
POSSESS A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF BUSINESS ANALYSIS

This book is intended to help business analysis professionals master their profession. In order to master business analysis, you must first possess a clear, complete understanding of the essential skills of a business analyst (BA). Business analysis involves very complex and sophisticated thinking patterns and advanced communications. Describing and defining the role is very difficult. What is it that makes a BA successful?

- ◆ Is it being an expert on workflow diagrams?
- ◆ Is it having a strong technical programming background so as to be able to design software that will meet business needs?
- ◆ Is it being a strong facilitator, in order to lead requirements elicitation sessions with large groups of people?

Yes and no. A successful BA is all of these things and something more. There is something special and rare about the people who can combine technical knowledge, business acumen, analytical skills, and the communication skills necessary to be successful in this role. Excellent BAs bring value to their organizations by understanding true business opportunities, making realistic recommendations, and facilitating the successful implementation of these solutions. This chapter will give you insights into the skills and knowledge that successful BAs share.

WHAT IS BUSINESS ANALYSIS?

The International Institute of Business Analysis (IIBA™) defines business analysis as “the set of tasks and techniques used to work as a liaison among stakeholders in order to understand the structure, policies, and operations of an organization, and recommend solutions that enable the organization to achieve its goals” (www.theiiba.org).

Business analysis involves:

- ◆ Identification of business problems and opportunities
- ◆ Elicitation of needs and constraints from stakeholders
- ◆ Analysis of stakeholder needs to define requirements for a solution
- ◆ Assessment and validation of potential and actual solutions
- ◆ Management of the “product” or requirements scope

BAs elicit, analyze, communicate, and validate requirements for changes to business processes, policies, and information systems. The business analysis professional understands business problems and opportunities in the context of the requirements and recommends solutions that enable an organization to achieve its goals.

The business analysis discipline has emerged from work previously done by project managers (gathering high-level business requirements) and systems analysts (designing functional requirements for software behavior). Currently, in many organizations there is still an unclear differentiation between the work of business analysis and project management. Chapter 2 of this book will discuss these unique roles. Business analysis builds on many of the same techniques used in *systems* analysis but focuses more heavily on business goals and less on the technology designs. Business requirements are elicited and analyzed at a much more detailed level than traditionally done during systems analysis. Business analysis also places more emphasis on understanding user groups and business environments and designing highly usable applications. The discipline of business analysis is useful for solving business problems and taking advantage of opportunities by helping business people design procedures, structures, and technology to support and enhance their work. Many solutions include a significant software component because most business areas benefit extensively from software automation and it is often the most complex piece of a solution.

Most of the projects in which business analysis professionals are involved include a software or IT solution, but the profession and role are not limited to software development. The work of business analysis focuses on helping to elicit, analyze, document, and validate requirements and implement solutions to business problems. The same skills that

are useful for helping with software development projects often translate well to other types of business solutions. Frequently, an effective solution to a business problem involves a software component along with procedure changes and possibly job responsibility changes. It is rare to find a business unit that is not using software and technology to perform its work. BAs help to design solutions, not just software. The profession and the IIBA are working to use the word *solution* when possible instead of limiting discussions to software systems.

Business Analysis vs. Software Development

When talking about software development methodologies and approaches, it is important to recognize how business analysis relates to these processes. Most software development methodologies have been created by software developers to help organizations more efficiently build application systems. Very few of them include or even acknowledge the primary work of business analysis. Using the Rational Unified Process® (RUP) as an example, it mentions business models and business modeling as an activity that happens *before* project initiation. This has a very important implication: the assumption is that when a software development project is started, the business model has already been developed (and hopefully documented) and the solution determined to best support the business is software. When RUP's assumptions are accurate—the business is well understood and solution evaluations have already resulted in a conclusion—RUP works well. The software can be designed and created following the business needs and will fulfill user expectations.

Unfortunately, many organizations do not understand RUP's underlying assumptions. Truly analyzing and understanding the business is not done before project initiation. In these situations, business analysis professionals are assigned to the team to gather business requirements in the context of a methodology that has no time allocated for this work. RUP uses the word “analyze” as one of its phrases, but this is *software* analysis, not *business* analysis. Business analysis professionals who are assigned to work on these projects often find themselves helping to design software functionality while they are trying to understand the business (other methodologies have similar constraints, as discussed in Chapter 5). This slows the process of eliciting requirements, causing developers to be waiting for business analysis deliverables. Planning time for eliciting business requirements before functional or software requirements is the best way to prevent this confusion and delay. Business requirements may be developed before project initiation or as a first step of a project as long as time is allocated for this important work.

The Role of the Business Analyst

The business analysis profession has emerged and continues to grow mainly because of the need for people who can translate business needs into software technology and organizational solutions. Individuals who have both strong communication skills and analytical aptitude (the critical foundational skills) can be taught to use analysis documentation and presentation techniques. People who can clearly communicate and who can think logically will always be valuable to the success of their organizations. This unique combination of soft and analytical skills is the key to the BA role.

Business analysis work is being done by professionals with titles as varied as developer, project manager, systems analyst, systems engineer, requirements engineer, etc. More and more organizations in the United States and around the world are recognizing business analysis as a distinct profession and developing career paths for people who are interested in specializing in this area. Gartner Research predicts BA staffing at one BA per major business process (Morello and Belchar, 2005). This means there could be hundreds of thousands of BAs! Another interesting comparison is to developers. Currently, many organizations have BA to developer ratios like one to six, but that ratio is rapidly increasing. With the sophistication of developer tools and the speed at which code components can be assembled, the ratio will swing toward more BAs. It takes more time to perform thorough analysis and clearly understand a business problem (and design a solution) than it does to build software. In the next couple of decades, the ratio may be much more like two to one or even three to one BAs to developers.

Even as the role of the BA is still being defined, specializations in this profession are already emerging. There are business analysis professionals who specialize by industry, by software application, by technology, and by level of experience. Gartner, Inc. projects that one BA type is not going to meet all the needs of an organization (Morello and Belchar, 2005) and recommends that each organization develop a pool of BAs with different expertise and experience. This is great news for those in the business analysis profession. The more recognized the role is, the more opportunities there will be. It is also critical that individuals within the profession specialize so they can focus on particular types of business problems or solutions.

Business analysis is a complex, broad area that will continue to grow like other professions. The profession is still young; BAs often are expected to “know it all,” like the early years in the legal and medical professions. Originally, a lawyer dealt with everything from copyright protection to personal wills. Now there are lawyers who specialize in corporate software contract negotiations and others who specialize in high-wealth indi-

vidual estate planning. In the medical profession, as medical research continually uncovers new diseases and treatments, general practitioner doctors and nurses are unable to maintain expertise in every area. The medical profession has specialties like cardiology, podiatry, and nephrology. New technology, pharmaceuticals, and procedures also drive many medical professionals to choose a specialty and focus on it. Patients benefit from this specialization because a specialist can stay abreast of new discoveries in his or her area of expertise. BAs also will become specialized and focus on a particular area of the work where there is a special interest and proficiency.

Business Analyst Traits

Most people who are drawn to the business analysis profession have traits in common. Analysts enjoy learning new things and have a natural curiosity. In addition, BAs have a rare combination of the ability to see the big picture (conceptual thinking) while being very detail oriented. This combination of traits results in a very successful BA.

The “people” skills necessary to be a successful BA are many and varied. They include strong listening skills, both verbal and non-verbal. They include the ability to ask good questions and probe deeper for very detailed information. They include leadership abilities—running successful meetings, encouraging team members, and supporting corporate goals. The real secret to all of these skills is knowing the individuals with whom you are working because every human being communicates slightly differently.

