Your Company's Success?

Almudena Rodriguez Pardo

What are OKRs? Is this some sort of improved KPIs? Objectives & Key Results (OKRs) are actually nothing new. OKRs were created last century by the company Intel, but it was the company Google who promoted and made the concept famous worldwide. The OKR-System has been the key for success for several companies within the last few years. Up to the point that companies like the Finnish IT company Bryter are driven 100% by OKRs, without any management!

However, for some other organisations, OKRs have been hidden in plain sight. And nowadays everybody is speaking about them: it seems that we are facing a new hype, as many sectors are seeking 'miracle solutions' for our daily challenges.

Are OKRs going to solve the problems of my organisation? Maybe...if you do your homework!

Objectives & Key Results are quite simple to describe, it just divides the classical goals into two parts:

- **Objectives set goals based on the strategy** - abstract, polarising and highly motivating. They pick up the employee on the emotional level and secure his commitment to the goal.

- **Key Results have the task of making the objective measurable and showing how the objective can be achieved.**

Yes, that was all the theory so far!

The OKR-System gives the impression at first sight of being uncomplicated. Unfortunately, there are many companies that are frustrated when they try to apply it in practice. Often companies, teams and individuals fall into the classic

mistakes of the past and end up in the so-called "cosmetic agility". Even if the dynamics behind OKR seem to be very simple, it is important to have an experienced OKR coach guiding the introduction.

One question which always arises (yes, always) is : "That looks pretty much like KPIs, right?"

Wrong. Plain wrong.

Comparing KPIs with OKRs is like comparing basketball with handball: yes, both have a ball in the hand and two teams playing against each other...and that is all they have in common.

Human brains loves reductionism, defined by Merriam Webster as "a procedure or theory that reduces complex data and phenomena to simple terms". That is, the hope to handle complexity through plain numbers. And this is what we try to do when we reduce the goals and strategy of our organisations to KPIs, setting a number to be reached...by losing the holistic view of our vision and goals.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) define a set of values against which to measure success.

Key Results measure whether we are achieving our objectives.

KPIs measure performance, and are often tied to a bonus.

Key Results have no financial compensation, we just seek learning and improvement.

Now what should any organisation do when planning to introduce OKRs?

First some homework has to be done! The company management has to make sure that a vision exists. Where is this company heading for? The vision has to be crystal clear to any employee, and it is the duty of management to communicate it in a way anybody can understand. Best exercise for a clear vision is to avoid PowerPoint, and try to put it in a tweet.

Second step is to ensure there is a strategy to reach that vision. This might sound trivial, but as a consultant I keep running into organisations where the strategy is not known, or not available, or we have trouble finding where it was stored. Again, the strategy of the company has to be clearly communicated to each and every employee.

Once we know where we are heading for (vision) and how we are planning to get there (strategy), the OKRs party can begin!
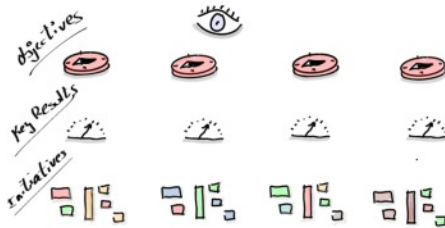
Make sure OKRs are defined first on company level: secure with support of an OKR coach the high-level executives define them at enterprise level. These OKRs will be the compass for the rest of the company. We ensure those OKRs are *cascaded* to the further flight levels of the organisation, applying principles like Hoshin Kanri and 'catch ball'.

We very often run into OKRs being defined on a team level, without a higher instance above: team OKRs need to be hooked to the company strategy, otherwise they end up being a checklist of things to do…

Once OKRs are defined, make sure that they are tracked weekly, and evaluated at the very least quarterly: this allows the employees to learn whether they are heading in the right direction.

Last but not least, secure collaboration! Avoid department OKRs, or BU OKRs, or any sort of silos-like ones, go for OKRs where different areas of the company work together to reach the desired goals! This way we keep the systemic view, where our company is heading for!

The first time you introduce OKRs, it is mostly a pain: it is cumbersome, looks complicated, takes time...you will probably fail. Don't worry, the learning effect is great, and the second OKRs quarter will already bring some value to you.

Summarising, OKRs is a powerful method to thrive your company strategy and secure alignment throughout the complete organisation. It is surely not easy to introduce OKRs, but the value they bring is really impressive. Don't miss the train and jump onto the OKRs band wagon!

Do you want to know more? Just contact us at www.rodriguezpardo.com

Almudena Rodriguez Pardo is a Business Agility Consultant at Rodriguez Pardo & Associates. You can connect with her on LinkedIN.

Zooming Out: Thinking Beyond 'Customer' Journey Maps

Adrian Reed

I am a real fan of journey maps. They are a great way of cultivating a conversation about the value that a stakeholder is seeking and the types of experiences that will satisfy them. A few recent experiences have moved my thinking on journey mapping, and this blog post is my attempt to capture these thoughts.

'Customer' or 'User'?

You may have noticed that some practitioners talk about 'customer journey mapping', others talk about 'user journey mapping'. Sometimes these terms are used interchangeably, but in terms of journey mapping I have found them rather problematic. For example:

- **Not all 'beneficiaries' are customers, and who we consider the 'customer' depends on our perspective:** There can be situations where the 'beneficiary' that the 'journey' exists for isn't considered a direct customer. Who is the 'customer' of an electronic patient record system? Is it the health trust that procures it? The clinicians that use it? Or the patients whose data it stores and processes? It could be any—or all—of these depending on the perspective we take and how

broadly we define 'customer'—and whichever perspective we embrace will affect the *types* of journeys we consider.

- **'Customers' and 'users' are not (always) subsets of one another:** There can be users who are not customers (e.g. an internal call-centre worker using an internal system. Or an external stakeholder who is managing the financial affairs of a relative under power of attorney receives no benefit themselves, yet they need to 'use' the banking service). There can be customers who are not users (e.g. the person whose affairs are being managed via a relative still needs their interests protected).

- **Journeys need to protect the needs of other stakeholders:** There may be others who have a 'stake' in the journey whose needs ought to be protected, even if they are not a customer or a user themselves.

