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Q4 2023

BA DIGEST

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Welcome

Welcome to the Q4 edition of BA Digest. As usual, in this edition you'll find a diverse range of articles from authors around the world. I hope that you find them useful and interesting.

A question that often evokes controversy amongst the BA community is "when was business analysis first practised?". There is no single answer to this, and the truth is that there's probably been analysis of organisational problems going on in some form for as long as there have been organisations. I know I was doing roles that would now be considered business analysis before the title of 'business analyst' was widely recognised…

However one milestone in this journey was definitively recorded. The International Institute of Business Analysis (IIBA®) held its inaugural meeting 29th October 2003. Of course, business analysis had been practised long before this, and IIBA® is not the only professional association of interest to BAs, however this is one milestone that many of us will recognise.

The reason I mention this is that October 2003 is **twenty years**' ago. I wanted to personally wish a very happy birthday to IIBA®, and give a special shout-out to staff and volunteers past and present who have contributed to the organisation and its international chapters. Business analysis has wider recognition due to your efforts.

I look forward to seeing how the collaborative, global, virtual 'community of practice' that connects us all evolves over the next twenty years. And, if you haven't connected with your local IIBA® chapter, be sure to do so. It's a great way of meeting like-minded colleagues!

Until next time

Adrian

Adrian Reed

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Contents

4 Product Management and the BA - *Karen Newnham*

7 Three Reasons Most Projects Fail (and How Your Project Can Be One of the Few Winners) - *Thomas Heneker*

11 Agile Business Analysis Planning? The Initiative Is Yours! - *Line Karkov*

14 How Much Written Documentation Is Enough? - *Stuart Mann*

17 I Am Not a Robot - *Emily Tom*

20 Have You Thought about Becoming a BA Mentor? Lessons since Becoming a BA Mentor - *Eirik Netland*

23 How to Leverage a Hybrid Role for Your Career Growth as a Business Analyst - *Laura Brandenburg*

27 Business Analysis on the Frontline Against Cybersecurity Challenges - *Erivan de Sena Ramos*

30 Getting Comfortable with Ambiguity to Drive Your Business Analyst Growth - *Inga Davids*

33 Using Group Construct Analysis to Understand Stakeholder Worldviews in Ambiguous Situations, Part 10: Is That Even a Thing? - *Nick de Voil*

37 The Mistakes That Made Me - *Danielle Harley*

40 Business Analysis Planning - from Theory to Practice - *Yevhen Kliukin*

46 Cracking the Curse of Knowledge: Avoiding Traps in Interviews - *Kateryna Stryhunivska*

50 The Power of Perspectives - *John Wisner*

54 What My 87-year-old Mother Taught Me about Technology Accessibility - *Li Yang*

57 The Elegant Expectation Setting Factory - *Robert Snyder*

62 How Should Businesses Compare and Prioritise Use Cases? - *Praneeth Pancheti*

65 BA Back Stories: Kathy Berkidge - *Interviewed by Christina Lovelock*

71 Viewpoints

Product Management and the BA

Karen Newnham

In some companies project management has given way to product (or service) management.

Product (or service) management is about continuously improving products and services over time. Product owners set the direction and strategy for the product, user researchers regularly check in with users on current issues and future needs, service designers design the future service and developers make the changes. So what does a business analyst do?

It's not as straightforward as saying a BA in a product team does the same as they do in a project team. Sure, a product team commonly uses agile delivery methods so it shouldn't be that different. However, I have witnessed enough examples of BAs being *misused* to know something is up.

My belief is that business analysis is crucial to the success of a product team so we need to act. But first, let's consider why product management is all the rage.

What is a project anyway?

We all know what a project is right? We get involved in them from an early age. We have work projects, school projects, craft projects, home improvement projects. As a society we seem to have internalised the key processes of a project (even if we don't always follow them!).

According to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK®) these processes fall into 5 key areas: initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and controlling, and closing.

Each area is important to successful delivery however, a common factor is that all projects have a start and an end. Teams come together and once a project is complete the teams disband. Something is delivered, everyone celebrates (or not) and then we all go home.

Project management has been the dominant model for many years so it's easy to think this is the only way of doing things. But the product management team does things differently. They deliver continuously. Why is this important?

The Digital Transformation Race

We've seen how providers like Uber and Just Eat use digital and data capabilities to disrupt old service models. So, an increasing number of companies are focussing on digital transformation in order to survive. Customers expect easy-to-use digital services that are available to them at any time, through any channel. And if it isn't easy to use they walk away. In this shifting environment with increased customer expectation, services need to continuously improve. Given projects have a finite lifecycle (with a clear start and end) they don't fit this shifting context… enter product management.

We will have to leave the question as to whether this view is correct to another article. Regardless of the answer, product teams are here to stay and so let's instead turn to the question: how does a business analyst best work within a product team?

To answer that we first need to consider what happens when a BA goes into a product team with no guidance.

Tickets Please!

Product (and service) teams deliver continuous improvements—continuously. In that kind of environment delivering stuff and understanding customers gets prioritised over other work. This doesn't leave much room for traditional BA activities. Common misconceptions about the BA role in this environment include:

- 'User stories come from the user researcher surely?'
- 'This service design map looks a bit like a process map so why do we need one of those?'
- 'The team works together all the time so we all know what we need to deliver—we don't need to define requirements'

And so what does the business analyst get asked to do instead— write tickets! Yet clearly this is a waste of a vital skillset.

How do we take ownership of the BA role in these contexts and change viewpoints?

Behold the Business Analyst

As a BA community we need to be proactive in educating our colleagues and senior leaders about the value a BA can bring within product teams. We need to advocate for business analysis and help BAs succeed in product teams. We are much more than ticket writers after all!

Where should we start? My view is we need to start by showing the outcomes we enable.

I offer three ideas below with the intent that BAs can adopt these practices, get feedback and publish case studies showcasing the successful product outcome. Please share your learnings both with senior leaders and the BA community so we can adapt and grow together.

Product teams typically want to continuously improve products and services as efficiently and effectively as possible to stay ahead. Business analysis enables improvements to be achieved more efficiently and effectively—let's show the world what we can do.

3 New Ways of Working

1. The pace of product teams means initiating and planning is squeezed to a minimum. But these activities are still necessary for success. The BA needs to identify what items on the roadmap need to be shaped and how. Work with the team to agree how and when team members are involved. Take ownership of your analysis plan and how work is initiated.

2. Steve Jobs reportedly said "people don't know what they want until you show it to them." This quote is often misunderstood, but at its essence is a reminder that user research and other insights are useful but you can't drive your product roadmap solely on customer insight. BAs need to take the insights and assess them alongside analysis to consider in what direction to drive the tests needed to prove (or disprove) value. Help the team craft clear hypotheses with test criteria to check these insights.

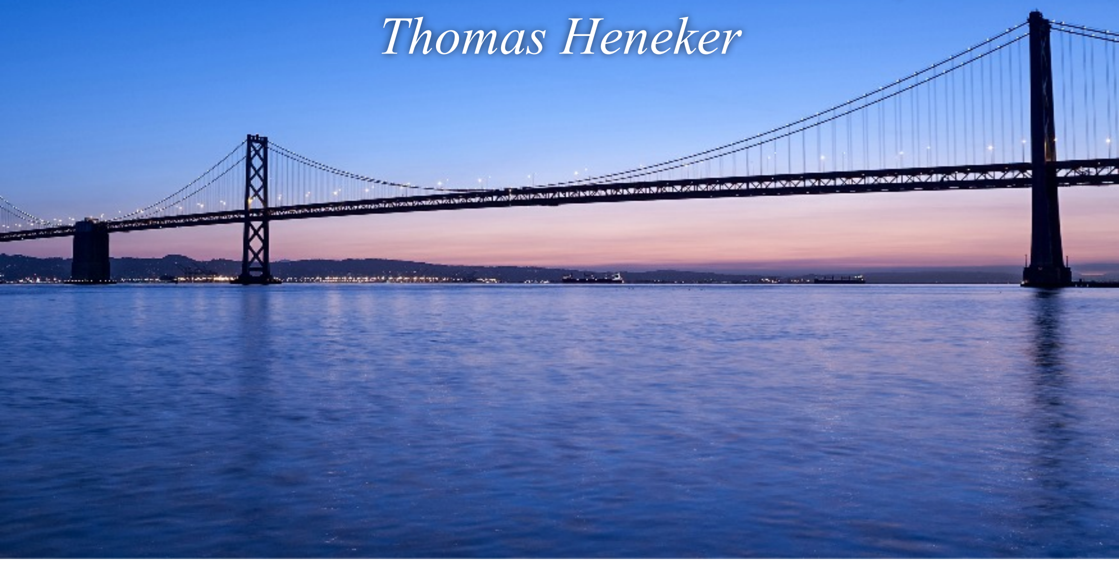
3. Performance metrics need to evolve as the product or service evolves. Consider how each iteration impacts performance measures and work with the team to deliver the changes required.

Finally, being in a team delivering continuous improvement can be relentless (and mind-numbing if you are just writing tickets). Instead, be proactive and show what success can look like when business analysis is delivered effectively.

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

Three Reasons Most Projects Fail (and How Your Project Can Be One of the Few Winners)

Thomas Heneker



If, like me, you enjoy stories that challenge the way we think, I highly recommend the BBC podcast "Sideways" with author and journalist Matthew Syed. Each episode examines a different idea or story that's changed the world, and one of my favourites is about the rebuilding of the Oakland Bay Bridge following the 1989 San Francisco earthquake—which was delayed by six years and went 2500% over budget. Many mistakes were made, and even if you have no plans to rebuild a multi-billion dollar bridge any time soon, there's a lot we can learn from project failures like this—because small projects and large ones tend to fail for similar reasons.

From Overpromising to Underdelivering: Why Projects Are Destined to Fail

Think about the last project you were involved in. Did it fulfil all it promised? Did it complete on time? A study at Oxford University showed that less than 1% of Megaprojects are successful. So, is there anything we can do to ensure our project is part of the 1% that succeed? The answer is yes, and in this article we'll find out how. But first we need to understand why projects often break down.

Top 3 Reasons behind Projects Failure

Throughout my experience working on projects, as both a project manager and sponsor, I have identified three primary reasons for project failure:

1. Inflating Benefits Could Be The Death of Your Project

Bent Flyvbjerg, Professor of Major Programme Management at Oxford, proposed a theory known as the Iron Law of Megaprojects which suggests that in any large project, costs are likely to escalate beyond initial estimates even as the project's benefits fall short of what was promised.

We live in a busy and ambitious world, where companies tend to prioritise profit and efficiency—vying for what they perceive as ever-smaller pieces of the same budgetary pie. This means practically the only way to get your project funded is to exaggerate its benefits.

In this context, the greater the competition, the more exaggerated these benefits become. But the more unrealistic the promises, the higher the chance of failure. Conversely, realistic and well-thought-out projects seemingly never get the go-ahead. Despite their meticulous planning and careful consideration of risks, they tend to be overshadowed by the more flashy and ambitious proposals.

A similar problem applies to the prestige and career-enhancing potential of a project. A big, innovative project will be much more appealing for a senior leader's ambitions than a safe and ordinary one. This means the "exciting" project gets approved, while the more practical and realistic project is ignored. Case in point, building a new state-of-the-art bridge in San Francisco is more impressive than rebuilding an existing one, even if a rebuild takes half the time at a fraction of the cost.

2. Speed Up or Fail: Lingering Projects Are Your Worst Nightmare

Imagine this: You're being interviewed for a job, and the hiring manager asks, "What do you strive for? Perfection or mediocracy?" What would you answer?

Although we'd all love to say we value perfection, perfection can be the downfall of a project. Or, more precisely, *taking too long* can make a project fail. That's because the longer the project goes on, the more the circumstances and environment around it change.

Back to the Bay Bridge example, at any time during the rebuild, another earthquake could have hit San Francisco—causing massive damage and likely setting the project back by many years. The longer the project went on, the higher the risk of it hitting an unforeseen delay. An example of one of the many problems experienced was an unexpected increase in the cost of steel, which had a major effect on the budget. With this in mind, it may be better to construct a boring-looking (but safe) bridge quickly than spend years making it historic and memorable.

This concept can be summarised as follows: there is a simple relationship between time and variance. The more time you spend on a project, the higher the likelihood of encountering unexpected events. For example, if you take a long time to rebuild a bridge, there is a chance of experiencing another earthquake. Similarly, during an extended project to upgrade IT security, there is a risk of being targeted by a cyberattack which could have been effortlessly avoided with the installation of basic software.

3. Project Sponsors Go Astray

Have you ever seen a team full of excitement at the beginning stages of a project, only for interest to dwindle and eventually fizzle out as the project matures?

An exacerbating factor that happens all-to-often is senior sponsors losing interest in the project and becoming less invested in its progress. Of course, at the beginning, everyone is enthusiastic. Sponsors eagerly share their ideas, offer support, and express genuine belief in the project's goals and objectives. This enthusiasm motivates the entire team, fuelling their determination to bring this vision to life.

But when it comes to the detailed work of planning, sponsors often leave it to the core team—becoming distracted by new projects or initiatives and losing sight of the project at hand.

Two Game-changing Solutions for Project Excellence

To address the issues outlined above, I propose two simple solutions.

First, the project sponsor should be held personally accountable for the project's results and benefits, and their active involvement should be expected throughout the project, not just in the initial stages. Research by the Project Management Institute has shown that the higher the sponsor's commitment, the more likely the project will finish on time and provide greater benefits. Greater accountability also means sponsors will be more critical of the project's initial feasibility, reducing the risk of overpromising benefits. Additionally, it builds trust and long-term partnerships between sponsors and project teams, creating an environment in which all stakeholders are working towards the same vision of success.

Second, teams should adopt an iterative approach to project implementation whenever possible. Features should be released as they become available, rather than attempting to complete the project in one go. This approach can be applied in almost any domain or industry, and it greatly reduces the likelihood of an unforeseen event derailing the entire project. Whether it's software development, construction, or even a marketing campaign, breaking down the work into smaller increments allows for more flexibility and adaptability throughout the entire process.

A good iterative project will carefully prioritise which features should be released first based on their business value and impact. Doing so ensures that the most critical functionalities are delivered early on. As an added benefit, you get to gather valuable user feedback along the way, allowing for ongoing improvements and adjustments based on real-world usage and needs.

By implementing these two solutions, sponsor accountability and an iterative approach, we give our projects a fighting chance at being among the 1% that truly succeed—on time and on budget. Cultivating a culture of accountability and flexibility lets project teams easily and quickly adapt to unanticipated challenges, ensuring smooth progression and the ultimate success of our project. If the Oakland Bay Bridge reconstruction had adopted these principles, I've no doubt we would be celebrating it as a triumph of engineering rather than a regrettable failure of project management.