The technical awareness needed to be a successful BA includes software development approaches, organizational IT standards, data design and storage strategies, and software usability principles. Business analysis professionals must stay abreast of current trends and capabilities and be able to communicate effectively with the technology team.

Since the role of BA requires so many different skills, most individuals in this role are constantly working on improving and increasing their skill sets. The effective BA is always stretching himself or herself to learn new techniques and improve his or her use of analysis tools.

The extent of the responsibilities of the BA changes on every project and may even change during the course of a project. Since the BA is bridging a gap between groups of people who speak different languages, he or she must be able to span the gap, regardless of its width. Refer to Figure 1.1. Assume the length of the line to be the extent of the gap. When a BA is working with an individual or group of subject matter experts (SMEs) who are very knowledgeable about their business and have worked on IT projects in the past, the gap is narrow. On the other side, when a BA is working with technical people who

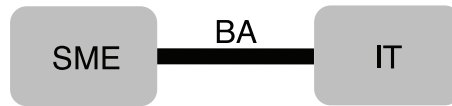


FIGURE 1.1. Short Bridge for Business Analysts to Span

are strong communicators and knowledgeable about the business, the gap is narrowed. In this ideal scenario, the BA is easily able to span the gap by bringing the two groups together. Ideally, these are the types of project situations to which a new BA should be assigned.

When a BA is working with an individual or group of SMEs who are not experienced with IT project work, have never provided or reviewed requirements, and/or who are inexperienced in the business domain, the gap widens. On the other side, when a BA is working with an individual or group of technical professionals who have weak communication skills, little or no industry or business knowledge, and/or limited experience in developing software, the gap widens further. In this more challenging scenario, the BA stretches himself or herself to the maximum he or she can to bring the groups together to develop effective business solutions. This requires a more experienced, adaptable BA. Figure 1.2 shows this wider gap.

Most projects fall somewhere between the two extremes. An experienced BA assesses this gap soon after being assigned to a project. *He or she then plans the business analysis work with the size of the gap in mind.* Clearly recognizing and acknowledging this gap gives the BA an important insight into the scope of his or her responsibilities.

History of Business Analysis

Traditionally, everyone involved with software development came from a technical or IT background. They understood the software development process and often had programming experience. They used textual requirements along with ANSI flowcharts, data flow

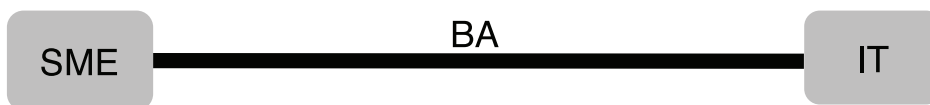


FIGURE 1.2. Long Bridge for Business Analysts to Span

diagrams, database diagrams, and prototypes to document the software design. Frustration with software development was caused by the length of time required to develop a system that didn't always meet business needs. Business people demanded easy-to-use, sophisticated software and wanted it better and faster.

Many business people got tired of waiting for large, slow-moving IT departments to roll out yet another cumbersome application. They began learning to do things for themselves or hire consultants, often called BAs. These consultants would report directly to the business management and help with software design and development. As businesses experienced the benefits of having a person dedicated to finding solutions to business problems, the number of BAs increased. Individuals from the business units became BAs, with backgrounds as varied as marketing, accounting, payroll processing, and claims administration.

IT groups did not initially see the value of this new role. BAs inside business units were sophisticated users who were anxious to take advantage of new technology and were willing to look outside the enterprise for help. Some user departments purchased software packages without consulting their own IT department. Others hired outside developers to create new software. These stand-alone systems caused even more problems for IT, which was suddenly asked to support software that it had not written or approved. Small independent databases popped up everywhere, with inconsistent and often unprotected data. IT organizations realized that creating a BA role internally was critical for continuing to support the business and stay in control of software applications. In addition, as some software development projects were outsourced, the need for quality, detailed requirements became painfully obvious.

Several other factors have increased the need for and value of dedicated business analysis professionals. The explosion of customer-facing Web pages demanded an increase in the understanding of usability and human factors in design. The International Organization for Standardization® (ISO) set quality standards that must be adhered to when doing international business. Carnegie Mellon University created software development and organizational quality standards with CMMI® (Capability Maturity Model Integration). Six Sigma™ has provided a disciplined, data-driven quality approach to process improvement aimed at the near elimination of defects from every product, process, and transaction. Business process management products are dedicated to improving efficiency and consistency at an enterprise-wide level. Service-oriented architecture (SOA) encourages improvements in software design and reuse of system components (called services).

All of these movements have been driven by frustration with the quality, timeliness, and applicability of business support from technology groups. Every study of software

development failures shows that incomplete, incorrect, and missing requirements are the main reason for failures. It has become clear that the software development process needs a profession of people who are dedicated to eliciting, analyzing, and presenting requirements from a business perspective and making sure that the business needs are met in the software design and development.

Where Do Business Analysts Come From?

BAs come from both IT backgrounds and business areas. In the best situations, the business analysis professional has a combination of IT and business skills.

From IT

BAs with an IT background are very analytical individuals who enjoy problem solving. They are attracted to software development because of its emphasis on solution design, logical thinking, and discipline. Systems analysis and design involves the same type of critical thinking skills as business analysis. These individuals often were strong designers and developers because of their inherent logical thinking patterns and attention to detail. They are often promoted to more analytical roles because, in addition to their strong problem-solving skills, they have strong communication skills.

Case in Point

I began my career as a developer and was successful. I found that not only did I enjoy solving problems but enjoyed finding them and learning about business processes from the business experts. I remember the first time that I was programming based on requests and specifications from a BA. I felt frustrated because I wasn't tasked with talking with the users directly. I wanted to know exactly what went on in the business and why they had requested this software functionality.

BAs with an IT background can become masters in business analysis as they build their business expertise. Often, new analysts with IT experience limit recommendations for potential solutions to software. They may not consider process changes or organizational changes as effective methods for problem solving. They may not understand the time required to implement a change in business procedures when new software is deployed. They need to look for business solutions without assuming that technology is the

answer to every question. They need to learn to think like a business person, understanding the goals of the enterprise, and adjust their view of technology to one that supports the business goals rather than driving them.

From Business

Individuals from business units have also moved into business analysis. BAs who have work experience in a business typically have been acting as SMEs on IT projects, so they are familiar with project structure and requirements. These BAs bring a wealth of subject matter knowledge with them. Often, they originally joined the organization as a professional business person and excelled in their role. These individuals are promoted within the business because of their intelligence and ability to see more than just their job. They often recommend procedural or workflow changes to improve efficiency in their areas. They show strong analytical and problem-solving skills within the business area, along with strong communication skills with management and their co-workers.

Case in Point

Several years ago, I joined a project, in progress, as the project manager (and BA). The assignment was to implement an upgrade to a vendor-supplied software package that supported annuities for an insurance company. The application running in production was several versions behind and the vendor was about to discontinue support of the oldest version, so the upgrade was mandatory and had a firm due date. Because some custom development had been done to the production version of the software, the new version of the package could not be installed directly “out of the box”; it had to be reviewed and modified where necessary. This application supported thousands of annuities worth several million dollars.