Incidentally, asking questions about who is considered to be the customer will typically create a healthy and useful debate around who we are designing the service *for* and who it *affects*. I particu-

larly like to use tools such as UCOB and the PQR Formula to provoke these types of thoughts , yet I worry that by branding a journey as 'user' or 'customer' it may have the inadvertent consequence in *unconsciously* shifting our attention to particular types of stakeholder. Without intending to get into debates about how we define either term, (and there are certainly broader definitions of 'customer' that are more inclusive) I have come to the conclusion (for my own work) that *it just doesn't matter* **and we are perhaps served best by just referring to 'journeys' or, perhaps even better 'service journeys'**. That way, we liberate ourselves from the tacit presumption that we ought only to focus on journeys from the perspective of 'users' or 'customers', however we define them.

Zooming Out: Service Journeys Cross Boundaries

This is important for another reason too. An end-to-end service journey is often much broader than we might first imagine. Taking a seemingly curve-ball example: I recently went for a routine doctor's appointment, and my doctor sent me for a standard blood test. In order to have blood taken, I had to make an appointment at another local clinic, who then took the blood and sent it to a pathology lab, who would return the results to my doctor.

Imagine being the pathology lab, plotting a 'customer' or 'user' journey. Blood comes in, results go out—as long as the accurate results go to the right doctor, then it's pretty much OK, isn't

it? The doctor is the 'customer', as they place the request and get the results. **Yet raw results by themselves have limited value, the macro-level** *service* **is about** *diagnosing and treating a patient.* **It's about ensuring someone stays healthy, it's about a** *person* **not a** *sample.* There are many other crucial stakeholders too, losing sight of this can be really dangerous and can mean that bad experiences slip in. This requires collaboration—and thinking beyond—organisational boundaries.

Taking just one example, when I arrived at the clinic to have blood taken I found it really difficult to find the right *building* on the hospital campus, as the signs were (in my view) rather confusing. The paperwork I had been given referred to a 'Phlebotomy clinic'. Phlebotomy isn't a word I use very often, I assume it means 'blood', but I had no idea which *building* this clinic was inside.

Not in any of these places….

I decided to choose a random building and speak to the hospital receptionist, who gave me very precise directions—and announced them almost on auto-pilot (like that was the seven hundredth time she'd advised someone that day). When I got into the right building, there was a colour coded sign, and it was easy to find (even the walls were colour coded for ease of navigation).

Found it! A very useful sign.

When I got to the appointment, I was told I should have fasted—I hadn't been advised of this and this wasn't on my written instructions so I hadn't done. "Ah, this happens all the time" the clinician told me. Clearly there is some kind of communication breakdown in the journey meaning patients aren't being advised. I had the blood taken, but was told I'd likely need to repeat the test.

This isn't, in any way, intended as a criticism to the National Health Service or the clinicians involved, who were all extremely caring and compassionate, and I am extremely grateful that we have the NHS. **It is, however, an illustration that a 'service journey' spans multiple organisations, is 'multi-channel', and considering multiple stakeholder perspectives and thinking *beyond* our organisation is key.** This might lead us to think about communication and sign-posting—yes, even physical signposting on buildings—to enhance the overall experience.
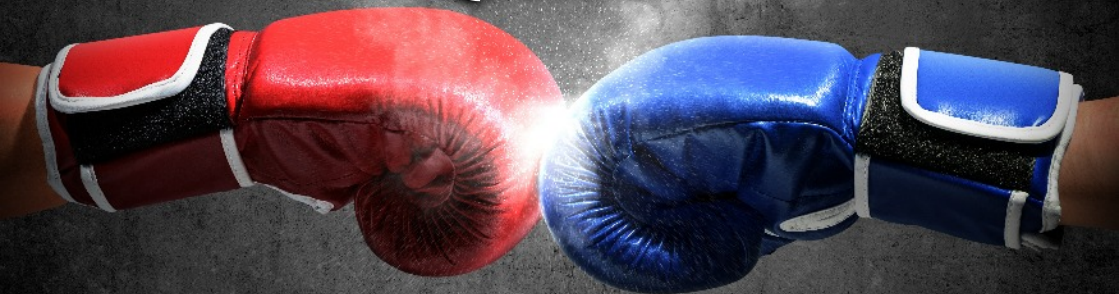
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New Words For BAs

" Hoftip "

Intentionally bad handwriting used on flip-charts ONLY for words you can't spell.

As-is Versus To-be, How to Answer This Important Question

Craig Willis

As business analysts we are often challenged on the need to start with an As-Is process. It can also be difficult at times to ensure that everyone is on the same page in a workshop. Making sure that participants and stakeholders alike are clear on what you expect to achieve in a workshop is the basis for success.

In this article I'll share the main considerations that help you determine whether you need to start with the As-Is process or whether it's safe to jump straight to the To-Be. With this information you can confidently agree the approach with the relevant stakeholders BEFORE you start working on the processes.

Get this straight from the beginning and you'll avoid the debate and time wasted before your workshop gets started. Why not start by asking yourself the important questions I've outlined below to understand where you need to get started.

What do we mean by As-Is and To-Be?

Let's go back to the very beginning and make sure we're clear about how we define As-Is and To-Be. In general we are talking about business processes and the need to understand them.

As-Is process mapping is about understanding the here and now. It tries to answer the questions;

- What is happening in this process right now?

- How does it work today?

It's also often called the Current State and isn't always just the process but also includes lots of other data and information about the business.

To-Be process mapping is where we start to explore the future;

- How should this process work tomorrow?

To-Be process mapping is also commonly called Process Design or Future State mapping. It might be that we are making minor improvements to an existing process, or designing a process that doesn't even exist today.

The disagreement many have is whether there is value in spending time documenting the As-Is or whether you should jump straight to the To-Be. This decision really depends on the individual project but it's up to you to make that clear from the beginning.

Why are you mapping processes?

The first thing you need to ask yourself is - what are you mapping these processes for? These typically break down into the following types of process mapping;

- investigating to see what could be improved

- documenting for compliance / quality / training reasons

- understanding requirements for an improvement or designing a completely new process

Be aware that only designing a completely new process can legitimately have a case for going straight to a To-Be. Even if this is the case, you'd need to do some investigation beforehand to understand what the business already knows about this area. You may need to understand if there are any constraints but this doesn't necessarily require process mapping.

