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Q4 2022

BA DIGEST

- Stop Being an Owl. Start Being a Leader
- Can an Introvert Succeed as a BA?
- The Difficult Stakeholder
- The Coaching BA
- And much more ...

Your regular round-up of useful BA content

BA Digest is published by Blackmetric Business Solutions
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Welcome

A very warm welcome to the Q4 2022 edition of BA Digest.

One of the aims of BA Digest is to bring together a wide variety of topics from a diverse set of authors. Each article embodies crucial nuggets of knowledge, and as BA Digest has grown one challenge you may have had is finding particular articles. Up until now, finding a specific article would have involved manually looking at each edition of BA Digest…

We were keen to find a better way, so we've launched a search facility. Yes, that's right, you can search the entire back catalogue of BA Digest articles for free. We hope that you'll find this useful, here's the link: www.blackmetric.com/search-ba-digest

We hope that this will enable BA Digest to be an even more useful resource for you!

I'm also very pleased to announce that:

- BA Digest has been assigned an 'ISSN' by the British Library (an ISSN is to a magazine what an ISBN is to a book). So we are now officially catalogued & classed as a recurring publication.
- BA Digest is recognized by IIBA® as acceptable for 30 Continuing Development Units (CDU) per article published
- The BA Manager Forum (BAMF) recognises articles published in BA Digest as being relevant for the continuing development requirement for holders of the Expert BA Award.

It is fair to say that BA Digest has grown far larger, and far faster than we ever imagined. Thank you for making that so.

Finally, I'd like to extend a massive thanks to our authors. Remember, BA Digest is nothing without its authors, so be sure to connect with them. Also, thank you to our advertisers. It is the adverts that keep BA Digest free… so remember the brands that you see here: they are investing in a community resource, and it is well worth supporting them when you can.

Enjoy BA Digest, and be sure to pass it on to a colleague!

Until next time,

Adrian

Adrian Reed

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

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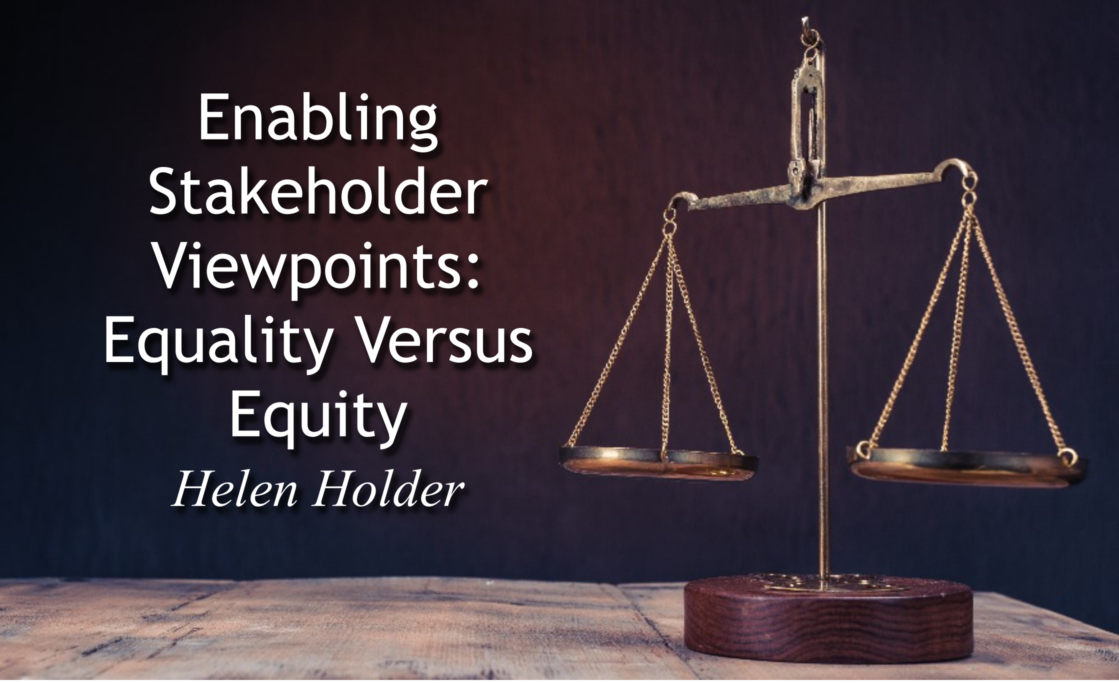


Enabling Stakeholder Viewpoints: Equality Versus Equity

Helen Holder

Across the BA profession I'm sure there are few of us who would need to be convinced of the importance of good stakeholder engagement and the synthesising of different viewpoints to drive effective change management.

Stakeholder identification and analysis techniques ensure that we have considered the relevant groups for any given change initiative, and that we understand their levels of interest, power, and influence in order to factor in the appropriate level and style of engagement needed to manage those relationships.

Regardless of tools and techniques used by individual BAs or organisations, and whether from a project or organisational perspective, it is accepted that combining different perspectives from a diverse stakeholder community helps in achieving a more holistic approach to delivering change. This supports early identification of risks and challenges, which allows for these to be managed and mitigated effectively.

Often our focus when gathering stakeholder viewpoints is around providing an equal opportunity for people to have their say. Commonly this involves the utilisation of workshops or focus groups which can provide an opportunity to bring together diverse groups and invite them to contribute.

So, if we already understand these viewpoints as being important and are providing forums for people with different perspectives to have an equal opportunity to participate and put their views forward – what's the issue?

For me the shift has come with the emergence of the design thinking approach and increased focus on

Customer Experience (CX) and User Experience (UX). I have found in my own organisation that we often group our stakeholders by business areas, job roles or grades and whilst this does invite a divergence of experiences it perhaps doesn't go far enough in enabling us to understand the individuals behind the formal structures.

Whilst equality is about providing the same resources or opportunities to all, an ***equitable*** approach to stakeholder management requires consideration of the different needs of our stakeholders and understands some will need to be treated differently and provided with different resources. It is about recognising that equal doesn't mean fair. In contrast, ***stakeholder equity*** allows us to take a more personalised approach to how we build and maintain relationships and hopefully helps us to forge more inclusive outcomes.

Re-Shaping Stakeholder Analysis: Equity Over Equality

In order to try and adopt this mindset myself and within my own team, we have begun to reshape the way that we address stakeholder analysis and look at how we can diversify, co-create and personalise our approach:

Diversify: We have embraced the variety of different toolkits available to BAs to allow us to identify stakeholders and explore both the impacts and opportunities of a change. Whilst techniques such as the stakeholder wheel and power/influence grids continue to be useful there are other approaches that can complement and build upon these. Techniques such as personas and user journeys do not have to be purely the domain of user researchers and can be used to provide insight into the lived experience of users as they interact with particular products or services.

Personas, for example, can be used to create perspectives around those groups who may be under-represented in the main stakeholder categories and consequently help us to focus on different aspects of accessibility.

Co-Create: Stakeholder identification outcomes can be strengthened through sharing and inviting others to evaluate whether we have really considered all of the relevant groups. Working with the wider project team to review and contribute to our work can ensure that everyone has a deeper understanding of who the key stakeholders are and what their motivations might be. In addition, individual stakeholders themselves can be invited to comment on the type of engagement that they find most productive.

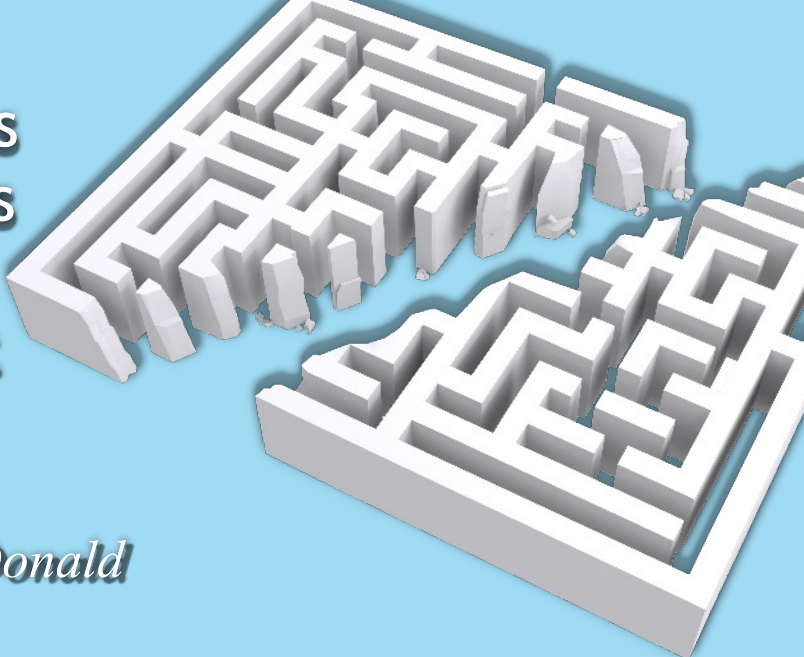
Personalise: Lastly, it's just accepting that one size does not fit all, and it's okay to have a divergence in our plans to cater for a set of needs that may only relate to a small group of people. This could be a group of users who we have identified as being more resistant or anxious about a change and so need additional engagement. This could involve using one to one interviews to support stakeholders who struggle to engage in larger groups because of hearing or speech impairments, or perhaps it's simply offering hybrid options for workshops to accommodate those who may not have the same access to technology to participate in a purely virtual event.

When utilising workshops or focus groups, active listening and strong facilitation skills can go some way to ensuring that we manage the voices in the room and call out those who might be struggling to be heard against more confident and outspoken participants, but, thought could and should be given to how we can tailor group sessions to incorporate a mixture of techniques and exercises that might appeal to different personality types.

In conclusion, there is no fixed template to achieve equity and perhaps no way to ensure that this is achieved all of the time but the thought and the effort to move forward in this space can only support richer relationships with our stakeholders and promote a more inclusive culture which in turn can allow us to achieve more quality outputs.

Helen has been a BA for over 10 years and currently leads the BA function for the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) Chief Information Office. She is passionate about learning and advancing in her own role and supporting others to do the same. You can contact Helen on LinkedIn at www.linkedin.com/in/helen-holder-a765354b

Business Analysts Can Be Product People



Kent McDonald

Are you a business analyst who wonders what your career will look like in three to five years?

Is your company undergoing an agile/digital/product transformation leading people to believe that "we don't need business analysts anymore?"

Do you really enjoy business analysis but feel like the only way to get the compensation you deserve is by taking a new job with a different title?

As I first noted back in 2017, product management roles offer a viable career path for business analysts. This path is especially relevant for business analysts who currently work on custom software development projects in their current role.

Here are the stories of four people who shifted from business analysis to product management.

