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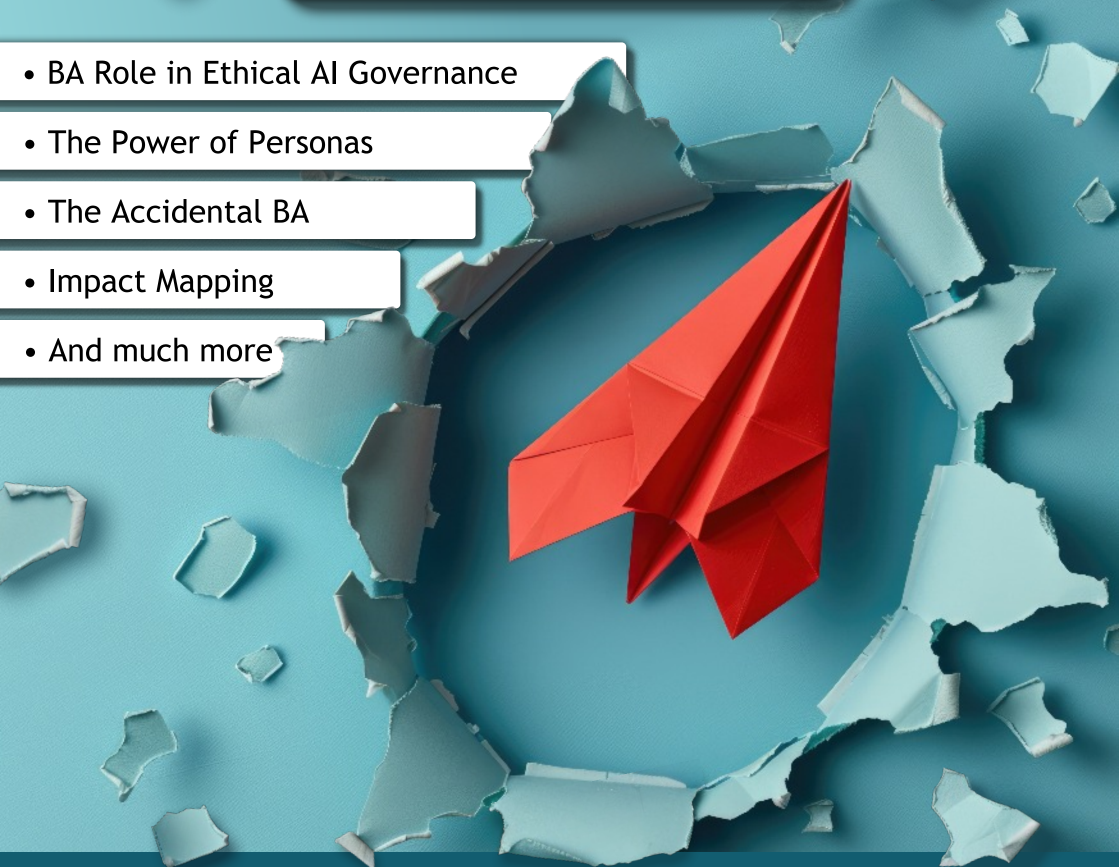
Q2 2025

BA DIGEST

- BA Role in Ethical AI Governance
- The Power of Personas
- The Accidental BA
- Impact Mapping
- And much more



Your regular round-up of useful BA content

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Welcome

Welcome to the Q2 2025 edition of BA Digest!

Last year, I decided to try to learn some Polish, via a well-known language-learning app. I learned a range of phrases, but found the app was increasingly serving up phrases with questionable business relevance. As interesting as 'słoń pije mleko' ('the elephant drinks milk') is, I can't think of many situations where I'd use this during a business trip.

I stopped using the app, but then the 'gamification' went into overdrive. Multiple notifications telling me I was breaking a streak, or that my streak had been 'frozen' if only I'd jump on and study some more today. The app was pestering me for attention, and I ended up uninstalling it to make it stop.

Don't get me wrong, gamification can be useful, but it made me think about the need for balance, and the ethical questions that companies face when designing products or services. I recently dealt with a telecommunications provider that allows upgrades to be processed instantly online, but to downgrade (save money), you have to contact someone by phone who tries to convince you to change your mind. Is creating extra 'friction' when a customer wants to downgrade or leave ethical? The jury is out on that one… presumably this was a deliberate design decision aiming at maximising retention. Yet it does so at the expense of customer convenience (plus, some busy people will likely give up).

I'm passing no moral judgement on these design decisions, however I do believe that BAs can be strong ethical voices in organisations. When a design decision is being made that might have ethical consequences, we can stand up for those who aren't in the room. With tech such as AI this feels even more important than ever.

You'll find an article about AI and ethics in this edition of BA Digest, along with a diverse selection of articles from a wide range of authors. I hope that you enjoy them all!

Kudos to all of the authors who have taken time to share their experiences. If you see an article that resonates with you, please do connect with the author and let them know. Believe me, they'll appreciate it.

Finally, thanks to our advertisers. Remember, it is the advertisements that keep BA Digest free. Be sure to check them out, and when you need a service that they offer, be sure to consider them.

Until next time. dziękuję, do widzenia.

Adrian

Adrian Reed

Editor-In-Chief, BA Digest

Principal Consultant, Blackmetric

PS: If you are considering attending the IIBA Poland Chapter summit, you should definitely do so. Last year's was awesome!

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Contents

Business Analyst Role in AI Governance with Ethical AI Training Model

Afifah Hanun

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionising industries and redefining how businesses operate. However, with great power comes great responsibility. As AI technologies grow more complex, so do the ethical challenges surrounding them. This is where business analysts have the opportunity to shine, ensuring that AI innovations align with ethical principles, business needs, and societal values.

BAs bridge the gap between technical teams and business goals. Their role in AI governance extends beyond requirements gathering—they can define ethical frameworks, address biases, and ensure that innovation is balanced with responsibility. Let's dive into these three crucial areas to understand how BAs contribute to ethical AI implementation.

1. Defining Ethical Guidelines and Frameworks

Before any AI system is implemented, a solid ethical foundation is essential. Ethical guidelines ensure that AI systems respect values like fairness, transparency, and accountability. This isn't just a technical responsibility; it's also a business imperative.

BAs play a pivotal role in developing these frameworks. By collaborating with stakeholders from different departments, BAs help identify organisational values and translate them into actionable AI policies. They also ensure these frameworks align with external standards, like global ethical guidelines on AI governance.

Imagine a company developing an AI tool to screen job applicants. Without an ethical framework, there's a risk the tool might unfairly favour or exclude candidates based on biased training data. A BA ensures such risks are addressed early by defining processes that promote fairness and prevent discrimination.

Moreover, BAs document these frameworks in clear, accessible language. This makes it easier for teams across the organisation to understand and follow them, ensuring ethical principles are embedded at every stage of AI development.

2. Bias Identification and Mitigation

One of the most significant risks in AI is bias. AI models learn from historical data, which may contain inherent biases. If not addressed, these biases can lead to unfair outcomes, harming both the business and its users.

Business analysts bring a unique perspective to bias identification. They act as mediators, ensuring that technical teams and decision-makers consider potential blind spots. For instance, BAs might ask:

- Is the training data diverse enough to represent all user groups?
- Are there checks in place to identify unintended consequences?
- How will the system's outputs be audited for fairness and accuracy?

For example, a healthcare company developing an AI tool for diagnosing diseases might inadvertently train its model on data primarily from one demographic. A BA would flag this issue, ensuring the system is inclusive and effective for diverse populations.

Additionally, BAs communicate the implications of bias in simple, relatable terms. This builds trust among stakeholders and promotes transparency, which is crucial for gaining user confidence in AI systems.

3. Balancing Innovation with Responsibility

In the race to innovate, it's easy to overlook ethical considerations. However, businesses that prioritise speed over responsibility risk reputational damage and long-term losses. Balancing innovation with responsibility is where BAs truly make a difference.

BAs ensure that AI projects don't just meet technical and business goals but also align with ethical standards. For example, a BA might advocate for a phased implementation approach, allowing teams to test and refine the AI system before full deployment.

Consider an AI-driven chatbot designed to handle customer service. While the technology promises efficiency, it might fail to address sensitive queries or provide empathetic responses. A BA would ensure that such scenarios are anticipated and addressed, balancing automation with human intervention.

By facilitating conversations about ethical trade-offs, BAs help businesses innovate responsibly, fostering trust and loyalty among customers.

Why Business Analysts Are Vital to AI Governance

BAs are natural problem-solvers, communicators, and facilitators. Their ability to connect technical teams with business stakeholders makes them indispensable in AI governance.

In addition to their analytical skills, BAs excel at understanding user needs, anticipating risks, and ensuring accountability. They don't just identify potential issues; they also propose solutions, ensuring that AI systems are both effective and ethical.

As businesses increasingly rely on AI, the role of the BA will continue to evolve. Their expertise in navigating ethical challenges will be crucial in shaping a future where AI benefits everyone, not just a select few.

Conclusion

AI governance is a team effort, but business analysts play a uniquely important role. By defining ethical frameworks, identifying biases, and balancing innovation with responsibility, BAs ensure that AI systems align with organisational goals and societal values.

In a world where technology is advancing faster than ever, BAs help businesses innovate responsibly, fostering trust and creating long-term value. As we continue to explore the possibilities of AI, the role of the BA will remain critical—not just as a strategist but as a steward of ethics and accountability.

Afifah Hanun is an experienced BA passionate about digital transformation and ethical AI. Drawing from years of experience in process improvement and project management, Hanun advocates for humane approaches to innovation. Hanun is also a financial literacy activist and mental health advocate who loves exploring creative solutions to real-world problems.

I've Started so I Won't Finish: Embracing the Incomplete

David Gibbs and Paul Williamson

What do the Cincinnati subway, Basílica de la Sagrada Familia, and the portrait of George Washington on the $1 bill have in common? They are all examples of projects or works that started but didn't finish. As business analysts, we often do not have individual or end-to-end control over whether a project is completed, and it's quite common for BAs to start work on tasks or projects but not be able to finish them. This reality can be challenging, but it's essential to our role. Over time, we have realised that this feeling is not only okay but can also be a positive career signal. It may mean that we are using our unique strengths as BAs, prior to handing work over to others who have their own specialisms.

This article focuses on practical tips to help business analysts evolve from doers into trusted advisors/consultants as they progress in their career. This involves letting go of the detail and the desire to complete and be comfortable saying, 'I've started, so I won't finish.'

Trusted Advisers

Our line manager often assigns us the "fuzzy problems". These are the nebulous ideas or early, unformed needs expressed by business sponsors or stakeholders that must be explored and understood. These fuzzy problems or ideas require shaping so that they can be clearly articulated to a broader set of (usually senior) business stakeholders.

As we progress in our BA careers, we must feel pride and satisfaction in being asked to advise and shape rather than deliver.

If, due to the analysis and shaping you perform, that idea turns into a project (whether you end up delivering it or not) or goes no further, you played a valuable role in getting it to that point. Your analysis has helped inform critical strategic decision-making.

You had a seat at the table with the senior stakeholders and sponsors to understand their thoughts. You offered business value by turning the seed of an idea into something meaningful or ensuring that no more time was spent on something that didn't warrant it.

Some BAs may find this frustrating as they are not completing the end-to-end project or Software Delivery Life Cycle (SDLC), but it's important to recognise that tackling fuzzy problems and strategising with business leaders requires considerable professional and soft skills that comes with experience. This means sponsors and stake-holders trust us to help define complex challenges, placing us in the "trusted advisor" zone—exactly where we want to be.

Changing Priorities

Our work as BAs is impacted by shifting priorities, changing requirements, and stakeholder needs. Projects, initiatives and programmes regularly change focus and will sometimes be wound-down or closed. As BAs, we must be adaptable and ready to pivot, even if it means leaving some tasks unfinished.

This can be frustrating, especially for projects that we find personally interesting. However, we should adopt a philosophical approach and recognise that every experience is an opportunity to learn and gain new skills—growth and progress lie in the journey, not just the destination.

If a project we are working on is closed and we don't receive an explanation, as BAs we should try to find out why and be confident in asking probing questions. This is particularly important if we believe the work has business value.

Playing in Position

The basketball legend Michael Jordan once reportedly said: "Talent wins games, but team and intelligence win championships". This wisdom rings true for us BAs. We have both learned in our careers that understanding our role and value within the team is critical. Practically:

- We must be strict with ourselves and not get drawn into detail, particularly if this is our natural tendency.

- We need to trust our colleagues to take the work forward and deliver, even if their style and approach differ from our own. Jordan was so successful because he incorporated his great individual game into a team game and learned that to win, he had to pass and let others score. We, as BAs, need to play the position we are being asked to play. This might challenge BAs in smaller organisations who are used to playing multiple positions.

Embracing the Incomplete

What can you do to embrace the incomplete?

- **Communication is key:** Share your concerns with your line management, team, and BA community—these people will provide support and guidance. Be transparent with stakeholders so that they understand the reasons behind unfinished tasks, and you maintain integrity.

- **Be mindful of what you are working on:** When things are busy, and deadlines are tight, it’s all too easy to be so focused on the tasks in hand that you do not see the wood for the trees, both in terms of the projects you are working on and, critically, the impact and value on the organisation and your career. Perspective allows you to review your workload, prioritise, and understand the trade-off in stopping non-critical tasks to focus on the most critical business needs first.

- **Documentation**: Ensure adequate documentation is created for incomplete tasks/work so that you or others can pick them up again and understand the status and context.

- **Practice gratitude:** As a BA, you are in a profession that will challenge and reward you and give you opportunities across not just single organisations but whole industries. You have found a profession that can lead you to so many future paths of career growth, and you can control when and where you want to go next. In the trusted advisor zone, you have a seat at the table with senior organisational leaders. Pat yourself on the back. You are doing great.

Navigating the BA role requires a delicate balance of analysis, advisory, and strategic functions. Understanding and embracing the evolution of our roles can lead to a more fulfilling and rewarding career. Ultimately, it's not just about starting and finishing but about the journey and the value we add along the way.

David Gibbs and Paul Williamson are Senior Business Analysts working in Private Equity.