Mapping processes purely for the purpose of creating and maintaining documentation, such as for training or consistency reasons suggests an As-Is approach. However, you may well be documenting processes for the first time. In which case you are capturing As-Is processes but with small improvements as the teams come together and learn from each other and discuss the best way to do things. You are building a future state process that I tend to call the As-Is Plus.

The other two types of project, investigation and requirements gathering absolutely need some degree of As-Is capture and analysis. It's perhaps here that most will argue over the need for one versus the other.

The problem is really in the perceived value of conducting the exercise. It's time consuming and focuses too much on the past when everyone is excited about the future of the project. Though the reality is that we must understand the past otherwise the future will be built on shifting foundations.

So any project that aims to change the way something works today really needs

some level of As-Is understanding. How deep that goes is covered in the next questions.

How well are the problems understood today?

Building a shared understanding of the problems you're trying to solve is essential for success. Understanding the problems ensures people are brought into the need for change. However one of the biggest challenges here is whether people have the same perception of those problems.

People normally describe problems in terms of the symptoms they experience. As analysts part of our job is to help identify the root cause of those problems. But if we do that away from the stakeholders they will still see the symptoms they experience as different problems. As such they may well think any proposed solution is not designed to address these.

One of the most powerful aspects of process mapping in a workshop environment is that it aligns people firstly around the work that happens and then gives them space to have a conversation about the problems.

Understanding today's problems is not just about the project team, it's also about ensuring everyone else shares that understanding. As-Is process maps are a powerful way of investigating and validating problems with the wider business. Indeed that workshop you organise, and the conclusions you make together, is key to ensuring that everyone is on the same page going forward.

Is there a clear business case for all stakeholders?

Having identified and clarified the problems it's possible to build a business case for improvement. The impact of those problems can be measured and then used to assess the viability of potential solutions.

The point here is to ensure that there is a clear business case at all levels. A business case that increases revenue or profits is great but if it requires individual stakeholders to work harder, with no additional pay, they may not be so keen to implement it.

This is why having alignment on the problems is so important, it allows you to understand how each problem impacts individuals and therefore create a clear business case at each level.

Are all the constraints and risks understood?

Many projects miss important deadlines when a key constraint is only identified in the final stages. Constraints could be anything from legal requirements to legacy technology and it's essential to know what these are as early as possible.

Again, one of the most powerful aspects of As-Is process mapping is that it provides a simple clear language for lots of different stakeholders to align against. This makes it that much easier to have

focused conversations about what might prevent any solution being implemented.

Is Change Management required?

Here we focus on implementation plans. What do we need to know to make sure that the project will be a success, where are the gaps and how are we going to fill them.

The only way to truly identify the gaps is again to understand how things work today, who does them and what with. That is an As-Is process. You need that in order to compare it to your To-Be to identify the gaps in personnel, skills, systems and so much more.

Conclusion

It is worth considering the answer to these questions in order to determine whether it would be beneficial to conduct As-Is process analysis before continuing. The cost of not doing so can be expensive. It is your role to ensure that the business understands the value in taking the time to go through the As-Is. The key is to address that question up front, as part of your introduction: "today we are here to map the …. because this will give us …." Making sure that is understood before your workshop kicks off will save you valuable time and ensure stakeholder satisfaction.

Craig Willis is the CEO of Skore, the Process Improvement Software Platform. Designed to be used and understood by everyone in the organisation, Skore's simple two shape system enables you to effortlessly map and manage processes in workshops whilst gaining valuable insights into the business. You can connect with him on LinkedIN.

Cultural Clues: Who Is Watering the Plants?

Adrian Reed

As business analysts and practitioners of strategic change, we probably all find ourselves 'parachuted' into new organisational situations from time to time. Whether we are working with a new client, business unit, team or department, there is a need to get up to speed with the domain and the culture quickly. In these situations it's important to learn as much as we can about the organisational situation—whether that's through document analysis, ad-hoc conversations or other more formal analysis techniques. Yet understanding organisational *culture* can be much harder, but it is crucial that we try to do so.

A thorough understanding of culture can only really be achieved through spending time *in* the organisational environment, but there are sometimes signs that can be useful indicators of cultural norms. It is almost like our stakeholders leave a trail of clues for us to follow. And that might even start by looking at the office plants…

Looking for Cultural Clues

This probably sounds crazy, right? What can office plants tell you about the corporate culture? Well, whilst they certainly won't tell us anything conclusive, they potentially provide some very useful hints. Imagine the following situation: the facilities management for a large office is outsourced. The cleaning staff that used to water the plants are no longer part of the team, and the new contract cleaning staff are given a strict

'checklist' that they are not allowed to deviate from. Unfortunately, whoever specified the cleaning checklist was not aware that the cleaning staff also watered the plants….

Over time the plants start to droop. People in the office start to notice—and then, at some point, somebody has to make a conscious decision. Yet the types of decisions that will be taken will be—to some extent—shaped by the culture of the teams. There are many possible outcomes, but two short-term outcomes are:

1. Each plant is 'adopted' by someone nearby who waters them, whilst working out a longer-term approach for other plants in the building

2. The plants are ignored, and droop further

We could draw some *potentially useful* inferences from these scenarios. In scenario (a) there is an element of pride in surroundings, ownership and taking responsibility for problems even if they are *outside* of an immediate job specification. In scenario (b) people are willingly watching plants die in front of them and—for whatever reason—don't feel able or compelled to take action. There *will* be a reason behind this—perhaps they have too much work, are not supported by their managers, or perhaps there is a strict, tall hierarchy and doing anything that isn't within a job specification is frowned upon. Or perhaps it is another reason. It would be useful for us to probe further and find out more.

Even if we know little about the organisation, signs like drooping, brown, dying plants will help us ask questions. They are useful indicators of *potential* cultural habits—although it is important that we see them as indicators to prompt our attention—to be used alongside a range of other techniques. Yet when 'parachuted in' all of this insight, including the level of attention to things as seemingly irrelevant as plants, can help us achieve a richer understanding.