Lessons Learned from BAs who are now product people

Don't worry about the title, focus on your skills

Stephanie Cooper started out as a data analyst at an IT Consulting firm where she taught herself SQL. After a few months, the company had a business analyst spot open on their tech side so she moved over to that role.

After a few years as a business analyst, she wanted to have a bigger impact on her business and have a bigger vision of her product. She felt that shifting from business analyst to product manager would allow her to do that.

To make that switch, Stephanie started looking for product management roles outside of her company. To overcome the challenge of not having an official product management title before, she leaned into the skills she brought to the table, not necessarily the title. The skills came from her business analyst experience including working through requirements with customers, and working with API integrations.

Stephanie's advice to business analysts looking to move to product management is this: "Don't doubt yourself in the skills that you have. Look at the skills that you have. Don't worry about your title, worry about the skills that you have and see what transitions over."

Explain how your BA experience applies to product management

Stephanie Lewandowski got her business analyst experience working in the business analysis practice of an agile technology firm. While in the business analysis practice she became practice lead and expanded the practice to include aspects such as process analysts, product managers, strategists and data analysts.

Stephanie's move to product management initially came when she expanded the business analysis practice, followed by leaving consulting to become a practising product manager. She made the move to product manager to get out of consulting and because she found that the business analyst role seems to "tap out" at some point and the product management role is higher on the organisational chart and includes more responsibility.

During her search for a product management role, hiring managers weren't clear on how the business analyst role at a consulting agency performed the same as product managers within an organisation. She clarified the product ownership and product management techniques she used, but the interviewers responded with "but you haven't managed a product in our industry."

Fortunately, when Stephanie got her first product management role, she found out she was doing "more than what they expected for an experienced product manager."

That experience leads Stephanie to observe that business analysis and product management are very similar from a skill set perspective. The difference comes in the scope of responsibilities for the two roles.

Stephanie's advice for landing a product management role is to explain how what you've done as a business analyst matches the abilities the product management job is looking for. For example, if the particular role you're trying to get is looking for the ability to put together roadmaps, be prepared to "explain how you've done that before and communicated them to a wide range of audiences."

Discovery should be iterative

Beth McHugh's path toward product management included several roles such as a stint as a business analyst/developer, a move to user experience then a move to product management.

Looking back on her various roles Beth identified the flexibility of the business analyst role as an enormous benefit. The various processes she analysed exposed her to a variety of situations that helped her refine her interests and decide her career path.

When she transitioned into a product management role, she found she got the most benefit from having worked with a product manager. That experience helped her understand “what he was doing and how he approached things and what his role was because I honestly don't think a lot of people understand what product management is.”

Beth’s advice for business analysts moving into product management is to keep the proper perspective on discovery and research. Instead of trying to do all of your research at the beginning of a new effort, make it more iterative and do it in increments. You won’t find all the answers during an “analysis phase” so you should view research work as a way of answering questions and get direction throughout the entire initiative.

Acquire additional skills while in your BA role

Muhammed Zaulifqar had a variety of product owner and product lead roles over the course of 3 - 4 years which he considers “technically” business analyst roles.

While in those roles he began “pushing for user feedback, tracking analytics, user discovery to better understand personas, GTM strategy & a more focused product vision.” Those extra activities led to additional responsibilities and eventually a move into the product management role.

Muhammed made the move to product management because he saw the product manager role as an opportunity to empower users more than he could as a BA.

Muhammed’s advice to business analysts looking to move into product management is to pick up the additional skills you’ll need as a product manager while still in the business analyst role. “This could be technical, strategy, commercial, user experience (UX), data querying, learning new tools, etc. Whatever you do, think about how it will enable you to empower your users.”

Do you want to be a product person?

If you answered “yes” to one or more of the questions in the intro, it may be time to learn how to apply your existing skills in a product setting and pick up additional product management skills.

That collection of skills will come in handy whether you’re joining a software product company, or you’re working on internal products - custom developed software that your organisation builds for itself.

Kent J McDonald writes about and practices software product management. He has product development experience in several industries, including retail, fintech, agriculture, financial services, health insurance, nonprofit, and automotive. Kent practices his craft with various product teams and provides just-in-time resources for product people at insideproduct.co and Product Collective.

How Is Professional Development like Salad Dressing?

Emily Tom

In your workplace, have you ever noticed the executive who is focused on strategic aspects of the job but doesn't communicate well? Or how about the project manager who is great with people but gets led down the wrong path by the technical team? Or how about the workshop facilitator who spends more time taking notes than coming back to the stakeholders with thoughtful analysis. Are you one of these people?

No one intends to do their job poorly, but I wonder if it would help advance our careers if our professional development (PD) plans were a more intentional, balanced mix of skills and knowledge.

A Balanced Mix

Some of you may know that I'm a bit of a foodie, so I often use food analogies when I work. I have thought about PD and how it's like homemade salad dressing. Generally, salad dressing is part acid (e.g. vinegar, lemon juice), part oil and part flavourings. With just these three components, there are endless kinds of salad dressing you can make. Go overboard on one of these components and it may be too acidic or bland.

I think of PD in three general categories (ingredients): a) technical domains, b) business domains and c) soft skills. Just like salad dressing, each one of us needs to think about what is the appropriate mix of PD that we need to do our job well.

Of course, we need to take the training that is required by our organisations such as ethics training, data protection training, security training etc. But this is not enough to help us do our specific job. Taking a cookie-cutter learning plan for someone who is in the same role as you (e.g. "business analyst", "project manager", "product owner") isn't sufficient either.

This is where we can map the different roles and PD categories. People generally fall into one of these roles at a given point in time:

- Strategic – defining the organisation's mission, vision, and strategy
- Tactical – executing solutions to meet the mission, vision and strategy
- Operational – performing day-to-day functions to conduct the business
- Facilitator – bringing together the appropriate stakeholders to define a problem/solution; training and change management to apply the solution

Then these roles can be mapped to the three PD categories as follows:

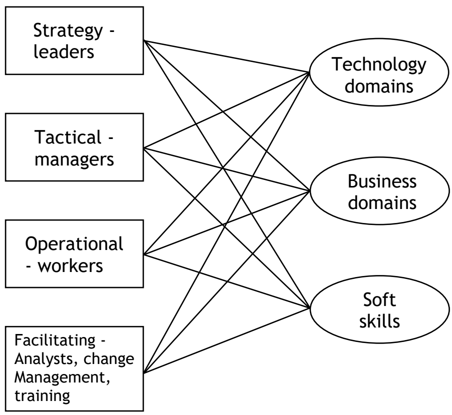


Figure 1 Role - Professional Development Mapping

At first this might imply that everybody needs to know everything, but of course in reality this is absolutely not the case—different roles will need a slightly different mix of skills. The table below describes the mappings:

Type of Role	Technical Training	Business Domain Training	Soft Skills Training
Strategic (e.g. C-level)	Needs to know the trends, benefits, risks, benchmarks. E.g. Awareness of cyber-security threats and impact on business	Needs general knowledge about many domains plus deep knowledge about their own domains. E.g. Understanding regulations, relevant domains such as insurance/finance/ underwriting etc.	Must build and maintain strength in these areas to be able to work with people. E.g. Negotiation skills, communications skills, emotional intelligence
Tactical (e.g. Project Managers, Developers)	Needs specific technical knowledge to perform own tasks plus general knowledge of any technical solutions they are implementing. E.g. How to use management and reporting tools such as MS. Project, JIRA. Plus need to understand the scope and purpose of the technology solutions that their team is implementing.	Needs a deep understanding of the business affected by the solution. E.g. Business impact of e-invoicing.	Needs to be able to communicate with a large variety of stakeholders to effect change. E.g. Motivational skills, how to give good feedback, communicating project objectives/ issues
Operational (e.g. People perform the work processes)	Needs specific technical knowledge to perform own tasks. E.g. How to approve e-invoices for payment	Needs a deep knowledge of their own domain plus knowledge of related affected domains. E.g. How Accounts Payable and Procurement work together	Needs to have these skills to be a team player, to communicate their perspective, to get buy-in E.g. Negotiation skills, training others
Facilitating (e.g. business analysis, change management, trainers)	Needs knowledge on how to apply technical solutions to solve a problem and their impact on stakeholders. E.g. What are the transition requirements for converting a manual process to an automated process	Needs medium-depth knowledge about many business domains (broad range) so they understand processes and terminology. E.g. Finance, government, manufacturing, telecom, healthcare, environment.	This is a critical skillset for this type of role. E.g. Being able to communicate the value proposition, stakeholder empathy

Table 1 Role - Professional Development Mapping Descriptions

As you can see, every role needs to have a balanced mix of PD for their job. The general organisation training or cookie-cutter role learning plans don't address this mapping. You will need to reflect on your own skills and knowledge, do your own gap analysis and determine what is the custom PD mix that you need.

If you consider yourself a business person, you do not need to shun technology, and if you are a technology person, you do not need to shun business domains. You need just enough of the appropriate training in these domains to be productive in your job and your career.

Yet, everyone needs soft skills because we all need to work together and have the ability to communicate with our teammates.

Conclusion

In today's knowledge economy, where you may transition from one job to the next, one employer to the next, you need to take control of your own learning. Don't become obsolete. You know what your own gaps are and what skills and knowledge you need to be successful. Or reach out to a mentor who can provide guidance and share their experiences and lessons learned.

PD is personal. You cannot use a generic, cookie-cutter learning plan because you are likely coming from a different starting point than everyone else. Also, you know what you need to do the job – in what areas are you lacking confidence? Develop skills to boost your confidence.

Remember that your PD plan needs to be a combination of technical, business and soft skills. If you go overboard in one category and overlook another, it just may ruin your salad. Try different things and see what works. After all, variety is the spice of life.

Figure 2 Author's Spice Drawer

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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capsifi

Strategy, not technology, drives digital transformation

Your business model is your companies' most important strategic asset.

The truth is that many of the worlds leading companies were not engineered for the digital world. Their systems are outdated, operations complex, processes inefficient, business knowledge fragmented and their value proposition rapidly losing its lustre. Without a complete overhaul of their business model, no amount of digital technology will save them.

Unfortunately organisations have not tended to invest in their business model as an asset. This lack of a single source of unambiguous truth becomes particularly challenging when it comes time to change. Most large-scale transformations require a considerable exercise in "business archaeology", wasting unnecessary resources on discovery and analysis of the as-is situation and the relative maturity of their business capabilities. The lack of a dynamic, enduring, incrementally evolving view of the consolidated business model constrains decision-making, limits competitiveness and inhibits business agility.

For business analysis professionals, this presents a significant opportunity. As we move on from the era of process automation and managing long-term capital investments to an ongoing focus on business model innovation, the business analyst and the business architect become pivotal roles as custodians of the most important core strategic asset in a digital business – the business model.

The Capsifi Digital Business platform enables a connected enterprise establishing the business operating model as a core startegic asset.