Since the project plan was already done and the team was small, I should have had plenty of time to play the role of the BA. But things did not turn out as planned! The project plan turned out to be incomplete, and I also discovered that this organization did not have a quality assurance group. Suddenly, in addition to analyzing, developing, and implementing, my team had responsibility for all system and integration testing and managing the user acceptance tests. This all still may have been manageable if I had been an expert in annuity processing. But I was not. Annuities are very complex financial instruments. The owner invests either a lump sum or a series of payments, and the insurance company pays back the investment through a series of periodic payments that begin sometime in the future,

along with earned interest. Some annuities are tied into life insurance policies, with payment starting or changing upon the death of the insured. There are cancellation penalties and complex interest calculations.

Insurance agents and annuity administrators spend years learning all of the calculations and payment options available with annuities. They also must understand the government regulations (i.e., the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission) related to annuity contracts. This is not a business domain that I was going to be able to analyze and learn in a few weeks. In addition to the complexity of the product, testing had to be conducted using future dates (have you ever tried to set your system date to a date in the future?), and we had to simulate transactions over several years and several mock deaths. This was a project where an industry expert BA was critical.

Fortunately, I was able to justify the addition of a full-time BA to assist with the package customization requirements and conduct all of the testing. Even more fortunately, I was able to find an experienced BA who was an expert in life insurance and annuities! The story has a happy ending because I was able to focus my time on project management and implementation requirements while the BA handled the business stakeholder communications, elicitation and analysis of requirements, creation of test plans, and execution of the test scenarios. Without this skilled and experienced resource, the project would have failed.

BAs with a business background will benefit from increasing their technical intelligence. They need to learn as much as possible about how software is developed, what capabilities are available through technology, and the relative time and cost of developing each capability. A BA must be able to discuss options with very technical individuals and must feel confident in his or her knowledge during such conversations. BAs also need to learn about IT architecture. Often, IT components must be built in a particular order because the underlying architecture is needed before business functions. IT architecture is discussed further in Chapter 5.

Where Do Business Analysts Report?

Business analysis professionals reside in one of three departments in most organizations: IT, individual business units, or a central business analysis group often referred to as a business analysis center of excellence.

BAs who are assigned inside business units have a different perspective and a different emphasis than those from the IT area. BAs working in a business unit will be much more aware of the business conditions, competitive issues, and financial issues and will be aware

of how other groups see their business unit and how these other groups work with their business. This perspective allows the BA to analyze and solve business problems at a detailed level. BAs working in the business area are often involved in writing business cases, documenting current workflows, and re-engineering processes. They also understand how critical IT support is to the business workers. When a BA is sitting in an office next to a customer service representative and hears that person's frustration because the system crashes daily, the BA is acutely aware of how much disruption this system problem is causing. By being close to the business, the analyst is better able to articulate the importance of launching a project to correct the problem. Also, understanding the competitive nature of a business unit, especially in the sales or marketing area, helps the analyst understand why new product ideas must get to market as soon as possible. There is usually a window of opportunity that if missed will decrease the long-term sales of the product.

When BAs are working inside a business unit, their line management and project sponsors usually report to the same division. This alignment allows the BA to be a true advocate for the business. There may be conflicts when the BA reports to an IT project manager or the project management office because these groups may have different priorities than the business. A challenge may also arise because the BA may not understand the software development process and may not prioritize architecture pieces as high as necessary for strong software design.

BAs working in IT will be much more aware of the technical environment, availability of new capabilities, and other current projects that may be related and will be aware of how technology is developed and maintained. This perspective allows the BA to analyze and solve business problems from a strong technology perspective. If the BA is sitting in an office next to someone at an IT help desk and hears that person voice frustration every day because callers don't understand how to use a particular application, the analyst is acutely aware of how much disruption this system problem is causing. The analyst is better able to articulate the importance of launching a project to correct the problem. Also, understanding the architectural nature of software helps to better design solutions that will interface smoothly with surrounding applications. If a BA has a deep understanding of what is possible and what IT resources are available, he or she is able to set more realistic expectations and help the customer envision more powerful solutions.

When BAs report to IT management, they often have access to resources and technologies of which the business unit may not even be aware. A challenge with this organization structure is that IT may drive the business as opposed to the business driving software development. It may be difficult for the BA to be an advocate for the business when he or she reports to and is paid by IT. This is a conflict of interest.

As the role of the BA has been refined, the work of the position has grown. The BA working in a business area often analyzes business problems *before* projects are identified, utilizing techniques such as root cause analysis. He or she may identify potential solutions and perform cost/benefit analysis, developing a business case to gain project funding. The BA working in the IT area is typically assigned *after* a project has been approved, focusing on learning the business requirements and making sure the technology solutions meet those needs. An experienced, well-rounded BA could work in either arena effectively.

A business analysis center of excellence is a business unit expressly created to support individuals performing business analysis work. The idea for this group comes from the project management office concept, which many organizations have instituted. The advantage of having a department expressly focused on business analysis work is that the best practices and guidelines are more easily standardized and available for the entire enterprise. Business analysis professionals share lessons learned on projects to improve future work. BAs have support and guidance from other BAs.

A business analysis center of excellence supports business analysis professionals by providing a list of approved analysis techniques with diagramming and naming standards. A mature center of excellence may provide analysts with software tools to support the development of requirements, requirements management, and requirements tracing.

Managers who are considering reporting lines in their organization should consider the advantages and challenges of each option. These decisions depend on the enterprise philosophy toward business analysis work and the organizational culture. Consider who is driving the development of technology solutions: marketing, sales, IT? Consider how well the value of business analysis work is understood by the organization. BAs can demonstrate their value quickly regardless of where they report as long as they are given the time and resources necessary to elicit and develop quality requirements.

WHO MAKES A GREAT BUSINESS ANALYST?

There are several important characteristics and skills that are necessary for success in business analysis work. The BA must:

- ♦ Be an outstanding communicator
- ♦ Understand general business concepts and be able to advocate for the business
- ♦ Have an understanding of technology
- ♦ Enjoy very detailed research and recording

- ◆ Be skilled at organizing and managing large amounts of information in various formats
- ◆ Be flexible, be naturally curious, and enjoy learning new business domains
- ◆ Understand the software development process
- ◆ Be able to work through complex business problems and determine the root cause of a problem
- ◆ Come prepared with a tool kit of techniques to elicit, analyze, and present excellent requirements

This profession requires a wide breadth of skills and extensive business experience. You may be considered a competent and successful BA after you have a few years of experience and learning, but the learning and increase in abilities will continue throughout your career. Compare this with the skills and ability of a musician. Many people play the piano successfully both professionally and as amateurs. Beginners can learn to play many songs and accompany groups. Intermediate and advanced players compete and win awards. Career players are invited to join symphonies and orchestras around the world. Some virtuosos have solo careers that include concert tours and recording contracts. Yet, they are all *pianists*. Ask anyone who plays whether they have *mastered* the piano and 100% of honest pianists will say: “No, I have not mastered the instrument.” When asked if they could improve, most will answer: “Yes, I could improve with more lessons and more practice.” Their answer will never change throughout their lives. BAs should also answer these questions in the same way. There is always more that can be learned; mastering business analysis involves work on different types of projects, dealing with different stakeholders, using different techniques, creating different deliverables, and analyzing different business areas. Skills can always be improved and honed. A BA can continue to grow within the profession throughout his or her career.