If we find ourselves in an organisation where the staff willingly let the plants die around them (because there are either too overworked to do so, or feel it's 'not their job' to water them), this is a *potential* indicator that we might find that we are in an organisation where work is stockpiled in backlogs, where teams have strict delineations and if a customer demand doesn't fit the specification then it is shunted between teams until it goes away. This would be a very different culture to one where people felt empowered to tactically solve problem whilst looking for longer term solutions.

Of course, it's not *just* about plants there are many other useful clues that we can observe. Whether it's out of date posters on a notice board, phones left ringing, rubbish left in meeting rooms or overflowing drip trays on water-coolers, all act as useful indicators. All of this is all an *approximation*—culture is a tricky thing to read. But there are clues all around us, and it is worth looking out for them!

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7 Steps to a Successful Business Analysis Career

Eno Eka

The Business Analysis skill is fast becoming a sought-after skill by many organisations hence the increased demand for Business Analysts.

Through my personal research, there are approximately 400 new business analyst roles posted on LinkedIn daily.

With the pandemic hitting the world in 2020, there has been a significant rise in the adoption of technology & digital transformation.

Organisations are looking for professionals with the right business and solution knowledge that can help them adapt to the new norm with processes & technology that fit best.

Before we move forward, let's define some key terms:

1. Business Analysis

According to the IIBA®, Business Analysis is the practice of enabling **change** in an organisational **context**, by defining **needs** and recommending **solutions** that deliver **value** to **stakeholders**. The set of **tasks and techniques** that are used to perform business analysis are defined in A Guide to the Business Analysis Body of Knowledge® (BABOK® Guide)

2. Business Analyst

According to the IIBA®, A business analyst is any person who performs business analysis tasks described in the *BABOK® Guide*, no matter their job title or organisational role.

These tasks include:

● understanding enterprise problems and goals

● analysing needs and solutions

● devising strategies

● driving change

● facilitation of stakeholder collaboration

From the definitions above, we can deduce that Business Analysis is a prac-

tice, and that the business analyst role can be performed by anyone regardless of their education or title.

So, if you are looking to start practicing business analysis in 2021, here's some steps you can take today to get into this career path that is in high demand.

Step 1: Adopting the right mindset

- Knowing that whatever you set your mind to you, can achieve it

- Auditing your journey and understanding your value

- Building your confidence and self-belief

- Having the right tools to help you stay optimistic

- Understanding that you are a solution provider

Step 2: Leveraging your Experience

- Be confident in your existing experience both past and present

- Job titles **DO NOT** matter

- Every Experience is **VALID**

- Don't discount your experience because you didn't hold a job title called Business Analyst

- Leverage your experience to get you where you want to be

Step 3: Leverage & Develop your knowledge

- All the knowledge you have gained from your education, courses, books, webinars, podcasts and your work experience are all RELEVANT

- Leverage the knowledge you already have

- Working in an industry or using a tool/software makes you knowledgeable about something, leverage that knowledge to become a subject matter expert

- Improve your knowledge by learning Business Analysis frameworks, techniques, tools and terminology. This is how you become the go-to expert.

Step 4: Leverage Your Existing Skills

- You already have skills that you have been using to help bring value at work

- Understand the difference between hard and soft skills

- Know your transferable skills

- Do a SWOT analysis to know your strengths and weakness

- Learn new skills quickly to set you apart

- Keep learning all the required skills for your target roles

Step 5: Get the relevant industry certifications

- Know what certifications companies are looking for with new hires

- Get the ones that have the most demand

- Certifications help to validate your existing skills and experience

- You are now seen as an EXPERT

- You now become globally sought after

- You have better understanding of your job

Step 6: Invest in Mentorship & Coaching

- Get expert guidance from those who already have success in Business Analysis

- Imbibe the habit of investing in coaching to help you succeed

- Having a mentor or coach helps you avoid making mistakes as you learn from their mistakes and get a clear roadmap to success

Step 7: Continuous Improvement, never stop learning

- The business analysis career path is very dynamic and there's always something new to learn

- Leverage the IIBA® membership to get access to the member library, webinars & certifications to help you grow in your career

- Join the chapters to volunteer, network & learn at their events

As a professional who has successfully made a transition into Business Analysis years ago and has been recognised as one of the Top 8 Women to Watch in Business Analysis in 2021 and Business Analysts to watch in 2021, I assure you that if you embrace and follow these steps, the same will happen for you.

Eno Eka is a multiple Award-Winning Business Analysis Consultant & Coach who is passionate about helping professionals around the world start and grow successful Business Analysis careers.

She is the Founder of the Business Analysis School where she has trained over 20,000 professionals in 20 countries & 5 continents on how to start a successful business analysis career.

Her work towards providing education and supporting professionals has been recognised & featured by Forbes, IIBA®, RBC, Women of Influence, New York Finance, CBS, Fox and many others.

For free training on how to start a successful business analysis, register here.

Follow Eno on LinkedIn and YouTube to see more of her daily content on the Business Analysis career.

Putting on the Brakes *Adrian Reed*

It won't come as any surprise to regular readers of this blog that I have always been somewhat of a 'geek'. I've always been fascinated with computers, and particularly how they can be used to communicate. Long before the Internet went mainstream, I enjoyed dialing up 'Bulletin Board Systems' (or BBS as they were known) on my 2400 baud modem. It was slow, unreliable and seems archaic now, but it felt *really* futuristic at the time.

One thing I miss about those pioneering days is the discussion forums. They were, by today's standards, very low-tech. There was a voluntary 'store-and-forward' network called Fidonet that allowed messages to 'ripple' out to other BBS around the world. I won't bore you with details of the topology, but in brief each BBS would poll at least one other server a day, and exchange messages. This meant that, over several days, a message posted in a discussion forum by a user in, say, Edinburgh, would be visible to users in London.

This seemed amazing to me at the time. For the cost of a local call, you could collaborate and discuss all sorts of topics from people all over the country (or even the world). And whilst there was very robust debate, there was very little 'trolling' and very little need for moderation.