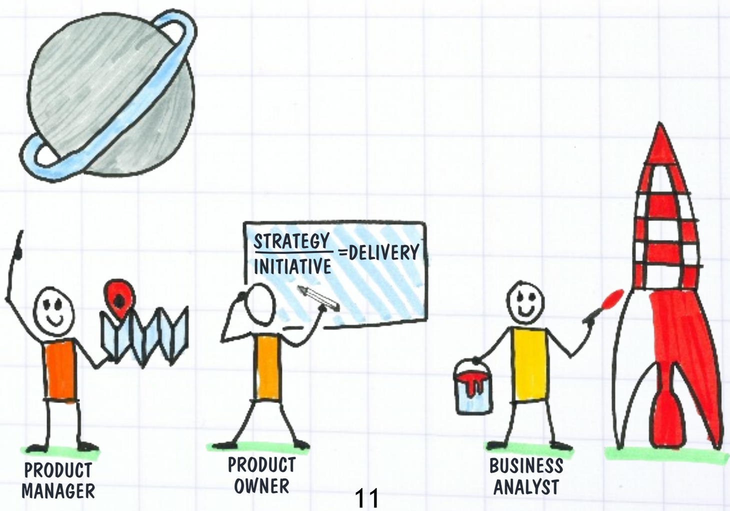
Thomas is an award-winning professional with over 20 years of experience in business analysis and strategic development. Thomas specialises in helping senior teams launch new businesses and enhance operations. His experience includes growing small startups into profitable businesses, and building multinational organisations to billion-dollar revenues.

Agile Business Analysis Planning? The Initiative Is Yours!

Line Karkov

In BA Digest Q3 edition I wrote about how the structure of a backlog can support the strategy, initiative and delivery horizons of product development that are defined in the BABOK® Agile Extension. Once appropriately structured to support these horizons, the product backlog needs to be broken down to get work ready for a delivery team. This requires planning of analysis on the strategy and initiative levels as well as the delivery level. In my own experience, work on the initiative horizon is often ignored or underestimated, and I believe that effort put into qualifying scope on this horizon can do much for the quality of the product.

It is not rocket science but if it were, it might look something like this:



Focus on the Initiative Horizon

When the objectives are understood then it is possible to break them down into specific initiatives that can also be prioritised and planned just like user stories. Similar to user stories, they can be delivered one at a time, however this can be more difficult than it sounds and is certainly not a job for control freaks. It requires a willingness to park certain things for later and the courage to say: “we don’t know how to solve this at this point in time, but we will work it out later”. The good news is that this is where a lot of the classic business analysis is done: modelling processes, information and user experience. This is where I prefer to put most of my efforts because it makes it much easier to define good user stories. It is a good idea to set up a demo of the scope of the initiatives for sign off. Sign off between product manager, product owner and business analyst ensures alignment across objectives and reassessment of priorities. Planning is not only required to make sure that enough work is always ready for the development team, but also for the relevant stakeholders to be able to contribute at the right time. Validation with key stakeholders ensures that there is clear agreement on what is in scope, what belongs in another initiative and what is completely out of scope.

From Initiative to Delivery Horizon

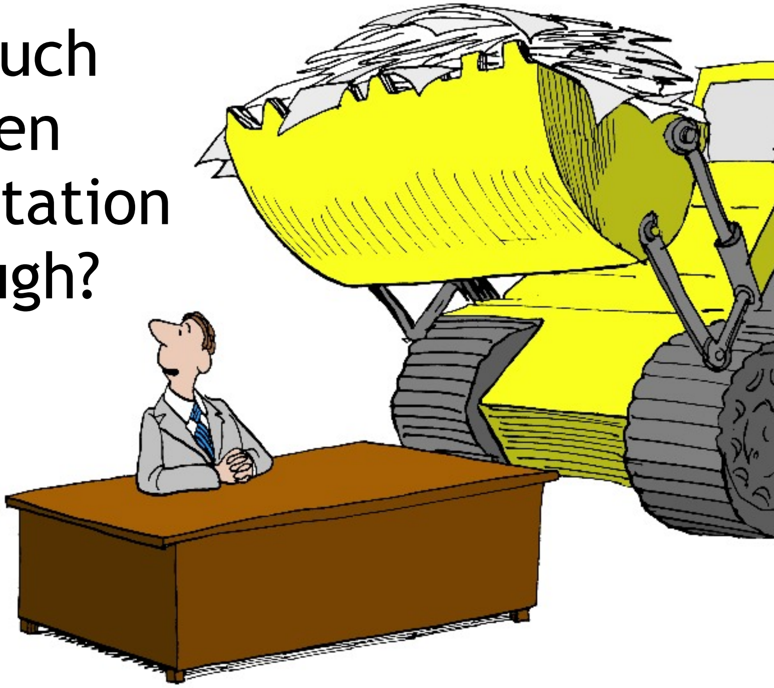
I will happily admit that I hate administrative tasks and status meetings. I look forward to the day where I won’t be asked for status updates. What I would like stakeholders and team members to ask is: “what does the conceptual, process, or information model for initiative X look like at this point in the analysis?”. That is how we get to meaningful conversations that ensure knowledge sharing and manage expectations. The prerequisite for this type of conversation is visibility, which can be created by managing product ownership and business analysis work on the product backlog. This can be done at different levels of detail, either by assigning the initiative work item itself, tracking the status and documenting scope in the description. Or by breaking the initiative work item down to smaller work items that can be completed one by one. This means that stakeholders can go to the backlog management tool for status, accessing any dashboards that are relevant to them. Using dashboards ensures stakeholders can access information without having to understand the structure of the product backlog.

Agile’s Gift to Business Analysts

In the “good old days”, the project manager would do a project plan with all the business analysis activities lined up in order neatly aligned with development and quality assurance activities. Everything was well-managed and structured but there was very little room for adjustment as we learned more about the problem or solution. Now, as a part of agile, self-organised teams, we have an even greater responsibility to plan for business analysis activities. The beauty of it is, that we can apply different approaches to the same product backlog, depending on the nature of the initiative at hand. This is our opportunity to showcase the breadth of our business analysis skills.. This is why I believe that the agile mindset and ways of working are true gifts for business analysts. Our standards continue to stay relevant because they provide us with the ability to adapt and adjust without compromising on quality. Product ownership is not rocket science. I am however convinced that it is the closest I will ever get to rocket science because of the complexity of the collaboration that it requires. It continues to challenge me and require everything I have in my toolbox and motivates me to continuously expand it.

Line Karkov is a business analyst and product owner from Copenhagen, Denmark with more than 15 years' experience. Her professional areas of interest include product ownership, visual thinking and specification by example. Please reach out on LinkedIn: *Line Karkov | LinkedIn*

How Much Written Documentation Is Enough?



Stuart Mann

We are bombarded with a huge amount of information and there is only so much we can take in. When it comes to written documentation, less is more. Business analysis is always vital, written documentation is not.

There are occasionally edge cases where reams of written documentation might be required. However, if you are following an agile approach and iteratively building small pieces of work, communicating effectively as a team and have no lag time between analysis and build, then lengthy written documentation should be the exception rather than the norm.

What is the smallest amount of documentation normally required? I would argue that it is a short description or hypothesis covering the "why" of a particular feature or function and acceptance criteria. The acceptance criteria would then evolve and link through to your test cases. If you have too many acceptance criteria, your story or feature is too big and you should split it. A core principle of Lean thinking is that small items flow faster through a system and small chunks of functionality have the added benefit of exponentially reducing risk (speaking anecdotally: half the size is about a quarter of the risk).

Adding Acceptance Criteria

Hypothesis: If we provide an email password reset function, call centre volumes will drop by 60%.

Password reset via email

Acceptance criteria

1. The authenticated user must be able to reset their password and log back onto the system without talking to the call centre.
2. A full log of all password reset steps and activities must be kept for audit and security purposes.
3. The password reset email must be sent within 0.5s of the user clicking submit.

An hypothesis with acceptance criteria is usually all you need for written documentation.

The Flawed Argument for Written Documentation

When I chat to people about the business case for written documentation, three main arguments are provided—I believe that all are easily refutable.

The first is, "So developers know what to code and testers know what to test." Here it's worth repeating a previous point—if you are iteratively building small chunks of value, communicating effectively as a team and have no lag time between analysis and build, then written documentation is largely superfluous.

The second argument is, "So that when something goes wrong, we know where the problem is and how to fix it." Ask your production support team whether they look at written documentation when they get an incident. Invariably they don't because documents are hard to locate, are usually out of date (it's impossible and very time consuming to keep written documentation in sync with production) and, even when they are able to easily find an up-to-date document, it's very difficult to locate and quickly understand the specific piece of information that they are looking for.

How can we satisfy the 'quick diagnosis when there's an incident' need? Take a look at your (ideally automated) test cases. Test cases become the single source of truth for comparing how the system actually works to how it should work. Like an accounting ledger you have debits and credits. If the books don't balance, figure out whether it's your production system or your test cases that are faulty and get your books to balance again by fixing the problem.

The third and final argument is, “So that when new people join our team, they can understand how the system works.” Imagine if I tried to ‘document’ my house for you. Compare the experience of giving you a lengthy, one-dimensional written description versus sending you some photos versus a physical visit. If you were joining a new team, would you prefer to read hundreds of pages of written documentation or play around in the system? Even the most diligent bibliophile would gain a much richer understanding by playing around inside the system—and for an in-depth understanding of specific functionality and business rules, the test cases are once again the best option.

The Voice Is Mightier than the Pen

There is a lot more I could cover but, since this is an article about how terrible written documentation is at conveying information, I think it’s best I stop now. If you made it this far in the article and learnt something—congratulations on being an anomaly! And of course, if you disagree with any of the above—let’s chat!

As for me, I’m off to discuss with my wife what to cook for dinner—on the days when she’s doing the cooking, I’ve found that this is another use case where a friendly conversation produces much better results (and a more appetising meal) than sending her written requirements.

Stuart Mann is a passionate Agile Coach as well as a compulsive marathon runner having run over 250 marathons and ultra marathons. You can take a look at his blog (runningmann.co.za/category/agile/) and connect with him on LinkedIn or Twitter (work profile @StuartDMann / running profile @runningmann100).

I Am Not a Robot

Emily Tom

And neither are you. With Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning having gone mainstream over the past year, a lot of questions and thoughts come to my mind about how these trends impact our business analysis work and our stakeholders.

I don't claim to be an expert in AI—far from it. Call me old-fashioned, but I still believe in good ole stakeholder engagement, creating one's own material and not always being perfect in our work. That's probably why I haven't become an early adopter of AI.

There are pros and cons to AI and I think it's important that we BAs are aware of them and that we educate our stakeholders to apply critical thinking before they blindly accept AI tools as the solution to all of their (and our) needs.

Why I'm Not Sold

A few years ago, when I started hearing some conference talks about AI, it was touted as revolutionary, working so much faster and with more accuracy than a human possibly could. That makes me nervous. It makes me wonder who stands to profit from AI technology? Is it really in the best interest of employers, workers and customers?

I was getting rather annoyed that EVERY conference talk about AI started with describing how cool it is. Just because something is cool and possible to do, doesn't mean it's a good idea. (Eating ice cream every day is cool and possible to do, but it doesn't mean that it's a good, healthy idea.) I remember that many conference speakers would talk about how IBM used AI to produce a robot that could beat even the most expert players in the GO game. My thought back then was—ok that's cool, but what's the point? Why would I want to play the robot if I knew there was never a chance that I could win? That's no fun.

I worry that with the way AI is being marketed, it sounds like an affordable, good-enough replacement for *AUTHENTIC* Intelligence. I'm going to steal an adjective from World War I and World War II—I fear that those who are ok with the quality of AI outputs are ok with *ersatz* intelligence. "Ersatz" describes something that is an inferior substitute for something of better quality but has become acceptable by the masses.

That's why it's critical to apply critical thinking when deciding to use AI. Don't get me wrong, there are both pros and cons to using AI; it's a matter of thinking wisely (using critical thinking) when deciding how to use it.

Pros of AI

AI is beneficial in several ways:

Conducting research: AI can be very helpful when doing research. Think of how we've all become accustomed to doing Google searches. Tools like ChatGPT levels up this function. It uses data available on the internet and comes back with answers to your questions in an easily consumable format, as though it's a person answering your question.

Drafting writing: Some people use ChatGPT to compose written material in a style they wish. For example, you can ask ChatGPT to "write a 3-paragraph text in English for ninth graders to understand, explaining the issue of climate change". This can be very helpful for people whose first language may not be English. It can help with grammar, spelling and word usage. After all, Microsoft Word does this when we do a spelling & grammar check.

Efficiency: It's now common for AI and machine learning to be used to perform repetitive tasks much faster than humans can. Think of how AI and machine learning are used for analyses of medical x-rays, handling a much larger volume of files, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week without getting tired.

Cons of AI

Originality: AI doesn't actually create any new thought. It uses data that's already out there to produce outputs that can *seem* to be created by a real person. Someone once told me that he could use ChatGPT to write stock email messages if he were a busy manager and didn't have time to write original messages. Personally, I'd prefer an original email message with my manager's own authentic words rather than stock messages. Stock messages would start to feel like store-bought greeting cards with no personalised message written inside.

Plagiarism: There is a vast amount of freely available data on the internet, and, it's easy for ChatGPT to grab that data to produce an output. But just because it's on the internet, it doesn't give ChatGPT license to plagiarise it. I think of the example where AI was used to create a song that was a mashup of lyrics and voices from Drake and The Weeknd. No one ever asked those artists for permission to do so. And what happens if the product is used for profit without seeking permission?

Ersatz Intelligence: Because AI tools like ChatGPT are so easily accessible by the average person without any subject matter expertise, it's easy to be fooled into thinking the output is factual and good. What would happen if we all started using ChatGPT to write our resumes? It can form an impression of what all BAs should be like. But of course, we're not all the same.

Biases: AI isn't currently smart enough to avoid biases that are not reflective of real life. For example, if you asked ChatGPT to produce a picture of a female lawyer, how would you feel it come back with a white female, aged 30-40, with perfect hair and skin and supermodel body type? Of course, not everyone fits this mould, but AI thinks they do.

The BA's Authentic Intelligence

BAs have an opportunity to get in front of AI while it's still just a cool toy for people to play with. We need to teach our stakeholders that AI can be useful for research and automating repetitive tasks, but it does not replace the human. We are not robots—let's not lose the quality of the human experience. As BAs, it is even more important now to understand our stakeholders, use critical thinking and empathy to engage with them.

I encourage all of you to stay authentic. Use your critical thinking and curiosity to learn rather than taking AI's output as factual. Be OK with your own imperfect writing. Be OK with not knowing the answer to everything. Because if we and all of our stakeholders rely too heavily on AI, then all the outputs will start to look the same. I am not a robot, and neither are you.

Emily Tom, CBAP is an independent consultant based in Ottawa, Canada. She is also the Regional Director IIBA Americas Northeastern Region, supporting 18 IIBA chapters. She is passionate about promoting the business analysis profession and supporting fellow business analysts in their careers.

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Have You Thought about Becoming a BA Mentor?

Lessons since Becoming a BA Mentor

Eirik Netland

Mentoring business analysts is a very rewarding activity for me as I thrive when helping others. I am witnessing my mentees progress in achieving their career goals and fulfilling their potential, and I am learning a lot through this myself. I'm happy to be able to share some of the lessons I have learnt, as I'm sure there is a good chance that some of you who read this magazine either already are in a mentoring relationship or are in a position to start mentoring BAs in your workplace.