We've created an eBook especially for BA's. Explore how business architecture & customer-driven design are key enablers of Business Model Innovation and learn to leverage agile analysis techniques to drive clear value propositions.

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How to Succeed as a Solo BA

Thando Jacobs

I am a lone wolf.

For a large part of my career, I've been the only BA in my team. It's great because I do things my way and work within my own systems using tools and techniques that resonate with me the most. Plus, I've learnt to be a self-motivated self-starter in such a way my line manager doesn't even have to *manage* me.

Being the only BA is great, but every rose has thorns. For example, I don't have the option to huddle with other BAs to brainstorm ideas to tackle problems. Instead, I pull out my sticky notes, whiteboard and pens to brain dump my thoughts. Occasionally, I talk to myself too.

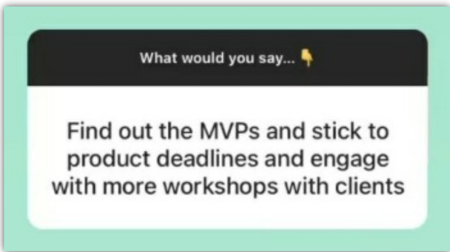
But every wolf needs a pack so I joined a community called Young Business Analysts (YBA). YBA is an online community for young BAs providing a safe space to connect with each other and grow in our skills and knowledge so we can be confident in our careers. Plus, it's run by young BAs!

I look after the social media marketing for YBA and I asked our members on Instagram what they would advise for a solo BA to succeed in their role.

This is what they said.

All pictures are snippets from the [Instagram Stories of the Young Business Analysts page](#).

Have A Gameplan



"Find out the Minimum Viable Products (MVPs) and stick to product deadlines and engage with more workshops with clients"

This is solid practical advice.

I like to think of projects like a moving train that is heading towards the desired destination. I see this advice as learning to jump onto the moving train, getting on board to perform your duties effectively.

Highlighting the last point, it is valuable to engage more. There can be times when we focus on the analysis and neglect engaging with clients and other stakeholders. To quote the Manifesto for Agile Software Development, we should place greater value on individuals and interactions over processes and tools. There can be times when we focus on the analysis and neglect engaging with clients and other stakeholders.

Show Your Value

"Own it, show the team what value you bring!"

As BAs, we are highly valuable.

We bring clarity to the needs of the customers and the business and help senior stakeholders agree on the desired future state. We advocate for the needs of the business and often act as the voice of the customer to ensure the project achieves its goals. Plus, we manage the requirements, provide the details needed by solution developers and we translate the complex ideas and concepts into a simple format so the problem to be solved and the proposed solution are well understood.

The truth is, you already know that, so you don't need me to tell you what you do. Follow the advice from our members and actively show your team the value you bring!

Learn As Much As You Can

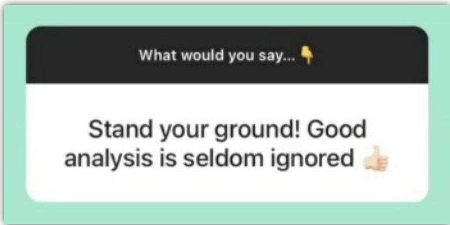
"You got a great opportunity to learn more!! Stay focussed!!"

Get ready for a fun ride.

As a solo BA, you'll have so many opportunities to be involved in projects that will teach you a lot. You have the opportunity to develop in-depth knowledge about the processes and operations within the organisation. As well as learning more about the industry/domain, the organisation and its customers.

It's important to identify what you need to learn and learn it as fast as you can. Taking action without investing time in learning first can lead to poor decision-making and ineffective analysis. You can utilise the POPIT™ model to identify the key things you need to learn in each business area.

Stand Your Ground



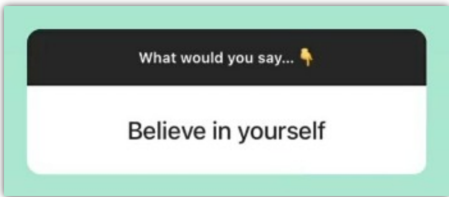
"Stand your ground! Good analysis is seldom ignored"

Ultimately, you performed the analysis and you own the requirements.

This puts you in a position of authority to know what may work and what may not work. There will be times when you have to challenge stakeholders or question decision-makers. Your analysis may uncover more problems to be solved or highlight the complexity of implementing the solution.

Take our member's advice and learn to stand your ground because *"good analysis is seldom ignored"*.

Believe In Yourself



"Believe in yourself"

I love this one!

Believing in yourself means having confidence in your own capabilities. As a fellow solo BA, I know too well how imposter syndrome can cloud your self-belief and lead you to second guess your every move.

One of the best ways to build confidence is to identify your strengths and find ways to incorporate them into what you do every day. Or, proactively check in with your team on anything you can help them with. Helping others boosts your confidence.

Conclusion

The core tips to succeed as a solo BA are:

- Have a gameplan
- Show the value you bring to the team
- Learn as much as you can
- Stand your ground when necessary to promote value for the business/ customer
- Believe in yourself

If you've enjoyed what our members had to say and it sounds like YBA is for you then feel free to join us. We'd love to have you!

Thando is a Business Analyst at the London Stock Exchange Group. He's also part of the leadership team at Young Business Analysts leading their marketing activities.

Connect with Thando on LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/thandojacobs

Join the Young Business Analysts LinkedIn Group: www.linkedin.com/groups/8970429

Stay out of the Tech: Why Conversational Development is a More Human Approach

Sue Cornish

I believe it's time to get a bit radical, maybe even tear up some pages of the rule book. As business analysts we are taught from the start about the importance of writing detailed requirements, the word "atomic" is often used to describe the need to have beautifully formed singular requirements. It is sometimes assumed that in order to be "atomic" that requirements must have an immense level of technical information added to them. With this technical detail added, we then hand requirements over to our developers and off they go, hopefully delivering *exactly* what we have specified….

Let's stop and reflect for a minute: whilst BAs are deeply engaged in writing all those requirements, are we getting too bogged down in the detail and is this stopping us and the developers designing being able to get creative and build better systems? Could technical-heavy requirements be leaving our developers hamstrung, with no ability to use their own creativity?

Don't Constrain The Solution Too Early

Over the last couple of years, I've been engaged in a major IT transformation project which has involved building an enormous technical system from the ground up, module by module. To start with I was creating very detailed requirements in the form of user stories, my acceptance criteria was written with a high level of technical detail, right down to telling the developers what field types to use. During a requirements refinement session one day one of my development colleagues said, "Sue can you stop specifying what field types we should use, it's not necessary, we know what will work best, all you need to do is tell us what the problem is". At this stage I had a lightbulb moment, I'd been merrily writing requirements and chucking them over the fence to the developers without stopping to think about the bigger picture or allowing the developers to get creative.

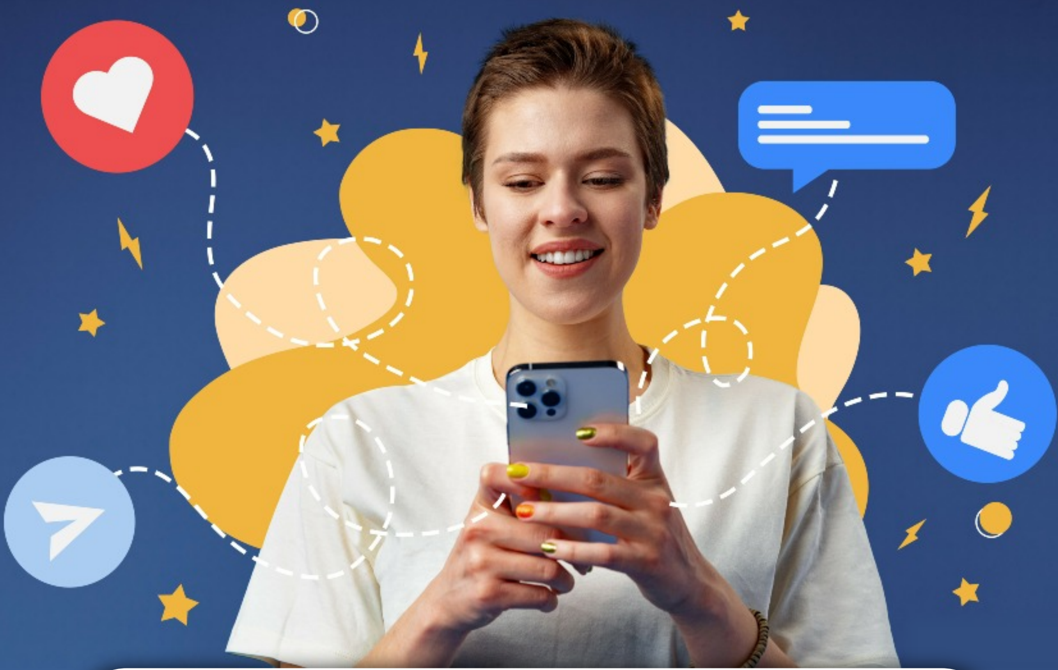
At this point I hit the stop button, reassessed what I was doing and thought about how getting bogged down in technical detail was limiting us. I was "telling" the developers what to do in a solution that they were experts in, this was leading to us missing out on opportunities to look at new functionality and develop solutions that not only added value but that were forward thinking. By focussing on the business need, and keeping things technically agnostic, this pattern can be avoided.

Fear Of Ambiguity

This is where it probably gets a bit scary for BAs, what I did next was to start creating requirements with less technical detail, instead focussing more on the problem the business was describing and provided a much vaguer and at times ambiguous set of acceptance criteria and detail. I adopted visual methods of communicating the requirements, including screen mock ups of my "vision", and these were especially useful in helping business stakeholders understand what was possible. All of this forced me to engage more with the developers because we needed to work together to explore options and work out what would work best. We had many conversations, working together, involving the users more and bouncing ideas off each other.

What this change has left us with now is a good and collaborative approach to software development. We work as one unified team who have got to know each other well and who work together to explore options, refine requirements, deliver value and ultimately have a lot of fun doing it. The conversational approach focuses on the fact we are all humans and that when we talk to each other we work better, create a clear and shared understanding, and share the load and deliver better outcomes.

Sue is the systems transformation and engagement manager at bpha and a practising business analyst, you can contact her on LinkedIn linkedin.com/in/susan-shirley-cornish



VIEWPOINTS

On social media, we posed the question
"What advice would you give to someone just starting out in business analysis?"

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

A huge thanks to everyone who contributed to this editions' bumper Viewpoints section.

Find a mentor or network of BAs for guidance and support. It's understandable to feel uncertain in any new role - having someone there to talk to and offer practical advice will ease that, as well as help you to adapt and grow your practice.