Note that number of years of experience alone is not a good indicator of business analysis expertise. If you have been doing the same tasks, in the same business area, for many years, your other analysis skills may be lacking. For example, a BA who supports maintenance changes to a particular application system may know exactly how to write functional requirements and design changes to that system. The projects all follow a similar process and the stakeholders are always the same people. This BA may be very proficient in these projects and have a very satisfied sponsor, but if moved to a different department or assigned to work on a different application, he or she might not be able to be effective because a different project might require different techniques and skills.

Many successful BAs are individuals who have worked as consultants in different organizational settings, on many different types of projects, using many different analysis techniques. Others have worked for several companies, gaining experience in different industries and working with different types of stakeholders. This may be considered a “fast track” for the business analysis professional. *If you are interested in developing into a master business analysis professional, ask to be assigned to different business units and different types of applications, using different software development methodologies and tools.* The more varied your experience, the more flexible and adaptable you become. Flexibility and adaptability are key skills for business analysis.

So how does a person learn business analysis and how does a BA become a virtuoso? To take the piano analogy a little further, you must first learn the basics and then practice, practice, practice. Pianists learn the basics like reading music, memorizing the notes created by each key, and understanding the use of the pedals, along with the fundamentals of technique (e.g., when to use the thumb vs. the index finger). They then use what they have learned on simple pieces to start to put all of the knowledge and skills together to create “music.” They don’t start out playing Chopin—they often start out with “Row, Row, Row Your Boat”!

Similarly, a BA must start by learning the basics:

- ♦ What is a requirement?
- ♦ What are the techniques for eliciting, analyzing, and presenting requirements?
- ♦ What are stakeholders and what is my responsibility toward them?
- ♦ How are business problems solved?
- ♦ What technologies are available?

The BA puts all of this knowledge together on a project (hopefully a small, simple one at first) to perform “business analysis.” The basics of business analysis are: an understanding of the role of the BA, understanding requirements, and learning to think analytically and critically. There will be missed notes along the way. There will be hesitations and stalls as the BA works his or her way around the “keyboard.” Have you ever listened to someone who is just learning to play the piano? It can be painful on the ears. They are encouraged to practice alone. But BAs must practice on real projects, right in front of everyone!

As with any complex work, there are always prodigies. Mozart started playing piano at the age of four and by age six was accomplished and giving performances. There are some individuals for whom analysis, problem solving, and solution design are as natural

as walking. There are also individuals for whom asking questions and probing for detailed information are part of every interaction. These individuals are natural-born analysts and will quickly develop into very successful BAs once they learn the formal techniques and guidelines within which to harness their talents.

Understanding the development of a business analysis professional and his or her maturity level is very important for managers and project managers who are assigning resources. If possible, new BAs should be allowed to work with experienced BAs who can coach and mentor them through their first few projects. Quality training in analysis techniques and communication skills should be provided. BAs should have an intern period, almost like doctors, where they are supervised by an experienced BA for a year or two before they are left on their own. Support, help, and guidance for new BAs will best help them develop their skills. Experienced analysts often require little supervision. Recognize prodigies who may not produce a requirements deliverable exactly according to standards but probably have an excellent vision of a possible solution.

Case in Point

My career has spanned several industries and business areas. My first job was as a programmer for a U.S. automobile manufacturer. The career path then was to start as a programmer, move to a programmer/analyst, then a systems analyst, and finally a project manager before being considered for management. As a programmer, I worked with systems analysts who worked with the business stakeholders to understand needs and then design a solution. This was before the role of the BA was separate from that of a systems analyst. As a developer, I was also often included in discussions with users, doing everything from gathering requirements, facilitating requirements workshops, and designing user interfaces to conducting training. My first assignments were in assembly plant support. I did not know anything about building cars or trucks. My business stakeholders patiently explained the assembly process to me and gave me frequent access to the plant floor to see how parts were brought together and assembled into a working vehicle. Although today I still retain a high-level understanding of the process, I never became a business expert or industrial engineer. I was able to understand the process at a high level and ask suitable questions to develop an in-process inventory system. It was not easy, but I was able to bridge the gap between the business needs and the technology solution.

My natural interest in problem solving was supplemented by systems analysis training. I was fortunate to be working with excellent co-workers who mentored me as I learned to consider all of the ramifications of a possible solution.

Other projects included manufacturing systems, cost accounting systems, and developing a data dictionary system. These business systems are very different, and each required me to do extensive learning from the SMEs before I could help to recommend effective solutions. After my first job, I worked at a mortgage servicing company and an automobile club. Once again, at the beginning of each project, I had to learn as much as I could about the particular business area (i.e., mortgage tax pay procedures, the secondary mortgage market, emergency road service). This is the part of the job that I most enjoyed—learning new business areas. An important characteristic of excellent BAs is that they want to learn new things.

Business Analyst Suitability Questionnaire

Becoming a BA is not something that a person should decide quickly. There is a long learning curve, so you need to make a commitment to the profession. It is also not something that someone else should decide for you. Many individuals have found themselves wearing the title BA without understanding what the role involves. Others have been “promoted” into the role by managers who don’t understand the skills and characteristics required.

The questions below are intended to help you determine if the BA role is appropriate for you and to determine how well suited you are to the profession. Use these questions to honestly assess yourself. These questions can be answered by anyone interested in or working in the business analysis profession. If you are feeling frustrated in your role, you may find out that you are not well suited for it. If you are well suited to the role but are having difficulty being successful, it is likely that the role is not being supported adequately by your organization. This questionnaire could also be used by career development managers to assess an individual’s interest in moving into the business analysis profession. As you read each statement, decide if you agree or disagree.

Suitability Questionnaire

1. I enjoy organizing information. My personal finances are filed and easy to reference.
2. I enjoy planning my work. I like to shop and run errands with a list.
3. I enjoy, and am good at, preparing documents that are clear and easy to review.
4. I am good at drawing diagrams (e.g., maps, floor plans).
5. I am able to simplify a complex topic.

6. I have a list of tasks that I need to complete daily.
7. I enjoy learning new techniques. I am very curious.
8. I love problem solving. I enjoy puzzles and logic games.
9. I really enjoy getting into details.
10. I can step back and see the big picture.
11. I am able to motivate myself to get work done.
12. I appreciate constructive criticism and feedback so that I can improve myself.
13. I love working with people.
14. I can handle people with strong emotions.
15. I can remain calm when people around me are overstimulated.
16. I prefer not to manage/supervise people.
17. I am generally patient when others don't understand something that I do.
18. I am comfortable dealing with conflict.
19. I can honestly and politely tell people when they are straying from the main point when telling a story.
20. I am good at negotiating solutions between two other people.
21. I enjoy working on long projects.
22. I get personal fulfillment from the *act of working* more than the *delivery* of a particular product.
23. I am comfortable making presentations in front of groups.
24. I am good at conducting meetings, keeping everyone on topic and on schedule.
25. Most people enjoy working with me and help me when I ask.
26. Before I start every task, I think through how I am going to do it.
27. When I receive an e-mail message, I take a few moments to think about to whom and how I am going to respond rather than just reacting.
28. I rarely have to send follow-up e-mails to clarify my message.
29. When others review my work, they only find a few corrections.
30. When someone does not understand something that I am explaining, I can explain it in another way.
31. When I give a formal presentation, attendees understand my message.
32. I enjoy helping people learn new things.
33. I create positive relationships with people.
34. I don't mind changing my language to words that better communicate with my co-workers.

Answers

How did you do? The more statements with which you agree, the more likely you are suited to the business analysis profession. The purpose of this assessment is to honestly answer the question: “Do I want to be a BA and will I excel in this role?” If you do not enjoy the type of work that BAs perform or these are not your strongest skills, it may be better for you to find out now. Keep in mind also that there are various levels of BAs and you will probably start at the beginning level. Beginning BAs will refine and improve their skills as they gain more experience.