Juxtapose this with today's Facebook message forums, and there is a world of difference. I am a member of a local

community forum where a range of local issues are discussed, and even though there is a lot of constructive debate sometimes things escalate very quickly and turn ugly. **The discussion turns from constructive to personal extremely quickly. So why is there so much more conflict now than in those early Fidonet days?**

The Danger of Immediacy (Without Brakes)

Well, there could be many reasons. Perhaps the demographic of the user is different (as Fidonet was largely used by computer enthusiasts), but most likely it is a combination of factors. **One significant factor is likely to be the dampening effect of delayed messages.** In the old days, you were reading messages that were probably posted at least a day ago, and it would take a day for your reply to be visible to the wider world. This led to a natural opportunity to pause, think and reflect. **Things just couldn't escalate quickly. It is almost like the system had 'brakes' built in**. An exchange of four or five messages might take a week—on Facebook it could take less than five minutes!

This draws us towards an important systemic principle: **Sometimes we need to deliberately build in brakes. Sometimes we need the ability to selectively and deliberately control acceleration and escalation**. From my very arbitrary understanding of physics, I believe this is why nuclear reactors have carbon control rods—they can be lowered to slow the reaction and stop it running out of control, or raised to allow it to accelerate.

But do we build our own control rods into our systems and processes? For example:

- What if a marketing campaign creates more interest than we anticipated, and we can't service the demand? Do we have a contingency plan to dampen demand or stagger it in some way? Or scale up?

- What if a customer is really dissatisfied. Do we respond quickly, empathetically, addressing their issue and the root cause? Or do we wait until it's a complaint (by which time they've complained on social media and to the press?)

- What if a process inadvertently generates more and more 'waste', and as the backlog increases even more 'failure demand' is generated (as people chase). Are we monitoring this? Would we even know?

- On a personal level, do we respond immediately to those 'annoying' emails (creating the potential for an accelerating feedback loop) or do we deliberately pause. Or even better, reply by phone?

Being conscious of these types of feedback loop, and accepting that sometimes they emerge somewhat unexpectedly, will help us consider what control mechanisms are necessary. And when we consciously build an 'accelerator', we should be sure to build a 'brake' too!

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Deliver Quicker and More Successfully by Improving Your Skill at Resolving Conflict

Leon Bamforth

When I start as a business analyst with a new client, I have a strange request: "please put me in the area that has the greatest amount of conflict." I usually get very odd looks and people ask, "why would you want that, are you a sadist?" The answer to this is that I know that many people have a tendency to avoid conflict in a way that is not healthy.

Certainly, I used to do so but simply avoiding conflict ultimately makes our lives much harder than they need to be.

On one occasion my client said "our greatest conflict is with our information governance team, our contact, Jimbo, just doesn't respond". In conflict this is often the worst situation . I asked: "what

have you done to resolve the situation?" My contact replied " well, we have sent an email and he didn't reply". I enquired what they did next and they explained that they escalated, by sending him a chaser email copying in his boss but his boss hadn't responded either. I asked whether they tried ringing or speaking to Jimbo or his boss, and the answer was a resounding "No."

I get it. When working on projects we are very busy, and we just want issues to be resolved with minimum effort. If project stakeholders don't do their jobs or complete their tasks, surely it's a manger's responsibility to intervene? Often, the tools that we use to attempt to resolve conflict reflect this mindset. **Two escalation techniques that are ineffective and overused are, "send another email" and "escalate to their boss… over email."**

I have learnt to adopt a different mindset for resolving conflict that has made me much more successful: I am genuinely curious about what is going on for the other side. I'm not saying that sending another email or escalating the problem to their manager will never work. However, in most cases listening to them will be both quicker and more effective.

Listen don't talk

In this case I found out where Jimbo (our information governance contact) sat and I went and sat at his desk and listened. Listening is key number one for resolving conflict, and it is interesting that all of us learn to talk but many of us do not learn to _really_ listen.

Our own language betrays our mindset about how to approach conflict resolution. When we finally pluck up the courage to go have a difficult conversation, we might tell those around us "I'm going to go give them a good talking to" or "I'm going to give them a piece of my mind" or even the more neutral "I'm going to speak to them". We would never say "I'm going to give them a good listening to!" or "I'm going to give them a space in my mind" or even "I'm going to go over there and listen to them." **We have a false notion that we will resolve conflict by talking at people.** We think that they just need to listen to _us_ to find what is really needed. Email is brilliant for talking at someone but is terrible for listening to them. We resolve conflict by getting information not giving it.

We get information for two reasons. One is to find out what is really going on. Let's get back to Jimbo: It turned out that he had far more work on than he could complete, and as he was not sure what we needed, our work kept being put into the "later" work pile. When we understand what is going on, then we can find a resolution that fits the situation rather than proceeding based on what we assume fits the situation.

Connect don't demand

The second reason that we get information is so that the other person feels understood. How inclined do you think someone is to do what you ask if your second escalation is to send the same email again and third escalation is to copy in their boss? It is likely they will

resent you, which is not conducive to getting what you need!

As my new friend, Jimbo, and I sat together, I didn't demand a response over why the previous emails hadn't been replied to. Instead, we connected. I discovered more about his world, I discovered what he needed from us to progress things. I spent time getting to know him as a person .

The objection I get when describing this approach is that people worry that by listening to someone else's perspective that this means we lose a bit of control and that we give up on what we need by allowing them to justify why they can't help. That is the opposite of what I have found in practice. The key is not to give up what you need but instead, by listening to people, to actually connect with them and to give them a safe place to think through what is needed. We are so busy running around that people rarely get listened to. I have seen time and time again that this approach has a transformative effect.

When finishing my conversation with Jimbo, we agreed another catch-up in a couple of weeks and we agreed what he would be able to deliver by then. I didn't demand either of these, but I did ask the questions and I did make what we needed as clear as possible I'm not there to impose a solution, we are finding the way forward together.

Two weeks later, he delivered.

Summary

When dealing with conflict our mindset is often a "parent-child" model. We know that we are right, so we tell them what to do and expect them to come around to our "correct" way of thinking. A more effective approach is to assume that there is information that we don't know which explains why the other person is acting the way they are and to work with people, not on them. By listening and connecting to the individual amazing things happen.

I wish you luck and I would love to hear your success stories about your successful difficult conversations!

Leon Bamforth is a Business transformation consultant, mediator and professional speaker. You can connect with him on LinkedIN or via www.leonbamforth.com.