Empowering the BA Community: Our Commitment to Continuous Upskilling and Growth

Reena Cheeneebash

Business analysts are the bridge between business needs and technical solutions, but even the strongest bridges need regular reinforcement. As the role of BAs continues to evolve, staying ahead requires more than just experience; it demands continuous learning, adaptability and a culture that promotes growth. In our organisation, we recognise this and we have implemented a range of initiatives to ensure that our BA community is always equipped to navigate new challenges and drive meaningful impact. In this article, I will outline six key practices.

1. Laying a Strong Foundation

Our onboarding process sets the stage for new BAs to succeed from the outset. This comprehensive program involves essential knowledge, tools, and techniques needed to start their role.

To ensure relevance and practical application, BA Leads design and continuously refine the onboarding materials, aligning them with evolving industry standards and organisational needs. The onboarding process includes the following:

- New BAs undergo structured training on core responsibilities, tools, and techniques such as requirement elicitation, documentation, validation, user story mapping, and stakeholder analysis. These foundational skills enable them to effectively gather, define, and communicate business needs while collaborating with stakeholders for successful project outcomes.
- Each new BA is paired with an experienced colleague for intensive support during the first three months, ensuring a smooth transition. This includes personalised guidance on tools,

processes, and stakeholder interactions. The buddy remains a key contact beyond this period, providing ongoing support to build confidence and autonomy.

Feedback on the onboarding process has been positive, with new BAs describing that the buddy system makes them feel truly supported from day one.

2. Accredited Learning Journeys

Our efforts to elevate the BA profession include what we refer to as "The Product Learning Journey". This structured program designed by our internal Product Chapter, accredited by a prestigious UK institution, blends classroom instruction, self-paced learning and hands-on practical exercises, offering a well-rounded educational experience that covers both theory and real-world application.

As part of the learning journey, participants gain exposure to Lean Six Sigma principles, enabling them to integrate process improvement techniques into their daily work. Additionally, all BAs are BPMN 2.0 certified, equipping them with a standard approach to business process modelling.

The program enhances the BA toolkit with JIRA and Confluence training for user story formalisation and project workflow management. Our vision is to make JIRA the single source of truth, automating dashboards to track squad activity and key performance metrics.

Moreover, this year we introduced a user story masterclass, crafted by the BA Leads to ensure that participants not only understand but also practice writing effective user stories. The BA Leads go beyond traditional training by facilitating the practical implementation of learnings, encouraging participants to apply new techniques in their projects and sharing insights with their peers.

- Last year, we saw the successful graduation of our first cohort of 12 Product Owners (POs) and Business Analysts (BAs).
- Building on this success, we are onboarding an additional cohort of 12 POs and BAs this year.

This commitment not only enhances individual skills but also positions our organisation as a learning-driven environment where professional growth is a priority.

3. Global Engagement and Exchange

Staying connected with the global BA community is another foundation of our upskilling strategy. We encourage active participation in worldwide forums to stay ahead of emerging trends:

- **International conferences:** Each year, at least one BA Lead attends the BA Conference Europe. This experience allows us to gain insights from thought leaders and bring back practices and techniques to share and implement within our team.
- **Webinars and forums:** Our BAs participate in various webinars and knowledge exchange sessions, creating opportunities for networking and continuous

learning. For example, last year eight BAs attended the BABOK® study sessions facilitated by IIBA®.

These interactions keep our BAs updated on industry best practices. One key takeaway we recently implemented is BA planning and monitoring to effectively support continuous delivery.

4. Embedding Continuous Improvement among the BA Community

To ensure learning translates into action, we have established a framework where each BA explores and integrates new tools, techniques, or best practices into their work. This process includes:

- **Application and documentation:** BAs adopt and document new approaches, assessing their impact on work quality and efficiency.
- **Community sharing:** They share insights with the BA community, enriching our collective knowledge base. Last year, we hosted five knowledge-sharing sessions, including one where a BA shared how empathy mapping enhanced her understanding of user needs, leading to more effective solutions.
- **Showcasing success:** Additionally, BAs are encouraged to highlight their contributions through internal presentations, newsletters, or chapter meetings. For example, during our quarterly Product Chapter Day, three BAs showcased their work, reinforcing the visibility and impact of the BA role.

We have received excellent feedback from our team members, with our BAs feeling that peer-to-peer learning helps with the continual improvement of efficiency and quality of work.

5. Creating Career Pathways

To retain top talent and provide a growth path, we have established a clear career progression framework. This initiative allows us to acknowledge exceptional performance and high level of technical expertise and maturity to leverage our most experienced BAs for strategic assignments.

A key highlight includes the introduction of the Senior BA role who is responsible to take on complex projects requiring advanced skills, adding value beyond their day-to-day tasks and accompanying junior BAs in their projects.

The creation of this role not only motivates our BAs but also ensures that we have highly skilled professionals ready to tackle our most pressing challenges.

6. Ongoing Coaching and Support

Leadership is not only about setting expectations but also about providing guidance. Our BA Leads maintain close collaboration with team members to:

- Offer guidance in navigating complex projects and challenging stakeholder relationships.

- Help BAs become autonomous and confident by providing structured feedback, increasing responsibilities, encouraging independent decision making, offering personalised coaching and promoting a supportive learning environment.

Feedback from the team has shown that weekly catch-ups with a BA lead have been invaluable in providing clarity and direction.

Our Commitment Moving Forward

Our holistic approach to upskilling the BA community is our commitment to excellence. As BA Leads, we go beyond executing these initiatives; we advocate for professional growth by providing the necessary support, resources and opportunities that empower BAs to reach their full potential. As we continue to invest in our people, we look forward to seeing the BA community grow stronger and more confident, contributing to the success of our organisation and the broader business analysis field.

Reena Cheeneebash is a highly motivated and committed Business Analyst Lead with 15+ years of experience in Business Analysis. She leads and mentors BAs, driving process improvements and enhancing business analysis capabilities, with expertise in Agile methodologies. You can contact her on LinkedIn at www.linkedin.com/in/reena-cheeneebash-0b77981aa/

Impact Mapping: A Simple yet Effective Visual Thinking Tool for Business Analysis

Vincent Meunier

In the early 2010s, Gojko Adzic proposed Impact Mapping as a "strategic planning" technique to help organisations visualise and understand the relationship between business goals and the changes needed to achieve them. Because it is born in this context, it is associated with the improvement of software development. Yet in Belgium it is not often used by business analysts. Through this article, I emphasise the general capabilities of this tool and its potential broader use in business analysis.

First, let's get back to basics. What is an impact map? An impact map is often a visual representation (similar to a mind map) that starts with a clear business goal ("why") as its centre and branches out to show:

- **Who** can help achieve the goal (in Adzic's terms, the "actors", in business terms "stakeholders")
- **How** their behaviour needs to change (the expected impacts)
- **What** can be built or done to create these changes ("deliverables")

There are two main ideas at the core of this:

- **Hypothesis-based approach:** an impact map makes explicit the assumptions existing between the deliverables, the impacts and the goal. These assumptions must be verified.

- **Traceability:** additionally, it shows these hypotheses and links them clearly, in a way that can be clearly communicated.

Gojko Adzic suggests using relevant SMART targets for the goal and the impacts, so that the hypotheses can really be verified. You are not going to work on all the conceived deliverables if your first one achieves the business goal… Are you?

In this short article, we will not dive into the process of building an impact map but do make sure that you build it with the right people—a subtle mix of business decision makers and informed doers. The creation process should ensure that you can do what you decide to include on your map, but also that you can/are willing to fund it.

Impact Mapping for Alignment

Because of its simplicity, impact mapping is a tool that can truly help align business and IT people on what they do and why they do it. But not only that. I believe that, because there are different levels of "why" (business goals), the technique can be used at different levels and areas of business analysis activities.

You could use it:

- For business/developer alignment as part of an IT project,

- In a pure business project, to identify and work on business deliverables,

- In a programme, to identify the needed products and projects,

- To transform a defined business strategy in a roadmap of programmes and projects,

- Even in the conception of a strategy based on the vision and anticipated evolution of the business model.

Let's take a simple (hypothetical) example to illustrate this last envisioned application.

Exploring Impact Mapping with an Example

Let's imagine that the fictional company "BAaaS Consulting" aspires to be Europe's leading provider of business analysis services by 2034. What does that mean for the executives and directors and how will they know they have achieved this vision? They decide that, in its field of work, the company should have the biggest revenue and the biggest number of consultants in Western Europe, as well as a client satisfaction rate of +80%.

How can this be achieved? Let's start with a small slice. The first and most important stakeholders are the clients. Let's imagine the following metrics and targets are defined:

- They need to be happy about the services provided by the company so that they return (loyalty) [target: min 60% of clients order a service more than once].

- They should talk about their contentment to other companies (referrals) [target: during the next 10 years, one acquired client generates orders from at least two other new clients within two years].

How can that be achieved?

For the first target (loyalty), the company should maximise the feedback captured from their clients and consultants throughout each engagement. So, it may be necessary to set up a project to clarify how the feedback loop is working now and how it can be improved. Alternatively, as a minimum, the management will first note this idea as a crucial element of the strategy of the company for the next few years.

For the second target (referrals), we could imagine a referral program in which the client bringing another client receives a discount on their "next order". The management decides to create a dedicated project to study the impact of such a measure on finance and other parts of the organisation. Now, let's visualise that (small) part of BAaaS Consulting's strategy (Fig. 1).

Could you imagine seeing something of this kind in your company? How would it help, not only aligning all decision makers on the direction they are willing to take, but also the rest of the company to realise how their work comes into play with the company's vision?

Conclusion: Impact Mapping Adds Clarity

Of course, the big work is not purely about drawing a mind map. However, a clear impact map will allow any part of your strategy to be synthesised and visualised at any level. The process of creating an impact map will help clarify the justification and target elements necessary to keep stakeholders engaged, and they will be ready to embark on the journey. The result will be a simple yet effective communication tool that can remind stakeholders of agreements and their justifications.

Vincent Meunier is a BA and founder of v2b consulting. His practice focuses on creating value through strategic vision and well-defined benefits realisation. He likes to build small walls of books at home, to the despair of his wife and amusement of his son. He is based in Brussels, Belgium.

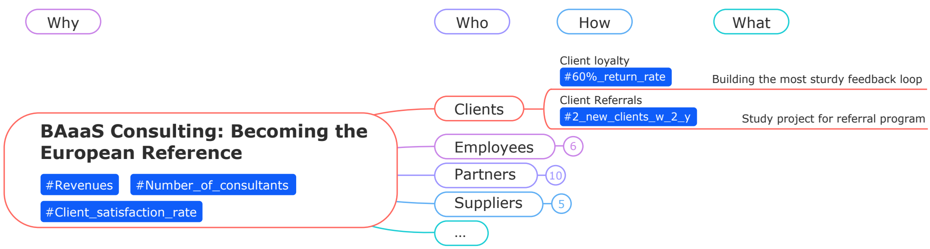
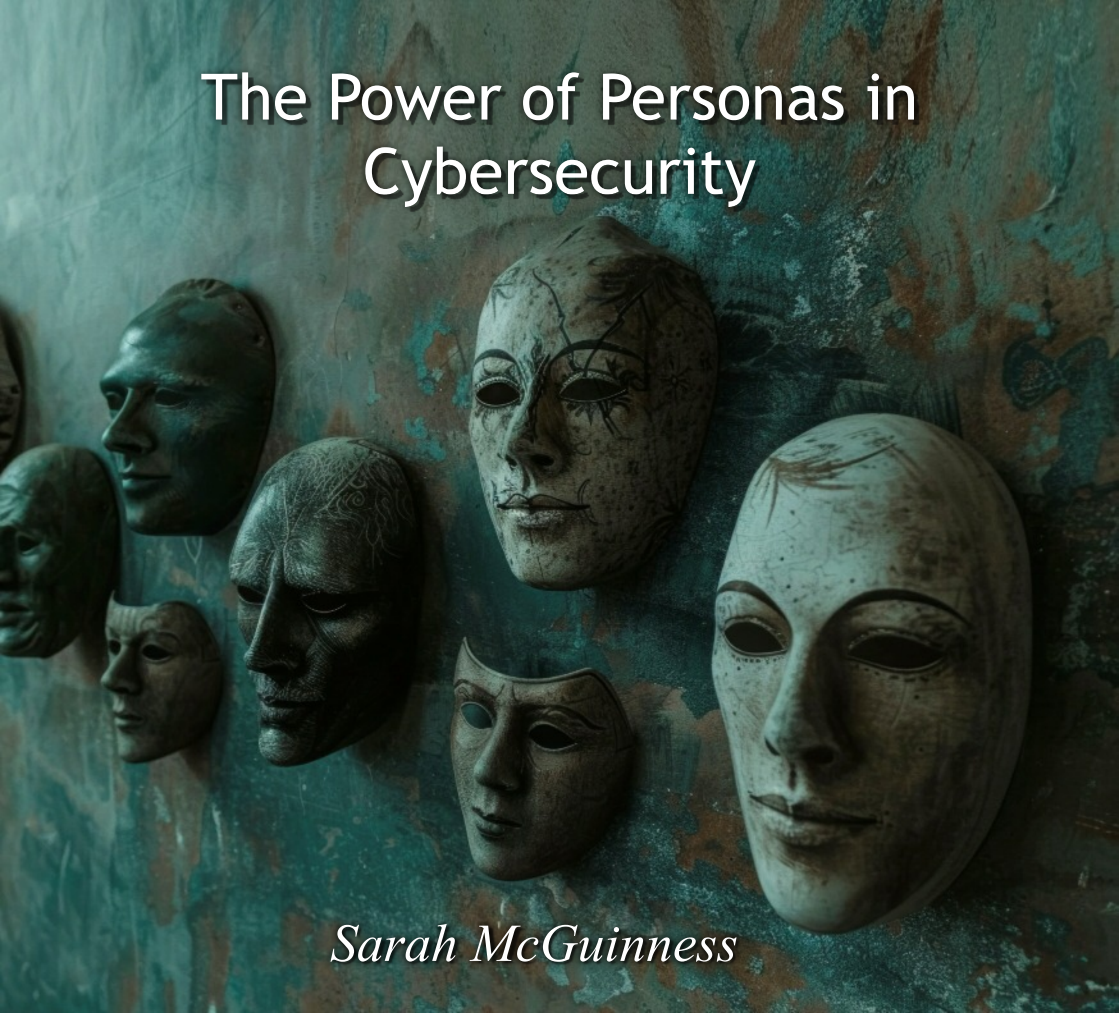


Fig. 1

The Power of Personas in Cybersecurity



Sarah McGuinness

I am sure that your organisation, like my organisation, understands the importance and benefits of diversity and inclusion. And I am also sure that the teams in your organisation, as they are in my organisation, are diverse. However, we cannot expect to understand and represent the true diversity of our customers, stakeholders and colleagues in our organisations.