Naomi Berryman

Ask questions! Ask about everything, there's no such thing as a stupid question - you'll learn more and it develops a habit you'll need to be a successful BA. Pay attention to other BAs and absorb what they do in workshops and meetings to identify what traits and behaviours make a great BA. Don't pretend to be anyone but yourself - authenticity helps you build better and more productive working relationships, and you'll begin creating your personal brand which will make you stand out in the workplace. Prioritise learning and take the time to reflect on what you're learning - don't rush, everything will fall into place with time and practise!

When you're experiencing self-doubt, speak to your mentors/ peers, you'll realise everyone feels like that at the beginning and you'll learn how to overcome self-doubt, which will give you the belief in yourself to succeed.

Lauren Gascoigne

When I first started I made the mistake of rushing into analysis to show/prove that I know my stuff and it was a huge mistake. I advise prioritising learning initially because knowledge enables you to be an effective BA. Learn why the project exists and what it's trying to achieve. Learn about the organisation and the way things work within it. Learn how the teams work and collaborate. Learn the project methodologies used and the available tools the project teams use. To speed up this learning period, identify a couple of BAs who can be your unofficial mentors to guide you through.

Thando Jacobs

My advice would be to listen. Listen more than you speak. Get really good at asking insightful questions and never, ever think something is a stupid question. If you have the question in your mind, you can be sure at least one other person in the room has the same one! Also remember people generally like talking about their job, their challenges and what would make their life easier.

Getting used to reading body language is also crucial to getting the full picture of a situation.

Finally, I would say to try to be empathetic - as BAs we are always being launched head first into new situations that need us to get our head around things quickly so to do this we need to keep stakeholders on side.

Brenda Duffy

Don't be afraid to make mistakes and to ask the simple questions (they're often the ones people have forgotten to think about because they seem too obvious!)

Helen Holder

Ensure the problem statement is understood and agreed by all stakeholders involved. This also helps validate your initial stakeholder matrix.

Farrah Pearson

Listen, and then listen differently.

For most change projects there'll be a range of views held by your stakeholders which you will take time to understand. As you do that it's important to observe the way they are feeling. How do they express themselves? Does it give you a clue to their emotional connection to the project?

Are they excited? Why? An obvious answer might be because of the financial savings expected, but maybe it's because they think the team structure might change for the better...

Are they dismissive? Why might that be? Not interested? Or maybe they've seen it all before and have some good insight into potential pitfalls...

If you consider the why behind people's emotional responses, you may just discover a whole new understanding of the project and a clearer view of what it's important to deliver.

Kate Stephens

There's no such thing as a stupid question... Unless you ask it too late.

In the past I've made the mistake of joining a new team/project and being afraid to ask 'stupid' questions, which I learned the hard way, are much more difficult to ask when you have been working on something for a while and still don't know the answer! Don't assume that everyone else already knows the answers - quite often the 'simple' questions can lead to wider and important conversations, and not clarifying everyone's understanding can lead to issues later in a project.

Jenny Loren

Find yourself a mentor and demand exposure to a variety of work alongside your training. Being a BA is about more than learning 123 techniques. It's about knowing when to apply them, which you will learn through continually being exposed to different types of work and working alongside experienced BAs.

Ensure you understand that BA knowledge is one part of the jigsaw. Understand your business domain and find the techniques that would help you understand a completely different domain. Investigate the wider trends in the IT industry – what is your opinion on a BA having no part to play in Scrum and just how does a BA work with a Product Owner? Understand that being a BA means being curious and unleash that skill by exploring the wider community in which the BA profession plays such a key role.

Frances Eccles

I'd offer two tips to new BA's - read and relax. Read everything you can - from publications by IIBA and BCS to blogs from real world BAs and magazines like BA Digest, network and read profiles and posts on sites like LinkedIn. Take stock of what you know to build your confidence and dive deeper into things that are new. BA work requires agility and constant learning. Relax - if you're on this path, you're in the right place. It isn't for everyone, but if it's for you, you know it.

Kathleen Schwaber

Ensure you are inserted in a correct environment. People in your company need to know what a business analyst is and how it can be useful. If they are unsure, drive their expectations.

Do not count on templates and models, follow your way. Less is more, but only in the amount of notes and documents you prepare. Go in detail as much as possible and from there define the milestones, never adapt facts to an idea, good ideas always come from the study of the exceptions.

Relationships are important, make sure to have access to people, resources and supportive sponsors.

Last but not least, ask for a "start kit": never accept the assumption that "you will understand with experience". If it is not clear from the start, there is something wrong. If your company doesn't give you all this, look around or push for a change.

Claudio Pedrazzini

The Difficult Stakeholder (Customer)

René Lamens

When I read about this opportunity to write an article for BA Digest, I immediately remembered a situation at work where I had to deal with difficult stakeholders. The story starts when, after being a technical IT consultant for almost 20 years, I changed jobs and became a business analyst for one of the biggest oil refineries in Europe. The refinery consisted of five main factories, each with their own Information Management Focal Point (IMFP). Each of these IMFPs was responsible for supporting the IT of the workers. This included making sure new globally rolled out software was introduced without problems.

Each week key stakeholders within these IMFPs would have a meeting with the IT business systems manager who was my boss. This role acted as the interface to the global IT organisation, to discuss and understand business stakeholders' problems and frustrations with IT.

So what's the connection with difficult stakeholders? Well in the first week in my role as a BA, I was told to take over the meetings with these stakeholders because my boss could not handle the criticism any longer and had simply stopped attending them. My boss probably thought René is an experienced business analyst with the right people skills, he can handle that?! So with a blank sheet and not knowing what to expect, I planned the new series of meetings with stakeholders who I will nickname "Mr. Bully", "Mr. Know-it-all", "Mr. Complaint", "Mr. Whiner" and "Mr. Quiet". As you might have guessed these are not their real names but they do represent how I perceived their character at the time.

Soon I learned that Mr. Bully was the loud mouth, who would grab every opportunity to threaten escalation if things did not go his way. He would act in a dismissive way, saying things like "we make the money for the company and IT is inferior to that". Next to Mr. Bully we had Mr. Know-it-all, a guy who had an opinion about every topic tabled even if it was not of his concern. A guy who thinks "I'm bright and you're stupid." Next we had Mr. Complaint, who complained about everything, not a thing was done the right way even to the annoyance of Mr. Bully and Mr. Know-it-all. Mr. Whiner was a bit like Mr. Complaint, although he would keep on whining about decisions and actions that were already signed off and completed. And last but not least there was Mr. Quiet, he would sit and listen and not say a word.

After a few weeks of these meetings I tried to find a common denominator, why were these people so angry and frustrated with IT and the people who worked there? It turned out that the key reason was that they did not trust IT, since IT continually failed to keep its promises. Even worse, new IT stuff was implemented without consultation and the people in the factories spent more time trying to get IT to work instead of doing what they were hired for.

Armed with this knowledge, I tasked myself to regain trust with these people so that they would see IT as a valuable asset instead of an unavoidable pain. The first thing I did was to introduce a new set of rules of engagement for the meetings. We agreed that we would listen to each other and that everyone gets an equal share of the time to express their concerns and issues. The next thing we did was to prioritise and clean up the issue list, assigning each with their own risk profile. Crucially, we deliberately restructured the meetings and agreed that we would have an open and honest discussion without any back-stabbing.

The stakeholder who I had perceived as a "bully" was far more cooperative once he had taken on several responsibilities, and he became an excellent owner of the issue list. It was his task to keep the issue list up-to-date and clean, and this gave him the control he needed.

To address the concerns of the stakeholder who I had perceived as Mr. "Know-it-All" I invited guests to the meetings with specific subject matter expertise. These people had the knowledge and ability to have a meaningful discussion with the group and address any specific questions. This also turned out to be the solution to get Mr. Complaint on the right track. By showing the bigger picture, supported by the subject matter experts, Mr Complaint took a more holistic view and realised there were bigger problems to solve.

The new rules and structure of the meeting transformed the meeting and the relationship with these stakeholders. Now you might think this was done in a couple of weeks but changes like this require time. In this case, the first signs of improvement only showed after a couple of months. It just takes time to regain trust. I think it's really important to acknowledge people's frustrations, use humour to break the ice and tension, and to be honest and open in the discussions you have with your stakeholders. In my opinion you first need to invest to (re)establish trust in order to have people work with you to solve any issues at hand. That's why I'm convinced that having the right people skills is of utmost importance for a business analyst, maybe even more than the business analysis techniques, tools, frameworks and methodologies.

René is a retired lead business analyst who worked for 35 years for Shell. He started as a mainframe operator and finished as an agile coach. Currently he is a steerco member for the International Institute for Business Analysis (IIBA®) Dutch Chapter.

Stop Being an Owl. Start Being a Leader

Jenn Bedell

I was recently visiting a friend's cottage for a "girls" weekend. Aside from the obvious camaraderie, a notable part of a girls weekend is the team approach to everything. If a meal needs to be cooked, it gets cooked. If dishes need to be washed they get washed. If drinks need to be poured (and this happens often), they get poured. Although there was advanced planning to ensure we had enough supplies, we didn't assign tasks. We all know stuff needs to be done and it always gets done—by the person or persons who are inclined to do so at any given time.

Approaching a project this same way is not advisable. Can you imagine the kick-off session for a project where the sponsor shows up with a basket full of login IDs and passwords, but the team needs to randomly determine who uses each one and when? This example is extreme and not likely to occur, but there will be some things that slip through and go unassigned.

In a project or operational role, we may hear phrases like “who is responsible for tracking risks?” Or “who was supposed to follow up on the last meeting?” Although, it is wise to get clarification at times, we need to be careful that we don't become owls who constantly ask "who?" If the response to these questions is "not sure", then YOU are responsible.

Here are a few examples of project scenarios we discussed when I presented this topic at the Building Business Capability Conference (BBC) in July 2022:

1. Unclear project goals
2. Nobody managing risks
3. Stakeholders not available
4. Not enough resources
5. Unrealistic deadlines

Although these may not all seem like issues within the business analyst role on a project, everyone on the project is a stakeholder in its success. As a business analyst, how would you handle these project scenarios?

1. Unclear Project Goals

You have joined a project in flight and cannot find the project goals. You have asked for clarification on the purpose and objectives so that you can align your work to them. However, nobody can give you a clear answer.

One Possible Solution: Create your own project objectives and validate them with the project sponsor. Once you have confirmation, share them with the team. Now everyone is aware of the main objectives so that decisions and direction can be aligned.

2. Nobody Managing Risks

Your project is moving along as planned and the team is working well together. As you are reviewing requirements, you realise that a stakeholder group was not consulted. This poses a risk that the solution may not meet the needs of all stakeholders. How will you make sure that this is addressed? You could just manage it on your own, but your role is focused in other areas.

One Possible Solution: Consult with your project manager. Work together to create a centralised risk register so that anyone on the team can log risks. Be sure to clarify the difference between a risk and an issue as many teams use different definitions.