Things that you will probably not do as a new business analysis professional include:

- ♦ Manage/supervise people
- ♦ Direct activities
- ♦ Be able to immediately respond to a request
- ♦ Generate revenue directly for your organization
- ♦ See immediate results of your work

This is not a scientifically tested assessment. There are many formal assessment tools that may be useful to consider if you want to get a better understanding of how you work and how you best communicate with others. Communication skills and work preferences are so important to business analysis work that an analyst must understand his or her own styles and preferences. An analyst works with many different stakeholders and is rarely able to convince a stakeholder to change his or her style. The analyst must adapt and conform to the most effective style for each stakeholder interaction. This requires significant self-awareness, along with the ability to read and assess other people.

The Birkman Method® is one approach to learning about yourself and your preferred interactions with others. It is an assessment that results in detailed information about your everyday interpersonal style, underlying motivations and needs, and reactions to stress. It also highlights your interests and recommends the type of work for which you would be most suited (www.birkman.com).

Another useful assessment is the DISC®. DISC is a behavioral model which looks at behavioral style and preferences. Four aspects of behavior are assessed: Dominance (control, power, assertiveness), Influence (social interactions, communications), Steadiness (patience, persistence, thoughtfulness), and Conscientiousness (structure, organization). Scores describe the extent to which an individual is assertive vs. passive and open vs. guarded, in addition to the intensity of each of the four dimensions. For a complete reference, see *The Universal Language—DISC* by Bill Bonnstetter and Judy Suiter.

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI®) is probably the most well known and most controversial of all personality assessments. The MBTI results in a description of an individual's preferences in areas called *dichotomies*: Attitude (extroversion vs. introversion), Functions (sensing vs. intuitive and thinking vs. feeling), and Lifestyle (judging vs. perceiving). The terms used for these dichotomies have very specific meanings within the MBTI which differ from everyday usage. Volumes have been written about the meaning and applicability of the MBTI.

There are numerous other assessments and published works that strive to help improve human communications. Being aware of your personal style and preferences will allow you to more easily adjust to the styles and preferences of others. As you work with different individuals, you will become more skilled at informally assessing their styles. Carefully listening and observing others is always the best technique for improving communication skills in any profession.

Business Analyst Career Progression

If you are a new BA or working in a new organization, find a mentor—formal or informal—and utilize that person at every opportunity. Don't be afraid to ask for help and direction. No great musician got to Carnegie Hall on his or her own.

BAs who come from a business background or report to a business unit may spend their careers in the same industry or the same business area. For example, if you have years of business experience in a telecommunications company and decide to change jobs, you are likely to move to another telecommunications company because your knowledge of the industry is valuable. BAs with this industry experience and knowledge will also be excellent candidates for consulting roles. These individuals will be valuable as executive managers in their area of expertise because of their understanding of the business issues and their analytical capacity to imagine and implement solutions. If a BA is interested in moving into management, his or her experience will easily transfer to more strategic positions in the enterprise.

BAs who have IT experience or are working in the IT department may find themselves moving in slightly different career paths. To successfully understand the business requirements without having worked in the business unit requires a person who can learn quickly and imagine a situation without having actually been in the situation. These individuals have the ability to understand most business requirements at a high level and translate them into a technological solution. These individuals are often able to work in various business areas, relying more heavily on SMEs for detailed business understanding. BAs

with a strong technical background and the ability to see business requirements will be excellent consultants, either internally or externally. These individuals will also be great candidates for management positions that lead to a chief information officer role. More and more chief information officers list business acumen as the most important skill necessary in their job.

Historically, people who effectively perform business analysis work in IT (often called programmer/analysts or systems analysts) have been promoted to project managers when they were interested in career progression. This is not always an appropriate transition because many of the skills and characteristics of an excellent project manager are different from those of an excellent BA (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of the roles of the project manager and BA).

There are different types of business analysis work, and people who perform business analysis work do not have exactly the same skills. A large organization may have many individuals doing different types of business analysis work. Recognizing that the organization will benefit from a variety of analyst roles often leads to a set of job descriptions, titles, and career paths supporting business analysis professionals. Formally creating professional standards for business analysis work is one of the goals of the IIBA. Experienced BAs are committed to elevating the profession, setting professional standards, and bringing recognition to the role. The more well defined the positions and job descriptions, the easier it will be for professionals to find the appropriate positions for their skill sets and their interests. See Table 1.1 for an example of a BA career path (possibly someone from a business background) and Table 1.2 for an example of a BA career progression within IT.

KEY BUSINESS ANALYSIS TERMS/CONCEPTS

Organizations use terminology very inconsistently. One of the roles of professional standards organizations like the Project Management Institute and the IIBA is to standardize definitions and the use of terms throughout their respective professions.

Language is very important to the role of the BA. BAs must learn to be very precise in their use of language and be very consistent. Words, concepts, and ideas are all used to convey requirements. Listen carefully to the way stakeholders use words so that you can communicate back to them in a language that is familiar. When a business person calls their customer a *client*, the BA should always refer to the

TABLE 1.1. Business Analyst Career Path

Title	Experience	Tasks
Junior Business Analyst (novice, BA intern)	0–2 years of experience doing analysis work; may have industry experience or IT development experience	Elicit and document requirements for small, well-defined projects, often changes to existing systems. Ideally works with BA mentor.
Business Analyst (Business Systems Analyst)	2–5 years of experience doing a variety of analysis work	Elicit, analyze, and document requirements for medium to large projects. Works with the project manager to scope new projects.
Lead or Senior Business Analyst	5–10 years of experience doing a variety of analysis work	Elicit, analyze, and document requirements for large, complex, mission-critical projects. Supervises/mentors junior BAs. Works with the business to initiate and define new projects.
Business Consultant/ Client Relationship Manager	10+ years of experience doing analysis work	Assist the business with strategic planning, business case development, and new product implementations. Helps to identify projects. Sets up and manages a business analysis center of excellence.

customer in the same way. It doesn't matter if that is not the best or most appropriate word. It doesn't matter if that is not a word with which the BA is comfortable or familiar. The word is used by the business person and as such must be used by the BA to facilitate and demonstrate understanding.

BAs must recognize that terms have different meanings to different individuals and be able to translate these words and meanings to the concepts they represent. There are a few key business analysis terms and concepts that will be used throughout this book. They are introduced here.

What Is a Requirement?

The word *requirement* is one of the most important words in business analysis work. BAs must understand the uses of this term. In the industry, the word *requirement* is used

TABLE 1.2. IT Business Analyst Career Path

Title	Experience	Tasks
Programmer/Analyst	0–2 years of experience doing analysis work; 0–2 years doing software development	Elicit and document requirements for small, well-defined projects, often changes to existing systems. Make, test, and implement the software changes.
Systems Analyst (Systems Architect)	2–5 years of experience doing a variety of analysis work	Elicit, analyze, and document requirements (or review requirements developed by other BAs) on medium to large projects. Make software design recommendations; write technical requirements and program specifications. Manage developers.
Business Systems Analyst	5–10 years of experience doing business and system analysis work	Gather, analyze, and document requirements for large, mission-critical projects. Supervises programmers and systems analysts. Works with the business to initiate and define new software projects.
Business Consultant	10+ years of experience doing analysis work	Assist the business with strategic planning, business case development, and new product implementations. Helps to identify projects. Sets up and manages a business analysis center of excellence.

inconsistently and can mean various things to different people. The IIBA chose to build on an existing definition created by the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) many years ago:

IIBA Business Analysis Body of Knowledge® (BABOK®) definition of requirement:

A requirement is a condition or capability needed by a stakeholder to solve a problem or achieve an objective (IIBA, 2008).