CNN, the US multichannel news organisation understood the need to know and respond to the needs of their clients. In their book "The user is always right: a practical guide to creating and using personas for the web", Steve Mulder and Ziv Yaar state that in CNN: "...personas have successfully allowed internal teams to focus on the needs of real users to such a degree that an executive recently distributed T-shirts that proclaim 'We are not the target audience.'" Yes, it was so important they printed it on a T-shirt!

What Are Personas (and Proto-personas)

Personas are not a new technique, having been used in fields such as marketing, user experience design as well as business analysis. If you are not using personas, this article is written to encourage you, my business analysis colleagues, to adopt and gain the benefits from personas.

If you are unsure what personas are, allow me to use the big screen to bring them to life. When you start to watch a film, have you noticed how key the first few minutes are to establishing the film's characters?

For example, I wrote this article after just re-watching the 1980s film, Beetlejuice. If you are familiar with the film, the opening scene establishes the Maitlands as a wholesome loving couple.

If you think about your favourite film, you will be able to identify the personas of the characters being built in the first scenes. Personas, like characters in a film, are *fictional.* However, unlike characters in a film, personas represent *groups* of individuals. In fact, in the 2020 book User Experience Foundations*,* Nick de Voil defines a persona as "a named fictitious person who represents a group"

A persona is a model of a particular kind or group of user, actor or stakeholder. It allows us to hypothesise what their behaviour will be. The persona can be used in information security to build and refine models from the analysis of security behaviour. Creating personas enables a risk based approach to security. Personas give an understanding and empathy to design security solutions across education, technology and processes that protect effectively.

Personas should ideally be built on research, insight and data about a particular group of stakeholders. However, this won't always be possible, and in those cases a set of hypothetical personas can be built—sometimes referred to as 'proto-personas'. The idea is that these personas are not yet validated, but can be once insight has been gained.

These types of personas are an excellent tool to consider the requirements and preferences of a group of colleagues and customers without having to engage with them. Commercially, focus groups are not ideal to gain feedback on a new product or service (as this may lead to commercially sensitive secrets leaking). Not only this, but focus groups are time consuming and incur expense. Proto-personas can be used to elicit requirements from a group of stakeholders, based on the assumed knowledge of the team, without revealing a new, commercially sensitive product.

This also works for security. For many reasons, we may well want to build our understanding of a high risk group of colleagues without their awareness.

Another advantage of using a persona is that it does not require that a colleague is taken away from operations to attend interviews and focus groups. This thinking is important to emphasise when we describe to our board how we enable rather than constrain our business.

Practical Tips for Personas

In most scenarios, I would limit the creation of personas to between three and six. Tempting as it is to create and use many more personas, more than six may prove difficult to recall easily. Personas should be able to be differentiated enough so that they feel like real people and can be described quickly.

Personas should feel like real people, segmented by their behaviour and other relevant attributes. Where possible, it is preferable to segment by behaviours that are tangible and measurable.

I would avoid analysing characteristics protected by equalities legislation such as age unless it is relevant. Great behaviours to create information security personas from would include phishing interaction, phishing reporting, incidents and completion of security learning.

The value of personas and proto-personas is the insight gained from real behaviour analysis and my recommendation is to avoid proto-personas *unless* they are subsequently validated by observing actual behaviour. I would also avoid using stock photos with your personas, as this may embed unintended assumptions or biases. If the desire to use an image stems from a need to bring your persona to life and make them memorable then I would employ a generic cartoon type image.

The Value of Personas

The work required to analyse behaviour and create personas will be repaid by the insight gained when used to map user journeys across products and services. For every design decision, the conversation can include 'what would this persona do?'.

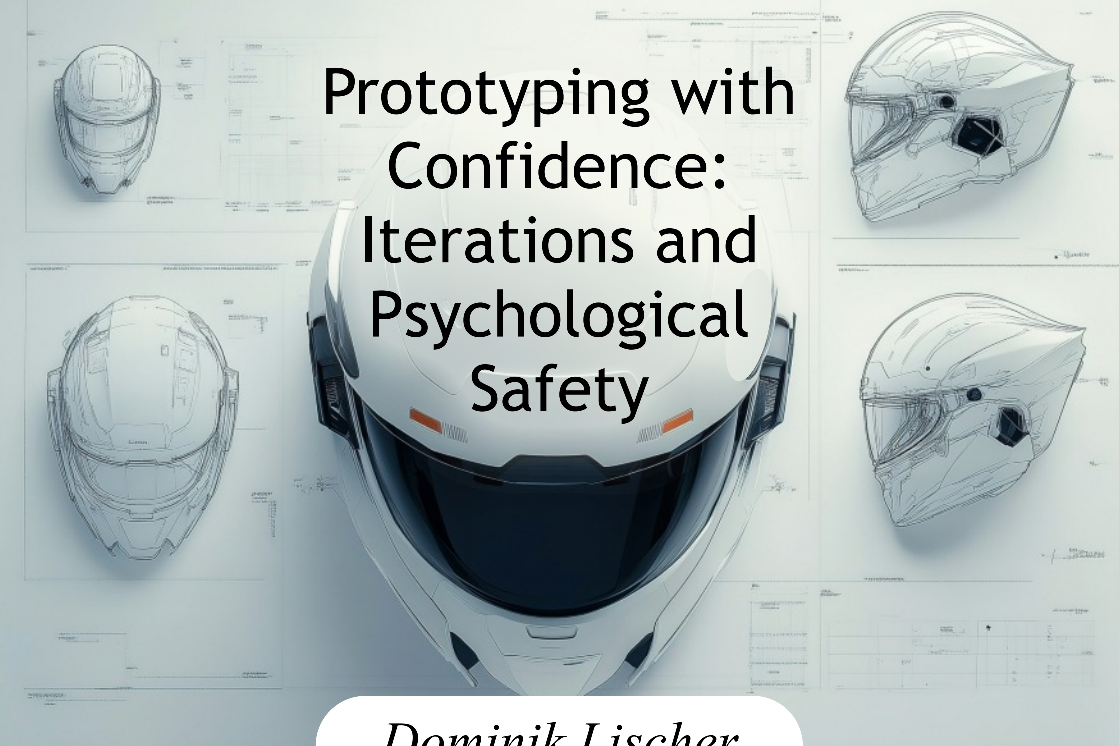
The creation of personas is not where the work ends. For personas to continue to give relevant and useful insights, they must be kept up to date. We build on personas with our latest user behaviour intelligence. We use this intelligence to determine whether a new persona should be introduced. Personas should be retired if no longer relevant. This is essential for information security, so that we are focusing on those groups who pose the highest risk to our organisation.

Conclusion

Personas are a well established technique that have proved their value across marketing, business analysis and information security. Hopefully this article has inspired you to give them a go and realise the power of personas to truly get up close and 'persona' to your users.

Sarah McGuinness has worked across business analysis and information security for over 30 years. She also works for the British Computer Society as an assessor for the International Diploma in Business Analysis. Sarah will be speaking at the BA & Beyond conference.

Sarah is on Instagram as @SarahMaccyg



Prototyping with Confidence: Iterations and Psychological Safety

Dominik Lischer

Working in iterations and using prototypes to solve problems is not a new idea. In earlier days, we built models out of wood, metal, or paper to support our imagination. Then computer software revolutionised prototyping. Today, we design precise digital models with the help of Computer Aided Design (CAD) tools. We can combine the CAD draft with 3D printing, laser cutting, and Computer Numerical Control (CNC) machining to get a first look at potential solutions.

In software development, there's the Scrum framework (a popular iterative and incremental development methodology). The idea of working in iterations means trying to build a solution step-by-step, frequently presenting it to the end-user for feedback. Regular prototyping can be used as part of this process, so that the customer does not have to wait until the product is completed before providing their views. They are regularly asked: "Are we heading in the right direction with this approach?" We move from one increment to the next, seeking feedback to improve the product.

The cornerstone of working with prototypes and following iterations is trial and error. Learning from mistakes and improving in fast cycles enables success. The continuous improvement allows the early detection of design flaws and ensures better alignment with user or customer needs. This approach has been adopted across various industries to enhance product quality and reduce development time and costs.

Overcoming Prototyping Challenges

As we all know, not all that glitters is gold. There are pitfalls when working with prototypes. Granlien et al's research paper entitled 'Project management strategies for prototyping breakdowns' highlights that user misunderstandings due to a lack of communication, confusion over the process, or rising uncertainty since a structured working method is missing in the project, could result in issues.

In spite of the challenges, iterative approaches have been widely accepted and spread across different industries, as researchers from the University of Johannesburg document in their study. It is therefore worth exploring how some common challenges can be overcome.

As mentioned before, the cornerstone of an iterative approach is trial and error. Failure is therefore an important part of the process. But admitting that one has made the wrong decision is not always easy. Some might therefore be hesitant to explore new paths. Furthermore, when a prototype is tested, you're seeking feedback on the presented solution and you might have to deal with negative responses. Being respectful and understanding in such a moment is crucial. Listening skills are required to make sure that expectations can be met in the next attempt. While working on improvements, it is key to ensure that everyone is working towards a common goal. This means communication is key, as Adriana De Oro Osorio states in her article on a UNHCR project that followed a prototyping approach.

Another common challenge in iterative projects is chasing perfection, as Adriana recognised. If a team is chasing perfection, they misunderstood the approach. Sooner or later, this leads to confusion in the process. Therefore, everyone must be guided on how to proceed. It's all about managing expectations through clear communication. A contribution to the product in progress does not have to be perfect. It should be a valuable input towards the goal. As observed by Joanna Płaskonka PhD in her blog post: "Frameworks like Scrum emphasize the importance of delivering a working product swiftly to foster rapid feedback and collaboration."

We have discussed the ups and downs of working in iterative cycles—but what is the prerequisite for successfully applying this approach in organisations?

The Importance of Psychological Safety

A framework that touches on many lessons discussed above is psychological safety. In her studies, Amy C. Edmondson reveals the success factors of high-performing teams. In a psychologically safe environment, team members dare to expose themselves, seek feedback, admit mistakes, and propose ideas. They feel confident that their input will not have a negative impact. This is why coworkers ask questions and do not fear questioning the status quo. They're confident that a critical stance does not have negative consequences.

The task of a manager is to create a climate in which people feel cared for, safe, and supported. This includes good management practices with regular, individual exchanges in which suggestions for improvement are discussed and expectations are clearly expressed. It's also about establishing clear norms that lead to fairness and predictability. Actively listening to employees and showing humility when people speak up is another important quality a manager must have. The focus is on responding individually to employees, showing appreciation, and offering help when they seek support.

In conclusion, working in iterations requires clear communication, structure, listening skills, respectful interaction, and trust. The framework of psychological safety enables an environment that supports these needs. If a manager is capable of establishing a psychologically safe environment in an iterative project, the chances are good that the project will be a success.

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The Power of Organisation: Maximising Project Outcomes Through Requirements Architecture

Olena Myslitska

I notice that the term “requirements architecture” causes much confusion. Although it may sound abstract, at its heart it is a deliberately formed structure to keep all business analysis information and requirements artefacts together. An appropriate requirements structure helps the team to focus on important things, saves time and boosts development effort.

In this article, I am trying to simplify this term and find easy steps to enrich your requirements with order and consistency, which empowers you and makes communication with your team clear and transparent.

First, let’s find out what types of requirements artefacts we should put together. For that reason, categorise the information and artefacts you have or expect to have for a project. It might be a broad list, starting from the business analysis approach plan and stakeholders list to user stories and models. As an example, I provide you with categories I usually have in practice:

- **Planning** (BA approach, requirements management approach, stakeholder analysis and collaboration plan, change request approach, other BA information)

- **General artefacts** (everything I plan to reuse such as glossary, business rules, error messages etc)

- **Product vision** (problem or opportunity, business context, business goals and requirements, gap analysis, statement of what is in scope/out of scope, risks, assumptions and constraints, roadmap)

- **Requirements** (functional requirements, usually features and user stories, non-functional requirements, transition requirements).

As you can see, this list is a prototype of our requirements' architecture with an implied hierarchy. The hieratical structure is really convenient and clear and allows you to broaden content as much as you need. Although you can add a lot of levels of hierarchy, I would recommend limiting it to 3–4 levels so that it maintains simplicity. This approach is easy to implement with such tools as Confluence, Notion, Document 360, Slite, Nuclino and others.

The next step is to define techniques appropriate for each category and create standards and guidelines or templates. This will allow different viewpoints of the requirements to be achieved (see IIBA®'s BABOK® Guide for more information about viewpoints).

So, at this point, we have an approximate list of categories—shape and structure, and we have templates—content of categories.

The Benefit of A Good Requirements Architecture

A well-defined requirements architecture is a powerful tool. When attention is paid to requirements architecture, there will be the following benefits:

- Easier requirements analysis. Interestingly enough, the task "define requirements architecture" relates to the "requirements analysis and design definition" knowledge area within BABOK®, as it teaches us to enable comprehensive analysis and ensure that requirements are appropriately specified with the help of guidelines, templates and thorough structure.

- Easy tracing of requirements. Hierarchical structure helps to implement "derive" relationships between requirements of different levels of abstraction.

- Easy validation against business goals and requirements.

- Easy maintenance of requirements. Tools such as Confluence allow you to edit one page and keep all versions you need. What's more, if you add a change log table such as that shown in the screenshot, you'll have a record of the versions history and changes (2) and user stories (1,3) where these changes were implemented. This is an effective tool to maintain and trace your requirements.

Version	Date	PO/CR Initiator/Version Initiator	Changes	Link to Jira stories
1	2 Oct 2023	Adam Zych	New	US - 01.01. User can sign up US - 01.02. User can log in/log out US - 01.03. User can reset a password 1
2	19 Oct 2023	Piotr Koch	If a user doesn't conduct any action during 30 minutes, they should be logged out by the system. 2	US - 01.02. v.2 Forced log-out 3

- Avoid duplications and enable the reuse of requirements. Each time you have repeated functionality and requirements, the requirement can be reused and linked elsewhere. Having captured business rules separately, we have already laid the foundation for the reuse of business rules. You can follow this approach with other types of requirements.