Engage with Mentees Who Invest in the Process

The first lesson I learned was the more the mentee invests into the mentoring process, the more they get out of it. The mentees I have observed grow the most are those who have put the most thought, intentionality, time and effort into the mentoring sessions. This applies in terms of the preparation that they put in prior to sessions, the questions they ask during the sessions, and in following up on actions after sessions. I focus more of my time on those who are the most motivated and are goal oriented in their learning process, and who initiate the mentorship themselves. Although, outside of line management, if you don't show openness to being a mentor in the first place you may never be asked, so putting yourself out there as a mentor is necessary. However, I recommend only initiating mentoring when the mentee is very motivated.

I have found it very valuable to ask what the mentee's goals are, to understand what they are aiming to achieve. Understanding what their next career goal is, or their main personal objective at work, gives a good framework for the mentoring relationship and a common understanding of where help and advice is needed. As mentors we can add valuable insight in suggesting potential goals or objectives, but I believe the high level goal or the overall main objective must be fully owned by the mentee.

Identifying and honing in on the mentee's strengths is one of the most important ways a mentor can encourage and add value. I will give one example here and share an insight I haven't been the first to notice: Men tend to have been raised by society to be ambitious while, as Reshma Saujani says in her TED talk, "women have been socialised to aspire to perfection and they're overly cautious" when it comes to applying for a role they don't 100% fit the criteria for. Check out "Teach girls bravery, not perfection" a TED Talk by Reshma Saujani for more details on this. I have noticed this pattern in some of my female mentees, and they have been encouraged when I have highlighted that they already have relevant experience that a more senior BA would normally carry out. For example, to have taken on a large or complex project, communicated with a wide range of stakeholders including leaders, worked on solving a complex problem, or understood the business at a high level and imparted this knowledge to others. Often we don't recognise some of our skills and strengths until an outsider observer does and that added recognition can build confidence and momentum.

Choose the Timing for Constructive Feedback

Something else I have found myself reflecting on recently is the tension between when to challenge or give constructive feedback and when to hold back and focus on the positives and strengths instead. I have picked up on underlying issues in certain mentees' approaches to work, but in some cases I have chosen not to share this with the BA I am mentoring. There is a bridge of trust that must be built, and the trust often needs to be built up to a certain level before pointing out an unhelpful attitude or something else I can see that is holding them back from achieving their goals. However, one time I decided to bring the challenge and initiated a '5 whys' exercise and attempted to let the person find their own way to the root cause, which they did. Discerning the right time to bring a challenge and when to hold back is something I think we all need to grapple with in different ways. I do think providing constructive feedback is important, and a mentoring relationship can be a great place to uncover these underlying issues that are perhaps holding the mentee back from reaching their full potential. But doing so with sensitivity is important to maintain a productive mentoring relationship.

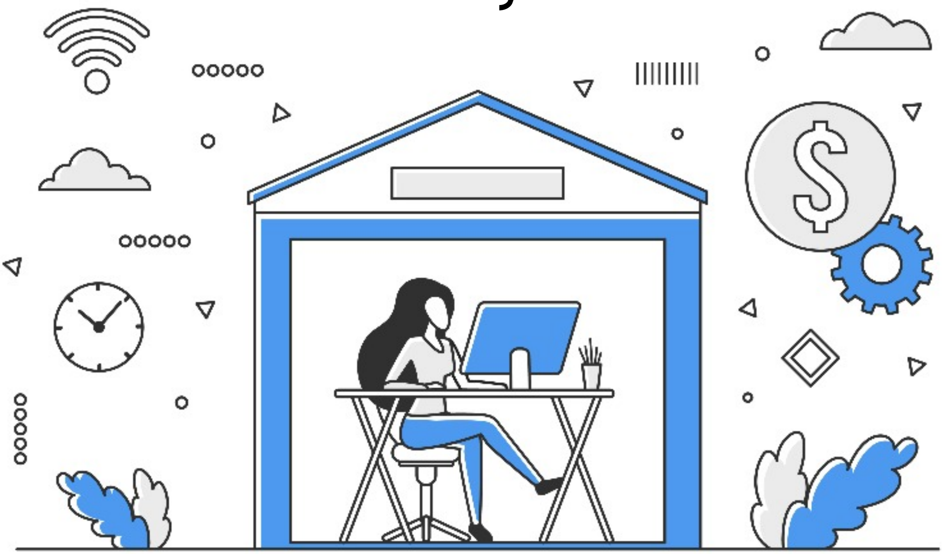
Often, BAs who are early in their careers can struggle with imposter syndrome, be overly critical of their own work, and be extra sensitive to receiving feedback. It can be devastating for a junior BA to hear something like "that user story doesn't make sense", or to notice that a stakeholder is impatient with them because they lack understanding of the existing system. However, the more we ask for feedback, the more comfortable we get in receiving it, and the less personally we take critical feedback. So I have encouraged my mentees to ask for feedback and look at it as a gift. But what questions should they ask, when and how should they ask them, and how should they prioritise the feedback that they receive? These are questions those of us with more experience can help them find good answers to. Currently I am in the habit of asking for feedback from the development team after each time I have presented requirements to them. This has been a very useful exercise, as it has helped me to improve the clarity of my documented requirements and my presentation skills. It has also helped me choose the right level of detail when first introducing the set of requirements. The team have been encouraged and felt listened to when I have acted on their feedback which has contributed to a good morale in the team. The reason I chose to focus on my presentation skills was because I recognised it as an area I wanted to grow in. Identifying focus areas like these is something an experienced BA can help with.

In summary, my encouragements and recommendations for those of you who want to mentor business analysts are as follows:

1. Let the mentoring be initiated by the mentee so it is driven by the mentee's motivation to learn and grow.
2. Use the mentee's goals and objectives as a framework for the mentoring sessions.
3. Be sensitive both in evaluating when to bring a challenge and how best to do it.
4. Give examples for how the mentee can ask for feedback and encourage this.

Eirik Netland is a Senior Business Analyst and BA mentor, and you can connect with him on LinkedIn at linkedin.com/in/eiriknetland. If you are interested in being mentored by Eirik he offers a free introductory call to find out how he can help you.

How to Leverage a Hybrid Role for Your Career Growth as a Business Analyst



Laura Brandenburg

Hybrid roles are a reality in today's workforce.

It's very likely that at some stage in your career you'll find yourself leveraging your skills as a business analyst *and* fulfilling one or more other roles, such as project manager, tester, product manager, or maybe even developer.

The sky is really the limit!

Hybrid Roles Are a Good Thing for Business Analysts

Historically, there has been a lot of pressure in the profession to be a "pure" business analyst, to get more clarity on the business analyst role, and to essentially - put ourselves into a BA box. This advice has been well-intentioned, as there is a need at a macro level to focus on the business analysis role to establish its value across organisations.

However, when taken on as an individual, this guidance tends to result in the business analyst overlooking the opportunities provided by hybrid roles, and leads us to constrict rather than expand our career potential.

Personally, my career took many twists and turns:

- I transitioned from quality assurance engineer to systems analyst, a role focused on the more technical side of business analysis work.
- After moving to a new company, I was promoted to manager, business analysis, a role that involved current state analysis and program management as well as overseeing an offshore testing team.
- Then after moving companies again, I oversaw an enterprise analysis effort across 5 newly acquired companies as well as started practices in business analysis, quality assurance, and project management.
- All of this led to a director of enterprise solutions role, where I managed all 3 practices as well as performed strategic business analysis.
- After leaving this role, I focused on project BA work in contracting and consulting roles as I started building the training company that is now Bridging the Gap.

By exploring and taking on roles and responsibilities outside of business analysis, you have the potential to expand your career opportunities, grow your skill set, and cultivate multiple types of experiences to draw from as you progress in your career.

But First, Let's Look at the Risks

While there are clear benefits to hybrid roles, there are also risks. First and foremost, you can end up taking on too many responsibilities and become unfocused, finding yourself doing anything for anyone, and stuck spinning in a dead-end career. This often means you are over-committed and don't have the time or energy to excel in multiple roles.

To counteract these risks, it's important that you only take on roles that expand your opportunities and elevate you professionally. A good practice is to regularly re-evaluate your responsibilities. Look at what responsibilities are pulling you forward and what are drawing you back.

The next step is to eliminate, delegate, or minimise the activities that are not aligned with where you want to go or have become stale. I suggest doing this practice at least every 6 months, as roles, the environment, your career goals, and even the opportunities available to you can shift quickly. Hint: If you haven't evaluated your responsibilities in a while, *now* is the perfect time.

How to Choose Hybrid Roles That Elevate You Professionally

Embracing hybrid roles is not about taking any task that lands in your lap. Be discerning with what responsibilities you take on.

For example,

- When you are trying to get into business analysis, taking meeting notes for a business analyst is a great opportunity to build your listening and written communication skills. But if you are a practising BA, while you might take on this task to help a peer on a critical project, you wouldn't volunteer for it regularly.

- If you are pursuing a business analysis leadership role, making a lateral move to project management, or taking on some project management responsibilities would help you build leadership, oversight, and planning capabilities.

- If your goal is to become a product manager, look for responsibilities in user-experience design, a marketing-focused project as a business analyst, or seek out the opportunity to undertake financial planning on an enterprise project to build skill sets needed to start a career in product management.

In essence, look for responsibilities that broaden your skill set and move you towards your bigger picture career goals.

We tend to think of new roles as landing points, or places we are going to stay awhile. Instead, consider new roles and responsibilities as jumping off points. Consider where this opportunity will lead to and what even better opportunities will open up if you take it on.

It's Ok to Say No

If a particular role or responsibility is not leading you forward, then it's OK to say no to the opportunity. What's more, taking on a new responsibility may also require that you let go of a current responsibility. In general, you want to be eliminating and delegating any task that's become boring or is no longer helping you grow.

One of the most difficult tasks for me to let go as I moved into my director-level role was the detailed requirements analysis. But it was essential that I freed up that energy to build our team's practices.

It can be difficult to let go of a task and set new boundaries. Here are a few tips:

- Get absolutely clear and specific on what you want (or what you are no longer willing to do).

- Create a plan for how the work will get done without your involvement. The task you are letting go of will often be a great opportunity for someone else to grow and expand. Embrace the possibilities of delegation!

- Share your intentions with those who need to know. Whenever possible, ask for support rather than asking for permission.

- Shift your environment to support letting go of the task. Is there a meeting you need to decline? Or a distribution list you need to be removed from? Maybe you even need to ask for your desk to be moved.

- Be ready to respond. What will you do when someone asks you to do the task you are no longer willing to do? Pre-decide how to handle this so you don't have to try to come up with a response on-the-fly, which often leads to back-pedalling.

You Are in Charge

When it comes to hybrid roles, the most important thing to realise is that YOU are in charge. This is your career, your work, the way you contribute your unique value to the world. It's more important than ever that the way we work is aligned to who we are as individuals, and no one knows who you are better than you.

Laura Brandenburg is an internationally-recognised leader who helps professionals start and excel in BA careers. She founded Bridging the Gap, authored How to Start a Business Analyst Career, and created The Business Analyst Blueprint® certification program and the Applied Certification of Business Analysis™ (ACBA).

Connect with Laura on LinkedIn

Business Analysis on the Frontline Against Cybersecurity Challenges

Erivan de Sena Ramos

The expansion of technology has made cybersecurity a growing concern in organisations. John Chambers, the former Cisco CEO, once wrote, "To maintain a strong level of trust… businesses must think of themselves as security companies". This quote from nearly a decade ago has become ever truer as each year cybercrime causes $100 billion or more in damage (see Möller, 2020), and the global cost of cybercrime will surge in the next five years, rising from $8.44 trillion in 2022 to $23.84 trillion by 2027. The World Economic Forum (WEF) Cybersecurity Outlook reported that most leaders believe that it's at least moderately likely that the current global geopolitical instability will lead to a far-reaching, catastrophic cyber event in the next two years. As concerns about cybersecurity risks expand across the entire organisation, business analysis plays a crucial role on the frontline, supporting organisations facing cybersecurity issues. Taking an approach where business analysis is conducted in collaboration with IT services can allow organisations to identify and consider the full range of risks, define measures to combat cyber attacks and increase the business resilience to threats related to cybersecurity (see Makarenko et al 2023).

Business Analysis Can Support Cybersecurity Solutions

Business analysis is a discipline that helps organisations identify their business needs and solve problems. It can support the development and delivery of secure, high-quality systems using various techniques to collect, analyse and help companies improve their cybersecurity posture. BAs can be essential to an effective cybersecurity strategy for any enterprise in the following ways:

Assessing and Identifying the Cybersecurity Risks

For Adham Etoom, a cybersecurity expert, to build modern and effective cybersecurity management, enterprises must recognise cybersecurity as a strategic imperative integrated into their overall risk management framework and reassess it as the threat landscape evolves. BAs can support companies in identifying and assessing cybersecurity risks by analysing business operations, associated technology, and data management practices. For instance, BAs can conduct risk assessments across the organisation to determine weak points, including vulnerabilities in network architecture, system design, software development, or access controls. This information can help organisations prioritise risks, implement appropriate controls, and develop mitigation strategies.

Supporting Compliance

Jeffrey Engle, President of Conquest Cyber, advises that organisations need to go beyond federal cybersecurity compliance standards to stay one step ahead of cyber criminals. Enterprises need much more than compliance with any current regulations or laws; they need to be effective by mitigating and preventing business-specific threats. BAs can support organisations in meeting regulatory requirements regarding cybersecurity, considering the business context to deliver compliance solutions based on their needs. For example, BAs can help develop documentation, processes, and procedures that facilitate compliance with regulations and look at how those protections can be used more effectively.

Developing Policies and Procedures

Last year's geopolitical risks significantly influenced the organisation's cybersecurity strategy worldwide. The WEF points out that over 70% of cyber and business leaders have implemented efforts to strengthen policies and practices for engaging direct-connection third parties with data access.. BAs can help ensure that cybersecurity is an integral part of the organisation's systems specifications by defining security-related requirements in line with industry best practices. For example, BAs can articulate security requirements that address data encryption, network security, access control, authorisation, and authentication, including analysing and identifying critical functions, data, access controls, and user roles. By doing so, they can help ensure that cybersecurity considerations are integrated into the organisation's software development lifecycle.

Increasing Cybersecurity Awareness

People still play a significant role in security breaches and incidents, from phishing and misuse to simple mistakes. Verizon's 2022 Data Breaches Investigations Report (DBIR) points out that 82% of breaches involved the human element, emphasising the importance of enterprises applying for a robust security awareness program. BAs can support organisations in increasing cybersecurity awareness among employees and stakeholders by facilitating communication, conducting awareness campaigns, and communicating cybersecurity awareness best practices, such as support training programs that address password management, phishing attacks, malware prevention, and incident response. It can help organisations to reduce the likelihood of breaches that involve the human element.

BAs Can Be Skilled Cybersecurity Professionals

More than ever, cybersecurity analysis requires the support of qualified professionals. As organisations fight an uphill battle against rising cyber threats, a shortage of skilled cybersecurity talent is one of the biggest challenges for companies. In this scenario, cybersecurity expertise can lead BAs to many professional opportunities. According to the last IIBA Survey, 34% of BAs already have formal cybersecurity training. One way to become proficient is to pursue the Certificate in Cybersecurity Analysis (IIBA® - CCA). This certification demonstrates a thorough understanding of the principles, practices, and skills to identify business vulnerabilities, mitigate risks, and find cybersecurity solutions.