Note that the IIBA definition does not say anything about the format or representation of the requirement. Analysts are free to represent it in any way that clearly communicates the need. Nor does the definition prescribe who will own or manage the requirement.

Every experienced BA has his or her own understanding of what a “requirement” looks like, but as a group, the profession does not have a shared understanding. It is almost like a piece of art. When one person sees a canvas with various colors of paint spattered on it, he or she may think of it as art while someone else may think of it as a mess.

In this book, a requirement is defined as anything that is important enough to discuss, analyze, document, and validate. A requirement can be documented and presented as:

- ◆ A sentence (“The system shall . . .”)
- ◆ A structured sentence (as in a business rule)
- ◆ A structured text template
- ◆ A table or spreadsheet (list of stakeholders)
- ◆ A diagram (workflow)
- ◆ A model (entity relationship diagram with associated details)
- ◆ A prototype or simulation
- ◆ A graph
- ◆ In any other format that communicates

The format or representation does not qualify it as a requirement; it is the *intent* and the *stakeholder need* that make it a requirement. Traditionally, software developers have used the word *specification* to describe a document or diagram that specified the product to be built. This word may be used interchangeably with *requirement* when describing software design components.

Since the definition of *requirement* is so broad, it is helpful to think of requirements in terms of some broad categories or components. These *core requirements components* are the building blocks upon which very complex business areas and systems can be described. You might compare them to the letters of the alphabet. Understanding the letters and how they can be combined into words allows you to make sentences and communicate very complex ideas and concepts.

Core Requirements Components

When describing a business, there are four basic requirements components: people, information, process, and rules (these components will be covered in detail in Chapter 6). People may include individuals or departments inside or outside of the organization (called *external agents* or *actors*). This component also represents “systems” or other

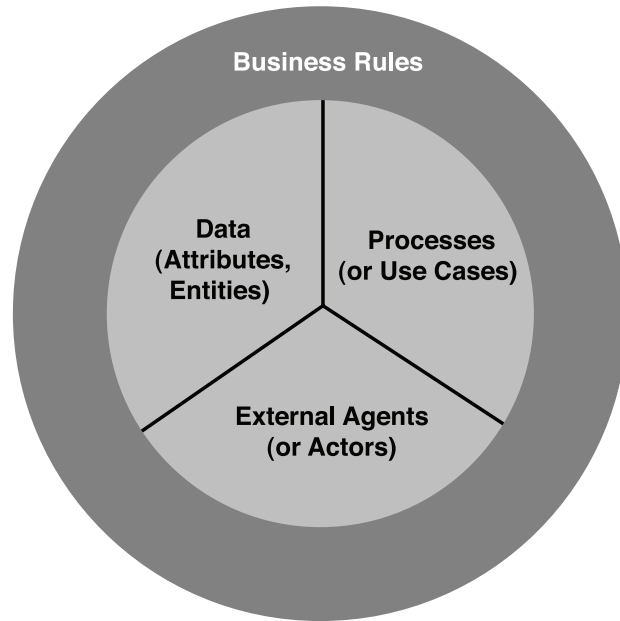


FIGURE 1.3. Requirements Components

business areas. Information is *data*. *Processes* are manual or automated activities or procedures that the business performs. *Rules* are business rules, guidelines, constraints, or policies under which the business operates. You can think of rules as encircling the other three components because rules guide the use of the other components (see Figure 1.3).

This is a simple way to start thinking about analyzing any business area. See Figure 1.4 for an example of the breakdown of requirements components.

By breaking requirements into their core components, BAs begin to see the business more analytically. They can identify specific parts of the business that may need improvement and develop more specific questions to get more detailed requirements.

Why Document Requirements?

To an experienced BA, this may sound like a silly question, but it needs to be answered for new BAs, managers, and the rest of a project team. New agile approaches to software development question the need for any written, formal requirements because they slow down a project and may not be seen as critical to success.

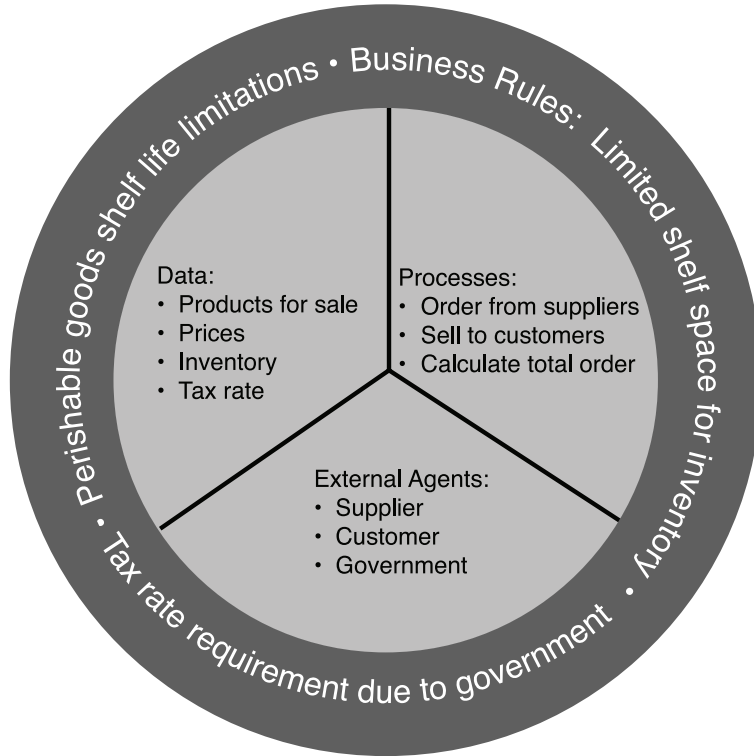


FIGURE 1.4. Requirements Components for a Grocery Store

Everyone agrees that requirements must be elicited from stakeholders and given to developers. Buy why not communicate through a conversation? Why not have the business SME talk directly to the developer and cut out the “middle man”—the BA?

Here are a few reasons why requirements should be documented:

- ♦ **People forget things.** Business stakeholders will forget what they tell developers. Developers will forget requirements. This leads to a lot of wasted time while team members try to remember what was discussed.
- ♦ **Verbal communication is fraught with errors.** Remember playing the game telephone as a child? A message that is passed from one person to another changes significantly as more people are involved. Requirements are very specific, detailed items that can easily be changed by using a different word or phrase. Verbal communication of requirements will rarely be accurate.

- ◆ **People sometimes answer the same question differently if asked twice.** Business stakeholders often give different answers to the same question at different times. This may be because after the first discussion a stakeholder has had time to think about the question further, or it may be that a stakeholder has simply changed his or her mind. BAs are experts at asking the same question in different ways before documenting a requirement to be sure that the SME has really answered definitively.
- ◆ **Writing something down forces a person to think about it more carefully than they do when they say it.** For example, an SME may say that he wants a report to show totals by month, but when he sees a report layout with 12 columns crammed together, he realizes that he actually wants the last 3 months only.
- ◆ **Having a second person (the BA) try to write down a user request and then have the user review it for accuracy highlights ambiguity and poorly defined requirements.** It also identifies missing requirements and undocumented assumptions.
- ◆ **New people joining a project need to get familiar with the requirements.** This is most effectively done by having requirements documented.
- ◆ **Evaluating and managing a developer assignment requires the assignment to be clear and documented.** This is actually true for all employees and is the reason why human resource departments encourage managers to articulate assignments accurately. It is difficult to hold a developer responsible for implementing a requirement when the requirement is not documented anywhere.