As a result, the structure of our requirements and BA information makes it simple to access, navigate and understand. This way, all related requirements are kept together and up-to-date, which in turn saves time when recalling them and conducting an impact analysis. What's more, a lot of time gets saved thanks to avoiding duplication and the enabling of requirements reuse, as well as the possibility of easy and quick validation of requirements.

It also saves time for a team, as such an approach makes it easier to see the big picture, leading to a better solution architecture and less rework. In other words, well-thought requirements structure maximises the outcome of a project.

Sharing an experience of one of my projects, I want to say that a good requirements architecture gives transparency and confidence to the team and inspires them to create a great product.

Choosing a Requirements Tool

To finish my article, I would like to express my view why tools such as Jira or Azure DevOps are not a good choice for managing requirements.

Tools like these may be good for managing the workflow of development, but requirements management is so much more than this. On the one hand, the need to close epics and features to track development progress hinders the maintenance and holistic view of requirements. Once an epic or feature is closed, it cannot be modified or updated with new stories, meaning any changes to diagrams or requirements force the creation of new features, fragmenting information and making it hard to understand the full scope without re-reading multiple epics.

On the other hand, business analysts are tasked with managing requirements and other business analysis information, but such tools as Jira and Azure DevOps are structured around the needs of developers and project managers to track the process of implementation and time of a project. This limits the business analyst's control over requirements management processes and often necessitates maintaining a structure inconvenient for non-functional information and other BA information.

Critical business analysis elements like stakeholder lists, glossaries, business rules, and high-level artefacts cannot be stored effectively, often requiring additional tools or storage on the analyst's computer, which in turn limits access and transparency to these artefacts for stakeholders.

In summary, in my view, Jira and Azure DevOps are developer-focused tools that don't accommodate the broader, holistic requirements structure analysts need for efficient and organised requirement management. I would recommend using such tools as Confluence, Notion, whatever works for you.

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Secure by Design: Embedding Cybersecurity in Business Analysis Practices

Victor Asanmi

Would you rather have a pre-installed airbag in your car and not need it, or need one and not have it?

Think of cybersecurity as the airbag in your car—a safeguard that you might not always think about but can be the difference between a minor inconvenience and a major catastrophic failure. Like airbags in a vehicle, cybersecurity is best integrated from the start, ready to deploy when needed. Addressing security after a breach is like trying to install an airbag mid-collision when it's already too late. Proactively embedding security measures ensures businesses are prepared to handle the unexpected while protecting its most critical assets. As the saying goes—a security breach is not a matter of *if*, but *when*.

Developing a Security-first Mindset

IBM's *Cost of a Data Breach 2024* report reveals that treating security as an afterthought is very costly. A security breach could last several months costing an average of $5.46 million, thereby highlighting the need for proactive security measures to help minimise business disruptions and adverse financial impact.

As a business analyst, developing a security-first mindset starts with asking the right questions. At the start of every project or stakeholder engagement meeting, prioritise security by asking "*What are the risks?*" and "*How do we mitigate them?*". This habit helps you spot potential issues early.

Security-conscious BAs recognise that risks are always present, and they understand that the key is to identify them early and implement mitigation strategies that align with business goals and requirements without compromising the standard business processes and workflow.

As BAs, we do not pretend to have all the answers, but we must ask the right questions because cybersecurity failures are not just IT problems—they're business problems. We are often the bridge between technical teams and business stakeholders, and without cybersecurity awareness, vital security requirements can easily be missed in the early stages of a project. By embedding this awareness into our approach, we BAs can better understand how risks, vulnerabilities, and compliance requirements align with and impact business objectives.

Aligning Business Goals with Cybersecurity Objectives

As the threat landscape expands with advancements like AI, Internet of Things (IoT), and cloud computing, organisations must align their business goals with cybersecurity principles to ensure resilience and regulatory compliance. This involves mapping core business objectives to confidentiality, integrity, availability, and accountability to mitigate risks and build a security-conscious culture.

- **Confidentiality:** by protecting customer trust and brand reputation, and compliance with standards and regulations.
- **Integrity:** by presenting accurate data for decision-making and providing reliable and secure operations.
- **Availability:** by providing uninterrupted service delivery to customers and support for business continuity.
- **Accountability:** by ensuring that security responsibilities and activities are clearly defined, tracked, and enforced across the organisation.

Secure by Design: A Business Analyst's Role

As business analysts, our role extends beyond gathering requirements and facilitating discussions—we are a key player in embedding security into business processes. The *secure by design* and *security by default* principles ensure that security is not an afterthought but a fundamental aspect of every project, system, or business process.

According to Forbes, recently a DeepSeek AI data leak led to over one million sensitive records being exposed. This incident highlights a critical security issue, where the urgency of rapid deployment often compromises security best practices. A business analyst could have helped prevent this by ensuring security was embedded from the start by identifying authentication and access control requirements, risk assessments, compliance with security policies, and bridging the gap between development and security teams.

Secure by Design: Embedding Security from the Start

Much like defining functional and non-functional requirements, security must be considered from the inception of a project.

As a BA, you must ensure cybersecurity considerations are included during requirement gathering, risk assessments, and stakeholder discussions. Also, it is important to collaborate with security teams to identify threats and vulnerabilities early in the Software Development Life Cycle (SDLC), business process changes, or transformation initiatives. In the DeepSeek case, a BA could have mitigated the risk of such misconfigurations by integrating security requirements into functional specifications and governance work-flows, ensuring proper authentication and access controls were in place before deployment.

By documenting security-related business rules such as access control, encryption, and compliance needs within user stories, process models, and workflows, BAs can proactively identify potential risks. This not only strengthens security but also reinforces their role as key contributors to building resilient and compliant business solutions.

Case studies of security failures due to oversight in Business Analysis

Below I have provided two pertinent case studies, along with my understanding and interpretation of what went wrong in each case.

Case 1: Equifax Data Breach (2017) – Poor Risk Identification

According to the Electronic Privacy Information Centre (EPIC), Equifax, one of the largest credit reporting agencies, suffered a breach that exposed the personal data of 148 million people. The breach was caused by an unpatched vulnerability in Apache Struts, which attackers exploited. According to Bitdefender, it cost Equifax $1.4 billion in settlements, lawsuits, and remediation. It also led to reputational damage and regulatory scrutiny.

Without being involved, it is impossible to precisely understand the root causes. However, it is likely that additional business analysis oversight would have helped. There was likely a:

- Failure to prioritise security requirements for patch management.
- Lack of stakeholder collaboration between IT, security, and business teams to ensure regular updates were enforced.

Case 2: British Airways GDPR Breach (2018) – Weak Security by Design

According to the BBC, a cyberattack compromised over 400,000 customer records, including payment details. The Information Commissioner's

Office Judgment states that BA believe that attackers compromised a third party's access to a system, injected malicious scripts and used privilege escalation. British Airways was fined £20 million under GDPR regulations. Customers lost trust, leading to financial and reputational losses

My interpretation of this case is that there was a:

- Lack of security-first approach in business processes and customer data handling.
- Failure to test for security vulnerabilities in front-end applications.

Conclusion

Security is no longer just an IT concern—it is a business requirement. As a BA, you have the opportunity to integrate security thinking into requirement gathering, process analysis, and stakeholder engagement, ensuring that products and systems are secure, compliant, and resilient by design, intentionally.

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The Humble Business Analyst - Rethinking Soft Skills

Claudia Kralik

Growing up, I never considered "being humble" as a trait or characteristic I would desire to have in the business world. In fact, humbleness was rarely mentioned. Most of the career development sessions I attended focused on traits like assertiveness, conflict resolution, time management, leadership, problem solving, conveying confidence and so on. While these are undoubtedly valuable and essential qualities, it often felt like the "soft" in "soft skills" had been overlooked.

I want to share how staying humble has personally benefited my career as a business analyst. These are insights from my own experience, and I fully recognise that humbleness might look different for someone else. In this article, I've distilled the essence of humbleness into five core characteristics that have worked for me.

Side note: In this article, "stake-holders" refers to anyone who has a vested interest in the success of the project.

Tip 1: Show Appreciation

Show genuine interest and respect for your stakeholders. Take the time to get to know them personally—it builds trust and makes interviews and collaboration more enjoyable for everyone involved. Thank them for their time. Stakeholders are taking time out of their busy schedules to assist you, with the hope that their effort will lead to meaningful outcomes. However, there are no guarantees (e.g. funding might run out, leadership changes, or shifts in strategic direction), so acknowledging their contribution is essential.

Learn about their interests outside of work. Building a relationship by discovering what they enjoy fosters genuine connections. Avoid appearing as though you are following a script or displaying superficial interest. Pay attention and remember what they share. Take notes or record your sessions to avoid making them repeat themselves, which can be frustrating. This does not mean you can't ask for clarifications or follow-ups, but always respect the time they've given you and show that their input is valued.

Tip 2: Engage in The Art of Listening

As the Dalai Lama reportedly said: "When you talk, you are only repeating what you already know; when you listen, you learn new things".

Listening may seem simple, but many struggle with it. It's important to create space for others to speak, rather than rushing through questions in stakeholder interviews or finishing their sentences because we think we know what they'll say. While we may get the answers, stakeholders may not feel heard or engaged. I've been guilty of this, but my experience has shown that giving people time to fully express themselves fosters better connections and more meaningful conversations.

Having a clear agenda with defined goals is important but rushing through or interrupting stakeholders harms relationships. If time runs short, ask if they can extend the meeting, suggest a follow-up, or offer to send remaining questions via email for completion. This shows respect for their time and consideration.

Tip 3: Maintain Approachability

It goes without saying that as a business analyst, self-awareness is a crucial skill to possess, and it can take many forms. How you present yourself can significantly influence whether a stakeholder feels comfortable and willing to engage with you or hesitant to open-up.

Communication isn't just about words—you can convey a great deal without saying anything. Your body language and even the subtle micro-expressions on your face, which may not be so "micro", can impact how others perceive your willingness to listen.

Start by becoming aware of your own body language and facial expressions. Obvious signs like crossed arms, yawning, eye-rolling, or appearing disinterested can signal disengagement. If you're not getting what you need from your sessions, it might be time to reflect on and refine your presentability skills.

Tip 4: Cultivate a Learner's Mindset

Actively pursue opportunities to learn and enhance your skills, regardless of your current level of expertise. Cultivating a mindset of continuous learning and remaining hungry for new knowledge is essential for staying adaptable and relevant. Be open to learning from others and don't hesitate to admit when you don't know something—there's no shame in acknowledging gaps in your knowledge

In today's fast-paced world, where technology evolves rapidly and yesterday's advancements quickly become outdated, it can feel daunting to keep up. Start small—perhaps by reading one article a week—and gradually move on to books or deeper resources. Reflect on your interests and the areas where you want to grow.

Whether you're delving into technical subjects like machine learning or integration techniques or exploring topics like psychology or strategies for conducting more effective stakeholder sessions, focus on what excites you and aligns with your goals as a business analyst.

Tip 5: Be Modest

This might earn me a few disapproving looks, but I'll say it anyway—you are not above the stakeholders, nor do you know more or what's best for them. Yes, there is a strategic direction to follow, and yes, you are there to guide the stakeholder, align them with the vision, and navigate the various pressures from all sides to ensure the project's success.

However, demonstrate to the stakeholder that you are willing to step into their shoes and genuinely understand their perspective. Only then can you truly identify how to support them, comprehend their concerns, and address their struggles. Building this trust and empathy is the key to encouraging them to be forthcoming with you.

Conclusion

In my experience, humbleness has been foundational to my work as a business analyst for growing, building valuable relationships and being open and non-judgemental to new experiences. No level or amount of technical expertise or experience can foster meaningful human connections if you come across as anything other than having a willingness and openness to listen and learn.

As we all know, the BA landscape is far more complex and diverse and can take years of practice to navigate and understand the variety of different scenarios and cases you encounter. While adding humbleness to your skillset won't solve all your challenges or provide all the answers, it can certainly help create a smoother, more enjoyable, and collaborative journey for all parties involved.

A final thought: while "being humble" and possessing strong soft skills are essential for a business analyst, they are only one part of the bigger picture of being a well-rounded and successful professional. This doesn't undermine the value of experience and technical expertise but instead highlights the importance of striking a balance between these qualities to achieve success.

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5 Essential Techniques That BAs Can Use to Help Entrepreneurs

Olanrewaju Babalola

In my experience, many small businesses and startups fail not because of a lack of ideas but due to poor strategic planning and execution. A comprehensive understanding of business analysis techniques, derived from frameworks like the International Institute of Business Analysis (IIBA®) Business Analysis Body of Knowledge (BABOK®) Guide can help avoid these pitfalls by fostering a culture of informed decision-making, ensuring resources are allocated correctly, and aligning business operations with customer needs. This article explores five essential business analysis techniques that BAs and other change professionals can use to support entrepreneurs. Each technique, anchored in BA principles, plays a pivotal role in guiding businesses through the complexities of strategic planning, operations, and growth.

Benchmarking and Market Analysis

Benchmarking and market analysis are critical tools for positioning businesses strategically. They serve as a dual framework for evaluating internal operations and assessing external market conditions. Through benchmarking, businesses can compare their performance with that of industry leaders, identify best practices, and set performance standards based on those comparisons. For example, a startup that specialises in eco-friendly packaging could benchmark its production methods against established leaders like Tetra Pak® to identify opportunities to improve its operational efficiency and waste reduction initiatives.

Market analysis complements benchmarking by offering a view of the external environment. BAs can assist entrepreneurs in identifying opportunities and threats, understanding customer behaviours, and tracking emerging trends. This can be especially helpful for businesses looking to enter a new market or adjust their existing strategies. For instance, a BA can help a coffee shop conduct a market analysis to examine local consumer preferences. By surveying customers and studying market trends, the shop might discover an increasing demand for plant-based milk alternatives, allowing it to expand its menu and cater to new dietary preferences, thus giving it a competitive edge.