Breaking the Fire-fighting Doom-loop
Adrian Reed

I am certain that many people reading this will have come across the traditional Eisenhower matrix. This useful prioritisation tool helps us assess tasks, activities or even projects based on their relative importance and urgency. One version of the diagram is shown below:

	NOT IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT
URGENT	NOT IMPORTANT BUT URGENT	IMPORTANT & URGENT
NOT URGENT	NOT IMPORTANT, NOT URGENT	IMPORTANT BUT NOT URGENT

If there is one quadrant on this matrix that we are all familiar with, it is the "important and urgent" quadrant. I suspect many of us spend our working lives in this quadrant, working judiciously to hit the relevant project deadline, and doing everything that we can to progress the most important and urgent projects. There are probably some very long days, late nights and an element of pressure when working in this quadrant; everything is time critical. And this often results in a lot of pressure, and it may sometimes feel like we are *fire-fighting.*

Yet, the reality is that when a task, project or problem, is both important and urgent, often the options available for undertaking/solving it are limited. We may well find that we are placing metaphorical sticking plasters over large, systemic issues—we never seem to have time to "do the thing right". In an extreme case, it may feel like we are blundering from crisis to crisis; as soon as one fire is damped down we move straight on to the next. But we never actually find out the root cause—we never find the person with the matches who is starting the fires!

Thinking about how projects start, they are generally initiated based on a problem, idea, need or opportunity. **Often, when they are first conceived, they aren't urgent at all**. A training company may notice that its competitors are starting to develop online virtual courses; but whilst the revenue is coming in from traditional courses the urgency for exploring new virtual formats might seem low. A DVD rental company may notice substitutes such as streaming media services, but whilst its membership base is still renting movies it might sit back and think that it can ride the storm. Of course, in both cases if (or when) the market change, there will need to be urgent action—but by that case it might be too late. The training company will be desperate to develop new online offerings, very quickly, and won't have the luxury of time to consider multiple platforms or solutions. The DVD rental company may need to try to change its business model urgently—and as we have seen in at least one high profile example, that doesn't always work well.

The key to avoiding this constant fire-fighting and knee-jerk reaction is for us to encourage our stakeholders to think more about what is important but *not yet* urgent. These are crucial projects and initiatives that are on the horizon. These are the icebergs on our sonar screen—it's often much better to make a calculated, calm adjustment in direction than urgently lurching to port or starboard to avoid an organisational iceberg in our business environment.

This is as true for small, seemingly "routine " projects as it is for large strategic decisions.

What this means for business and business analysis

The BA toolkit contains a range of techniques that we can use to work with our stakeholders to understand, define (and align with) organisational strategy. We can work with our stakeholders to understand the likely projects, initiatives

and changes coming in the next 1, 3 or even 5 years, depending on our industries. Understanding the external business environment, the current (and future) business model, and the *portfolio* of business changes required is crucial.

We can help our stakeholders develop a strategic roadmap—showing the likely projects and initiatives. We can create short, concise and precise problem statements or Project Concept Summary documents which clearly catalogue the nature of the problem or opportunity being addressed. And we can anticipate the optimum time to start the work—with better visibility of the pipeline we can *plan.* We don't need to do masses of work up front, but we can ensure that the *key decisions* are made at the optimum time. As a team, we can decide *when* to decide—rather than waiting for the metaphorical urgent 'fire bell' to ring, by which time we have to make an instant decision.

Over time, this will help us and our stakeholders break the fire-fighting cycle. The initial challenge is to convince stakeholders that there is value in looking ahead one (or more) years when there are still so many "important & urgent" fires that need our attention. And of course, we must do this alongside the important & urgent work. Yet, even a small shift of focus will help enormously. It doesn't have to be time consuming, and it will help us build relationships with our stakeholders and get a bigger strategic view of the organisation. Looking forward will, in the long time, save time. We'll have better options, resulting in more optimal solutions and better business outcomes.

It is time to break the cycle!

Connect with Adrian on LinkedIn.

Resilience and Adaptability, Important Skills for Business Analysts

Corrine Thomas

Did you know that over 54% of working days lost through sickness absence are due to stress?

This is largely caused by workload pressures, uncertainty about the job role, and lack of managerial support. Business analysts work in an environment where there is a lot of uncertainty due to the change we are often involved in implementing. Also, in some organisations the role of business analysts is still misunderstood which can be stressful.

In this article I am going to discuss resilience and how we can build resil-ience for ourselves and work towards creating resilience for the teams and stakeholders we work with. This will aid us in handling challenges and adversity whilst keeping stress at manageable levels.

What is Resilience?

Resilience is all about adaptability, it's how each of us handles challenges that come our way and how we can thrive. You may have heard of grit, determination and mental toughness and think resilience is all about knuckling down

and getting stuff done even when you are not feeling great. It is not about taking on more and more and being tough, it's about learning how to adapt to what is happening and finding ways to cope so that we can keep a balance between high performance and personal wellbeing.

Resilience comes from the latin 'resiliere' which means to leap back or return to the original position. I like this definition from Angela Armstrong –

'the ability to take the challenges and changes of life in your stride and say yes to the opportunities that excite you'.

(Angela Armstrong, book - The Resilience Club).

But can resilience be learned?

Early investigations proposed that resilience is a fixed trait related to adaptability and coping, some people are born resilient, and others are not. However, studies from the 1970s onwards have shown that it is a state that can be developed as we go through life.

The accelerating pace of change in the workplace means individuals need to continually learn and grow so they can perform successfully and take ownership for their careers. Resilience plays a key part in this, it is a dynamic process which involves developing resources such as self-regulation of emotions, thoughts and behaviours, self-confidence and the ability to connect with others.

Building Resilience and Adaptability Resources

In a recent research project, I investigated how business analysts build resources to enable them to be resilient and adapt to the working environment so that they can progress in their careers. The participants in the study were all experienced BAs who had faced challenges at work that had led them to consider a career change. Several themes emerged from the interviews, the first of which confirmed that there is volatility and uncertainty in the modern working environment. Each of the BAs interviewed expressed the importance of taking ownership for their careers and having a passion for the profession.