3. Stakeholders Not Available

You've been assigned a specific topic and need to understand the current state so that you can help the business identify their needs. But, the people with the information are busy with their regular jobs and can't free up time to work with you.

One Possible Solution: Review any available documentation and create a starting point of requirements to review with your stakeholders. Schedule short regular calls that they can more easily fit into their day. Agree on a central repository for Q&A where you can log your questions and they can provide answers as time permits. This will not replace the need for live meetings, but it shows that you respect their time and it can reduce the number of meetings required.

4. Not Enough Resources

You find yourself working extra hours to keep up with the amount of work needed to meet your project timelines and you know there is not enough budget to add resources. This is not sustainable and may lead to missed time for illness, if not addressed.

One Possible Solution: The project manager is your friend! Make them aware of the situation by presenting options. This is where the analysis 'hat' comes in handy. Could the timelines be extended? Could the scope be reduced? Even without an official scope reduction, a review of the project objectives almost always leads to ability to reduce the scope of individual requirements. Those pennies add up to time saved. Of course, you will need to assure your stakeholders that their requests are not forgotten and they will be added to the backlog.

5. Unrealistic Deadlines

This is often the result of not having enough resources, but not always. Adding resources is not always an option. Remember that 9 women cannot have a baby in 1 month. How can you manage your own work when you know there is a high risk of missing the deadline?

One Possible Solution: Check with the project manager and/or project sponsor about the firmness of the deadline. External factors may have changed allowing flexibility. If there is still no flexibility, it is time to put on your prioritisation hat. Work with your stakeholders to deprioritise where possible. This will require clear communication that deprioritising does not mean deleting. Stakeholders are more willing to deprioritise if they know when they might have that feature added in future.

Regardless of your title or your role on a project, you are a leader. Leaders take ownership when they see areas for improvement or areas that require attention. As a seasoned BA, this is your role.

What is a leader?

In conclusion, a BA is a leader, often influencing without formal authority. A working definition could be "anyone who acts in a leadership capacity at any given time. One who makes themselves accountable to the success of the team". That certainly includes business analysts. So it's important that we continue to step up!

Jennifer leads the business analysis community for Mariner Innovations as well as speaking internationally at conferences related to business analysis and change management. You can connect with her on LinkedIn

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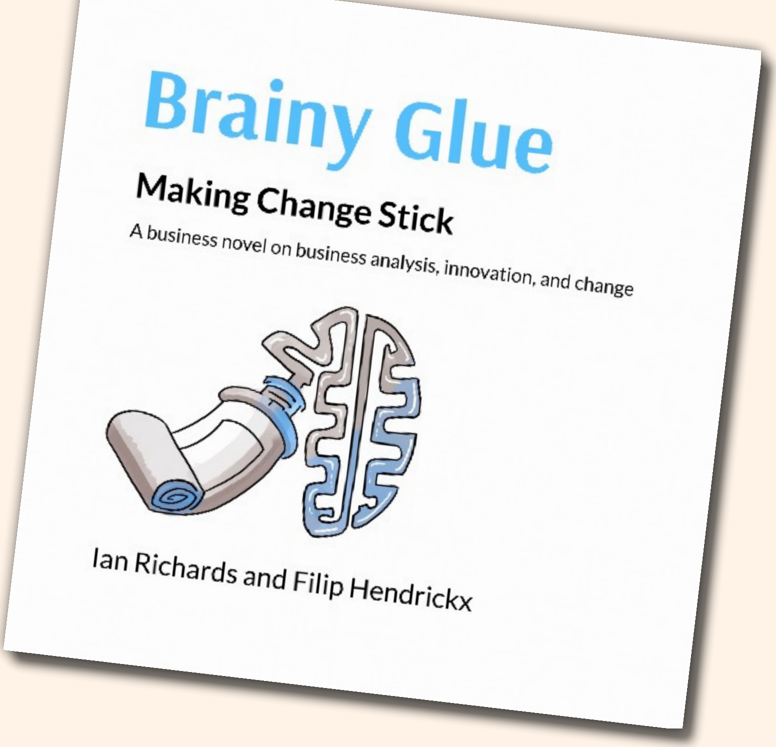

(An excerpt from a business novel on business analysis, innovation and change.)

Infinity Supermarket has been throwing away unsaleable fresh produce at an alarming rate and is now suffering from a social media disaster as a consequence.

To help them out, fictional business analyst Abbie Townsend

applies her own twist on 25 business analysis techniques while working with a range of different characters as she encourages business change from within the organisation. Through stimulating graphics, anecdotes and quotes Ian and Filip articulate the role and value that business analysis brings to the organisation in an informative and enjoyable way.

We catch up with the story at chapter 14 where Abbie and her wannabe BA, Jane Dawson,

host a creativity and innovation session with varying stakeholders within the supermarket to develop ideas on how the supermarket can throw away less fresh fruit and vegetables. At this stage, Abbie feels that although they had some good ideas by using more traditional techniques, she could just obtain a few more ideas by using SCAMPER.

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"I would like to try one more exercise called **SCAMPER**," Abbie said, conscious of Jane's quizzical looks as this was off-piste from what they had discussed.

"SCAMPER is an acronym for Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Magnify/Minify, Put to another use, Eliminate and Reverse. It is normally reserved for moments where we are stuck for inspiration, which I know isn't the case today as we have lots of ideas, but I would like to try it anyway. I will give you some examples along the way."

"So the idea is ..." Abbie continued, "that the product or service being discussed, products in our case, are assessed against each word to see what we could Substitute, Combine, Adapt etc to see if this gives us any other solution ideas... Get it?" They all confirmed that they understood.

"Right, S for 'Substitute'. An example of this was when Mars noticed that their sales of Mars chocolate bars dipped during the summer. They substituted the nougat for ice cream, and they maintained their sales figures across the two products. So, is there anything that we could substitute to get a better product for the waste?" No one spoke, "Nothing? that's ok, we are not going to get an idea for every letter."

"How about C for 'Combine'? An example of this could be the smelly crayons. Combining smell with crayons is a real winner for kids. Some smell so good they even try to eat them!" Abbie joked.

Charlotte Wilson from the customer perspective team said, "My family spends a fortune on smoothies. How about we combine the fruit with the vegetables and create smoothies?"

"That's a great idea Charlotte," Jane said excitedly, "we also spend a lot of money on healthy drinks at my house."

John Edmunds, one of the forklift drivers from the warehouse said, "Hang on a minute, I am not sure that I would want old gone off fruit and veg in a smoothie."

"John, trust me, these products have not 'gone off', they have just passed their peak quality date," Rachel the shelf stacker interjected. "For example, an apple that is deemed to no longer have enough 'bite' is still perfectly ok for a smoothie. I was astonished when I read an article that said that every year approximately 4.5m tonnes of food is wasted in households across the UK, estimated to be worth around £14bn, which equates to £700 a year for an average family. This is because families throw produce out that is past its sell-by date. Sell-by dates are simply an indication to the store to rotate the stock as we manage such large volumes and, in my opinion, the sell-by dates are often too short. This food is still very edible and I wouldn't have a problem eating most of our fruit and veg that we throw out because it's reached its sell-by date. I'll show you some when we go downstairs."

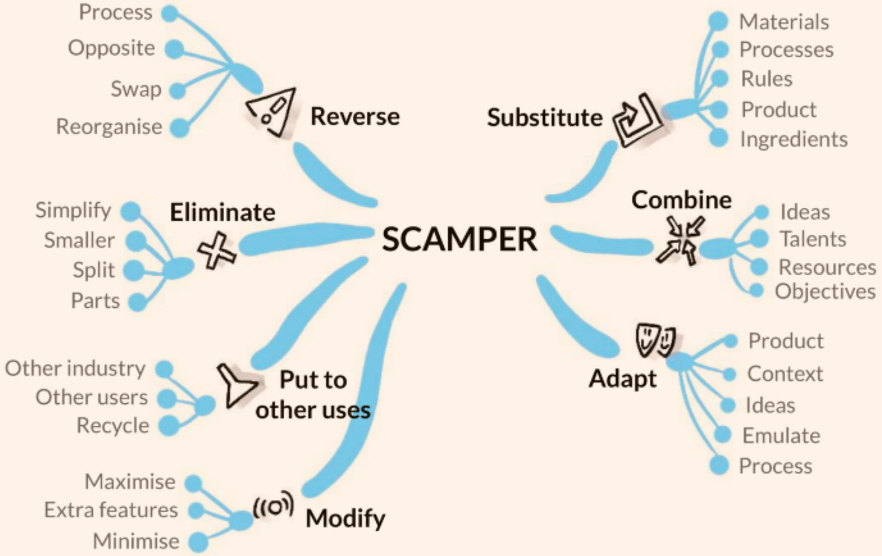
To prevent a discussion on the quality of the fruit and vegetables derailing the exercise, Abbie went through the *remaining words in Scamper, giving real-life examples such as IMAX cinema for 'magnify', iPod Nano for 'minify' and a tyre swing for 'put to another use', to which Jack jokingly volunteered Viagra as a better example, putting a tablet for high blood pressure to a different use, much to everyone's amusement.*

'Eliminate', was illustrated by the example of eliminating wheat from food products to create gluten-free food. Abbie went on to explain, "A great example of the 'Reverse' technique is restaurants. Who remembers when all food was ordered upfront and paid for at the end? Well, this process was reversed by some popular fast-food establishments by getting the customer to pay for the food at the point of order, allowing customers to simply leave the restaurant without needing to find a waiter to pay."

Each letter was interrogated, and a SCAMPER ***Mind Map*** *was drawn, but they all agreed that Charlotte's smoothie idea was top of the list by far.*

The next day…

"Help me carry these." Jack handed Jane and Abbie a selection of fruit juices, syrups and fresh fruit from the store and walked off into the staff kitchen area. Passing a pen and paper to Jane, and careful to follow strict hygiene rules, Jack weighed portions of fruit, and measured juice and syrups and Jane started taking notes. "We can't just try it now surely?" Abbie protested. "Why not?" Jack retorted…



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You will find drama, intrigue, humour and even romance in this unique novel and learn new perspectives on skills in the best way possible: through story-telling!

Join many other BAs worldwide and get your own copy now, as a physical book, PDF or Kindle format from BrainyGlue.com or Amazon (UK, US, NL, …).

__Ian Richards__ is a Director of Business Analysis, who does a lot of work with the wider BA community, including being a member of the BCS BA Leadership team, a member of the Business Analysis Conference Europe and have judged UK BA of the Year for the BCS and IIBA.

__Filip Hendrickx__ loves bridging business analysis and innovation, and mixes both in his work as speaker, trainer, coach and consultant.

As co-founder of the BA & Beyond Conference and IIBA Brussels Chapter president, Filip helps support the BA profession and grow the BA community in and around Belgium.