Business Model Canvas

The Business Model Canvas (BMC) is a strategic tool designed to provide a clear, visual framework for understanding how a business creates, delivers, and captures value. Developed by Alexander Osterwalder and Yves Pigneur, the BMC breaks down a business into nine key components: customer segments, value propositions, channels, customer relationships, revenue streams, key resources, key activities, key partnerships, and cost structure.

This technique allows BAs to help entrepreneurs in mapping out their entire business model on a single page, offering an overview that simplifies strategic planning and decision-making. For instance, consider a local bakery looking to expand its operations. By using the BMC, BAs can help the owner map out various aspects of the business, such as customer segments (e.g. families looking for custom cakes, busy professionals needing quick breakfast options etc.) and value propositions (e.g. provision of high-quality products made of organic ingredients, community-focused events etc). The bakery could also identify key activities (e.g. daily baking, marketing, inventory management) and key partnerships (e.g. local suppliers for organic ingredients etc).

The BMC encourages entrepreneurs to take a holistic view of their business and its operations, ensuring that all elements of the business are aligned with the overall value proposition. This structured approach can help identify areas where changes or pivots may be necessary, but the ability to execute those changes effectively depends on the organisation's capabilities and culture of business agility.

Financial Analysis

Understanding the financial health of a business is crucial for making informed decisions. BAs can be instrumental in helping entrepreneurs assess their business's financial health through financial analysis. By examining key documents such as income statements, balance sheets, and cash flow statements, BAs provide entrepreneurs with insights into their business's profitability, liquidity, and sustainability.

Entrepreneurs can use financial ratios like Operating Profit Margin and Net Profit Margin to evaluate their business's profitability. Meanwhile, liquidity ratios such as Quick Ratio help assess a company's ability to meet short-term obligations. A small retail business might use the insights to evaluate whether it has enough cash flow to expand or if it needs to focus on cutting costs and increasing profitability before considering any growth initiatives.

One common financial analysis tool is the break-even analysis, which helps entrepreneurs determine the point at which their business's revenues will cover its costs. This is particularly useful for startups, allowing them to set realistic sales targets and assess the financial feasibility of their business models.

Root Cause Analysis

Entrepreneurs are in business to solve problems. Also, entrepreneurs will inevitably face problems in their businesses, whether it's a dip in sales, customer dissatisfaction, or operational inefficiencies. BAs can help entrepreneurs apply Root Cause Analysis (RCA) techniques, such as the 5 Whys and fishbone diagrams, to identify the underlying causes of these issues. This approach ensures that solutions are long-lasting and prevents the recurrence of similar problems in the future.

The 5 Whys technique involves asking "Why?" five times in succession to drill down to the root cause of a problem. For example, a restaurant might use RCA to address customer complaints about long wait times. After asking "Why?" multiple times, the restaurant might discover that the root cause is an inefficient ordering process during peak hours, not simply a shortage of staff. By addressing the root cause, the restaurant can implement process improvements, such as adjusting staff schedules or automating parts of the ordering system, resulting in faster service and higher customer satisfaction.

Another RCA tool is the fishbone diagram, which helps businesses categorise potential causes of problems into various categories (e.g., people, processes, equipment, or external factors). This visual representation makes it easier to identify patterns and connections between different factors that contribute to the problem.

SWOT Analysis

The SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) is a well-known strategic planning tool used by BAs to assess internal and external factors that affect the success of an endeavour. By understanding their strengths and weaknesses, entrepreneurs can identify areas for improvement and leverage their advantages to gain a competitive edge. Meanwhile, by evaluating opportunities and threats in the external environment, entrepreneurs can anticipate changes in the market and adapt accordingly.

To maximise the effectiveness of a SWOT analysis, BAs can combine it with other tools, such as the VRIO analysis, which examines the Value, Rarity, Imitability, and Organisation of a company's resources. This helps entrepreneurs determine whether their strengths provide a sustainable competitive advantage. Additionally, a PESTEL analysis is used to analyse external factors such as Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, and Legal trends that may affect the business.

Conclusion

In the fast-paced world of entrepreneurship, BAs can provide invaluable support by applying key business analysis techniques to help entrepreneurs navigate challenges, make informed decisions, and achieve sustainable growth. By integrating these five BA techniques into their operations, entrepreneurs can increase their agility, drive innovation, and ultimately position their ventures for long-term success. The insights drawn from the BABOK® framework offer a roadmap for navigating the complexities of entrepreneurship.

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The Role of a Business Analyst in Data Migration Projects

Prerana Sharma

In today's data-driven world, with technology advancing rapidly, businesses must keep up to remain competitive and offer unique value. This often means system upgrades, or even full-blown digital transformation. Any such transformation will usually require data migration, which involves transferring data between systems, formats or storage locations while maintaining its integrity, accuracy, and security. In such projects, the role of a business analyst is indispensable.

As BAs, we encounter a diverse range of challenges every day which prepares us for just about any business problem that comes our way. Data migration projects can be particularly tricky, although of course different projects will have differing levels of complexity.

Migration is Technical

Data migration projects have both a business and a technical dimension to them. A BA will be required not only to understand the business context, align to organisational objectives, identify risks, and facilitate smooth transitions, but also define data structures, data models, requirements for source to target mapping, data validation, reconciliation, and stakeholder communication. All of this while ensuring that this process is seamless, efficient and aligns with organisational objectives. There is a lot to do!

Additionally, varying layers of complexity can arise, including:

1. Differences in data structures, processing rules or functionality on source and target platforms. This can be especially complicated when migrating between different platforms offered by different Commercial Off The Shelf (COTS) vendors.

2. Poor data quality on the source system

3. Unstable and unsupported legacy platforms with multiple work-arounds

4. Minimal Subject Matter Expert (SME) knowledge, alongside a lack of documentation

5. Differing (or inconsistent) business processes

6. The need to run existing and source platforms in parallel for a period of time (parallel or dual running)

Tips for a Successful Data Migration

A business analyst would need to navigate these challenges, and ensure the project is executed with minimal business disruption. Here are a few to-dos to help you achieve that:

1. Understand "the why"

It's important to understand the reason behind the migration. Migration projects are often long running and as the complexity grows, they end up losing steam. This means BAs can land in the position of being proponents of the change. If the purpose of the change is clear, it becomes easier to advocate for it. It's therefore important to understand the business need behind the change and document it well.

2. It's all about the data

Structure of the data

Data lies at the heart of a migration project and is the critical aspect that will ensure business continuity and will minimise negative impacts on customers. The BA must study the existing data models and structures. Having proficiency in SQL, Tableau, MS Excel is a bonus. That will aid in examining the data models and delving into the low-level intricacies of the database structure, understanding the organisation and storage of the data in the schemas and the relationship between various tables that hold the data. This will give valuable insight when the source to target mapping exercise is conducted.

Data Quality

Poor data quality not only leads to inaccuracies and inefficiency but can affect delivery timelines negatively if not addressed early. Key pieces of data must be identified early with business stakeholders, and any information that can impact a customer must be analysed in detail.

Data for key information must be checked for accuracy and completeness and where possible cleansing should be undertaken or rules and logic built during the mapping and data transformation to mitigate the issue.

Data Consistency

Data must be consistent across different systems. If there is disparate data in various interfacing systems, a single source of truth must be identified and all systems must align so that there is zero or minimal impact to any Business As Usual (BAU) processes.

For example, differences in formatting between systems, duplicate records especially in dual running systems and mismatched values will disrupt processes and downstream interfaces, applications, MI reporting etc.

Relevance of Data

It's important to ensure that only necessary data is migrated. This includes data that remains relevant for existing and new processes that will be utilised going forward, alongside anything necessary for regulatory compliance. Migrating unnecessary information will impact timelines, increase costs, and add unwanted complexities. The BA should also ensure that outdated data is corrected prior to migrating into the target system.

Data Integrity

The integrity of data and relationship between various data entities must be maintained for a successful migration. Any mismatch can cause the data to become corrupted and can cause potential incidents in the target system.

3. Know your Stakeholders

A data migration project will usually involve multiple areas of the business and stakeholders of varying degrees of interest will be involved. It will be useful to have a stakeholder map which can be used to define and guide the BA's communication strategy as well as provide a view of the decision-makers for faster decision making.

4. Know your systems and keep your external stakeholders close

Challenges will often emerge where it is necessary to understand system behaviours in a particular scenario. Analysis may be required in the legacy source system or the target system. When deploying an off-the-shelf solution, it is important to consider the role the vendors play, the engagement model and Service Level Agreements (SLAs) that drive the relationship. A positive relationship with external stake-holders goes a long way in clarifying system behaviours and getting quick answers.

5. Challenge! Challenge! Challenge!

The recommended approach is to question every ask. A BA must challenge the need for each piece of information that is deemed required. Constantly asking "why" and "what if" will often reveal that a lot of the requirements are "nice to haves" rather than "must haves". This will save time and reduce complexity.

6. Analyse upstream and downstream impacts

A thorough impact analysis of all upstream and downstream interfaces, customer communication and documentation, BAU Business processes and existing MI reporting must be conducted to ensure there are no surprises post migration. Often businesses have systems that produce reports for external entities, including external agencies, regulatory bodies etc. The BA must ensure that all compliance requirements are met through the data that is being migrated

7. Understand archiving requirements

At the end of a data migration project, the business would look to decommission the legacy platform. Another important consideration is to ensure critical pieces of historic information in the legacy system, which are out of scope of migration, but may be required in the future, are archived.

In summary, by focusing on data, minimising impacts, and ensuring stakeholder alignment, a BA can ensure their organisation achieves successful migration projects that not only preserve but enhance the value of data, leading to strategic success.

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Using Group Construct Analysis to Understand Stakeholder Worldviews in Ambiguous Situations, Part 16

Communication: It May Not Be What You Think It Is

Nick de Voil

The Transmission Model of Communication

We all know it: communication skills are important for business analysts. Communication tops the list of 'competencies of a business analyst' according to the BCS book *Business Analysis* (Paul & Cadle). IIBA®'s BABOK® Guide identifies communication skills as one of the six 'underlying competencies' for BAs.

But what *is* communication, exactly? Unfortunately, the BABOK® Guide introduces the topic with this well-worn definition:

"Communication is the act of a sender conveying information to a receiver in a method which delivers the meaning the sender intended"

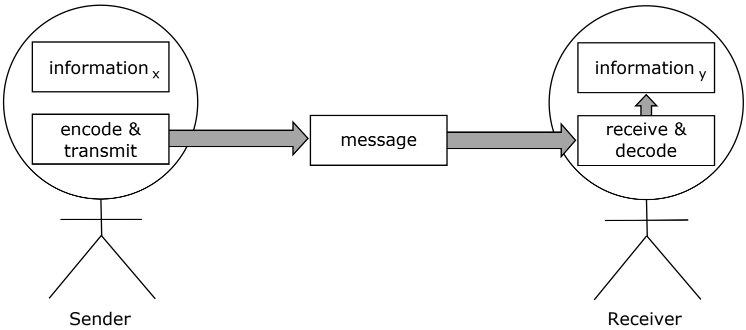

Figure 1: the transmission model. Success is defined as (x = y)

This is the so-called **transmission model** of communication. It's a naïve view which massively oversimplifies what's going on when people communicate. This isn't surprising. It's based on the Shannon-Weaver model, which is an explicitly mathematical framework created for telecoms engineering—hardly the most promising starting point for thinking about a profoundly human activity.

The first fallacy of communication

Communication is about transferring information accurately from one person's head to another.

What Does Communication Mean to You?

Let's step back for a moment. Broadly, business analysts are familiar with three types of situation where communication plays a crucial part:

1. Conveying to stakeholders our conception of the requirements for a project, or some other analysis results—this might be done by giving a presentation and/or distributing a document.
2. Collaborating with stakeholders to evolve the scope, vision or requirements for a project.
3. Studying the way in which people in a business situation carry out tasks in collaboration with each other.

The transmission model may be applicable to the first example, but it doesn't begin to do justice to the other two. It fails to cover four aspects of situations 2 and 3:

- The communication happening here involves multiple individuals.
- While example 1 describes a one-way flow of information, the flow in examples 2 and 3 is at least two-way—there's a feedback loop. When more than two individuals are involved, there are many feedback loops.

- The transmission model assumes that there's a known, defined message which needs to be transmitted—but in real life, that is very often not the case.

- It isn't normally important that $x = y$ (see Figure 1). On the contrary: when $x <> y$ the result is constructive dialogue and creativity.

If Participant A concentrates on ensuring $x = y$, participants B and C may feel they are not being listened to, and the message is likely to fall on deaf ears. As any experienced salesperson will tell you, the best way to persuade someone is to ask them questions and find out about the way *they* see the situation, rather than insisting on getting your message across. As business analysts, we should almost always be in listening mode, even when—*especially* when—we're trying to persuade someone of something.

Think about your own working week. How often are you trying to convey a clearly pre-defined message, and how often are you discussing a topic in an exploratory way, remaining open to thoughts and opinions from the other conversation participant(s)?

Why Is Communication Relevant in Group Construct Analysis?

If you've been reading the previous articles in this series, you'll know that Group Construct Analysis (GCA) is about understanding the construct systems (worldviews) of individuals and groups. You might be wondering why the subject of this article is communication.

- Could it be that the information that Participant A wants to convey is shaped by their construct system? Yes, this is true.

- Could it be that Participant B's ability to accurately decode the message sent by Participant A will depend on their construct system, and on its similarity to that of Participant A? Yes, this is also true, as we saw in article 15.

However, the most important reason is this: Communication is not simply a tool that an individual uses to transfer information. It's in the process of communicating that our construct systems are formed. In fact, every situation where communication takes place is an occasion for our construct system to develop, change and be influenced. Human beings are social animals—as discussed in article 9, we don't just dream up construct systems in isolation from each other.

Individual Constructs

Each person has their own individual construct system. Every time we communicate—unless we do it ineffectively, or our construct system is very **impermeable**, to use George Kelly's term (see article 2)—our construct system is likely to adjust itself in several ways, for example:

- **Confirmation bias** causes us to seek out evidence for our pre-existing constructs. If we find it, they will be strengthened (see article 7).

- We go through an unconscious process of rewriting the story that we tell internally about ourselves and about the past (see article 8), to accommodate any new narrative elements from other participants in the conversation.