In conclusion, as organisations navigate the ever-evolving digital landscape and the rise of cyber threats continues unabated, prioritising cybersecurity is more critical than ever. Through collaboration between BAs and IT professionals, companies can stay ahead and ensure proper and effective cybersecurity maturity in a structured way. Business analysis, as a discipline that focuses on identifying business needs and determining solutions, definitely can provide an essential set of tools and techniques for enhancing enterprises' cybersecurity posture, reducing the likelihood of cybersecurity incidents, ensuring the integrity of their systems and data and maintaining a solid level of trust among stakeholders. With the current shortage of skilled cybersecurity professionals, BAs can take even more critical and essential roles in organisations by helping them by assessing and identifying risks, supporting compliance, developing policies and procedures, or increasing cybersecurity awareness.

Erivan de Sena Ramos, an enthusiastic business analyst and requirements engineer, has over 15 years of experience in IT projects across Brazil and Australia, holding multiple techno-functional certifications, including CBAP®, PMP®, CSM®, ITIL®, COBIT®. For further insights, check out his articles on Linkedin, Medium, or his book "Dealing with Stakeholders".

Getting Comfortable with Ambiguity to Drive Your Business Analyst Growth

Inga Davids

Have you ever been frustrated working towards a task without having a clear direction? Have you struggled with contradictory business needs? Have you ever felt that you continually do not have the full picture? I don't know about you but I have had all of these feelings and experienced these moments over the course of my career.

These moments left me thinking about whether I was capable, whether the work I was producing was complete and accurate, and certainly left me feeling stuck not knowing how to move to action. It also gave rise to the hairy imposter syndrome monster, the nagging feeling that someone would call my bluff. It took me time to recognise that as a business analyst dealing with ambiguity, being able to shift gears comfortably and handle uncertainty is a key part of the role.

But how do you make sense of these moments of uncertainty?

Turning ambiguity into moments of clarity and shared understanding is easier said than done. Here are a few ideas on how to get comfortable with ambiguity to drive your business analyst growth.

Staying Curious with a Line of Questioning

Core to the business analyst role is the need to make sense of lots of varied information, which typically comes from a diverse group of stakeholders. The ability to synthesise and make sense of the data is crucial to create a shared understanding. This can be easy when the domain is well-known, however, combing through information can be difficult given the level of newness presented to a business analyst. Lack of experience within a domain, a stakeholder group, or technology can make predicting results, timelines, and actions virtually impossible.

In moments of newness, where you're uncertain of how to move forward there may be an opportunity to ramp up your communication and ask more clarifying questions. 5Ws and 1H is a great technique that can be applied in many areas to build clarity and direction. This simple line of questioning can help discover the answer to a problem, identify a missing stakeholder who should be included going forward, or pinpoint the timelines that need to be tracked. Staying curious with a line of questioning can help pace the conversation, and buy you time to collaborate helping you move to clearer outcomes and decisions.

Creating Clarity with Visuals

Translating what is in our minds or the minds of others is not easy. Only relying on language or technical jargon to explain concepts can be entirely foreign to you or the recipient of the message. This can lead to misunderstanding, disagreement, and confusion when only relying on our words.

As business analysts one of the strongest skills in our toolbox is being able to leverage diagrams, models, and visualisations to create precision and understanding. Using rich pictures can facilitate a greater understanding of the desired outcomes, can help to close any gaps, and can highlight any misinterpretation that needs to be clarified. A context diagram helps a great deal with scoping and understanding the systems, actors impacted within the domain. Having something to point at helps to set the scene and removes any unnecessary ambiguity. If you're only relying on language, maybe it's time to start finding opportunities to weave in rich pictures to help move the conversation forward ensuring everyone is clear on the meaning and intent.

Tapping into Your Knowledge Network

Leveraging your network of peers, team members or trusted advisors is an effective strategy to gain insights, advice, or knowledge on how to proceed when there is a lack of or inconsistency of information provided. Connecting with those you believe are experts in the field can reduce ambiguity when approaching novel tasks and offer a way forward. Using your networks as a sounding board to bounce ideas off, can help assist with brainstorming solutions to potential problems causing ambiguity. When you are feeling like you need to have all the answers, remember connecting with those more experienced can be a source of encouragement and advice.

In the midst of chaos, it can feel that all is lost. Ambiguity leaves everyone feeling unsure and uncomfortable. It is present every day, so having the tools to respond will help prevent paralysis and relieve the stress that comes with unpredictability. More importantly, leaving room for the unknown creates opportunities for creatively solving problems, encouraging conversation from differing perspectives, and creating clarity to move forward. The ability to navigate ambiguity is a growing skill that needs mastery. Staying curious with a line of questioning, creating rich pictures, and tapping into your network can help create clarity when moments of ambiguity creep in.

Inga is a Certified Business Analysis Professional, with experience across various domains. She is passionate about community and is actively involved in the IIBA. Connect with her on Linkedin here:
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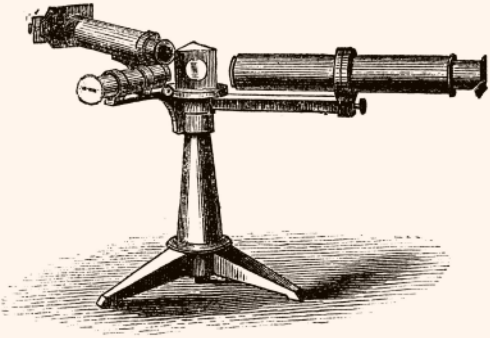
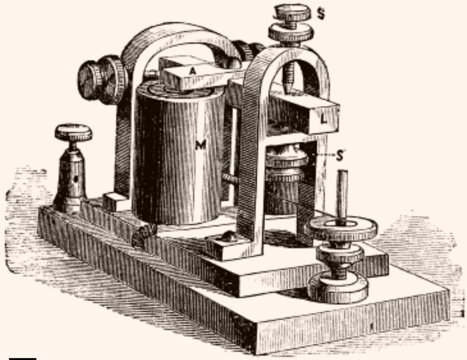
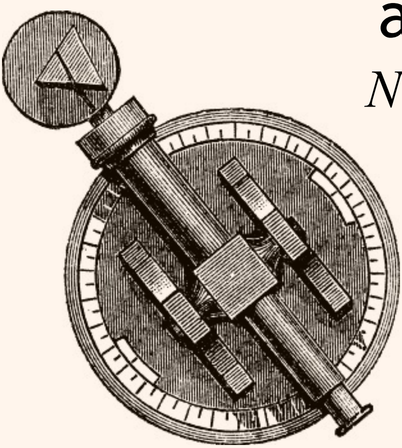
Using Group Construct Analysis to Understand Stakeholder Worldviews in Ambiguous Situations, Part 10

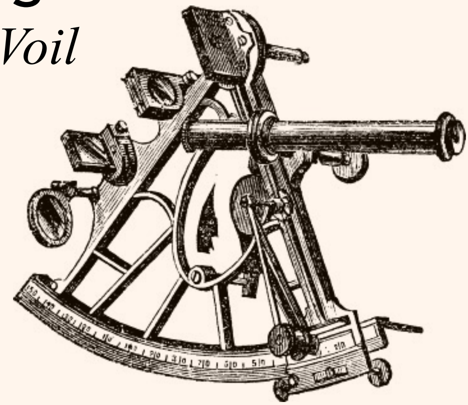




Is That Even a Thing?

Nick de Voil

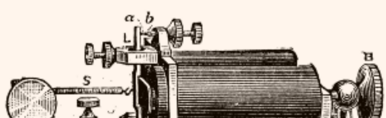




I'm not sure when or where I first heard someone say, "*is that even a thing?*"

It's a saying that makes me smile. It's self-deprecating; it somehow conveys naivete, openness and humour. But what I like most is that it tells us something profound about our mental processes as human beings.

An essential tool that we use for thinking is *reification*, which is closely related to *nominalisation.* Reification ("making into a thing") is what happens when we look at something complex, such as a process, a syndrome or a relationship, and decide to treat it as a **thing**, or a **type of thing**. To do this, we give it a label - in other words, a **name**. Nominalisation is the linguistic counterpart of this conceptual process: we refer to the thing using its name, which by definition is a noun rather than a full sentence or a verb.



An example from the vocabulary of business analysis might be the term "*requirements elicitation*". In grammatical terms, this is a noun phrase (see article 4). Most business analysts will have no trouble identifying it as a term which refers to a certain relatively standard set of activities. Those activities are complicated; in different settings, at different times, requirements elicitation is done in different ways, by different people, for different lengths of time, with different results. But we all feel that we know what it is, and it's a helpful term to use when talking amongst ourselves as specialists.

In Group Construct Analysis (GCA) anything that is reified and nominalised counts as a construct. When we're analysing a group's construct system, these are often the most important and interesting constructs to think about. This is because the group or organisation has at some point made a decision, whether consciously or not, that "this is a thing". That decision then guides and constrains the organisation in various unconscious ways until the construct is eventually discarded as obsolete.

Reification and nominalisation are important ideas for business analysts, but they're a double-edged sword. On the plus side, they're conceptual power tools. In principle, once you've given a name to something, you don't have to keep explaining it. That means specialists in any discipline can communicate complicated ideas accurately and efficiently using a stock of well-chosen and well-defined concepts that are relevant to the subject area. They can then recombine and build on those concepts to build progressively more complex and powerful thoughts and messages.

The downside is more subtle. When we simplify something complex by reifying and/or nominalising it, some consequences follow.

Firstly, we have now put the idea into a "black box". We stop thinking about it so hard. Once something has been given a name, we tend to assume that:

- it really exists;
- it's a matter of objective fact;
- there are no subsidiary elements within the overall concept which need to be "unpacked" and examined; and
- there's no reason to think there is any room for doubt or confusion about its definition.

These assumptions are often unjustified, and they make it harder to reflect reality in a meaningful and helpful way when thinking or speaking. Take for example the interminable fruitless debates about "what is the right way of doing ‘Agile’?" Questions like this can never have a right answer because the underlying construct ("Agile") is not based on firm ground. The only valid answer to a question like this is, "that is not a valid question".

More fundamentally, as individuals and groups, what we pay attention to **and even what we are capable of**

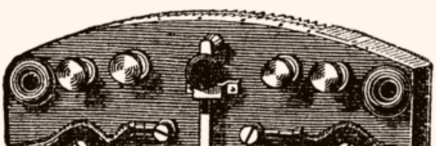
perceiving is shaped by our construct system. To the same extent that it illuminates some aspects of reality, any reified construct will also obscure other aspects of reality, like the lighthouse illustrated in article 8.

Personal Construct Psychology (see article 1) is based on the idea that psychological problems can be caused by unhelpful configurations in an individual's construct system and can be treated by identifying and changing those configurations. The same is true for groups and organisations: when a construct cluster represents reality in a misleading or outdated way, it can lead the group into dysfunctional or misguided behaviour and decisions. "Groupthink" sometimes makes it even harder for a group to recognise these mistakes than it is for an individual.

When you come across a reified construct in your analysis, here are some questions you might find it useful to ask:

- What is the evidence that this thing really exists?
- What are the constituent parts of this thing?
- If this thing exists and is important, then what other things must be non-existent or unimportant?
- Does buy-in to the construct necessitate buying in to a particular view of its subsidiary elements? Is that a problem?
- What does this construct make it easier for the group/organisation to perceive and to do?
- What does this construct make it harder for the group/organisation to perceive and to do?
- Are different sub-groups interpreting/using the construct in incompatible ways, and is this recognised explicitly? Is that a symptom of conflict? Is it a cause of conflict?
- Has the name used for the construct become detached from its original meaning? (Think of solution development teams who refer to a user story as "a Jira".) If so, is this a problem, and what does this **semiotic slippage** say about the group in general?
- Is the existence and/or definition of this construct associated with a certain individual or group? What are the implications of that?
- What overtones does the construct have? Does it provide fertile ground for certain types of value judgement?
- Does the prevalence of this construct work in the interest of certain stakeholders, or against others? How are specific individuals or subgroups adapting their behaviour to turn this construct to their advantage?

As I've mentioned before in this series, a construct system is never static. Any



map that we draw of it is necessarily provisional. As the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, discussed by Peter Checkland in his first book (see article 1) said:

> *"It is not possible to step twice into the same river… or to come into contact twice with a mortal being in the same state"*

In a group, the complexity is even greater. And, as some of the questions in the above list imply, the key factor distinguishing group construct systems from personal construct systems is that they are inherently **political**: in any group, at any given moment, there are usually multiple construct systems vying for precedence. This process is often undiscussed, but is an important area for business analysts to get to grips with. We will consider some aspects of how it works in a future article.

Nick is a director at De Voil Consulting. He specialises in helping organisations create people-oriented systems, products and services. He has trained thousands of professionals in business analysis, user experience, systems design, project management and agile development. Nick is author of the book "User Experience Foundations". Contact Nick via LinkedIn

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

The Mistakes That Made Me

Danielle Harley

"If I knew then what I know now…" is something I reflect upon in my personal and professional life. Whether that is how I raise my children, buying a house or making steps to progress my career, there are always opportunities to reflect. I have made mistakes in all of those areas, yet it is what I learn from these mistakes and how I try to prevent them in future that makes the difference.

In this article I will talk through examples in the earlier part of my business analysis career in the hope that this may resonate with you. Your career isn't a race and your experiences will help grow you as a BA. I have heard many times phrases such as 'when I get to 5 years' experience I will be considered a strong BA' or 'I need to progress to x title as a BA'. The projects you work on, the people you work with and your experiences (good and bad) help shape the BA you become.

I made a number of bad decisions early in my career and ended up in a test analyst role which I hated. In hindsight, it gave me the opportunity to work with some amazing colleagues and gain an appreciation for testers. Having gained this appreciation, I concluded that it wasn't for me. Testers act as a 'critical friend' of the business analyst and having gained this experience I would always recommend getting them involved in the early stages of a project. Testers (among others) are an excellent soundboard on validating that requirements satisfy relevant quality criteria (such as the INVEST framework). So even though choosing the role might be seen as a mistake, it is one that I was able to learn and grow from.

I started my university degree as a mature aged student after making several poor choices along the way. I wish I had known at secondary school that business analysis was a career that existed. I was hard on myself for being behind my secondary school peers, who were forging ahead in their careers while I was just starting university. Little did I know that I would be learning modelling techniques that I still use today. The poor choices beforehand were worth it.

Learning From Our Mistakes

The best BAs I have worked with have been those who champion others and are passionate about implementing change with the business. Those who reach out to help their fellow BAs regardless of where they are in their career. Those BAs are willing to say 'on reflection, I think I could have approached that task differently, or in future I would have done x instead of y'. On sharing this insight, they are educating other BAs that it is a continual learning journey and there is no point in time or a lightbulb moment where learning how to be a better BA stops. It also means having the courage to ask for help.