Why Do Requirements Need to Be Detailed?

Requirements must be discussed and agreed upon at a very detailed level. This assures that the business stakeholders have answered detailed questions about their business and clearly communicated their needs. Requirements also need to be detailed to give the solution team clear direction about the expectations.

Analyzing and developing requirements at a very detailed level is time consuming, especially for new BAs (see the skills discussed in Chapter 7 for help with this). For these reasons, many project managers and BAs don't go far enough. Managers don't understand why requirements take so long to develop, and most software developers don't like to get very detailed requirements because it stifles their creativity. All of these factors combine

to explain why the industry is still so poor at defining requirements. It also explains why agile approaches are initially appealing—no documenting of requirements. Often, BAs haven't done a very good job explaining why requirements need to be detailed. Without understanding the value of detailed requirements, few organizations will invest the time.

High-Level Requirements Are Interpreted Differently

Until the BA and business stakeholders get into very detailed discussions about how the business process will be accomplished, analysis work is not complete. As the BA and stakeholder discuss initial project objectives and goals, the BA begins to build a picture in his or her mind of what a solution might look like. Meanwhile, each business stakeholder also has a picture in his or her mind. It is very likely that these vague sketches in the minds of individual team members are different. These differences will not really be exposed until detailed requirements are discussed, written down, and jointly reviewed.

Many Analysts Only Use Text to Document Requirements

Textual requirements are by their very nature ambiguous and incomplete. It is difficult to capture the complexity of a business area or technology specification with text. When requirements are not detailed enough, software developers will build the product they see in their mind. This probably will not match the picture in the mind of the BA or business stakeholder. Building the wrong product means a lot of costly rework and an unhappy customer. This is not to say that developers can't provide great creative solutions, but they need to understand the constraints around which features (or components) can be designed creatively and what areas need to follow strict business guidelines.

Discussing and documenting requirements using diagrams usually prevents wasted time and confusion about true needs and wasted business user time adjusting to a change. Any change to a business area is disruptive. The BA can help discuss the ramifications of a change with the business stakeholders before the requirement is completed to make sure the change is appropriate and necessary.

Complex Business Rules Must Be Found

Many business rules are not exposed until very-low-level detailed requirements are documented. Many business rules and business guidelines are not mentioned during requirements elicitation because they seem inconsequential (too detailed) or because the business

SMEs take for granted that everyone knows them. These business rules often drive exception processing and cause major problems if omitted. Every business rule that will be automated by software must be explicitly stated in the requirements. With business rules, the requirements should include the desired exception processing, including the exact wording of any warning or error messages. Helping the business SMEs think about how they expect to see business rules enforced often exposes other business rules and more detailed requirements.

Requirements Must Be Translated

Requirements are usually expressed very differently by business stakeholders than the way that they are learned by developers. The BA acts as a liaison or translator, and the requirements are the tool for that translation. Ideally, the BA will be able to express the requirements in a format and style that can be understood by both the user and the technical team. This is the reason why expressing requirements in text is discouraged. Using language requires both audiences to share an understanding of terminology that must be very exact. For business people to learn IT language or IT people to learn the business language is a waste of time. The business analysis professional has the skills necessary to present requirements in visual formats that can be clearly understood by both groups. In addition, developers need requirements to be split into logical, technically related pieces. Data needs will be met in a very different technology than process needs, so these should be presented separately to IT. Some components of the requirements will be very obvious to business people (screen layouts, reports), while other components will be built into the software and not easily “seen” (i.e., business rules). These requirements should be documented and presented separately.

Case in Point

Suppose a business stakeholder requests a change to his data entry screen to add a new data element now required for government reporting. There are several important details about this requirement that should be discussed and documented before getting the developer involved. Without a BA and specific requirements (instructions), the developer will decide where to put the field on the screen (probably based on where there is open space), what the label for the field should look like, what edits are performed on the data entered in the field, and how the data is stored in the database. With these many decisions and guesses about the business need, the developer is bound to get something wrong. During

reviews or testing, the business stakeholder might complain that the field is in the wrong place, the tab function doesn't follow a logical flow of the data entry, or the label doesn't make sense. In a worst-case scenario, the developer reorders all of the fields on the screen to "clean it up" or make it more aesthetically pleasing. In this case, a simple regulatory change has become a major procedural change where the software users are required to change their entire workflow. For a system with hundreds or thousands of users, the time to relearn the data entry process would have a negative impact on productivity.

When an error is found during testing, the developer must code again and risk the possibility of creating other problems. This rework is a huge waste of resources. It would only take a BA a few minutes to ask the appropriate questions and document the requirement accurately.

What Is a Project?

A project is a temporary endeavor—with specific start and completion dates—undertaken to create a unique product or service which brings about beneficial change or added value. It is critical for business analysis professionals to understand the nature of project work vs. the ongoing work of the business. Projects, which frequently involve software/technology development, are funded to accomplish a specific objective. Once the project goals have been accomplished, a project is complete. In IT departments, changes to existing software systems may be categorized as projects when their expected completion time is significant. Smaller maintenance requests may not be called projects and are managed completely by the assigned resource (usually the BA or the developer). BAs may be assigned to work on more than one project at a time. They also may be assigned to non-project work (i.e., ongoing business tasks) or pre-project work (i.e., business case development).

What Is a Product?

In the context of business analysis work, a *product* is the result of a *project*. If a project charter states that the project work involves implementing a new payroll processing system, the payroll processing system is the *product*. Most projects result in a product, but not all do. A business process improvement project may result in process redesign and increased efficiencies without the development of a new product. It is important for business analysis professionals to understand the concepts of project and product and be able to differentiate between the two. For organizations whose customer products are

software, there is a clear distinction. In these organizations, people who perform business analysis work are often titled product managers. This title is also becoming common for people who manage internal products like the payroll processing system.

What Is a Solution?

A solution is something that “meets a business need, by solving problems or allowing an organization to take advantage of an opportunity” (BABOK). The word *solution* was carefully chosen by the IIBA BABOK committee to make it clear that business analysis professionals are involved with designing and implementing business solutions. The term *solution* is defined more broadly than *product* because it may include changes to a product, to existing systems, to procedures, and to organizational structures.

Case in Point

A request was made for a new field to be added to an existing screen in the customer relationship management system. The requestor wanted to be able to capture the customer’s communication preference because some customers like to receive their order confirmations via e-mail and others like to receive a paper copy through a delivery service. This sounded like a very simple change to the software. But as a BA, I needed to think about the larger implications of the change.

First of all, the other users of the screen(s) were consulted to determine if there were any potential problems with this idea. Second, the employee procedure manual had to be changed to show this new field and explain its purpose. Third, decisions had to be made about whether or not this new field would be required, what it should default to, and if it could be changed. Each of these decisions had an impact on the business workers. For example, business workers outside the order department who review the status of orders or answer customer calls needed to understand the new piece of information and be able to explain it to customers. In the end, to implement this solution successfully, there were several components: (1) the software change itself (the screen and sending the confirmation), (2) data entry instruction changes, (3) communication of the purpose of the new field to all users and training in how to use it, and (4) communication of this new option to the customers. The *solution* was much bigger than software.