- Any commitment that we make during the episode, for example a promise to do something or an assertion of a controversial position, is likely to be processed thoroughly to ensure that our system is still coherent.

- The same applies to any surprising behaviour on the part of another participant.

Group Constructs

We can only understand the construct system of any group by looking at the communication that takes place within the group and between members of the group and others.

The system is created by both explicit and implicit communication. The group's constructs are continually reaffirmed explicitly to maintain a consensus. Implicit communication happens, for example, when members of the group "second-guess" what opinions or behaviour would be acceptable within the group on the basis of existing well-tested constructs.

What Should a BA Do?

- When you're taking part (actively or passively) in a conversation, tune in to the way in which the ideas emerge and evolve.

- Afterwards, reflect on what the individual participants' construct systems contributed to the conversation, and how they influenced it.

- Can you draw a group construct map (see article 2 and article 15) showing which things the group agrees on, and where the areas of disagreement are? This is partly about the substantive issues that were explicitly discussed, but those are just the tip of the iceberg. What about the unstated assumptions, beliefs, values and norms?

- For a large group, you may need to think about sub-groups. For example, each department will have its own construct system. If a meeting includes groups of representatives from different departments, each group will tend to "close ranks" around its own system.

In the next article, we will look at the **second fallacy of communication** and discuss how group constructs evolve in the process of communication.

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The Accidental BA

Gordon McLean

I wasn't always a business analyst.

I started my working life as a technical administrator; essentially a technical dogsbody for a small IT firm. This involved a bit of database work here, a bit of user documentation there, and it was the latter that took me into the world of technical communications ("tech comms"). It was in tech comms I flourished, grew a career, became a manager, spoke at conferences, and eventually slid sideways into what I refer to as my "BA adjacent years".

I wasn't yet a business analyst but I worked with, and managed, a couple of great BAs within my team, learned a lot from them, and realised that my career built on writing technical documentation wasn't all that different from theirs, it was just at a different point in the software development process.

From Technical Writer to Business Analyst

Technical writers who create user documentation (e.g. user guides) based on the solution that is being built are known to be user-focussed. They aim to provide instructions that help users get the most value from a process or system whilst keeping the users' end goals in mind. Sound familiar? Shift that thinking to *before* the solution is being built and, et voilà, hello business analysis.

As I made the transition in my career so too did some of my colleagues in the technical writing team. We ended up creating a user documentation-driven development process; the developers would use the pre-written documentation as part of the requirements to help build the solution. This worked well in tandem with a test-driven development process.

That transition took place at one company over many years but eventually redundancy arrived and, after a couple of months of taking stock (essentially a holiday and a lot of trips to the cinema during the day), I needed a job. I saw a contract role for a business analyst and thought, well why not!

The interview was fascinating, lasted about 8 minutes and consisted of me being asked what I thought a BA did, to which I responded something about figuring out the “as is”, and what the “to be” could be, and was told that was all they needed to ask me. Ten years later I'm still a business analyst.

I don't have any formal qualifications, and if I'm honest I feel a bit long in the tooth for that these days. I have been an operations manager, worked with product managers, technical architects, software developers, testers, technical writers, UX designers, business managers, team leaders, team members, end users, and people on a production floor. What I've learned about being a BA I've learned by observing how things can be done, what doesn't work, and critically how to understand who needs to know what.

Adaptability Is Crucial

It also means that I don't slavishly adhere to a single specific methodology as I didn't learn to be a BA by following one. Like the best agile development teams will borrow and adapt from different approaches, perhaps blending elements of Extreme Programming (XP), Scrum etc, so do BAs. I think the best business analysis teams tweak common working processes to best suit the needs of their context and stakeholders. I think being able to flex your approach, and focussing on value add, has been a key mindset that has helped me in my career so far.

This is unlikely to be news to you, we all adapt how we work based on the environment, the processes, and the people. It's impossible to make every methodology fit within a particular environment. To those who determinedly hold to a specific practice and the processes it entails I ask this: do all of the things you do offer value? Are there some parts of your processes that you are doing because it's just what is done? As BAs we challenge this thinking regularly with others, but how often do we look at ourselves and how we work?

Reflecting on an Atypical BA Career Path

My career path is atypical, and I've always had a problem following rules. Whilst all of what I know I've learned on the job, I think I've weaved a good enough path through the myriad of different views and voices telling me how to do my job. I've still got a lot to learn, but I've Googled, I've asked colleagues, I've read books, and articles and I think I'm OK at my job. I'm also always happy to learn and improve, something my time as an operations manager taught me well. A good retrospective is a powerful thing.

I have a motto, I've used it for many years now: “Keep It Simple (Stupid)”. That last word isn't intended as the insult some take it to be, rather I interpret it as an instruction to keep things simple for people who aren't as skilled or knowledgeable as others. I’ve heard this idea referred to being “stupid in context”. I'm stupid when it comes to welding, but a welder isn't. This is an important mindset for a BA I think, to keep some humility and remember the "curse of knowledge" (hat tip to Chip and Dan Heath for that phrase).

I have enjoyed my time as a business analyst, through a myriad of responsibilities and processes across many organisations. I am happy that I can bring both experience and some knowledge but, and I think most importantly, I bring a mindset of challenging how things are done, poking and prodding at processes for improvements, both within our team and for the wider business. I've been very lucky to have worked with very gracious and intelligent people along the way too, so whilst I didn't start my career as a business analyst, it feels like I finally landed in the right role for how my brain works.

So I'll keep learning as I go, I'll keep challenging practices and processes, and do my very best to keep things as simple as possible. It's how I work best.

Gordon is a Senior Business Analyst type, enjoys creating solutions with software. Open minded leader, always looking to improve myself, the team, and what we can offer to the business and our customers. Connect:
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Hello, Hola, Cześć – Cultural Differences in Projects

Łukasz Lechert

Do We Need Skills and Knowledge about Intercultural Management?

We live during intensive, international economic cooperation. Collaboration crosses national borders, and frequently new contacts are established with partners from different cultural areas. Organisations operating in an international environment should be aware of many dependencies and potential cultural pitfalls. To avoid misunderstandings, success depends on understanding the activities of international businesses outside of the organisation’s home country. It is impossible to ‘pack everyone in the same bag’ and think that everyone is driven by the same instincts, emotions and aspirations. It is important that cultural nuances are observed and respected.

Culture is vast and includes aspects including conventions, norms and even the shared memories of important community achievements. Cultural norms and expectations are passed down from generation to generation, for example what is considered “good” behaviour or the “accepted rules” of social coexistence.

Not all aspects of culture will be immediately visible to an observer. What is visible for everyone depends on what defines a given culture internally. The visible layer includes visible actions, speech, rituals, appearance, clothing, and the way that topics within the world are discussed and described. However, these features are a fraction of what makes up any given culture. There are also many hidden layers.

The hidden layers include aspects such as values, ideals, beliefs, preferences, and priorities. Basic values include understanding what is right and wrong, which helps when interpreting someone's behaviour and goals. Therefore, awareness and knowledge about cultural differences (including at least some appreciation of the hidden layers of culture) is necessary to collaborate effectively in an international or cross-cultural environment.

What Is Culture, and How Can We Learn It?

Wikipedia defines culture as: "a concept that encompasses the social behaviour, institutions, and norms found in human societies, as well as the knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, capabilities, attitude, and habits of the individuals in these groups. Culture is often originated from or attributed to a specific region or location"

You might be asking yourself: "Why should I explore information about other cultures?" The answer is simple: having knowledge and being aware of differences allows you to communicate with people effectively. Generally speaking, it is worth knowing what to say, when to say what and how to say it. In addition to the message to be conveyed, words can imply additional information or meaning. Not only this, but the way that a word is said, or the context in which it is used might completely change its meaning within a given culture.

Communicating unambiguously requires consideration of several dimensions including the level of communication skills of both the speaker and recipient, level of foreign language knowledge, mood and attitude of both parties, intentions of the speaker or author etc. To collaborate across cultures, you will also need knowledge about the customs in a given country, what is welcome, what is appropriate to the situation and what is not. Adaptation to a new reality takes time and effort from both parties. It may be preceded by culture shock, which may lead to inadvertent and unintended misunderstandings and negative outcomes. Awareness of differences is essential for living and working across cultures, and will help avoid culture shock. Knowledge about space and distance in communication, attitude to time (punctuality, accuracy), attitude to risk, information about stereotypes and so forth can prove very valuable.

Given many business analysts collaborate across cultures, knowledge about essential differences can be helpful in daily project activities and I believe this should be seen as one of the business analyst competencies.

Five Main Thoughts

The following tips are useful when working in a cross-cultural context:

- Don't judge. Try to understand people's behaviour.
- Your inner state is as important as your outer appearance. If you feel uncomfortable, anxious or nervous, try to understand why.
- Don't try to change your habits suddenly and completely. Change

them step by step, and it will be easier.

- Keep the end goal in mind and focus on daily achievements.
- Feel free, collaborate authentically, recognise friendly people and smile sincerely.

Can a Culture Be Measured?

Can culture be measured? The short answer is yes, there are methods of quantifying some aspects of culture. By analysing variables, you can better understand the characteristics of a given culture and differences between countries. Then you can use this knowledge in practice better. Dutch scientist Geert Hofstede, author of *Cultures & Organizations, Software of the mind*, created a set of cultural dimensions:

- Power distance
- Individualism vs collectivism
- Masculinity vs femininity
- Uncertainty avoidance
- Long-term vs short-term orientation
- Indulgence vs restraint

Other contributors have suggested additional dimensions. For example anthropologist Edward T. Hall suggested the addition of:

- Monochronic vs polychronic
- High Context vs Low Context

Let's examine the first of these additional dimensions. Time is a valuable resource and it flows continuously. A monochronic culture sticks to plans and punctuality, and treat deadlines as high priority. On the other side is polychronic culture, which may (at face value) seem to be less proactive. However, it is not better or worse, it is just *different.* A polychronic culture will likely treat time as being fluid and will place greater emphasis on getting to know the *people* and it is more flexible in context of changing plans.

Success is also a measure of every enterprise. Hofstede's dimension of *long-term vs short-term orientation* can be useful to consider here. Cultures with a long-term orientation will likely value focusing on longer-term outcomes (and planning towards them), whereas cultures with a shorter-term orientation may be focused on the "here and now". Someone from a culture with a short-term orientation may consider long-term planning pointless (as things are going to change anyway), whereas someone from a culture with a longer-term orientation may consider *failing* to plan to be irresponsible. These are simplified examples, but I'm sure they help outline the dimension.

Useful Tools

If you are working in a cross-cultural environment, you might find the following tools and techniques useful:

- Hofstede's '6D' model of national culture
- Conversation Patterns for Software Professionals
- Observation and mind mapping as elicitation tools, along with retrospectives and lessons learned to capture key areas of

improvement (see IIBA® BABOK® v3)

Conclusion. Are We Different?

A BA who is aware of cultural differences might be characterised by:

- experience in international projects
- openness to learning (continuous learning has been used)
- possessing appropriate communication skills
- adept at understanding different expectations in time management
- possessing practical conflict management skills
- good knowledge of foreign languages

Are we different? Yes, we are. We have different habits, behaviour, goals or competences but fortunately in many aspects of life we are similar.

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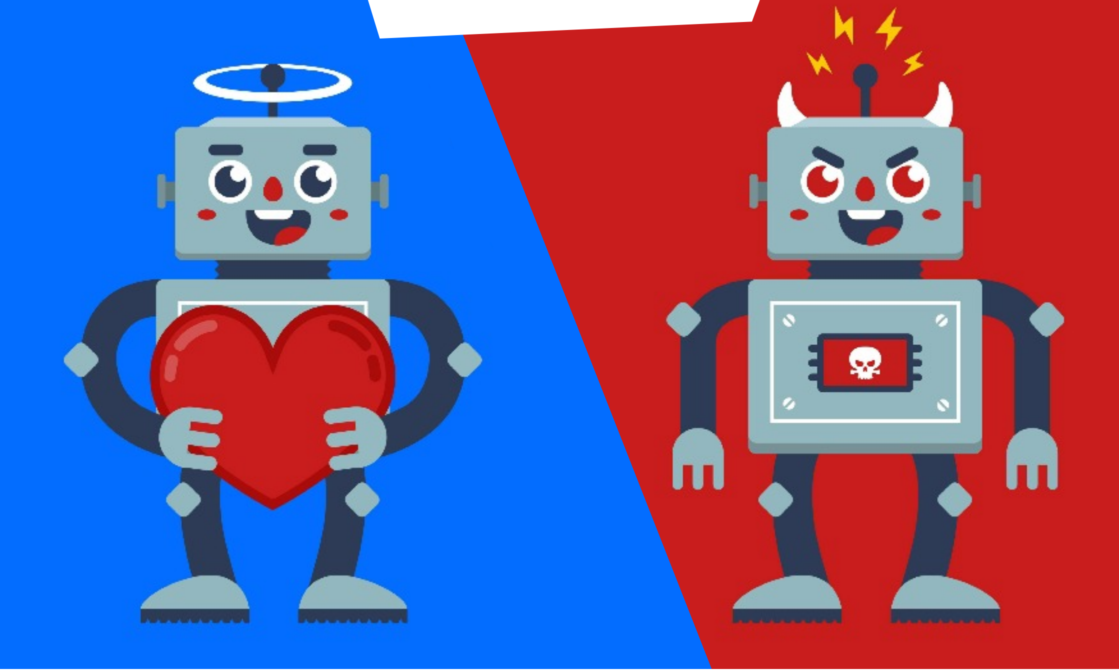
ChatGPT: Is It an Ally or an Enemy?

Lalita Lalwani



ChatGPT and other artificial intelligence tools are quickly changing the professional scene as the world continues to ride the tide of digital transformation. Product managers, project managers, scrum masters, and business analysts are increasingly using AI to improve workflows and provide value. But what is ChatGPT and how can it be a useful tool for business analysis? Let's dive in.

What is ChatGPT?

ChatGPT was developed by OpenAI and is designed to converse in a way that is easy for a human to understand. The innovative point about ChatGPT is its capability not only to answer questions but also to formulate new content and help in problem-solving, supported by huge amounts of data and a neural network design. It is like having a super smart and knowledgeable assistant who works around the clock. Not only does ChatGPT boast of a range of features, but it is adaptable too. Its uses span beyond technical documentation and it can be usefully deployed in creative brainstorming too.