Can an Introvert Succeed as a BA?

Tracy Mudzviti

We probably all had one teacher at school that we will never forget. Mine was my college economics teacher. We used to look forward to his lessons because he preferred to teach us about anything *other* than economics, spending more than half of the lesson chatting about his life, current news events and philosophy. One day he convinced us to take the Enneagram personality test and report back our results; that was the day my understanding of introversion changed!

If you are an introvert, you will most likely be aware of the internal struggles we face when we are forced out of our comfort zone. Unlike extroverts who are energised by being around people, introverts are energised by being alone. Social interactions can be incredibly draining and anxiety-inducing; whether that's small talk, unexpected gatherings, arguments, talking to strangers, presenting, group activities… the list is endless.

So, can an introvert be a good BA? The BA world is highly interactive, we are constantly being pushed into unfamiliar territories to investigate and discover. Not only do we have to talk to new people, we may also need to persuade them to embrace changes they don't want, manage their expectations and in some cases resolve conflicts. We facilitate workshops which often seem to be dominated by extroverts. This can feel frustrating for introverts in the workshop who may prefer to take time to reflect and analyse before contributing. It almost seems impossible that an introvert can be a good BA. But is this really the case? Before answering this, it is worth exploring introversion further.

When I took the Enneagram personality test I found out that I was a 'type 5' also known as 'the investigator'. This means that I tend towards being an introvert driven by the desire to understand the world and while minimising the need to interact with it. I also found out there were many 'type 5s' who were successful in their careers. Suddenly I realised that being an introvert wasn't such a bad thing.

Here are some key traits of 'The Investigator' according to the Enneagram test, and how they affect the introverted BA:

Thinks Extensively Before Speaking

Usually, introverts gather and process information to build a full picture, understanding the underlying themes and patterns before sharing their ideas. This can become a problem in settings such as meetings where they can be perceived as being passive or slow to think. Sometimes the pressure to contribute an idea during a meeting can make the situation worse for the introvert. But it's important to understand that it is alright to share those 'half-baked' ideas as they can provide useful insights to the wider group. You may also find it helpful to split any big meetings or workshops into two. The first meeting will be for idea gathering, there can be an interval for reflection and further investigation to build the picture and then a second meeting to review your findings. This way you give yourself, and any other introverts present, the opportunity to think without the pressure.

Good Listener

An introvert is unlikely to interrupt anyone who is talking as they tend to prefer to listen to the conversation than to participate in it. This trait can be valuable for the BA as we need to gain a deep understanding of our stakeholders' needs. Good listening skills can help us to fully grasp business processes and dependencies. Where there is uncertainty and confusion, the introvert can remain calm taking time to figure out the best course of action. However, it is important not to fall into the trap of agreeing to everything the other party says to avoid conflict.

Independent

Some of the analysis we do as BAs requires a degree of independent working where we spend a lot of time on tedious work such as analysing large data sets. This is an area that the introverted BA can thrive in but must avoid the temptation to overthink and strive for perfection. In an increasingly agile world the BA needs to focus on initially defining and delivering the minimal valuable product with the understanding that getting early feedback will allow improvements to be progressed.

Conclusion

Although there are hurdles to overcome as an introvert, with a few workarounds and embracing the traits that make us who we are, it is possible to succeed as a BA. In fact, as illustrated above, many of the traits of introverts are useful for BAs. So, if this article resonates with you, rather than being a reluctant introvert, perhaps it is time to 'lean in' and embrace it.

What Is Continual Professional Development? And How Do I Do It?

Pip Hall

Continual Professional Development. C. P. D. Lots of people talk about it; lots of qualifications require it; lots of courses offer it. But what *actually* is it?

In my opinion being aware, alert and actively participating in life means you will get it, whether or not you want to! Some of it will be deliberate, some of it accidental, some of it stealthy, but all of it—your professional and personal life experiences—combine to develop you and that development will consciously and subconsciously inform your thoughts and actions as a professional.

This article encourages you to widen your definition of CPD and see the value that different types of events can contribute.

Deliberate CPD

This is the content that most of us will be most familiar with, and I don't intend to dwell on it here. It's usually undertaken in the workplace (or comparable environment) with fellow professionals in the same or similar industry.

In the case of business analysis, my experience is that this encompasses both skills, methods and tools relating to my being a BA, and also those relating to the domain within which I am working. For example:

- formal training courses to learn new skills or how to use new tools
- informal development opportunities, working with senior or specialist colleagues on more challenging or complex projects, or implementing a new project approach
- self-guided development and training, such as researching a particular topic to aid understanding e.g., legislation and regulation
- webinars and seminars run by professionals or organisations on specific topics e.g. experience of applying a specific technique in a specific situation
- attending, watching or contributing to industry content e.g., Blackmetric's webinars and "Open Mic Night, AssistKD's BA Brew… and so much more…

These are all very valuable sources of growth and, assuming you continue to practice these new skills and tools, will make a significant contribution to your professional development.

Accidental CPD

This is much more subtle and requires a degree of self-awareness and reflection. More likely undertaken outside the workplace, on your own or with your family or social circles, accidental CPD is, in my opinion, *the* most important development for a BA. It's all about building, maintaining and developing relationships, understanding what is happening in the world around you and how you and others could, should or might influence it, and to what end. So how do we identify it? What does it look like?

I've taken a look back over my last week and have picked out a few examples of accidental, but significant, CPD opportunities from my non-work life.

Doing boring housework!

I am a working mum and found myself with a couple of hours to fill. What a treat! I had a number of mundane housework jobs to do, some volunteering tasks to complete, and the inevitable draw of some 'me time'. What did I do? In real life, I did the housework, made a cup of tea, and then awarded myself the rest of the time to relax. I didn't spend any time on the volunteering tasks.

On reflection, in CPD mode, I identified the outcome required by the end of the period available (make the house serviceable for another week), set out what the minimum requirements were to achieve that, prioritised the tasks on my list, made and then executed my plan.

Looking at it in more detail, taking the list of housework to a more granular level, I sorted and put the washing on, cleaned the kitchen and put the dishwasher on, cleaned the bathroom, and dusted, vacuumed and mopped the floor. Not very interesting is it? But, in a reflective CPD world, not only did I prioritise my housework over relaxing, but I prioritised within my housework, planning the order of tasks to maximise my efficiency within the time available and to ensure I ended up in an appropriate place to start my relaxation – I made sure the washing machine and dishwasher were working at the same time as me, and mopped myself into my lounge! Ok, it’s a very basic example but it demonstrates my thinking.

Watching a film

I then watched a film. How often do you reflect on the lessons you could learn from it? I don’t always do it, in fact I rarely do it at the time, but sometimes things occur to me and validate an approach to my work. Mary Poppins, for example, is one of my favourite films. I not only happily sing along to the songs, but also witness the story’s lessons at work at first hand:

- that embracing a positive outlook makes difficult things more manageable (“a spoonful of sugar…”)
- that routines are comforting and predictable and conversely change is hard to understand out of context; that until you understand someone’s worldview you cannot understand their observations and challenges (“the life I lead”)
- that putting someone at ease can lighten a challenging mood or task (“I love to laugh”)

If you don’t know the words already, look up the lyrics (better still, watch the film!) and see if you recognise any more lessons (there are loads). What lessons can we learn from your favourite book or film?

Indulging my hobby

I am an archer and I love spending time on the range, repeatedly shooting arrows into a target. Whilst in the moment, I combine my passion, equipment and technique, and make adjustments to adapt to weather conditions, to score the very best I can. I chase a personal best for no reason other than my sense of satisfaction.

In CPD mode, I am learning that:

- practising my technique makes me better, quicker, stronger and more confident
- improving my technique improves my scores, and that encourages me to push myself into more challenging situations
- visualising my outcome, and focussing on my success criteria, gets results
- monitoring and measuring my performance helps me identify how to improve
- the environment is unpredictable and cannot be controlled; I must control what I can, and be able to adapt to everything else

- not every day is a successful day, but it doesn't mean I've lost my ability
- a poor technique may get results, but they will not continue to get results when the goal posts change

Stealthy CPD

Finally, stealthy CPD. I define this as the development we are 'forced into' as a result of the challenges that life throws at us, for example, situations we come across in family life and parenting, travelling in different cultures and languages, navigating through significant life events, like buying a house, changing jobs, or losing a loved one. These are invariably difficult or complex situations that require thought, persistence and patience and, whether you control the exposure to the environment, and/or the outcome you achieve, the ultimate CPD prizes are the skills and experiences you gain that help you navigate a similar situation in the future.

In my experience, the key skills that are strengthened in this way are 'pausing' and 'persisting'.

Think twice, act once

A variation on the 'measure twice, cut once' rule, 'think twice, act once' is my reminder to engage my confidence and ability to pause, observe the facts, think through and respond to the situation rather than immediately react to the initial trigger whilst in my emotional mind. This is a hugely valuable skill and one that I practise and preach regularly. I always encourage my team and project stakeholders to think – our success is measured by the outcomes we achieve rather than the number of words we speak or type, or the detail of the approach we took. Passion is good, but it needs to be directed and expressed appropriately.

'Rome wasn't built in a day'

I am acutely aware that significant periods of my development have occurred as a result of prolonged challenge and effort, sometimes in adversity where I have not had a choice, and sometimes deliberately where I have chosen to break free from my comfort zone to learn. In each case, the challenge that felt like it was breaking me, provided the ideal conditions for growth – requiring sustained effort to work things out, and hard work to achieve almost imperceptible progress. My reflection has shown me that I have been richly rewarded for my efforts and hard work, but that it was always apparent at the time.

I wonder what will challenge me next? CPD is a daily occurrence, always just around the corner, if you know how to spot it.

Pip Hall is a business analyst at Telent Technology Services Ltd. She is passionate about delivering outcomes, driving continuous improvement, and challenging assumptions that hold individuals and organisations back from embracing change. You can contact her via LinkedIn: linkedin.com/in/pip-hall

Using Group Construct Analysis to Understand Stakeholder Worldviews in Ambiguous Situations, Part 6

Getting Underneath the Surface

Nick de Voil

On 23 August 2022, a train broke down underneath the seabed of the English Channel on its way from France to the UK. After being trapped for several hours, the passengers were evacuated from the train and escaped through the service tunnel. Among the many striking things about this story, I found myself reflecting on how we always talk about "the Channel Tunnel" as if it were a single thing, but actually there are three tunnels. One takes trains from England to France, and one goes in the other direction. The third, through which the fleeing passengers were led, is a smaller tunnel which is linked to the others and is used by engineering staff. It's unobtrusive and works differently from the other tunnels, but they wouldn't be able to function effectively without it. We'll come back to this later.

In previous articles in this series, we learned how to explore the way an individual thinks by eliciting and mapping their *personal construct system*. Business analysts can use this technique to generate a rich, nuanced and complete picture of a stakeholder's mental model.