Traditionally, IT analysts have focused on software as the solution and often underestimated the significance of the business changes that must be made to accommodate new

software. Business analysis professionals are in the unique position to understand the ramifications of a change to the entire business area. The business analysis profession is working to broaden the perspective by acknowledging that software is often a part of the solution, but it must be combined with procedural and organizational changes to effectively improve the business.

As a business analysis professional, approach each assignment with an open mind, even when someone has already recommended a solution. The act of analyzing means that you don't jump to conclusions or a solution until you completely understand the problem or opportunity and have considered many possible solutions.

What Is a Deliverable?

The word *deliverable* (root: to deliver) is used in software development to describe almost anything that is given to someone. A deliverable is given or presented to a stakeholder because it has some value to the stakeholder or the stakeholder is expected to act upon it. Examples of deliverables include a workflow diagram “delivered” to a stakeholder for review and approval, a database design “delivered” to a database administrator with the expectation that he or she will create a new database, and a new data entry screen “delivered” to software users to improve their process efficiency. To be accurate when talking about business analysis deliverables, the word *requirement* should be used as a prefix to deliverable. A requirements deliverable is then easily distinguished from a software deliverable, a training deliverable, etc.

Business analysis professionals create requirements deliverables for their stakeholders to confirm understanding of requirements, get approvals, communicate work to developers, communicate needs to vendors, communicate software testing requirements to quality assurance, etc.

Software development methodologies and processes often recommend specific requirements deliverables for their process (i.e., use cases are used with RUP). Many organizations also have company-wide standards that dictate required deliverables (i.e., business case, Requests for Proposal). BAs must be aware of the required/recommended requirements deliverables for their organizations and each particular project. In addition, the BA may decide to create other deliverables to present requirements that are not completely represented by the recommended techniques. It is important that the BA not simply follow the prescribed deliverables blindly. It is the BA's responsibility to communicate requirements accurately and completely; to fulfill this responsibility, creativity is often required.

System vs. Software

Terms are important in all BA communications. The terms *system* and *software* are often used interchangeably, sometimes causing confusion in communications. The word *system* is defined as a set of connected things or parts forming a complex whole. This word can be used to describe a computer system, an electrical system, a biological system, or a business system. Notice how the addition of a modifier makes the term much clearer. System can also mean a systematic approach to a problem or situation. *Software* is the programs and other operating information used by a computer.

Be aware that when you use the word *system* alone, your audience will envision something based on their background and experience. If you are talking with an IT person, he or she will think software. An electrical engineer will think electrical system. A business person will think business system. Use the word *system* carefully and with a specific purpose.

It Depends

One of the most common phrases that business analysis professionals use is *it depends*. Much of business analysis work is complex, abstract, and dependent on current circumstances. When a BA is asked about a recommendation for a particular approach or analysis technique, often he or she will start the answer with *it depends*. Every situation is unique, and BAs bring their problem-solving, communication, interpersonal, and teamwork skills and knowledge to tailor an approach to each new problem.

BUSINESS ANALYSIS CERTIFICATION

There are currently three types of certification programs for BAs: *certificate* programs, *certification* programs, and the IIBA certification program. Each program recognizes business analysis competency in a different way. A *certificate* program acknowledges that an individual has completed a course of study. A *certification* program proves that an individual has satisfactorily completed an approved curriculum and demonstrated the ability to perform the tasks required (a certification program also usually requires work experience). The IIBA is the industry organization that has defined the body of knowledge for the business analysis profession, BABOK. The IIBA's certification is an exam that measures knowledge of the BABOK and would be extremely difficult to pass without business analysis experience. In order to sit for the exam, you must have a minimum of

five years of experience. The certification is called CBAP® (Certified Business Analysis Professional™).

So which one do you need or which one is going to benefit you the most? It depends on why you want the certification and what you are going to do with it. Proof that you have attended business analysis training and/or have knowledge of the BABOK shows that you are aware of industry terminology and techniques. It will always be considered positively by employers and will make your transition into new environments easier. From an employer's perspective, evidence that a BA possesses not only business analysis knowledge but also the ability to apply that knowledge in a day-to-day, real-world business analysis environment is invaluable. Consider your current situation and where you want to be in three or five years when making this decision. BAs may choose to earn multiple levels of recognition based on their personal needs.

Employers are looking for a certification for BAs because the profession is very young and the role is not universally understood. Many organizations use the title differently or combine the role with project management or quality assurance. Hiring managers are looking for help in discerning the tasks typically performed by BAs, and since managers often do not have personal experience performing these tasks, they need help evaluating a candidate's capability. Tasks such as requirements elicitation, business process modeling/analysis, and documenting business data requirements are key skills for a successful BA.

IIBA BABOK®

The IIBA BABOK is a compilation of the currently accepted practices of business analysis professionals written and reviewed by expert BAs. The BABOK has been released in versions (current draft version 2.0) and will continue to evolve with the profession. It is divided into knowledge areas, tasks, and techniques. Each task and technique is defined and explained briefly. The purpose of the BABOK is to provide guidance and references for business analysis professionals. It is not a learning tool.

The goal of the IIBA is that eventually the BABOK will become the *best practice* standard for the profession. This may take 5 to 10 years of reviews and revisions. The BABOK is the basis for the IIBA professional certification CBAP.

This book addresses the knowledge areas of the BABOK from a different perspective. Its goal is to help business analysis professionals learn and hone their skills, working toward mastery. The book is structured to best communicate and teach business analysis

concepts. These concepts are best learned by combining topics from several knowledge areas. The recommendations are all in line with the BABOK and will assist individuals preparing for the CBAP certification.

Table 1.3 shows which chapters of this book address each of the knowledge areas. The knowledge areas were designed to best communicate the complexity of the business analysis body of knowledge. This book includes *Knowledge Area Keys* called “BABOK Connections” that map BABOK competencies to tasks or techniques that the BA can utilize to satisfy these competencies. Figure 1.5 provides an example.

TABLE 1.3. BABOK Knowledge Areas and Chapter References

BABOK Knowledge Areas V2.0	Chapter					
	2 Know Your Audience	3 Know Your Project	4 Know Your Business Environment	5 Know Your Technical Environment	6 Know Your Analysis Techniques	7 Increase Your Value
Business Analysis Planning and Monitoring	X				X	X
Enterprise Analysis		X	X		X	X
Elicitation			X		X	X
Requirements Analysis		X	X		X	X
Requirements Management and Communication	X				X	X
Solution Assessment			X	X	X	X
Underlying Competencies	X		X	X	X	X

BABOK Connection	
Knowledge Area	Task/Technique
Business Analysis Planning and Monitoring	Conduct Stakeholder Analysis

FIGURE 1.5. BABOK Connection Example

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

The first step in mastering business analysis is to acquire a very clear understanding of the work involved and the role of the BA. Business analysis work is performed by many people with various titles but always involves:

- ◆ An understanding of the communications gap between business and technology people, and the ability to accurately translate requirements
- ◆ Continuous development of knowledge about the business and the skills to develop potential technology solutions
- ◆ An understanding of the reporting structure of the organization and the importance of advocating for support of true business needs
- ◆ Being passionate about learning and being curious in eliciting requirements and helping business people articulate their needs
- ◆ An understanding of the use of the word *requirements* in the organization and throughout the industry so as to be able to justify the time needed to develop high-quality requirements
- ◆ An awareness of business, technical, and project terminology, techniques, and best practices

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