ChatGPT in Action: Practical Applications for Business Analysis

Here's a look at how ChatGPT can enhance business analysis tasks with practical examples:

1. Streamlining Requirements Elicitation

Suppose you're running a work-shop with stakeholders to elicit requirements. Afterwards you have a stack of notes to distil into a coherent requirements document. This is where ChatGPT shines. Just give it those notes from the workshop you attended, and it can:

- Summarise key points.
- Point out potential missing requirements.
- Suggest structured format for documentation.

This saves hours of manual effort and ensures you're not overlooking critical insights.

Example Prompt: "Summarise the following workshop notes into key requirements and highlight any gaps: [Insert notes]."

2. Creating Process Flow Diagrams and Business Rules

It can often be the case that process flows or business rules are created by a business analyst to increase the business's operational efficiency. ChatGPT can help in the following ways:

- Provide textual narratives of steps that can subsequently be transformed into a flow diagram.
- Propose typical business rules that are optimal for a particular industry.

Example Prompt: "Discuss every step in the e-commerce check-out process from order placement to payment and finally order fulfilment."

Thereafter, business analysts will receive step by step outputs which can be used to build a visual process diagram with tools such as Visio or Lucidchart.

3. Facilitating Competitive Analysis

Understanding the competitive landscape is vital when making decisions about positioning or product offerings. ChatGPT can aid a company's competitive analysis approach by:

- Noting important competition per industry and market segment.
- Highlighting their opportunities and weaknesses.
- Giving knowledge on industry movements changes and trends which can be used for differentiation.

Example Prompt: "Complete a SWOT analysis of key competitors of the cloud project management software."

BAs and product managers might use that information to further improve their strategies and properly place them in the market.

4. Risk Analysis and Mitigation Planning

For creating a risk analysis, ChatGPT can serve as our brainstorming partner. Given some information regarding the project, it will help in:

- Identifying potential risks: technical, operational, market-related, among others.
- Throwing in suggestions for the mitigation strategies to be taken.
- Drafting a risk register presentation format.

For example, a BA working on a Software as a Service (SaaS) product launch might ask ChatGPT to describe likely risks in rolling out new features. ChatGPT responds with a list of thoughtful considerations and proactive measures.

Example Prompt: "List potential risks and mitigation strategies for a SaaS product feature rollout, considering technical and market-related aspects."

5. Data Analysis & Reporting

ChatGPT will be able to analyse huge volumes of data and present insightful reports. Business analysts can use ChatGPT by feeding in raw data to spot trends, patterns, and anomalies. It can summarise data and create visualisations that are easily communicative to stakeholders. This is particularly useful in helping the project manager and product managers make informed decisions based on data.

Example Prompt: "I have a dataset related to [brief description, e.g. sales or customer data]. Analyse it to identify trends, patterns, and anomalies, and summarise key findings. Provide actionable insights, suggest visualisations (e.g. charts or graphs), and include recommendations for stakeholders like [project/product managers or executives]."

Limitations of ChatGPT

In addition to its merits, ChatGPT has certain limitations. Recognising these puts one at an advantage to use the facility effectively:

- **Lack of Contextual Depth:** The tool does not capture deep context for your organisation; it is, therefore, required that every little piece of information is properly vetted for relevance and accuracy.
- **Ethics and Privacy:** AI tools, ChatGPT in particular, would naturally awaken some ethical and privacy issues, particularly in sensitive or confidential information processing. It is crucial to develop a set of guidelines and protocols for responsible and secure data usage. Organisations may wish to deploy private GPT models to ensure their intellectual property isn’t used to train public AI platforms.
- **Garbage In, Garbage Out:** The clarity and preciseness of your inputs determine how good

ChatGPT responses will be. Poor input, poor output.

- **Risk of Generic Outputs:** Since ChatGPT is fed from large datasets, sometimes the outputs may be too generic. Further effort may be needed to tailor the output for specific needs.

- **Not a Decision Maker:** While ChatGPT can provide insights and suggestions, it doesn't replace human judgment or decision-making. It's a tool, not a strategist.

ChatGPT: Is It An Ally or An Enemy?

The introduction of any transformative technology often raises questions: "Will it replace jobs?", "Is it a friend or foe?"

It provides enormous gains through the improvement of efficiency, consistency, and scalability. This would release the business analyst for higher-value and strategic work due to the capability to automate routine activities. On top of this, its potential for generating insight and driving effective communication will drive more informed decisions and improve stakeholder engagement.

However, there are valid concerns about over-reliance on these AI tools. Business analysis intrinsically is a very human-centric profession that requires a lot of empathy, critical thinking, and interpersonal skills. While ChatGPT can amplify such abilities, it cannot replace the human touch. Thus, there needs to be a balance—a use of ChatGPT as a strong tool, yet keeping in mind the limitations and ensuring human expertise is leading.

In the end, ChatGPT is neither the ultimate friend nor an avowed enemy. It is a tool, a sophisticated and powerful one, that has the potential to significantly enhance the practice of business analysis if used judiciously. Understanding its capabilities and its limitations, the business analyst, product manager, project manager, and scrum master can leverage its potential to drive better outcomes and navigate through the complexity of the modern business environment.

ChatGPT and tools like it are a powerful addition to the toolset of the modern business analysis practitioner. They supercharge productivity, sharpen deliverables, and can even inspire creativity.

The next time you're facing an overwhelming task or creative block, consider calling upon ChatGPT. After all, in this fast-evolving world of business analysis, embracing innovation is not an option—it's a must.

To business analysis professionals, ChatGPT is an ally if used wisely.

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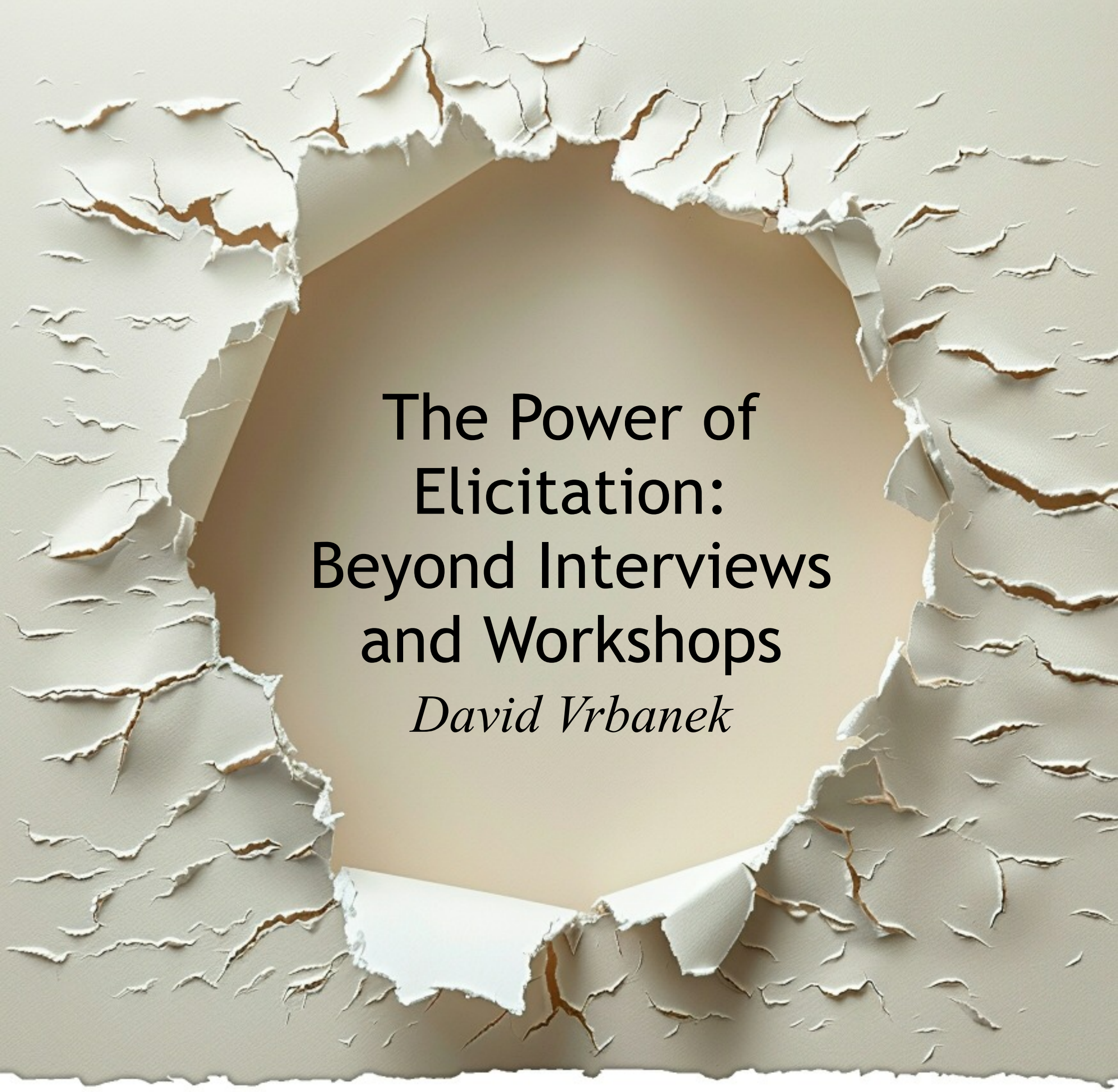

The Power of Elicitation: Beyond Interviews and Workshops

David Vrbanek

Have you ever left a stakeholder meeting feeling like you've barely scratched the surface of what they truly want? Or worse, do you sometimes discover critical requirements long after a project is well underway? If so, you're not alone. Many BAs rely heavily on traditional elicitation techniques like interviews and workshops, only to find that these methods don't always uncover the full story.

Elicitation is both an art and a science. It's not just about asking questions; it's also about creating an environment where stakeholders feel comfortable sharing their needs, challenges, and even their fears. Let's dive into why it's essential to go beyond the basics of elicitation—and how you can take your techniques to the next level.

Why Elicitation Matters More than You Think

Elicitation is the cornerstone of business analysis. It's how we uncover the needs that drive solutions. But it's also one of the most misunderstood aspects of our role. Too often, we treat it as a checklist item: schedule a meeting, ask some questions, and move on.

The problem? Stakeholders don't always know what they need—or how to articulate it. They might not even realise what's possible. If we rely solely on straightforward Q&A, we risk missing critical insights that could make or break a project.

To truly excel as a BA, we need to approach elicitation with curiosity, creativity, and a willingness to explore uncharted territory.

Going Beyond the Basics

Let's face it: interviews and workshops are the bread and butter of elicitation. They're tried and true, but they're not always enough. Here are some alternative techniques to help you dig deeper:

1. Observation: See What Words Can't Explain

Sometimes, the best insights come from simply watching how people work. Observation allows you to see workflows, bottlenecks, and inefficiencies in action—things stakeholders might not even be aware of.

- **Example**: A BA working on a retail Point Of Sale (POS) system spent a day shadowing cashiers. She noticed that they often had to exit one screen to process returns, a step no one mentioned during interviews. That insight led to a design change that saved employees hours each week.

- **Tip**: Approach observation with a beginner's mindset. Pretend you know nothing about the process and take detailed notes on what you see.

2. Role-playing: Step into Their Shoes

Role-playing is an underrated yet powerful technique. By assuming the role of the end user, you can better understand their frustrations and needs.

- **Example**: During a project to improve an employee self-service portal, a BA asked HR reps to act as employees submitting leave requests. This exercise revealed clunky navigation paths that the team wouldn't have spotted otherwise.

- **Tip**: Encourage stakeholders to role-play as well. It can help them articulate needs they hadn't considered before.

3. Journey Mapping: Visualise the Bigger Picture

Journey mapping involves charting the end-to-end experience of a user or customer. This technique helps uncover pain points, handoffs, and moments of delight.

- **Example**: For a healthcare app project, a BA created a patient journey map, starting with appointment scheduling and ending with follow-up care. The map highlighted gaps in communication between the clinic and patients, leading to actionable improvements.

- **Tip**: Use sticky notes or online whiteboard tools to make the map collaborative and easy to revise.

4. Silent Brainstorming: Let Ideas Flow Freely

In traditional brainstorming, dominant personalities can overshadow quieter voices. Silent brainstorming levels the playing field by allowing everyone to contribute ideas anonymously or independently.

- **Example**: In a workshop for a new CRM system, the facilitator handed out index cards for stakeholders to jot down their wish list items. This approach surfaced several ideas that wouldn't have come up in an open discussion.

- **Tip**: Combine silent brainstorming with group discussion for the best of both worlds.

5. Prototyping: Show, Don't Tell

Sometimes, stakeholders struggle to articulate their needs until they see something tangible. Prototyping bridges this gap by giving them a visual or functional representation of a potential solution.

- **Example**: A BA working on a mobile banking app used low-fidelity wireframes to gather feedback early in the project. Stakeholders quickly identified features they loved—and ones they could do without.

- **Tip**: Start simple. Even a hand-drawn sketch can spark meaningful conversations.

Overcoming Common Elicitation Challenges

Even with the best techniques, elicitation isn't always smooth sailing. Here's how to handle some common hurdles:

Challenge 1: Uncooperative Stakeholders

Let's be honest: not everyone loves meetings or understands the importance of elicitation. If you're dealing with unengaged or resistant stakeholders, try these strategies:

- **Build rapport**: Start with informal conversations to establish trust.

- **Show value**: Explain how their input will directly impact the project's success.

- **Be flexible**: If traditional meetings aren't working, try casual one-on-one chats or asynchronous methods like surveys.

Challenge 2: Hidden Needs

Some stakeholders might withhold information, either intentionally or unintentionally. To uncover hidden needs:

- **Ask "why" repeatedly**: Drill down to the root of their needs.
- **Use scenarios**: Pose "what if" situations to uncover edge cases.
- **Involve diverse perspectives**: The more voices in the room, the more likely you are to surface overlooked needs.

Challenge 3: Scope Creep during Elicitation

It's easy for stakeholders to get carried away during elicitation, suggesting features or ideas outside the project's scope. To keep things on track:

- **Set boundaries**: Begin each session with a clear agenda and scope.
- **Park ideas**: Use a "parking lot" to capture out-of-scope suggestions for future consideration.
- **Tie back to objectives**: Remind stakeholders of the project's goals to keep discussions focused.