There is nothing wrong with realising that a different approach could have been taken or that mistakes were made. Even if this is discovered in the middle of the task – this isn't admitting defeat but can be where 'imposter syndrome' kicks in. Don't be afraid to have the courage to stop. This isn't broadcasting "I think I'm a failure and I'm finally going to be found out!" Sound out your thinking with a peer to get their perspective and grow your continual learning. They don't need to tell you what to do, but a problem shared can be a problem halved. It can be refreshing to hear how others have tackled problems and how this can help you.

Sharing Our Mistakes

We tend to fixate on how we "smashed that project" and focus on the win so much that we don't stop to appreciate how much we learnt and can share. A BA with 12 months experience should be sharing how they approached their analysis, the outcomes and any lessons they found just as much as a BA with several decades of experience under their belt. This doesn't just relate to BA tooling either. How you went about dealing with that tricky stakeholder or how you presented findings back—and what you learnt—are just as important to share.

Having been a BA in different countries and working with project teams in different places has meant I have had my fair share of cross-cultural misunderstandings. All part of the bumps along the road. I am still learning that certain idioms are only said in Australia and people from other countries have no idea what I am talking about.

My daughter's secondary school motto is 'better never stops'. I think this is a great mantra as a BA and one we should apply to ourselves. Learn from our mistakes, analyse your weaknesses as part of a SWOT analysis on yourself. There are a number of free resources available online on conducting your own personal SWOT analysis. There are so many ways we can share our knowledge and learn from others. Alongside this, it's important to continually plan to grow.

Setting Yourself a Learning Action Plan

In order to truly grow, it is important to set yourself a challenge for growth. This involves being proactive in expanding your BA skillset. The BCS Book 'Delivering Business Analysis: The BA Service Handbook' by Debra Paul & Christina Lovelock provides an excellent example of a BA Learning Action Plan. It explains that *"a learning action plan provides a mechanism to encourage business analysts to commit to three actions they will each take in response to a learning and development opportunity. The intention is that these actions will help to embed the learning and share the knowledge".*

Consider some of these activities as part of your learning action plan:

- Discuss your analysis approach with a peer.
- Find a friendly ear when you think you could have approached things better. Talk it through and come away with a set of actions.
- Run a knowledge sharing session with peers on a topic you are passionate about, or present a piece of work you have completed.
- Document your lessons learnt as you go, don't wait until the end. Think about how you would tackle the lesson next time. If it is something that went well, let your BA community know. If it is something that didn't go so well, ask other BAs how they would have gone about it.
- Consider presenting about business analysis to your local secondary school.
- Think about where your knowledge gaps are. Do a personal SWOT analysis on yourself.
- Find a mentor to support your growth.
- Reach out to see if anyone would like you as a mentor.
- Introduce yourself to a BA in your community that you don't know.
- Consider working in a business area you have not worked in before.
- Apply for industry awards such as BA of the Year or encourage a BA you admire to put themselves forward.

Conclusion

Every practitioner will make mistakes. More important than the mistakes themselves are how we recover and learn from them. Making time for regular reflection, and conscious learning, will ensure that you grow as a practitioner. It is an investment well worth making!

Danielle is a BA with nearly 2 decades of experience in the UK/Australia. She holds the BCS International Diploma in Business Analysis and was IIBA UK/AssistKD's 2018 Business Analyst of the Year. She's passionate about promoting business analysis and helping other BAs grow. Connect with Danielle on LinkedIn.

Business Analysis Planning - from Theory to Practice

Yevhen Kliukin

Imagine you are a new BA on a greenfield IT development project, and you need to create a business analysis plan. No matter whether you will be working alone or leading a team, you will need to plan. Your BA planning will likely include the following:

1. Organising and coordinating the efforts of business analysis

2. Providing guidelines for other business analysts

3. Achieving a common understanding of the BA work to be done and getting buy-in from relevant stakeholders

4. Tailoring BA activities and artefacts to a specific project's needs before the project starts/changes

5. Baselining business analysis capability quality.

After reading the International Institute of Business Analysis (IIBA®)'s Business Analysis Body of Knowledge (BABOK®) Guide I realised that the "Business Analysis Planning and Monitoring" knowledge area contains everything you need. In this article I will share some guidance on how to turn BA planning into tangible artefacts, so you will understand not only "what" but also "how to". This article draws on the structure of the BABOK® Guide, adding practical guidance so you will understand not just what to do, but also how to deploy it in your current work..

Start with a Firm Foundation

As you start your business analysis planning you'll need to analyse the following aspects:

- Stakeholder expectations: talk to relevant stakeholders to establish what they expect from the business analysis activities (or you can help them by presenting the planned business analysis activities and explaining how they will contribute to their project success)

- Existing business policies: analyse the internal rules and governance considering how it may shape the BA activities you will perform on the project
- Information tools used by the organisation: deciding how business analysis information will be captured and stored
- Methodology or framework to be used: including whether predictive (e.g. Waterfall) or adaptive (e.g. Agile).

Having considered these aspects, you'll have a firm foundation on which to start.

Planning the Approach

When planning a BA approach, it is crucial that it fits within the overall project or product management approach being used and defines the BA activities and methods. This can be captured in a 'BA Approach' document, which will typically include a variety of different types of information, such as the information discussed throughout the rest of this article.

Business Analysis Approach and Activities

Summary of BA Approach

A BA approach can typically be summarised using sections including:

Section	Description
General Description	Outline the approach. Will it be predictive/adaptive/ hybrid?
Level of Formality	Outline formality and level of detail for relevant BA deliverables and activities.
Complexity and Risk	How complex is the project and what risks pertain to the BA work?
Acceptance	Approve the approach with key stakeholders and document the approvers and approval date here.

In addition to what is listed above, it's important to ensure that the underlying business need/goal is uncovered. This might be expressed as a problem statement, a set of outcomes, or in some other way. E.g. if there is a strategy document it might lead the time-sensitivity, value and risks that will impact the project work, including BA processes. Initial scope might also be expressed using a context diagram, functional decomposition or similar technique. What is right will vary depending on the context, and in any event, understanding of the underlying problem, opportunity or need will evolve as analysis work commences.

BA Project activities

After providing a summary of the BA approach, it is important to list the project activities the BA function will perform on a project. These include highly collaborative activities which require synchronous collaboration with stakeholders (e.g. interviews) and activities that may not require real-time collaboration to start with (e.g. writing up formal specifications). The later type of activities may require asynchronous collaboration with stakeholders (e.g. reviewing and commenting on a formal specification).

It can be useful to capture a list of activities in a table, using the following fields:

Field	Description
Name	BA activity name
Description	Purpose of the activity
Inputs	What is required to perform the activity?
When	When or how frequently will it be performed?
Stakeholders	People involved in the collaborative activity
When	The estimated time the activity will take, usually with a tolerance or level of certainty attached, and with any assumptions clearly stated.

BA Allocation

After you have defined the activities that will be undertaken, you can define how much time and effort will be required. This can be represented as follows:

Planning the Stakeholder Engagement

To effectively collaborate with the project stakeholders, you need to establish and maintain rapport. Prior to building rapport, it is necessary to identify stakeholders, and analyse which are relevant for the project or initiative. The following analysis activities are often required:

Field	Description
Project Role	BA's project role, e.g. BA Lead, Requirements Engineer, Proxy PO
Employee	The role performer's full name
Position	Official position and seniority level, e.g. senior business analyst
Resources Allocated	How many BAs will be allocated to the role?

Stakeholders Register

Maintaining a register of those with interest or involvement is crucial. Basic information to capture includes:

- Name
- Role
- Title (position)
- Organisation
- Contacts
- Location, time zone
- Expectations/concerns

BA Communication Plan

Of course, capturing the stakeholder information alone is not enough, it is important to discuss how and when they will be engaged. The following sections can act as prompts to consider these factors:

Section	Description
Communication Tools	What communication tools are used? ● Tool – name of a tool ● Communication features – how and for what this tool will be used
Meetings List	Provide the list of meetings with the following fields: ● Name ● Purpose ● Necessity ● Audience ● Agenda ● Method ● Frequency / Schedule ● Duration
Other Engagement	Provide other engagement of stakeholders: ● Name ● Purpose ● Engagement type (e.g. surveys, performing various types of analysis, feedback forms, recordings, webinars) ● Stakeholders involved ● Frequency / Schedule ● Resources and logistics needed

Effective communication within a BA communication plan recognises the diverse needs of each stakeholder group. Communication isn't one-size-fits-all; for instance, while an end-user might benefit from a hands-on workshop, a CEO could prefer a high-level strategic briefing. Crafting separate, tailored meetings for distinct stakeholder groups can enhance engagement and understanding. By customising the communication structure to fit the unique needs and preferences of each group, the plan becomes more effective, fostering better alignment and support for the project.

Planning the BA Governance

At this stage you need to understand how and which stakeholders will make decisions: how they will review, prioritise, change and approve requirements, so everyone can understand how all that occurs. We can create three artefacts related to this (or, this might be bundled into an overarching BA approach document):

Prioritisation Approach

Section	Approval
Formality & Occurrence	Outline how, when, and where the prioritisation will take its place.
Stakeholders	Who are the stakeholders, and their roles in the prioritisation?
Prioritisation Criteria	Define and weight the factors impacting the prioritisation.

Approvals Approach

Section	Approval
Approvals Process	The steps or requirements for approvals and their formality, the stakeholders involved, accountability for the approval.
Statuses	The statuses that will be used when approving requirements (e.g. 'new', 'under review', 'approved' etc.)
Checklist	A checklist which defines what constitutes an 'approved' requirement, including any review processes that must have been concluded

Change Control Process

Section	Approval
Formality & Process	Outline the process of changes, define its formality
Changes in Requirements	What changes are allowed at different stages during the project phases/iterations? Define actions required before implementing those changes.
Change Log	How you will write and store the changes, and what fields the change records should have?

Plan the Information Management

It is also key to define how relevant BA information will be stored, accessed and managed. The applicable document you can create here is an Information Management Approach. Again, this might be a separate artefact, or may be bundled in an overarching BA approach document. It will include information such as:

Information Management Approach

Section	Approval
Requirements Attributes	Define requirements attributes that information management tools should support. List them with the descriptions. (Requirements attributes are metadata stored about each requirement)
Information Management	Define the tools used for the BA artefacts, including how artefacts will be stored and managed.
Traceability Rules	Outline how you will support connections between BA artefacts.
Requirements Reuse	Consider how you will specify, store and use/reuse reusable requirements?

Anything else?

Yes, what you can plan additionally is:

- Define requirements quality and readiness: use requirements checklists or Definition of Ready to baseline the success criteria of your requirements to ensure your team is ready for proper development and testing.

- Business analysis / requirements management process: based on all the mentioned artefacts and activities you can provide a holistic view of BA work with appropriate method of process modelling

- BA performance improvement: baseline the process of evaluating and improving you and your BA capability execution. The topic is worth a separate article, so I will not expand upon it here.

- Risks: for each of these areas you can provide the risks of missing and skipping necessary items in the BA process. Do not neglect documenting and communicating them, ensure they are fed into the common risk management process.

It's important to highlight that the amount of BA planning will depend on the project's size and type. Smaller, routine projects with low risks will need less planning than bigger, innovative, uncertain, and riskier ones.

Also, BA planning isn't just done at the start of a project. It is an ongoing task throughout the project. It should be revisited regularly, and updated based on experiences throughout the project. If any changes arise, they should be considered for impact and gap analysis for the new BA planning artefacts version as well as gain the approvals from the key stakeholders after.

Conclusion

BA planning is a valuable investment as it organises and coordinates the efforts of business analysis, provides clear guidelines, and fosters a common understanding of the business analysis role among stakeholders. Moreover, it allows for the tailoring of business analysis activities and artefacts to specific project needs, thereby enhancing the overall quality and effectiveness of business analysis capabilities. So, do not neglect it on your project / company and enjoy the benefits.

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Cracking the Curse of Knowledge: Avoiding Traps in Interviews

Kateryna Stryhunivska

The curse of knowledge is a cognitive bias that occurs when individuals who possess knowledge or expertise in a particular topic find it difficult to imagine or understand the perspective of someone who lacks that same knowledge. The term was popularised by "The Curse of Knowledge in economic settings: An experimental analysis" article by economists Colin Camerer, George Loewenstein, and Martin Weber in 1989. Since then, this cognitive bias has been studied by numerous researchers in various fields, including marketing, education, and information technologies. Probably the most popular experiment is the "musical tapping study" by Elizabeth Newton. She divided participants into two groups: the "tappers" whose task was to tap the well-known song and the "listeners" who were asked to guess the tapped song. When the "tappers" provided predictions of how many of the "tapped" songs would be recognised by listeners, they would always overestimate.

Business Analysts (BAs) can face the curse of knowledge in various ways, for example:

When Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) are using domain-specific jargon, complex terminology or concepts that are unfamiliar to non-experts. In this practical example, a BA is the witness to a curse of knowledge as in the SMEs' opinion they are sharing well-known facts (but only well-known by themselves).

When a BA uses techniques from the Business Analysis Body of Knowledge (BABOK®) Guide or presents elicitation results using the Unified Modelling Language (UML) or Business Process Model & Notation (BPMN) diagrams that are unclear to SMEs. Yes, as a BA, you frequently deal with the same set of techniques. However, have you ever considered whether SMEs have heard of them, or used them before? I bet the answer may surprise you and this is the curse of knowledge in action.

The first step to resolve the problem is to acknowledge it. I have prepared practical tips that can help you to deal with the curse of knowledge during interviews. It's important to note that the interview technique summarises all the activities into 3 stages: preparation, during the interview and follow-up. For your convenience, I've organised my observations and recommendations accordingly.

The Preparation for the Interview

During the preparation stage, you typically identify the interview goal, then seek the right participants to be involved, define output and logistics and finally, you will prepare a list of the questions according to the designated interview goal and invited participants.

Where to Look for the Curse of Knowledge in the Preparation Stage and How to Handle It

Activity	Curse of knowledge traps	Tip
Prepare a list of the questions	You are reviewing your list of questions and have a feeling that you've done an amazing job and thought all through, but what if not? Do not let your assumptions and previous experience within a similar project blind you.	I use the following question during my interview sessions: "Is there anything I haven't asked you about?". This helps to validate with experts that you don't miss an important piece of the puzzle.
Plan the output	Think about your audience, are they familiar with BPMN? Have they ever used confluence before? What are their preferred communication tools and styles?	Have you prepared a stakeholder list for your project? Use it. Align the planned interview output with the information collected for a stakeholder list.
Prepare agenda	As the interview organiser and a BA, you're having an obvious advantage because you know what will happen during the meeting and why. But is it so clear for SMEs?	Communicate the goal and share the list of questions in advance, this will help to add clarity and avoid being captured by the curse of knowledge.

During the Interview

This is the stage where you convert your preparation activities into business analysis information elicited from SMEs by asking relevant questions and documenting the responses. I think it is the most dangerous stage from the curse of knowledge perspective. The questions you ask work like a spotlight that helps to reveal information, while all uncovered areas remain in the dark. I'd like to share with you some advice that can help to polish your questioning skills:

Active listening. There is no point in asking a question if you don't listen to the response. When you ask a question, give some space to SMEs, and listen carefully, remember the answer is not only about words but also about non-verbal cues and emotions.