> In principle, we could try to map the entire construct system of one or more individuals. However, this would be time-consuming and is usually unnecessary.

With Group Construct Analysis (GCA), as with any other modelling technique, it's important to focus our efforts where they will help most. Where is that? Well, in the context of one individual, that means noticing those parts of the construct system which are most relevant and/or remarkable; but the really interesting results with GCA start to come when we look at individuals or groups *interacting with each other*. First, though, we have to look at each individual separately and see what makes them tick. Paradoxically, our analysis of how people interact will only work if we first concentrate on understanding individuals.

During early investigation with stakeholders, draw individual construct maps purely on the basis of what each person has said in one-to-one interviews with you. These maps will be fragmentary and you'll feel far more confident about some parts of them than others. This is normal. Of course, the most useful constructs are often the ones you're most sure about, for example because an individual repeatedly uses words which indicate a particular construct. But you might include additional constructs because you feel they are implied by the other ones on the map. Specialised elicitation activities, like the ones we looked at in article 5, can help you to firm up on these constructs, but you may not have time for that.

Until you've created your first set of individual maps, be sure to focus on one individual at a time. Don't be tempted to add a construct to stakeholder A's map just because stakeholder B has mentioned it. Each map needs to represent your best effort at describing what goes on inside that stakeholder, purely on the basis of what they've said to you in one-to-one situations. If stakeholder B does mention an interesting construct, you can try probing gently to see whether it resonates with stakeholder A, but avoid putting words in their mouth. Only add it to A's map if they pick up the construct and run with it, and only introduce it into the conversation at all if A says something that clearly indicates it might be part of their system.

There's never a "right answer" when you're doing individual construct maps. GCA is an interpretative approach: as an analyst, you're actively searching for and choosing between potential interpretations of what you've seen and heard. Some important points to remember:

- Pay extremely close attention to what is said and how it's said. That includes intonation and body language, for example.

- Think carefully about what the person might be trying to imply, beyond the literal meaning of their words

- Think about what the person does *not* say. A stakeholder always has a choice of what to tell you in answer to a question. What are they leaving out? By choosing to foreground certain things and not others, what are they telling you about their construct system?

- Above all, concentrate on describing the stakeholder's view of the world, not yours. Don't introduce your own constructs, ideas or terminology. When interviewing, try not to use any vocabulary or ideas that haven't already been used by the participant.

Some of your most interesting findings may come from thinking about the stakeholder's throwaway comments or humorous asides. These may not even occur during a proper interview; they may crop up during the gaps between comparatively large set-piece events like meetings or workshop sessions.

Often, while talking about the organisation's issues, a participant will set up a *back channel* for making a kind of commentary on what they're saying. This is the conversational equivalent of the service tunnel that we mentioned earlier. On the one hand, most or all of what the participant says to you explicitly is strictly relevant and politically correct. We can compare this information to the trains that run through the Channel Tunnel. As business analysts, we care about this information and we need to elicit it. But on the other hand, we should be equally alert to the information coming through the service tunnel – the back channel.

Each participant has their own style of back channel. They may say certain things in a different tone of voice, or with different facial expressions. They may distance themselves from certain things by using words like "so-called" or "allegedly", prefacing them with a sigh or a particularly long pause, or making dismissive hand gestures. Conversely, they may indicate enthusiasm by talking faster, dilating their eyes or making hand gestures that indicate ownership or alignment. They may not even be aware that they're doing these things. Or it may be more overt than this: they may signpost things explicitly in words. Alternatively, if a participant is very guarded, perhaps because they don't trust you, then there may be no back channel evident at all. Whatever style the participant adopts, it's vital for the analyst to tune into it. You should demonstrate that you're picking up the signals; the explicitness of your acknowledgement should match the explicitness of the mode adopted by the participant.

Once you've mapped the construct systems of the most salient individuals, then it's time to start looking at how they behave in relation to others: we'll look at that in a future article.

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

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The next Normal, the Matrix, and the 21st Century Business Analyst

Byron Fortuin

As Steve Jobs said: "You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards"

In a similar vein, the term "new normal" has been employed to describe the new state after crises such as wars, terrorist attacks, financial crises, global recessions, and more recently the Covid-19 pandemic. History teaches us that these events ushered in a new age that we frequently refer to as the new or the next normal.

The recent Covid-19 pandemic altered the status quo. It turned the world upside down, businesses were forced to temporarily close, and it challenged what we thought we knew. Nevertheless, in times of adversity there are also opportunities, and during this time BAs were at the forefront of transformation. Business analysis was needed in order to define new ways of work, changes to business process, new business rules and new technology solutions. We could do this because we understood the rules, we analysed the "current normal/state" and understood the outcomes that our stakeholders were wanting to achieve. You only triumph if you know and comprehend the rules, your current state and where you need to be in your future state.

The notion of the next normal can be expressed with an idea I had when I watched the movie called The Matrix. A key theme from this movie is that "The One – Neo" **must** understand, **know**, and tolerate the rules of the Matrix to fully evolve and be relevant, in the next normal. I make a likeness here of Neo to the 21st century business analyst.

As in the Matrix aka "the corporate world, the new normal" the business analyst is a critical change agent using a range of appropriate tools, techniques, and modern technology to drive innovation. This will be achieved by appreciating the operating **context** to enable **change** by eliciting and understanding the **stakeholders** and their **needs** when integrating digital **solutions**, to ensure that **value** is generated when implementing the new strategy and transformation by following the rules & guidelines of the Matrix supported by IIBA®'s Business Analysis Body Of Knowledge (BABOK®) v3 as a guideline.

As the new normal transitions into the next normal it is very important that BAs shift their mindsets, equip themselves with relevant future skills and do things that might have never been done before. We need be even more agile and fluid. Conventional business analysis approaches are still relevant and these worked well during the transition. Covid came and challenged traditional approaches, including ways of work, ways of thinking and introduced us to rapid exponential change, and you know what? **These changes were defined by us!** As business analysts of the future, we accelerated into the future, we played by the rules of the Matrix, we evolved with technology, the proverbial "box" we were taught to think outside of does not exist, it is discarded. We must not be confined in our ways of thinking and break through boundaries.

We are 21st century business analysts, we need to plan differently, monitor our progress more effectively. We need to shift our mindsets when it comes to requirements elicitation and management, this can be done from anywhere in the world if you are online and connected. Strategy analysis has changed, our stakeholders expect more, and we need to deliver more to match this growing demand. Our solutions must be innovative as we are far more evolved compared with the more traditional BA. We have transcended beyond the new normal and are thriving in the next normal, this is the Matrix!

In conclusion: As BAs we need to understand the next normal and comprehend and articulate the value that we add. We have never been simply "note takers" or "scribes", we are trendsetting change agents who collaborate with a range of stakeholders to help bring the future into the now.

We need to be equipped with relevant digital skills and be at the top of our game so that we can make a profound impact in our domains. Sadly this is not as simple as in the movie The Matrix where new skills can simply be "downloaded". It will require conscious effort for us to develop the skills and competencies to thrive in the matrix aka the next normal!

You are living in an ever-changing set of next normals, you are changing this Matrix and defining the future from where you are. You play an important part in defining the next normal.

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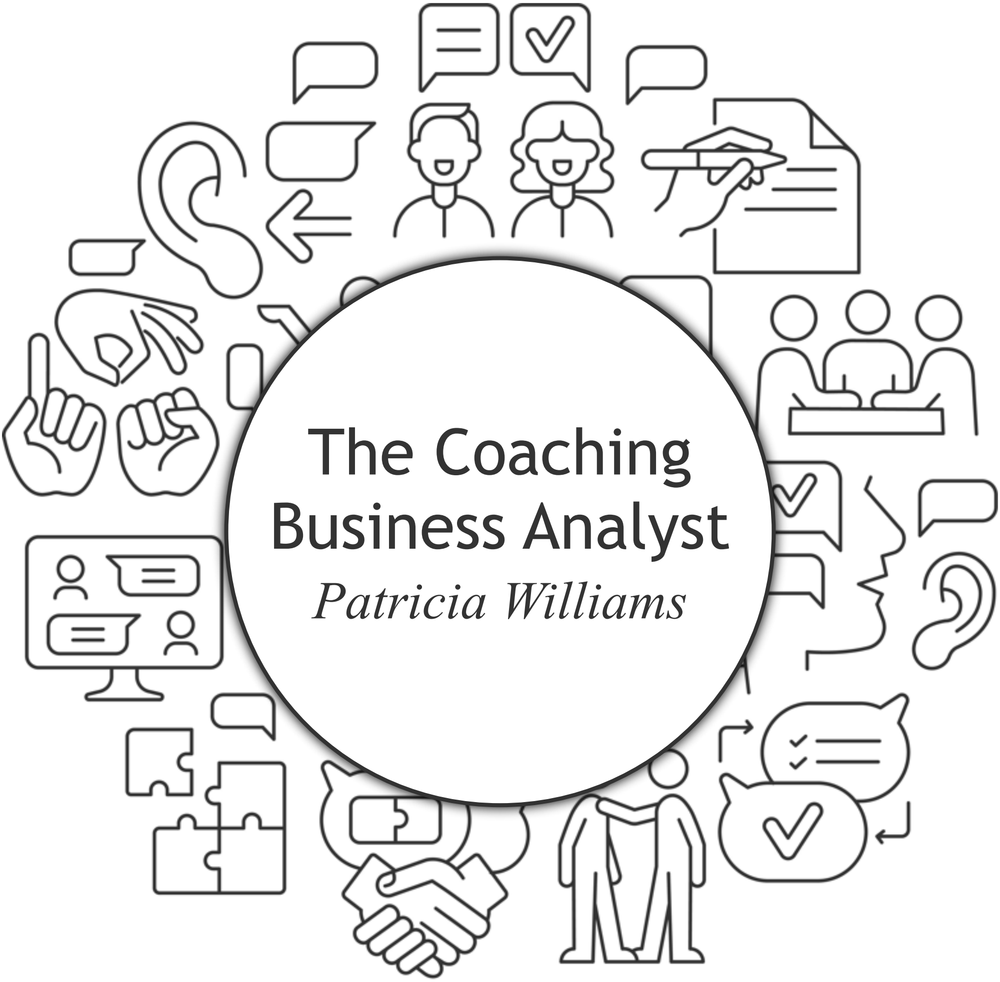

The Coaching Business Analyst

Patricia Williams

Have you ever considered the similarities between a life coach and a BA? A coach and client relationship is all about building trust, rapport and establishing an effective and positive relationship. Open and effective questioning, active listening and being inquisitive, reading between the lines. Offering no judgement and not putting words in people's mouths. Flexing your style and approach to suit the needs of the client. Does this sound familiar to you, my fellow BAs?