A commitment to personal growth was important, they had high levels of self-awareness that enabled them to handle career shocks, stay motivated and be proactive in making decisions about projects and their personal career development. They experienced a range of emotions during the challenges, both positive and negative. The negative emotions prompted the BAs to take action to cope with the situation and the positive emotions led to personal growth through the building of competencies that contribute to future adaptability and resilience. These included showing concern for what was happening, taking control through decisive action, being curious, interested, and inquisitive about the future, and having the confidence to believe in their own abilities.

When faced with challenges the participants described how they were able to

recognise their emotions, manage them effectively and then step back and use their analytical skills to make decisions on the best way forward. Being able to regulate these emotions and be emotionally intelligent was key to success.

They were able to ask questions and actively listen so they could get to the root causes of problems and explore opportunities for the way forward. Having an attitude of learning and a focus on outcomes was important for maintaining motivation. By having a feeling of control over the situation and the autonomy to determine a course of action this increased motivation and optimism for the future.

Another important theme that came out of the research was for the BAs to reach out for support during difficult times. All the BAs interviewed stated how important it was for them to work with people both in personal and work situations. Examples given were of building effective stakeholder relationships, manag-ing, and developing team members, and using a personal support network during challenging times. They reflected that having spent time during their careers on building good relationships with those around them was crucial during challenging situations as they were able to connect with and gain support from their personal network.

Research into resilience has demonstrated that resilience comes from many processes and interactions that go beyond the skills we develop as individuals. It is important also to build close connections with others and have a strong social support network. These act as protective factors that counterbalance the stress that comes from being in challenging situations.

The Adapting Response

Derived from the themes found in this research study, the adapting response the BAs used when facing challenges is proposed and summarised in figure 1.
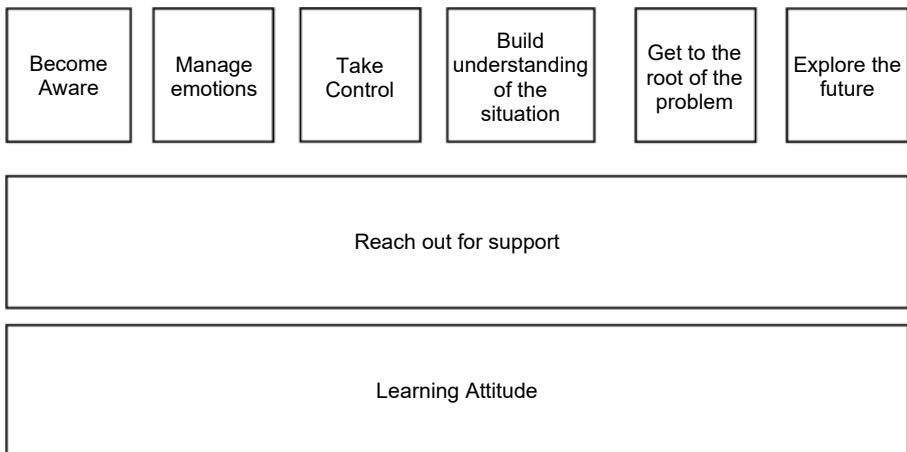

Figure 1- Adapting Response to Career Impacting Challenges - Corrine Thomas

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This response could be what underpins the BAs ability to develop resources to support their adaptability and resilience. As this study was limited to a few participants, it is not possible to generalise across the whole population of business analysts about the adapting response and key resources developed for resilience and adaptability, however this is a good start point.

To build resilience resources each of us needs to work on our self-awareness so we can regulate our own emotions. In addition, through developing skills of empathy and compassion we become more emotionally intelligent, can support others in their resilience, and build a network of people who we can regularly connect with.

Adopting a growth mindset through being open to learning, and actively seeking and acting on feedback will also support our confidence, motivation and contribute to resilience.

Corrine Thomas is a Career and Resilience coach. You can connect with her on LinkedIN.

Virtual Event:

BA OPEN MIC

Sept 23 @ 18:30

CLICK FOR MORE INFO AND TO BOOK YOUR PLACE

The Illusion of Progress:
Half a Job Is No Job

Adrian Reed

Working on projects can be challenging at times. It can feel like we are spinning a number of plates, desperately trying to keep them from falling to the ground. Add in human factors, power and politics and it is more like spinning plates in a storm (in the dark), with different stakeholders having different views over which plate is most important. This dynamic is one of the things that makes the role so interesting and varied.

In this challenging landscape, part of our time is spent planning and monitoring the analysis work. If you are a Principal or Lead BA this may involve leading and managing the work of others, else it may involve planning and structuring the

crucial day-to-day work that we do individually. It is easy to overlook this part of the job as it is something we probably do without thinking, yet it is a crucial enabler for the efficiency and effectiveness of our work. When things get busy, it can become tempting to stop planning and monitoring—there may be a pressure to "just get going". There can be an unstated pressure for us to spin our plates without considering how many we are tending to (and how long we'll be spinning them).

This can lead to a significant danger. Without an appropriate plan, we can get caught in a never-ending loop. It is easy to end up over-committed, as it is *so temptingly easy* to take on just another 'small task'. But each task takes time, and before long we find ourselves flip-flopping between activities with an uncomfortable sense that things aren't quite under control. The more tasks we take on, the more this insidiously uncomfortable feeling grows—we're worried that we're going to drop a plate without even knowing it! Perhaps you recognise this feeling? I know I do!

The Illusion of Progress

This pattern can lead to us and our project teams placing more focus on *starting* work than *finishing* work. Often sponsors and Project managers (quite understandably) want to know that work on something has commenced. Yet is it really meaningful to know that something has started when the person undertaking it is distracted by 101 other tasks? If they are unsure whether they actually have capacity to complete the task, perhaps it isn't.

I can give you a personal example, on a much smaller scale. In the past I would have around 10-20 blog articles that were *very nearly* finished. They just needed final tweaking, proof-reading or so on. Every so often, I would pick one of these articles up and start to tweak it—but most of the time I could't get myself in the right head-space as I'd forgotten the inspiration for the article. Probably around 90% of the time the article went back in the drawer, tweaked but unpublished, for me to pick up again another day… and so the cycle continued.