Gain common understanding through repeating, paraphrasing and reflecting. This will serve two purposes: building rapport and avoiding misunderstanding.

Balance open-ended and closed questions. This mix will allow you to discover further information through open-ended questions and clarify responses received via closedowns.

Where to Look for the Curse of Knowledge During the Interview and How to Handle It

Activity	Curse of knowledge traps	Tip
Ask questions	False assumptions can lead you in the wrong direction.	Use clarification questions to address all uncertainty. It doesn't mean that you should know everything just because you have a BA role on the project. It's okay not to know, but it's not okay to rely on unvalidated assumptions.
Document responses	If you read your notes a day, week, or month from an interview, you might no longer have the same assumptions as when you took them.	You can tackle this from 2 different angles: **(1)** In the area of online meetings use the advantage of the meeting recording feature so you can revisit the records later. (Be sure to have the consent of those who you are recording) **(2)** Rework interview results into defined output as soon as possible after the meeting. The purpose of note-taking during an interview is to capture elicited information. But this is not the final destination as you need to convert the input (your notes) into BA deliverables (documentation, diagram, etc.)
Wrap up the interview	Vague next steps.	By explaining the process of how the interview results will be used you can decrease the ambiguity and set clear expectations.

Interview follow up

During this stage, you will analyse discovered information and transform it into BA deliverables—defined outputs. *(see table below).*

I hope the provided information will assist you in avoiding the trap of the curse of knowledge in your work.

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Where to Look for the Curse of Knowledge in the Follow-up Stage and How to Handle It

Activity	Curse of knowledge traps	Tip
Result validation	Unclear task assignment.	Communicated expectations (e.g. review and validate) and set deadlines can sort it out.

The Power of Perspectives

John Wisner

The concept of stakeholders holding different "perspectives" refers to the distinct vantage points held by individuals, based on their backgrounds, roles, positions, experiences, and expertise. Perspectives are the lenses through which individuals view the world and process information.

The ability to consider and integrate different perspectives is a hallmark of a skilled and effective business analyst. By embracing diverse viewpoints, BAs can enhance their understanding of the challenges and opportunities present in a situation, improve decision-making, foster collaboration, and deliver impactful solutions that address the complex challenges faced by the organisations in which we work.

Every stakeholder we engage with possesses their own biases and blind spots that influence their perception. By engaging with stakeholders who possess different perspectives, business analysts can uncover these blind spots, challenge their own assumptions, and ensure credibility to their analysis.

The perspective obtained from outside of our organisation and from the wider BA community is also extremely valuable. I recall my own external awareness being informed in my early BA career, thanks to the insight gained from reading 'Business Analysis Techniques' (James Cadle, Debra Paul, and Paul Turner). I continue to seek external perspectives to compliment the contribution from internal stakeholders.

The Impact of Failing to Consider Other Perspectives.

Failure to consider alternative perspectives can have detrimental consequences. Doing so hinders a practitioner's ability to gather comprehensive insights, perform thorough problem analysis, identify root causes, make informed decisions, define appropriate requirements, and effectively address complex challenges. By disregarding alternative perspectives, a BA also risks developing a narrow understanding which may result in incomplete requirements elicitation and ineffective solutions.

Likewise, the BA who disregards other perspectives risks interpreting data through a limited lens. Diverse perspectives contribute to a broader understanding of data, enabling the identification of trends, patterns, and outliers that may otherwise go unnoticed. Ignoring these perspectives can result in biased interpretations, leading to flawed recommendations and missed opportunities.

Innovation also thrives on different perspectives. A lack of perspective here and the BA may overlook innovative ideas, unique approaches, and transformative strategies. Further hampering their organisation's ability to stay ahead of the competition, adapt to changing market dynamics, and/or seize new opportunities.

Overlooking different perspectives will also impede our ability to develop relationships with our stakeholders, as well as limit our growth as business analysts. Particularly as we learn continually from those individuals we meet while we explore their needs, opportunities, and outcomes. We learn from others, whether from internal stakeholders or from our wider BA network.

When and How to Identify Different Perspectives?

In everything we do as business analysts, there is opportunity to seek and embrace new perspectives. From understanding and agreeing scope, analysis of the current situation, when defining the business process, through to requirements and functional design or analysis there are opportunities to uncover different viewpoints. Therefore, recognising when to consider perspectives is easy: we need to do so at every step in our analysis process.

How business analysts approach perspectives is not so straightforward and can take many forms. The nature and focus of your analysis will determine what is appropriate and relevant. For example, at the start of your BA engagement, appreciating the different use cases or high-level processes from varying stakeholder perspectives is key. Project sponsors, development leads and technical architects will have perspectives that are well worth considering. Likewise, the various teams, managers, as well as those doing or affected by the work are also to be recognised. This helps avoid situations where a process is redesigned in a way that works wonders for one group of stakeholders but causes unintended annoyance for another.

Take every opportunity to engage stakeholders that you meet and ask them for their views on current issues and opportunities to improve. You might also want to ask them what they perceive as the benefits of specific requirements. Where you then observe contradicting views or uncertainty, bring people together to reach a common understanding. Elicit each stakeholder's experience or frustrations regarding how previous analysts have worked with them. This insight is invaluable to providing you the knowledge to do better.

There may be situations where considering alternative perspectives seems challenging or time consuming. However, the investment in understanding diverse viewpoints is likely to lead to better outcomes, improved stakeholder relationships, and increased professional growth. This is time well spent.

Techniques I Use for Considering Perspectives as a Business Analyst

Below are techniques I have employed successfully as a BA:

- **Conducting stakeholder interviews** with representatives across all teams and roles in the business process is an effective way to elicit perspectives. Structuring open-ended questions is a great way of encouraging stakeholders to express their viewpoints, ideas, and suggestions.

- **Collaborative workshops and brainstorming sessions** create an environment where perspectives can thrive. This is an opportunity to facilitate group discussions, to foster creativity, and to encourage participants to share their insights, experiences, and ideas openly. Be mindful to provide opportunities to individuals less inclined to speak up or spend time with them separately.

- **Business process modelling and analysis** provides an excellent platform to appreciate what activities are conducted and which teams, roles or individuals are responsible for the activities. Focusing on those who supply inputs into a process, execute or conduct activity or consume outputs from the activities, provides a platform to appreciate the context of issues, opportunities, and information, while establishing the merit and context of each perspective.

- **Shadowing and observing stakeholders** in their work environments provide firsthand exposure to different perspectives. BAs can observe stakeholder's tasks and engage in conversations to gain insights into their day-to-day experiences, while understanding challenges, workflows, and requirements of their stakeholders, to enrich the analysis.

- **Effective Stakeholder Management** helps to define where interactions will be required throughout the analysis. Stakeholders can be categorised using a list or a matrix, and this view can be extended to assess and recognise the perspectives that the various stakeholders hold. The stakeholder list or matrix can be extended further to clarify roles and responsibilities, by categorising individuals' relationships with tasks. Individuals can be flagged as Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, or Informed (RACI). These types of stakeholder analysis techniques can help to spot gaps, and ensure that a representative set of perspectives are taken into account.

Whose Perspective Is of Most Importance?

Business analysts must remain as impartial as possible to the organisation structure, stakeholder seniority, perception, and solution preferences. The findings and data explored in our analysis will inform the outcomes, recommendations, and prioritisation. While respecting each stakeholder's position, evidence (obtained through data and analysis) and consensus or other forms of agreement (in the absence of data-driven decisions) are perspectives that BAs should regard above all others. If the view of a senior leader and a junior administrator conflict, utilise data and the insight from the wider perspectives to determine the most valuable outcome to your organisation.

Conclusion

As a business analyst, employing effective techniques to consider diverse perspectives is essential for success. Actively engaging with your stakeholders, facilitating collaborative workshops, and promoting cross-functional collaboration are fundamental ways that BAs can assimilate a comprehensive range of insights and perspectives. By incorporating perspectives into everything we do, BAs will continue to deliver impactful analysis outcomes, underpin successful transformation, and provide legitimate value.

Take a moment to consider how your own background and experiences shape the way you power your analysis.

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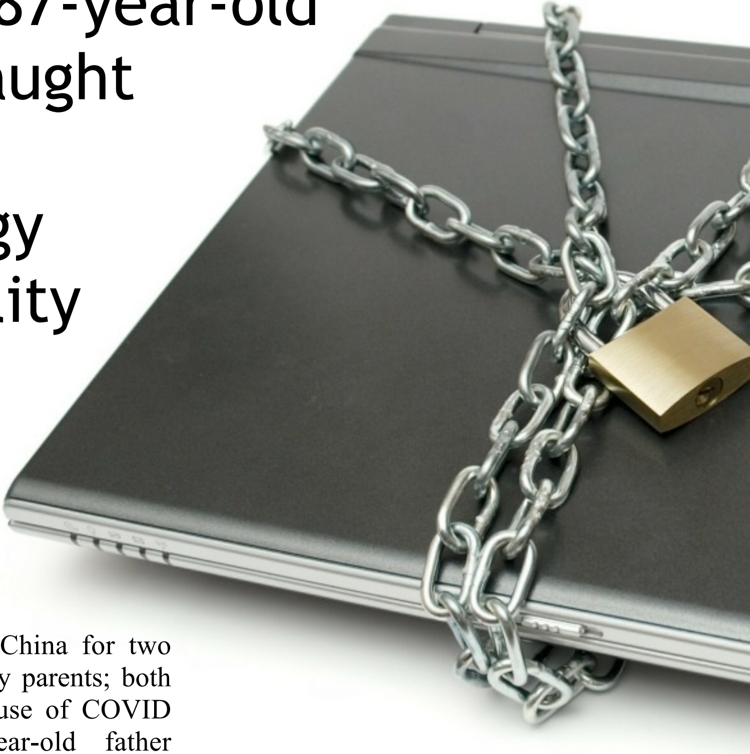
What My 87-year-old Mother Taught Me about Technology Accessibility

Li Yang



I recently returned to China for two months to look after my parents; both were hospitalised because of COVID infections. My 93-year-old father remains hospitalised after months because of underlying conditions and needs 24/7 care. My 87-year-old mother has embraced the new reality enhanced by technology.

My parents, a retired high-school teacher and a university professor, had been fiercely independent and lived by themselves. They were aware of the vast technological advancements in China: smartphone application usage is expected for many aspects of life, and app payments instead of cash have become the norm. Bewildered, they continued with their traditional ways. Realising they were falling behind, my mother had expressed a desire to learn to use some apps for online shopping, making doctor's appointments, paying bills, and hailing rides in the future. Other than not knowing where to start, she was also afraid that she would forget anything new she tried to learn and was fearful of making mistakes.

In the blink of an eye, life as we knew it was changed forever. The realisation that my father would likely never return home was a sobering fact that we had to accept. My mother, hardly ever apart from my father in their 63-year marriage, was determined that she would visit daily to bring him home-made liquid food, but we all worried for her physical ability as she suffers osteoporosis induced back pain. We wanted her to be at home and safe.

Multiple heated discussions took place where my mother felt hurt, unheard, and unsupported. Additional debates made us realise that aside from being active in my father's care as a family, we needed to support each other, including improving my mother's emotional wellbeing and her ability to cope. We wondered if technology could help.

Making Technology Accessible: Some Practical Examples

A smartphone is a convenient communication tool first and foremost. But if one does not know someone is calling or has called, the communication breaks down. My mother has had a smartphone but was not in the habit of checking for missed calls. While out of her apartment, she mostly kept the phone in her handbag and often missed calls due to her reduced hearing. A challenge we faced was how to ensure the communication channel stayed open. We solved this challenge by utilising a smartphone lanyard and an increased volume of ringtone. Now, with the phone hanging on her neck while out, my mother rarely misses calls. Knowing we can reach her gave all family members a peace of mind. Furthermore, my mother is now in the habit of charging her phone every night.

As a family, we decided that so long as my mother's health and safety are not in danger, we should respect her desire to visit my father daily. Of all the apps my mother wanted to learn, we decided to try out a ride hailing app. The list below summarises both expected and unexpected steps:

- **Prerequisite:** a family member had already connected a bank account of my mothers with an app that has bill payment capability on her phone.

- **Get the app and prepare for the first use:** I downloaded, installed, and logged into the ride hailing app, learned how to use the app, entered the hospital and home addresses, and attempted to increase the font size without much success.

- **Show, tell, and experience not just once:** I showed her how to request a ride, check for real time updates, confirm the car and verify the driver once getting into the car, as well as how to make payment after the ride.

- **Practice with reminders multiple times:** after two or three days of showing her, I asked my mother to use the app as I watched over her shoulder. After four, five days, she was proficient!

- **Unexpected challenges need resolutions:** observing that she was not always certain where to press on the smartphone, I reminded her to use her reading glasses. Having finished using her reading glasses, she would habitually put them in a case and often forgot where they were. I bought her a chain for the glasses so she could wear the glasses on her neck when using the app.

- **Dealing with exceptions is part of learning:** because I was with my mother for weeks after she started, I was able to help her deal with error messages and exceptions whenever those occurred.

- **Written manual is useful to make changes stick:** to reduce her fear of forgetting, I wrote down steps on a pad of paper along with necessary explanations. My mother reviewed the steps a few times, but the repeated daily use made a real difference. How to handle the errors and exceptions have been added to the written instructions.

- **Reducing complexity is key:** logging into the app with two factor authentication proves to be too complex for my mother. We traded security for convenience by using the "always log in" feature.

The ride hailing app is part of my mother's daily routine now! I can't count the number of times that passersby expressed their admiration for my mother as she negotiated the app on her phone.

Since the first time she used it, my mother immediately articulated the value: she no longer needs to walk 10 minutes to the main road to flag a taxi; the car will come directly to her apartment. The physical demand on her body is much less each morning. The in-app real time updates eliminate her anxiety of not knowing when the next available taxi will be. She can settle the bill at leisure so she can focus on bringing the food to my father upon arrival. I, the business analyst, could not have summarised the value any better!

Reflections for BAs

What I've learned from this experience is that accessibility is not just about the experience when someone uses specific features of an app or system, it is about removing hurdles and impediments before, during and after their interaction with the system. When defining processes and systems we must think, not just about the "happy path", but also about those who might have differing needs. We must ensure that we do not inadvertently exclude those who use our products and services differently, and we should build products that accommodate the needs of different types of users.

We should also accept that some users might need additional help, guidance or 'prompts'. By making our products as inclusive and accessible as possible, we will likely enhance the experience for *everyone*. After all, won't *all* users benefit from a quick, intuitive and easy-to-use experience?

As BAs, we play a key role in product and service definition. We should keep accessibility in the forefront of our minds.