The Human Side of Elicitation

At its core, elicitation is about people. It's about understanding their needs, motivations, and challenges. To excel in this area, you need to hone your interpersonal skills just as much as your technical ones.

- **Empathy**: Put yourself in your stakeholders' shoes. Understand their frustrations and aspirations.
- **Active Listening**: Don't just hear—listen. Play back what you've heard to ensure understanding.
- **Adaptability**: Every stakeholder is different. Be prepared to adjust your approach based on their personality and communication style.

Final Thoughts

Elicitation isn't just a step in the process—it's an opportunity to build trust, uncover insights, and set the stage for a successful project. By going beyond interviews and workshops, you can discover hidden needs, spark innovative ideas, and truly add value as a business analyst.

So, the next time you're preparing for an elicitation session, think outside the box. Try a new technique. Ask a different type of question. And remember: the power of elicitation lies not just in what you ask but in how you listen, observe, and connect.

Happy eliciting!

David Vrbanek is a Lead Business Analyst, Instructor, Mentor & Coach. You can contact him at www.linkedin.com/in/dvrbanek, he teaches BA courses at the University of Toronto's School of Continuing Studies, and he provides mentoring/coaching services to aspiring through seasoned BAs at www.everyday-ba.ca.

BA Back Stories

Christelle Govender

Interviewed by Christina Lovelock

Christelle is a senior business analyst, based in Durban, South Africa. Christelle's commitment to the BA profession is evident through her involvement in the IIBA South Africa chapter and her role as a track chair for the South African BA Summit.

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

I am missing part of the first IIBA® board meeting of the year! Many of my evenings are spent on supporting the community, because I am a volunteer as well as a board member for IIBA®. If I am not doing preparation for my day job, I will be working with other volunteers for something related to the IIBA®. Especially because I am on the marketing side and communication is such a huge part of what we do, we see how we can best communicate the value to business analysts to be a part of a community. We want them to know: You are not a lone fish in a corner, you are part of a welcoming community!

What are your passions or areas of focus at the moment?

I have a marketing degree, and by chance I found myself in IT, and now I work in retail as a business analyst. I feel like it's the perfect merge of my two passions, driving retail and understanding the customer. The business analysis side means that not all solutions have to be technical! Marketing plays into my role at IIBA®, but I am also passionate about growing the professional community. We had the BA Summit conference in Durban for the first time in 2024, and now business analysis has a strong presence in a different city, not just the usual cities that host the conference in South Africa. I really want people to know they are not alone. At some points in my career, I have felt alone, and I want to make sure no one else feels like that, like a 'lone' business analyst, because we do have this wonderful supportive community.

What was your first proper job?

After graduating, I worked at a printing company that did all the printing for the big retailers in South Africa. I was a tester that worked on the system used to plan when the printing would be done. It was my first introduction to IT, through testing.

What led you from there to business analysis?

We all meet someone who is very instrumental in our life. While I was working as a tester, I moved into testing financial apps. In that role I met the star player on the team, I had no idea of his job title until much later. I found out he was a business analyst, and I was intrigued to find out more about his role! He was always checking with me about the bugs and asking me what I thought we could do better. I had never heard of the BA role, but the more I watched him in his role I became more and more curious about becoming a business analyst. That person was Bryden Neville, a very instrumental business analyst in Southern Africa, he has spoken at quite a few business analyst conferences, and at that time I was totally unaware of how influential he actually was! He had a massive impact on my desire to move out of testing into becoming a business analyst, and that's how my journey started.

I followed Bryden's journey until he moved on to a different role and I found other BAs that were also passionate and insightful within the company that I worked at. I signed up for a mentorship program and was mentored by some incredible BAs such as Rita Sewdayal, Rafiq Sheik, Paulo Conde and many more. I closely observed their daily approach to the role, eager to understand their strategies and best practices. Like with cooking, the best way to learn is to watch someone do it right. I was watching those business analysts in action each day and saw how they handled different challenges. Eventually, after months of shadowing, an opportunity opened up for a role of a business analyst in our company and I applied and, the rest is history!

Is there a piece of feedback or advice that you receive that really sticks with you?

It's not necessarily good advice, but yes! Sometimes you hear something, and it becomes your theme, your 'Eye of the Tiger' song that plays in the background. It might be good, something that encourages you, or it might be about proving that statement wrong. Mine is the latter, a statement was made to me by a manager: "You're a square peg in a round hole. You don't fit in here, you don't belong here. You don't belong in IT". It became my life's duty at that moment to prove that statement wrong! So, while it may not necessarily have been a good piece of advice, it's something that motivated me to say "No, that's not right. I *can* make a difference in this role and I'm going to do exactly that".

Even when we get negative comments, you can choose to internalise it and allow it to break you down. Or you can say, "Well, that's your perspective. I'm going to use that exact statement and make myself better."

So now my statement is a square peg in a round hole still breaks the ground! I'm still going to do something groundbreaking for whatever project I'm on, even if it's one thing. That's my goal.

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

I think being a good listener. It's especially key for a business analyst because sometimes when your key stakeholder is telling you a problem, you need to discover what's the *actual* problem behind that? You've got to be willing to listen to what their actual pain-point is and understand it.

Sometimes it's difficult because you want to dive into solution mode! But you've got to really understand the problem before you can solve it. It might not be a system update needed, maybe it's a training problem. We have to really understand what the problem is. It's by no means perfected, but it's the skill that I choose to focus on because it doesn't matter how good of a communicator I am, if what I'm communicating is not actually the root problem. So, I choose to put my focus on active listening and really hearing what the person is saying.

Is there a skill or topic where you particularly want to develop?

I had the privilege of watching Terry Baresh and Bindu Channaveerappa give a presentation on cybersecurity at BA & Beyond two years ago.

Cybersecurity, especially in retail, is something that I really want to dive into even more. I am a retail business analyst, and I think there's so much that we can unpack there, not just in terms of online shopping, but even cybersecurity in stores. In South Africa, bricks and mortar stores are still very much a thing, and cybersecurity still plays a role in there. So, we need to bridge the gap between what's happening in the rest of the world in terms of retail while still being true to the context of Southern Africa. So that's my focus area where I really want to grow, because it is so interesting and because it’s a vital aspect of my job.

Is there a mindset or a philosophy that you bring to business analysis?

There is, I call it the “3 Ps” and I try to apply it in every project that I do. It's passion, perspective and purpose.

Passion is to remind me why I do what I do. Because sometimes projects get really complex, or have a tough deadline and everyone is stressed out. Then suddenly being a team player becomes more difficult! So I have to keep reminding myself I am passionate about my job and I am passionate about the value this role adds to any project.

Reminding myself of my passion, helps me keep my *perspective*. Sometimes, as a BA, you have to zoom into the detail, but you also need to be able to zoom out. At different times in the project you have to take different perspectives. Whether it's a long-term perspective, or the perspective of an internal stakeholder versus external. I have to constantly switch perspectives, but if my passion is not right, I'm not really seeing anything and then it comes back down to the *purpose*: What is the purpose of this project? What are we trying to achieve? What's the goal in mind? Because sometimes we run the risk of becoming too involved and then we have tunnel vision.

I use this example: I have two beautiful dogs at home. I love them to bits, but I'm not blind to the fact that they are naughty! They are pretty destructive at times, because they're quite big, but if someone else tells me my dogs are naughty, I'm going to be like, “No! Those are my babies! What are you talking about?!”. Sometimes when we're too involved in a project and someone says “That process could be improved” I think, “What do you mean? This is my process! It's beautiful. It's perfect!” So, I need to keep my purpose in mind and keep acting in the best interests of the project.

Every time I go into a project, I remind myself what is the passion, purpose and perspective required today for this project. And that's my BA mantra.

What's something in your career that you're particularly proud of?

I'm really proud of the fact that in 2023 I was the youngest speaker at the BA & Beyond conference. It was my first international conference, and

I was the youngest speaker there and I was in the company of people who had written books, people who had trained business analysts, people whose courses I myself had done.

As I entered the conference, I suddenly felt this feeling of "Maybe I am the square peg in the round hole" because I'm surrounded by these people with so much experience, how could I possibly share something that they've never heard before? But when I finished my presentation people came up to me, people who had written books or had lots of experience,and gave me positive feedback and encouragement.

They reminded me that it doesn't matter how long you've been in the career, you can always learn from someone else. That's the beauty of business analysis, because we're always learning. We're always changing, and we have that curiosity mindset, like Kathy Berkidge has asked us to have. Everyone's perspective can be insightful. So that's one of my proudest moments, and I celebrated my birthday at the conference too!

This is your chance to give a shout out to something that has inspired you and you think might inspire others.

I was privileged enough to receive a copy of Brainy Glue by Ian Richards and Filip Hendrickx, when Filip visited The BA Summit in South Africa and I was his track chair. He autographed my copy and gifted it to me, so it was very special and of course at that time I was very new and not exposed to some of the fantastic speakers out there in the world. I read this book, and thought it was such an insightful way to bring out the empathy aspect. There's lots of great gems in the book, but the empathy aspect really stuck with me. As technology changes, we as BAs will grow and evolve with it. But there's specific soft skills that should be with us at all times. They are non-negotiables, and empathy is definitely one that stuck out for me from the storytelling approach used in the book. Part of the role of a BA is being involved in change management. Change is often uncomfortable; it can be tough for people. So, empathy is such a foundational requirement, over and above the actual requirements of the project! A key principle for BAs has to be empathy.

Connect with Christelle on LinkedIn

About the interviewer:

Christina Lovelock is a BA leader, author and coach. She's active in the BA professional community and champions entry level roles. She is the author of two BCS books, Delivering Business Analysis and Careers in Tech, Data and Digital.

She would be delighted if you would like to connect!
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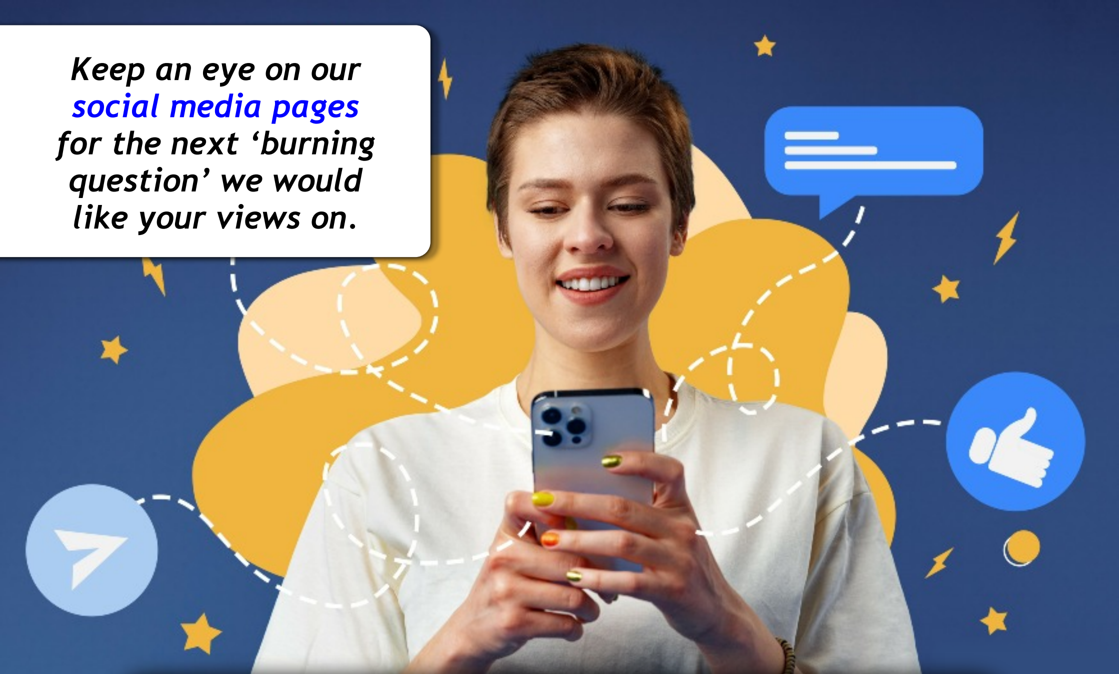
Keep an eye on our ***social media pages*** *for the next 'burning question' we would like your views on.*



VIEWPOINTS

On social media, we posed the question

What book would you recommend BAs read that they don't know they need to read (and why)?

How Not to Be Wrong: The Power of Mathematical Thinking, by Jordan Ellenberg.

In a world which relies heavily on mathematics, everyone who is afraid of math should read this book. This brilliant book helps you to navigate around the mathematical pitfalls and problems. And it does this not by throwing around equations and jargon, but by telling real-world stories and giving helpful examples. And even if you are not a afraid of math, it is a fantastic & funny to read book to refresh your skills.

Gottfried Szing

Thinking, Fast and Slow by Daniel Kahneman.

Explains how people think and make decisions. Stakeholder management of how people process information as opposed to how its delivered. Also data driven decisions are better than gut instincts and critical thinking. Lots to unpack with this book. You really question yourself!

Sharon Agboola

Problem Solving 101: A simple book for smart people by Ken Watanabe. I think this should be required reading for everyone, but for BAs, this is a crash course in problem-solving frameworks stripped down to the essentials. My favorite technique is the hypothesis-based thinking (to test assumptions systematically).

Pragati Sinha

Only one book, that is very hard to do... I would say "any book on art and artists" ... but let me stick to an almost philosophical but technical book: Data and Reality, by William Kent. This book goes beyond mere data modeling, it gives deep insight in the gap between the real world and information systems. And at the same time it shows the value of (data) models. The subtitle says it all: A Timeless Perspective on Perceiving and Managing Information in Our Imprecise World. I find paragraphs like "ONENESS (WHAT IS "ONE THING"?) very revealing.

This book takes you beyond the pure act of modeling, and helps you to realize that there's only a tiny part of the real world that can be described with a model. A lesson that we all need to remember.

Danny Kalkhoven

Excellent book to fine-tune BA's intuitive side and stakeholder engagement for well structured use cases is the book by Simon Sinek called Start with Why. The book also helps formulate high-level brainstorming ideas and conduct better workshops.

Jay Jobanputra

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