Here is a harsh truth: **Another way of saying "10-20 nearly finished articles" is "precisely 0 published articles".** Perhaps my combination of multitasking and 'polishing' caused delays. I have long since learned to focus on published articles rather than articles in progress. It is better to have one article published than 20 'nearly finished' collecting dust in a bottom drawer. In fact, the very existence of 20 unfinished articles can create an uncomfortable feeling—that nagging feeling that I should be finishing them…

Of course, this isn't just about article-writing. A similar thing happens in our organisations, projects and teams. **We could equally say that 10 projects 'in progress' that haven't yet delivered equates to precisely 0 implemented valuable changes.** In our enthusiasm to get change moving, as teams and organisations if we 'bite off

more than we can chew' there is a danger that we'll under-deliver. We risk disappointing our stakeholders, affecting our credibility. Our instinct to say yes and get to perfection may prevent us from getting *something* out sooner.

Of course, I'm not suggesting that we should necessarily say "no" to new work (although there is certainly an argument for more robust project selection ensuring we kill our turkey projects early, but that is a different story!). But perhaps we should say "Yes, and…"

"Yes, and if we take on this work, this is the impact on our other projects. Can we check that this is acceptable with the sponsors?"

"Yes, and a great way of us doing the analysis would be incrementally. Are you happy to get a very rough draft for validation earlier, so we can keep things moving?"

"Yes, and if we were to achieve that timescale we'd need extra resource. Here are some options for achieving that".

If we highlight the impact and give our sponsors options, we can ensure they are making informed decisions. If a project is of the utmost importance, then it might be considered perfectly acceptable to delay another: yet having this conversation up front will set expectations and avoid a more difficult conversation later.

But it is useful to remember, in most circumstances **half a job is no job**.

Connect with Adrian on LinkedIn.

Puzzles For BAs

		1			6			
			2			1		9
9	6					7	4	2
4			2	5				
3								4
			6	4				1
2	4	3					8	5
6		8		9				
			3			4		

Surely there's a quicker way to complete these? There's probably an online tool…

Before you look for that, let's understand WHY the grid needs to be completed in the first place...

Using Group Construct Analysis to Understand Stakeholder Worldviews in Ambiguous Situations: An Introduction

Nick de Voil

This is the first in a series of articles about Group Construct Analysis (GCA), a method which I have been using for some years to analyse the worldviews of stakeholders. These ideas will be further developed in my presentation at Serendipity Fest on 15 July 2021.

On seeing the term *worldview*, many readers will be put in mind of Peter Checkland's Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) - worldview is the "W" in the mnemonic CATWOE used in SSM. That is no coincidence. I use GCA to address the same issues that SSM is aimed at, and to flesh out some of the areas where SSM is comparatively weak. Let's take a look at what those issues are.

As an Information Systems (IS) consultant, the majority of the projects that I do are framed as IS projects. Typically, I am initially presented with a situation where stakeholders in an organisation have agreed on the need for a new software application to solve specific problems. Often, there has been a competitive tender process based on a more or less formal definition of the requirements. The expectation is that these requirements will also form the basis of the development project. Straightforward, right?

Wrong. Almost invariably, the people involved have prematurely settled on a specific idea of what the solution should be like, without fully considering the nature of the problem(s) and the implications of proceeding down the chosen path. By moving the focus of their conversations away from the issues and onto a single (as yet imaginary) artefact, they have persuaded themselves that they have achieved a level of consensus that does not exist.

The Principle of
Illusory Consensus

The more adamant a group of stakeholders is on the nature of the solution, the more likely they haven't completely considered the nature of the problem.

The development team must then deliver a solution that satisfies the contract by exhibiting some features of what was asked for, while at the same time trying to ensure a successful outcome by encouraging the stakeholders to explore and develop their group thought process more fully. This usually results in changes to the system requirements. In this way the development project becomes a learning process for the organisation, and the unfolding IT system itself a focal point for that learning.

Improving the organisation's thought processes requires the ability to articulate and visualise the rationale for the project and how it fits in with the world-views of the stakeholders. In SSM the term *worldview* refers to a simple, brief statement of a belief that could, in principle, motivate a human activity system. This is convenient, but it doesn't address the complexity of decision-making, culture and politics in organisations. We need a technique that is conceptually simple, but able to represent complexity. This is where GCA comes in.

GCA extends ideas from Personal Construct Psychology (PCP), a theory developed by George Kelly and used by psychotherapists to understand individuals, what goes on in their minds, and why they act the way they do. Kelly made no claim that PCP had any basis in neuroscience or even that it was "true", but it is a theory of exceptional elegance and explanatory power. In PCP, a person's *construct system* is a set of ideas that make up the way they go about understanding the world and acting within it. We can think of it as being the language that a person is speaking when they talk inside their head.

Constructs are bipolar: each one is made up of a thing and its opposite. For example, if a person tends to react to other individuals on the basis of an assessment of their honesty, we might say that this person uses the following important construct:
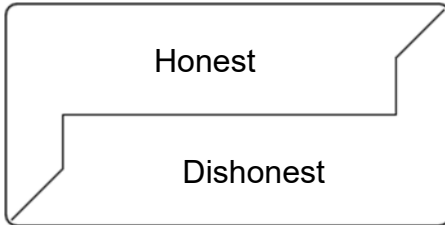
Each construct is more or less closely related to other constructs in the system. Consequently they fall into clusters. This can be shown graphically using a *construct map* which relates the constructs to each others with lines or arrows. These connectors can be used to show a range of different types of relationship between constructs.
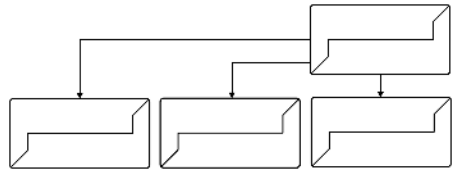
We can start to elicit a person's construct system by interviewing them and listening to the ideas they express and the words they use. We can then explore the way in which the constructs relate to each other by asking questions designed for that purpose.

Of course, in organisations, conversations occur not just inside individuals' heads, but between people. GCA extends the model to take these conversations into account as well, as we will see in a future article.

Nick is a director at De Voil Consulting. You can contact Nick via LinkedIn.

New Words For BAs

" *Neswin* "

An item on an action log, that no one can explain the reason for, including the person responsible to do it.

Thanks to all the authors who kindly allowed us to use their content.

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