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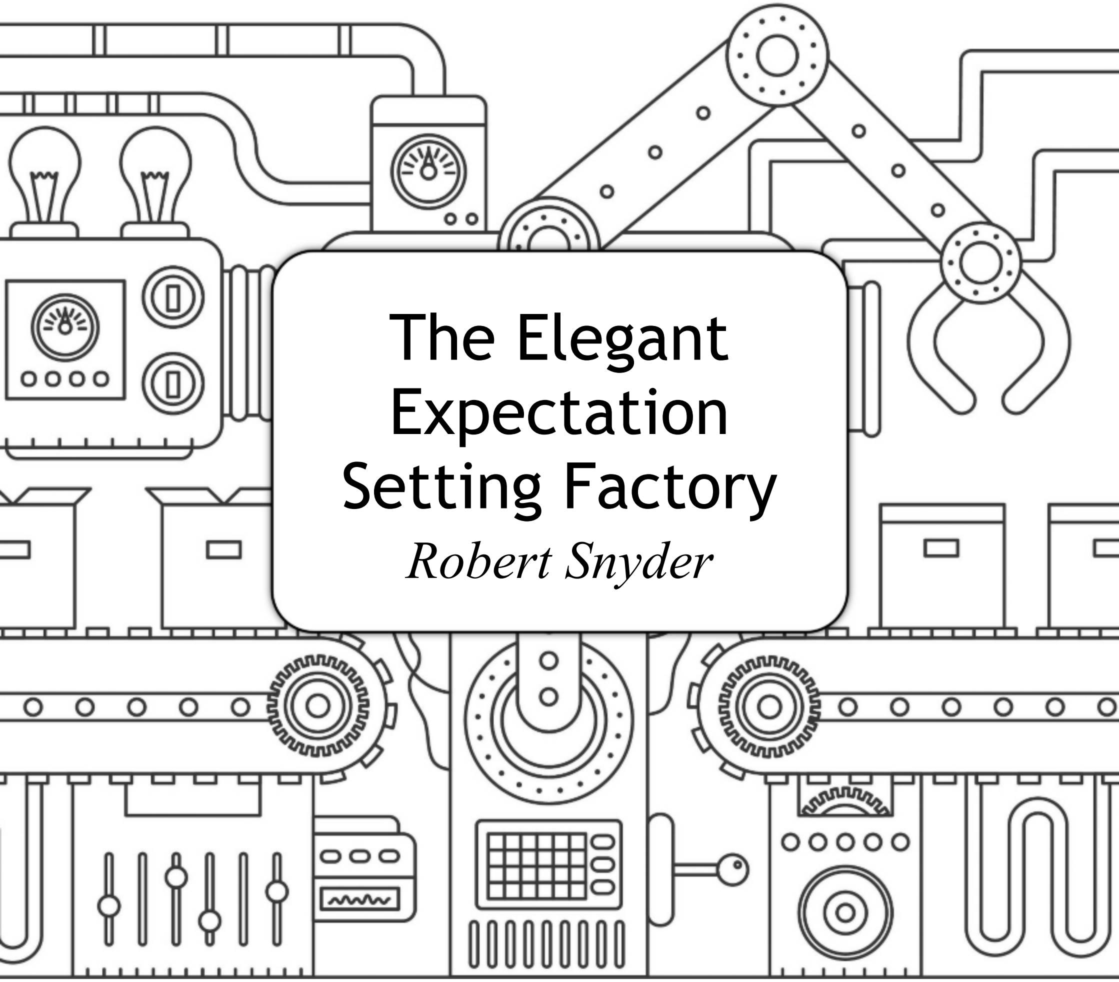
The Elegant Expectation Setting Factory

Robert Snyder



Waterfall and agile methods have typically been utilised in a software-centric way for many years, but the potential for improvement (in team performance and value) remains. Studies show that project success rates disappoint, and in many organisations meeting gridlock and email overload are common. Furthermore, fatigue and burnout are public topics.

The innovation world also harbours a dirty little (and poorly kept) secret. What makes innovation difficult is not software—it's people, how we interact, govern, collaborate, or just plain compete with each other. For innovation professionals who agree that it's people that make innovation difficult, proposing a people-centric methodology should not be revolutionary. Such a methodology would have to be simple, i.e. easier to adopt and execute than legacy methodologies. Such a methodology would also have to be more beneficial.

Defining such a methodology is certainly worth a try.

A people-centric methodology will need a strong foundation. One way to derive a strong foundation is to clarify what bad looks like. My rational brain lands on the word "chaos." My emotional brain lands on the word "cruelty." We can now pivot and look for opposing words to discover what good looks like. A term contrasting with chaos is *discipline*. A term contrasting with cruelty is *empathy*. We can hypothesise that good teamwork is underpinned by *discipline* and *empathy*.

Could culture traits of discipline and empathy survive hurricanes of opposition? Discipline and empathy are likely to feel more attractive to customers and employees than chaos and cruelty. I like the economics of attracting customers and employees and following the money feels like a strong foundation. Therefore, discipline and empathy feel like a strong foundation, both ethically and commercially it'll be important to infuse both into a methodology.

Infusing Discipline into a Methodology

Discipline in general is difficult and unpopular because of the upfront demands and costs, yet discipline is attractive when enjoying its ongoing benefits. Sentiments about discipline apply to innovation teamwork in the form of communication channels. Structured documentation resembles discipline. Structured documentation is unpopular because of upfront costs, but also popular because of its long-term benefits (such as low marginal cost to share information). The other communication channels—meetings and email—are comfortable and addictive because they have low upfront costs. But meeting minutes, meeting memories, and long email threads have low long-term benefits. Sharing information with them is laborious (expensive). Meeting gridlock and email overload cause communication traffic jams. Those communication channels can't and shouldn't disappear, but for healthy team discipline, rebalancing emphasis among communication channels seems sensible. The rebalancing requires more emphasis on structured documentation and less emphasis on meetings and email. Documentation is durable. The others are disposable. The right structured documentation is so valuable that it justifies an elevated title of "asset."

How to govern these assets? A RACI matrix has the right spirit when a team assigns who's responsible, accountable, consulted, and informed about each piece of work, but executing a RACI matrix harbours poor discipline and a lot of ambiguity.

A similar approach to assign a team's assets can accomplish what every team needs for scalable governance. Every document needs someone to *draft* it, some combination of stakeholders to *review* and *revise* it, one person to serve as tiebreaker and an embedded, low-drama point of escalation to *approve* it, and a person to *distribute* the document to non-contributing stakeholders. Those five verbs are rigorous and sufficient to govern a project team's durable work. They are simple and straightforward to use and repeat in a project plan. Their rigour allows "assignments" for meetings and email to stay governed in the appropriate application (such as MS Outlook).

In a project plan, the five verbs simplify specifying dependencies, duration estimates, target dates, and percent complete. While it's a breeze to change assignments and estimates, nothing—including what qualifies as "done"—is ambiguous. While completely formal, the work is not rigid. In fact, the simplicity, transparency, and explicitness of the assets ease a team to change their mind. The five verbs are adaptable.

For a team that subscribes to the five verbs, they do have to know what is worth documenting, i.e., what can withstand the rigour, accountability, and alignment of the five verbs. A sufficient asset portfolio contains approximately twenty project-independent assets, twenty assets related to project management, people (change management), and process, and approximately twenty assets related to technology decisions for design, build, and test. Sixty assets is a lot, but it's not six hundred. Although every team member should have a grasp of every asset's nature, every team member contributes to only a fraction of the assets, based upon their role (such as a business analyst).

Can a team get away with fewer verbs than those mentioned above? Thinking through each one, I conclude "no." Is there more 'work' to formally govern? Governing some portion of an infinite number of meetings or emails is a non-starter. Five verbs feel sufficiently rigorous without micromanaging or 'boiling the ocean'.

Cultivating Collaboration: Embrace Empathetic Arts

Collaboration feels like an important next ingredient for teamwork and will be central to a people-centric methodology. Collaboration contributes to discipline as well as contributing to empathy (after all, when there is collaboration, team members tend to care about each other). Collaboration doesn't drive human behaviour alone though. Humans compete, and ignoring our sometimes-competitive nature would result in poor discipline and empathy. A good methodology is thoughtful about collaboration and competition.

Several human activities are thoughtful about collaboration and competition. For example, parents navigate these with their children. Musicians and actors compete for roles and balance their contributions to music and scenes. Improvisers perform extraordinary collaboration in words, and dance partners perform extraordinary collaborations with their bodies. The martial art of Aikido neutralises competition and converts an attacker's motion into unexpected blending and collaboration.

These activities are arts. Improvisation, music, dance, and theatre are performing arts. Parenting and Aikido are also arts. They're people-centric, exercise care for other people, and show empathy. A single category that works might be the "empathetic arts".

These artists don't have to be world-class to be successful and meet expectations. Being an average performer is still respectable, fulfilling, and fun. Audiences—customers—find plenty of value and satisfaction in various skill levels. Audiences can be forgiving when they know how much work goes into these arts. Sustaining just average performances in these arts is demanding. Third-rate artists persist because they enjoy a sense of belonging, the pursuit of excellence, and contributing to something bigger than themselves, such as a family, community, symphony, or ensemble performance.

Innovation teamwork has much to benefit and profit from emulating the culture traits of the empathetic arts but sceptics exist. These professionals might not be inspired by empathy, collaboration, or being part of an ensemble. Their behaviour might even be contrary to team objectives. They are part of the team strictly on paper and on the payroll.

Sceptics and contrarians dislike being governed by five verbs. The five verbs are too structured and too disciplined. Contrarians dislike discipline. Contrarians prefer *verb freedom* and *verb sprawl*. The empathetic art of Aikido provides constructive responses to contrarians, bringing their preferred verbs out into the open, exaggerating them, then providing incentives for them to collaborate.

The call-to-action is to govern all collaborative work with the five verbs. On the surface, such a call feels petty, but the word choice and resulting rhythm is "a small hinge that swings a large door." Such work is well-organised, accountable, aligned, and durable. Work governed by verb sprawl is none of those things and fosters a VUCA environment. As mentioned above, every team needs to know the right assets - people, process, technology, and cross-project assets - to build.

Conclusion: Evolving from Software-centric Methodologies to An Expectation-setting Factory

Zooming out on these ideas, the combination of structured documentation, five verbs, and the arts are great models for our pillars of discipline and empathy. Meetings and emails don't disappear. They just take a back seat to discipline and empathy. What should disappear is chaos and cruelty. Obsessive synchronisation of five verbs for a finite number of documents (documents valuable enough to withstand the rigour of five verbs) eases traffic jams. This combination of language, habits, and culture feels compelling and robust, but it still lacks a name.

The repetition of the five verbs resembles a factory. Instead of an image of a sweatshop, see the factory as a scalable, straightforward, and transparent movement. This factory of structured documentation produces agreements—alignments—on matters that set expectations for stakeholders. The five verbs avoid messiness in a project plan. Five verbs look elegant in a project plan. This rigour—this ruthlessness—towards poor collaboration turns the screws on the common repeated errors so strongly that teams can recover from random, human errors with grace.

Ruthless Grace? A factory of elegance? An expectation-setting factory? An elegant expectation-setting factory. That combination of words seems to convey discipline, empathy, resilience, simplicity, transparency, seriousness, and exploration. Such a methodology would place teams on the frontier of their methodology, their innovation, and their profitability. It transcends software-centricity, shapes a culture of people-centricity, and improves the employee experience.

Robert Snyder's 30-year career spans Project Management, Change Management, and Performing Arts. He is passionate about ensembles – music, dance, improv, theatre, and innovation ensembles. Robert earned his BS in Electrical Engineering from the University of Illinois and his MBA from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University.

How Should Businesses Compare and Prioritise Use Cases?

Praneeth Pancheti

One of the fundamental responsibilities of a business analyst is the prioritisation of requirements within a project. Employing an array of techniques such as the MoSCoW method, Kano Analysis, Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP), Weighted Shortest Job First (WSJF), and numerical ranking, we strive to evaluate and sequence requirements based on essential criteria like their value contribution, business advantages, associated risks, resource investments, and costs.

This core competency of evaluating potential alternatives based on pertinent criteria is a skill that every proficient business analyst must possess. This aptitude extends beyond requirement prioritisation and proves invaluable in a myriad of scenarios that BAs often encounter. A prime instance where this approach proves indispensable is in the prioritisation of use cases.

Allow me to expound upon a few illustrative examples from my tenure as a business analyst and consultant, where this very skill proved exceptionally advantageous. I was entrusted with the role of a consulting business analyst for two ambitious, large-scale greenfield enterprise transformation initiatives:

1. The establishment of a central data warehouse for cloud-based analytics and reporting.

2. The implementation of Robotic Process Automation (RPA) to streamline procurement and finance operations.

Both endeavours were intricate, extended undertakings spanning several years and encompassing diverse disciplines. Both would result in substantial impacts on end users. Initially, project owners and clients encountered challenges in securing the requisite funding and resources for these transformational initiatives, given the considerable time frame required for the anticipated benefits to be realised.

To overcome this obstacle, we devised an approach that involved identifying an array of potential use cases for the proposed transformation, with the intent of showcasing their immediate value. This strategic course of action aligned seamlessly with the prioritisation methodologies I alluded to earlier.

In this scenario, the business analyst:

- Collaborated closely with various business units directly affected by the transformation.
- Discerned potential use cases specific to each impacted business group.
- Diligently articulated the business benefits associated with each identified use case.
- Formulated a comprehensive prioritisation matrix, encompassing weighted considerations such as value augmentation, cost savings, the magnitude of stakeholder involvement, and time investment.
- Leveraged the prioritisation matrix to methodically evaluate and rank the list of use cases.
- Subsequently returned to the funding table, armed with a refined project scope and a clear delineation of both short-term and long-term benefits.

This approach not only fostered the confidence of project sponsors but also facilitated the team's adoption of an agile, continuous learning-oriented delivery model.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the next time you contemplate the concept of prioritisation, don't confine your reflections solely to detailed project requirements. Instead, consider employing this approach whenever the need arises to discern and juxtapose diverse alternatives. The ability to evaluate multiple prospects through a lens of pertinent criteria is an asset that distinguishes adept business analysts and empowers effective decision-making across a spectrum of scenarios.

Praneeth Pancheti is a BA Manager at Optivia. He has 11+years experience as a BA/Consultant. Optivia is a data and analytics consultancy, specialising in data engineering and insights delivery, complete with a range of technologies for large companies with complex systems and data.

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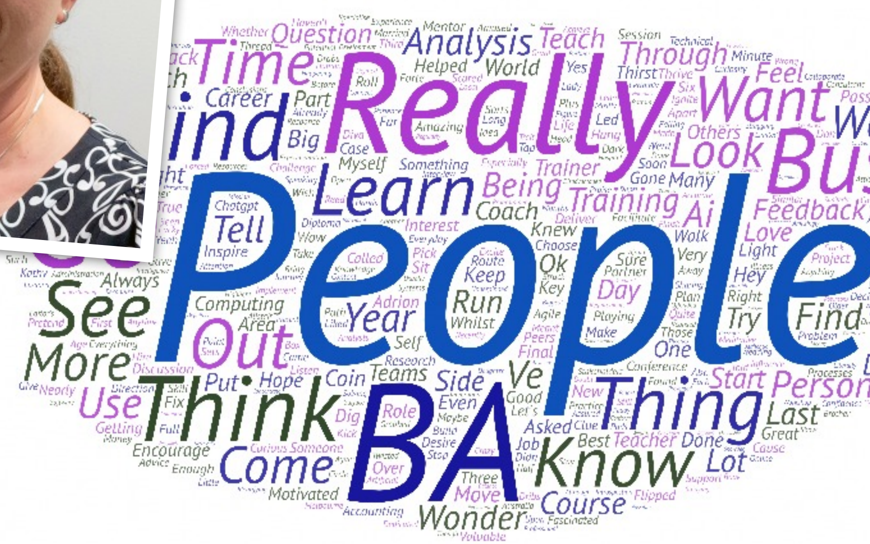
Kathy Berkidge



Interviewed by Christina Lovelock

Based in Melbourne, Australia, Kathy is an Agile Consultant, BA, trainer and coach. All of this is underpinned by being a dedicated mindfulness practitioner and teacher, helping teams to collaborate and thrive in our complex and busy world.