Building rapport can be a little hit and miss initially, but once it's achieved, it helps to grease the wheels of a good working relationship. A coach will go to great lengths to build rapport with their client, they will focus on being empathetic, authentic, harmonious, and interested in what is being said, they will seek to understand rather than being understood.

Like a coach the BA must build valuable relationships with stakeholders in order to get what they need from them and similarly must employ, as a minimum, good questioning and listening skills. This includes:

Effective questioning

- Asking a good open question that provides space for your stakeholder to answer fully, for example: “Under what circumstances does the error occur with the sales report?”

- Using a Summary Question: –the ability to ask the question to confirm what you have understood. For example: “Just let me check my understanding, I picked up that the error occurs when there is a negative balance of greater than £100 in the report, is this correct?”

- Selectively Deploying Closed Questions: usually we are asked to steer away from closed questions, but they can add value if used under the right circumstances. For example: “so the error only occurs when there is a negative balance?”

Active Listening

- Effective questioning works well if it is accompanied by active listening. The BA needs to read between the lines, take in more than what is being said, consider how it is being said and what is not being said, look out for incongruencies. This will create space for the BA to ask those deep enquiring questions to ensure they are getting a good understanding of the situation or problem and fully absorb what is being conveyed.

This is a BA’s bread and butter; it is what gets the inquisitive juices flowing to kick start the investigative fact finding and analysis.

Structuring a Conversation

Many coaches use a tried and tested method of conducting coaching sessions. It’s called the TGROW method—it is used to guide a client who didn’t know where to start. TGROW stands for:

T - Topic - What you want to discuss

G - Goal - What you want to achieve in the session and how it aligns to the topic

R - Reality – Where are you now, what is currently happening?

O - Options – What options do you currently have, who can help you?

W - Way forward – What are the actions, what can you commit to and when?

Although the origins of TGROW is steeped in coaching, I think it can be successfully adapted to suit a BA/ Stakeholder interaction. It could provide a model for a conversation and allow the BA to get the most out of an interview with any stakeholder ensuring that it is a valuable and enriching conversation, where a clear goal of the meeting is explored. I am sure that BAs achieve this unconsciously in a lot of cases but making it more explicit would reap benefits.

So, imagine taking this method and applying it to a structured conversation with a stakeholder. Consider the following scenario:

A BA wants to speak to the head of sales reporting to understand a problem with negative balances as part of a project to replace a Management Information (MI) reporting tool

BA: “Thank you for your time today, I would like to discuss the sales report (***Topic has been established)*** and in particular leave here with an understanding of the problems with the negative balance report ***(Goal established)***.

So can you tell me what problem you are currently experiencing? How often does it occur, how does it affect your ability to do your role, when does it happen, what are the issues in relation to the topic and the goal etc.? ***(Reality explored)***

What workarounds do you currently have, what else have you tried? What blockers are you experiencing? ***(Options discussed)***

In terms of next steps, can you send me the data discussed earlier, attend the workshop planned for next week, and I will reach out to systems to understand more about the bank end system as you suggested. ***(Way forward – next steps)***”

Of course, there are other coaching skills that BAs use consciously or unconsciously to create and improve relationships with others. After all stakeholders are people first and sometimes wearing that coaching hat can help to establish those all important relationships more smoothly.

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A Lesson from Top of the Pops: Knowing Your Real Stakeholders' Needs

Adrian Reed

Over the past few months, I've been watching old 1990s episodes of Top of The Pops (ToTP). For anyone who isn't UK based, or doesn't remember ToTP, it was a weekly show which featured music artists and bands from the charts. Being on ToTP was seen as a huge indication of success, and at the time it was one of the few places to see chart music on TV. For anyone that liked pop music, it was required viewing.

One of the things that looks really odd, in retrospect, is how the crowd reacts to the music. Generally speaking, they pretty much clap along in a weirdly coordinated, almost robotic, way. It's really odd seeing people clap and sway along to early 90s indie music in a way that, well, nobody ever would at a gig. If you go and watch an episode from 91 or 92 on YouTube, you'll see what I mean.

Having watched a documentary about the making of Top of The Pops, I gather that in the early 90s the crowd were pretty much *told* how to behave. Not only this, some bands and artists that weren't seen as 'visual' enough would be provided with backing dancers who would dance along with them. Watch these in retrospect and you can see how much the different styles of dancing jars with the music. It must have been a thoroughly bizarre experience to be in the audience, and in retrospect it's quite a bizarre thing to watch!

Building For "Them" Not For "Us"

The decision to encourage people to clap and to employ generic dancers could be described as 'design decisions'. Ultimately, an executive producer (or someone) is presumably responsible for designing the programming and ensuring the output meets its stakeholder needs. Those stakeholders would include the viewers, the live audience and many others (including the needs of the person commissioning the show).

When it comes to viewers and audience members, one possibility here is that at least some of the ToTP executives had very little insight into how people *actually* reacted when they watched live music, or what people wanted to see when they watch the show, and instead were focusing on 'doing what they'd always done'. Perhaps the senior people making the design decisions weren't typical consumers of Blur, Oasis, Aqua or any of the other 90s bands. They probably *weren't* packing themselves into some smoke-filled bar in some rainy corner of Portsmouth to listen to the next 'up and coming band' on a Friday night.

This got me thinking about business analysis and where definition and design decisions happen. Too often it seems to happen in comfortable conference rooms, miles away from where the service will actually be delivered or the solution will actually be used. Phrases like "oh, that workaround is fine, it'll only add an extra 60 seconds to the process" might sound completely innocuous when a group is scoffing down donuts trying to wrap-up a meeting before the rush hour traffic. The front-line staff left to deal with a queue of angry customers because the solution delivered is so slow might take a very different view.

A key point here is that it's easy to fall into the trap of defining and designing what *"we"* want and what "we" find acceptable rather than finding a balance of our stakeholders' needs and perspectives. Now, this is a provocative statement, and of course it is never quite that binary. Yet, the fact remains that it's very easy to specify features that the people in the comfortable, air-conditioned, coffee-filled conference room "reckon" would be a good idea, rather than actually understanding the needs of those that will use or will be impacted by them.

Engage And Engage Widely

We are probably *all* familiar with a range of stakeholder identification and engagement techniques. Yet, hand on heart, how many *actually* get used? In the rush of project initiation, where some enthusiastic and bombastic manager is rushing straight for an assumed solution (without doing any analysis), it's easy to get caught in the slipstream. Yet it's crucial for everyone—for our organisations, for its stakeholders, and even for the over-excited manager—that we don't.

Scouring the stakeholder landscape early and revisiting it regularly is crucial. This should start *pre-project.* How on earth can a project or product be defined if there is no input from key stakeholders? Yet it happens! This doesn't mean *all* stakeholders need to be consulted on everything, of course, but it is important to identify who will be relevant and approximately when they will be engaged. Ultimately, change is a lot like a jigsaw puzzle. Everyone holds a piece, but nobody can see the whole picture. Hopefully if we gain enough perspectives and enough 'pieces of the puzzle', we'll collaboratively see *enough* of the picture to make a real difference and avoid unintended consequences.

This conscious and determined effort to engage and understand stakeholders shouldn't be seen as a luxury or something to be played down or cut. Change is inherently a human endeavour, if you're doing it without the humans then it's very likely to fail! Remaining curious, having empathy, and seeking to understand perspectives will lead to a better set of outcomes. Surely that's better than rushing towards a solution that nobody uses and everybody hates?

Adrian Reed is Principal Consultant at Blackmetric. He speaks internationally on topics relating to business analysis and business change. Adrian wrote the 2016 book 'Be a Great Problem Solver… Now' and the 2018 book 'Business Analyst'. Connect with Adrian on LinkedIn. Check out Adrian's blog.

5 Tips to Help Make the Transition from a BA to a Scrum Master

Marcus Udokang

Some BAs aspire to be scrum masters. If you are making this transition, this article looks at the different roles and outlines some tips that will make things less daunting.

A scrum master places greater focus on leadership and less on analysis, and therefore may appeal to a senior BA, or BAs interested in moving into leadership.

BAs may be more familiar with requirements, co-creating value, solving business problems, recommending solutions, writing specifications, and mapping processes, and much else besides. A scrum master focuses more on processes and approaches. But at the core, both roles are agents of change, and of course there are transferable skills that are common between the roles.

Here are 5 tips that can help a BA in transitioning to a scrum master role. If you are an experienced BA, you may well be doing these things already.

Doing them more consciously, and building upon them, can mean that you're well-positioned to make the sideways step to become a scrum master.

Ask Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions inspire introspection. Posing these types of questions to your team and stakeholders elicit creative insights and initiate a commitment, curiosity, and a challenge. For example a scrum master might ask: What are the roadblocks and why do they exist? What can we do to improve the outcomes or the customer experience? What is the goal we are trying to achieve? How do we define and measure value? You will notice a definite overlap here with the types of questions that you already ask as a BA!

Have a Growth Mindset

To be an agent of change, it is important to be vulnerable and open about your failures. This involves gaining the support of your team to help find a solution to the problem you are trying to solve. It's crucial that you are open to change and actively establish a safe and positive learning space.

Work with your team to cultivate feedback and cooperation. Allow your team to watch you grow. Have your team hold you accountable to your goals. This will benefit them while also helping you to develop a growth strategy and providing alternate solutions to problems. Learning objectives should be tied to team goals.

Build Your Team Through Valuable Relationships

How do you build relationships with customers, stakeholders, and product managers? Have the right amount of detail to get the job done. Facilitate a shared understanding. Understand what your team needs. For example, make sure you can deliver and test that one user story.

Convey priorities to your team. Highlight recent accomplishments. Don't promise things you can't deliver. Share priorities with other teams, customers, and stakeholders. Regularly demonstrate progress. Be transparent and be a leader who is recognised as a creative problem solver, who can explain different points of view. Clearly define expectations and responsibilities.

Communication is Key

It's all about communication, individuals and actions over processes and tools. Deliver early and often.

The team, developers, stakeholders, and anyone in the loop should attend the relevant agile ceremonies. These meetings provide a frequent feedback loop of steady delivery to end users, and other stakeholders, with constant communication with all the actors involved. Consider any risks, whether business, technical, cost or schedule related.

Lead through influence, earn respect of the team, build credibility and build consensus. You need legitimacy and authority to get the work done.

Storytelling

Many people learn best through hearing and relating to stories. Allow your team to understand how scrum methods and agile values can provide different ways of solving a problem. Explain using stories how change can transform and benefit the way they work and accomplish goals. These stories are more effective than reciting the Agile Manifesto or Scrum Guide verbatim. The team needs to easily understand what the approach is, and why it is being used.

These 5 tips will help you if you transition from a BA to a Scrum Master role. They will also encourage project buy-in, develop team growth, and help you accomplish project goals.

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