What's getting your time and attention at the moment?

I'm doing some experimentation with Artificial Intelligence (AI) and ChatGPT, and I'm really fascinated as to what it can and can't do, especially for business analysis. I've been challenging ChatGPT to imagine they're coming up with requirements and I've been playing with it and found that I'm kind of amused and kind of scared at the same time! But the one thing I've assured myself is that the need for business analysis isn't going to go away any time soon because it only does so much.

AI comes up for discussion in nearly every workshop and every training session, and BAs are concerned. More and more people are playing with it, so if people are asking me about it, I want to know I've done some research and got some experience using it. My daughter got married last year, and I asked it to plan a wedding for 100 guests, and its response was so accurate and similar to what we had to do!

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

So I'll start with telling you what my partner says I do, and he says "she talks at people"!

Well, I hope that's not the case! When I'm speaking at conferences, I love sharing my passion with people. I'm talking *with* people, I hope, not just at them! When I am running training courses I'm facilitating discussions with people and of course, when I'm coaching, I certainly try not to talk at all. I like to let people come to their own conclusions.

So whilst my partner thinks I talk at people, I'd like to think that I facilitate, no matter whether I'm coaching, training or even running sessions at conferences. I really want to ignite peoples' thought processes around: what's really happening? What's really valuable here? What's the right thing to do? That's the common thread across all the things I do.

So I know that you are really interested in motivating others, what keeps you motivated?

Wow. I have to think about that for a minute!

It comes from supporting people. Recently I worked with a BA who was from a socioeconomic disadvantaged area. I mentored them and it was great just seeing them run with things and build their confidence. Similarly, when I run a training course, I get to see someone walk in and say "I'm really struggling with this" and then we talk it through and I see people walk out with a bit more confidence.

It's helping people on that journey from "I don't know what I'm meant to do" to "hey, I've got a bit of a clue!". So what motivates me is seeing people being able to achieve even more than they thought they could.

What led you to the world of projects and business analysis?

This is a true story and people laugh when I tell it. I started in the 1980s studying a diploma in business. As part of that diploma, you could pick a major, so we could specialise in our final years.

You could choose between accountancy, computing and business administration. I was doing really well in accounting, and anybody would have put money on it that I was going to go down that route. But although I was good at it, it didn't excite me and I was falling asleep doing it nearly every day. So computing struck my interest and part of that was the understanding of how to roll systems out, including managing implementation and integrations.

I knew that business administration and management was not my forte. So I had to choose between accounting and computing and I literally grabbed a coin, flipped it, and it came up computing!

But I knew that's what I was hoping for and I wanted to move in that direction. My older brother was already in computing back then, he was doing really well and he also encouraged me to go down that route. I started as a technical programmer in the 80s, there was no such thing as a BA, but you had to do the BA work! I was OK technically, but I knew that my calling was for what I liked doing, finding the real problem, identifying what was really needed.

So that's a long way of saying I'm really interested in solving problems.

Could you tell me what or who have been some of the biggest influences on your career?

There's three people that come to mind that I want to highlight.

In 2000 I had a serious illness and spent over 3 months in hospital. As I got better, I went back to the workplace in dribs and drabs, but I wasn't the best person I could be. My manager at the time gave me a great big, swift kick up the pants to say "please, we love what you do, but you've got to fix your attitude". And whilst I was offended at the time, I now know she was looking after me. She wanted me to excel, and if it wasn't for her patience and directness, I probably would have gone down a wrong path. She prevented me from being a dark and twisted individual.

The second person was someone I worked with in a role where I had to do a lot of training. I had to deliver training on using software and processes, as a BA, sometimes you're called upon to do all sorts of things. She was an amazing trainer and really encouraged me, she said that "you're good at this and you've done this before. And yes, I know that you're forced into it in this particular role in this particular project, but hey, you're doing amazingly". With her support and mentorship I realised I could be a trainer and I could just be me. You have to be you and bring your full self to it, and be the person that you are, with your crazy metaphors and everything else!

And the last lady I want to recognize is a lovely woman who encouraged me with mindfulness. She was my mentor and teacher for the last 20 plus years and every day she inspires me to be more mindful. As a mindfulness practitioner and a teacher, every day I think about her influence on my life, to become a lot more thoughtful and persistent and patient wherever possible.

How do you make sure that you keep learning?

What we need most in business analysis is that curiosity and that thirst for knowledge. To wonder why and how and where. I'm very passionate about that because when we teach business analysis to new BAs, they want to know ABC, what do I do first, second and third? I can't teach you how to be curious. I can't teach you how to question everything as a BA.

I've always been that annoying person who wants to know why. So I have that thirst for knowledge and to keep learning. If I stop learning, I think that they'll be putting me six foot under. I've surrounded myself with experts who I learned from, I'm constantly reading things and it's not something I have to try at because I am naturally fascinated by the world and all the wonderful creatures and people in it. So I'm always looking for opportunities to learn.

Apart from coin-flipping, how have you made the big decisions throughout your career?

Now, I was going to say it's mostly coin flipping! Really though, usually with a lot of reflection, introspection, using meditative inquiry, through my practice to see what comes to light.

So that's been half of it, but some of that is subjective. I also look to my peers and people around me. Not necessarily to make a decision for me, but to perhaps cast light on something that maybe I haven't seen. And then I do a spreadsheet!So there's a logic side, there's an intuition side, and then there's a desire side. And I have to figure out "am I just thinking from the desire or just from the head?" We have to get curious about it and that's why my meditation practice is so key, because it allows me that introspective time to really sit with something and really feel it out and wrestle it through.

Has there been any feedback or advice you've received that has really stuck with you?

We get feedback all the time, especially when you're delivering a lot of training.

I find that what's on the surface only tells you so much. It's really about thinking "what can I learn from what's been said?". So for example, I did an online course and there was a bit of feedback that wasn't the greatest. It said something like "there wasn't enough time and we needed to move along" and I thought to myself, OK, I can see where they're coming from. And I thought, well, I wonder what's caused that and I really wanted to dig in. So I'm always looking for ways to take feedback on in a way that can be constructively demonstrated, but sometimes with feedback we're limited as to what we can do. When you're delivering a certification course, for example, which I do all the time, you've got three days to get through the content and if I don't move along now, we're not going to finish! So finding ways to find balance is always a challenge.

And the most valuable advice I've had is "don't feel you need to be like everyone else".

I regularly get feedback that people see me as being authentic, I try not to pretend and if I don't know, I don't know! I look at some of the people I've learned from, and they've been awesome, but I don't need to be another

Dave Snowden, Alistair Cockburn, the Robinsons or Adrian Reed! *[Editor's note: please don't feed Adrian praise. He's a big enough diva to work with already!]*

I look at all of you amazing peers and I just think I've learned so much from each of you, and I am getting used to the idea that I don't have to be you. I can be me and still use those lessons and reflect them in my own personal way.

I wish we could teach everybody, from the youngest age: "don't be afraid of being you". You don't have to conform. Get through those horrible teenage years and the self-doubt and the pressure. I got to a point when I started thinking, "yeah, I don't have to do that anymore!". You just have to be you.

Do you feel there's a particular skill or trait that you have that's really helped you in your career?

I'm going to circle back to mindfulness. If I didn't have mindfulness, I'm pretty sure I wouldn't be on this planet right now.

As business analysts we need to be present. We need to concentrate and listen to our stakeholders. I'm very passionate about teams and stakeholders and the human side of work. If you're not mindful, then you're potentially missing things. You're listening to your own beliefs. You're believing your own theories and you're closed down. Whereas mindfulness teaches us to question everything and say, hang on, let's drop all that.

Often as a BA you're told "just implement this solution…here's what you need to do, just do it".

I've been able to say, hang on a minute, let's reframe this and pretend we don't know anything. Let's go through it again, with that mindfulness or that presence of mind to really stay open and dig deeper. I think about applying root cause analysis to why we think the way that we do, and why we have our own perceptions and opinions and beliefs. I like to see if we can get to the bottom of them and maybe dispel them and see things in a new light. That's the core of what mindfulness means to me.

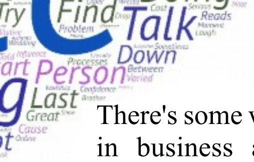
What do you feel sets the best BAs apart?

Curiosity and questioning, questioning, questioning! I've been lucky enough in my career to be able to hire business analysts into my teams over the last 20 years. When I'm in an interview with a BA or potential BA, if they haven't asked me any questions in that interview, they're gone. I want someone who can lean in and show that thirst for learning more. So absolutely, I think that's the key.

Finally, this is your chance to give a shout out to a person, event or a book, anything that has inspired you, that you think might inspire others.

There's so many things and so many people!

I encourage anybody who reads this, there are so many amazing resources out there, do your research far and wide.



There's some wonderful things going on in business analysis, whether it's a professional development day with the IIBA®, or a conference or event in your local area.

Also—talk to other BAs about what they do. The thing I've learned the most is that business analysis can't be defined into a little box, we have so much to find out from all the different resources that we have at our hands, there's not just one way to be a BA.

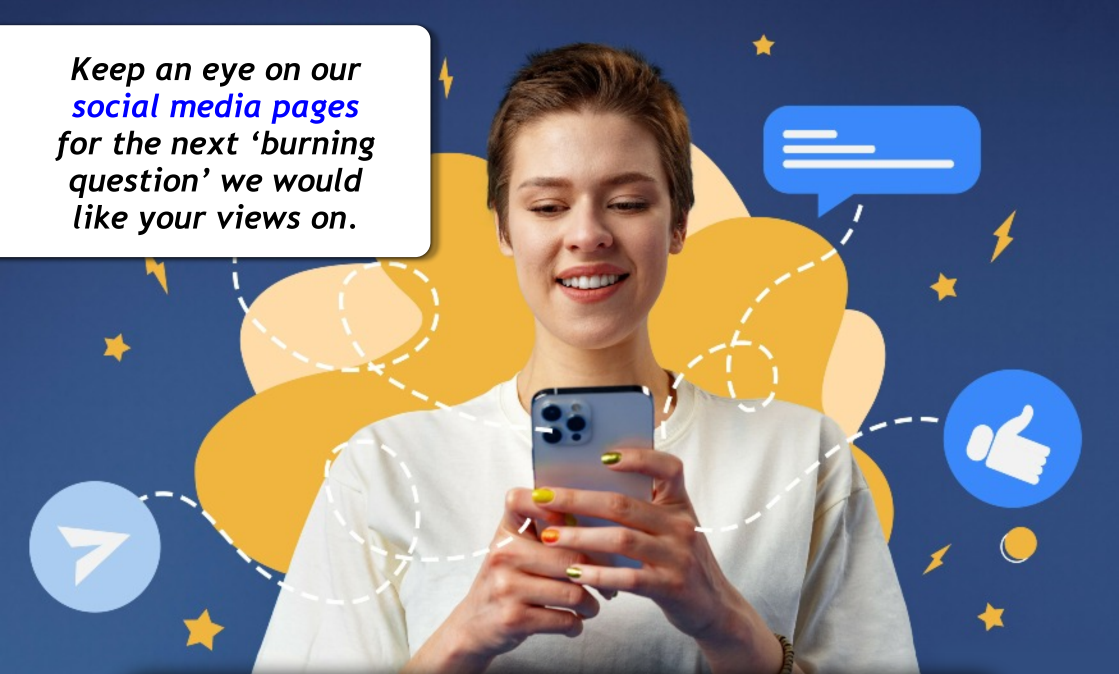
I definitely encourage people to look at all the wonderful work that you, Adrian, Fabricio, Grant & Paddy are doing, and so many others! So go to professional development days ("PDDs"), connect with other BAs and learn from all the wonderful people because there's a wealth of experience we've just got to tap into it.

Connect with Kathy:
linkedin.com/in/kathy-berkidge/

About the interviewer:

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

Keep an eye on our [social media pages] for the next 'burning question' we would like your views on.



VIEWPOINTS

On social media, we posed the question ***"What BA career advice would you give your younger self"***

Definitely don't take everything at face value. Quite often in project delivery things tend to be fluid even if some stakeholders think they are definite. It's always worth revisiting those absolute must haves. And try not to get frustrated!!!

Brenda Duffy

You have to own your own career development. Don't assume that your company will provide you with the training you'll need to advance your career. That means that you need to be willing to invest in your own professional development.

Kent J McDonald

Speak Up, BAs!

Getting back on the saddle after a gap of 8 years was daunting. To add to the challenge, I had to face these scenarios:

Employee 1: Can you get this training manual done by the end of the day?
My younger self: Sure thing (even though I barely knew the software)

Employee 2: This is how the manufacturing process works. Do you follow?
My younger self: Absolutely (even though I was lost and scared to ask for help)

And then I tried to be a people pleaser and blend in.

The verdict was: My younger self having cold feet. I don't think I can cut it as a BA! Maybe I should change my career path…and so on.

So, my fellow BAs, don't bite your tongue. Let your voice be heard and it will open doors for you. You are the boss of your own life!

Divya Kishore

My advice would be to be much more involved with the BA community. Learn and leverage from your peers. Don't be afraid to put your opinion out there. Be open to be challenged because that way you learn.

Retha De La Porte

Don't underestimate your worth and stop thinking that just because you can do something then everyone can. Being a great BA takes skills and experience which you will learn and earn in time. Most of all - enjoy it!

Eleanor Gardner

Do not wait for opportunities - create them instead. Learn to come up with ideas, evaluate, sell, and implement. Or look for them in places that others try to avoid. Such opportunities are usually painful to even talk about, take time time to cure, and are pretty complicated. Beating such dragons might be something over your head, but the treasures behind them are worth it.

Iurii Gomon

If I could speak with my younger BA-self, in some kind of Back to The Future moment, my advice would be: tailor your approach and techniques to your stakeholders and project/workstack. Not all initiatives are created equal. Solve the problem first then select the appropriate approach or technique for your analysis. And, don't forget to communicate regularly - both the good and the bad - to your stakeholders. If my calculations are correct, you'll be a much more effective BA in the future!

Rebecca Chatfield

Push yourself sooner, have confidence in your ability and reach out to the BA community.

Marc Debenham

Be respectful but also be challenging. You bring unique insights so keep pushing for better. And don’t beat yourself up if you don’t get to analytical perfection. Sometimes good enough is good enough.

Craig Rollason

The optimist says:
“The glass is half full.”

The pessimist says:
“The glass is half empty.”

The BA asks:
“Is this really the best size glass to serve this drink in? It seems to cause complaints.”

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