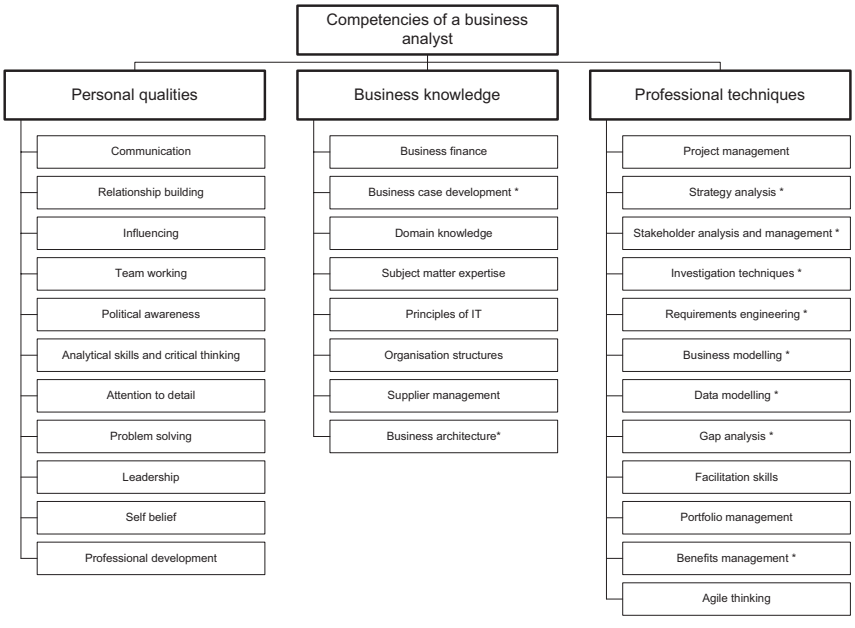
2 THE COMPETENCIES OF A BUSINESS ANALYST

Craig Rollason

INTRODUCTION

Good business analysts can make the difference between a poor and a great investment in business and IT improvements. They can also help to resolve issues without jumping to premature conclusions. But what exactly is a good business analyst? This chapter aims to address this question by identifying and describing the competencies that business analysts need in order to be effective in the modern business environment. Competence has been described as 'the ability to do a particular activity to a prescribed standard' (Working Group on Vocational Qualifications, 1986). For the purposes of this chapter, we shall define a competence as an ability a business analyst needs to perform his or her job effectively. The set of BA competencies can be divided into three broad groups, illustrated in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 The competencies of a business analyst



Note: Items marked * are covered in more detail in later chapters.

Personal qualities are concerned with how you think and how you interact with the people around you. They are not specific to business analysis but are general skills that are important for developing and progressing in any business environment. Behavioural skills are arguably more important than technical or business skills as they are a prerequisite for working with other people. It is often said that it is easier to give a person with good behavioural skills the techniques they need for their job than to graft behavioural skills onto a good technician. One of the main reasons for this is that good behavioural skills take many years to develop. We discuss the development of competencies later in this chapter. A business analyst also requires **business knowledge** which helps to develop a good understanding of their organisation and the business domain or sector within which it operates. This knowledge is vital if the business analyst is to offer advice and insights that will help improve the organisation's performance. The primary source of business knowledge is through the experience of working in a variety of organisation and project environments. Additional business knowledge can be developed through reading relevant literature or studying for business qualifications. The **professional techniques** are those specific to the business analyst role and differentiate business analysts from other roles. Each of the competencies shown in Figure 2.1 is discussed in the sections that follow and others indicated are covered in more detail in later chapters of this book.

PERSONAL QUALITIES

These are the interpersonal skills and characteristics that are useful for a business analyst.

Communication

Communication is perhaps the most important skill an individual can possess; it encompasses a wide range of areas such as building rapport, listening, influencing and building empathy. Much analysis work involves collecting and analysing data and then presenting back information that brings new perspectives on the project so as to propose a course of action. Poor communication skills are often cited as the root cause of problems during discussions between business and IT staff. The key issues involve the use of technical and business jargon, and failing to understand the other party's point of view during such discussions.

It is vital that we communicate with business colleagues in a language and style they are comfortable with and avoid unfamiliar terms and references. From the analyst perspective, it is important to understand the business, possibly by doing some prior research, and avoid using technical language that is likely to confuse. Spending time with the business team will help you to understand what the communication norms are and what will be effective. It is also important to adjust your communication to align with the other people in the discussion. We need to be aware of the interests and responsibilities of the participants and frame questions accordingly.

Relationship building

This is an extension of communication skill and concerns the ability to get on well with people, at a working if not social level. Some people seem to possess this ability naturally, others have to work at it but either way it is essential for a business analyst. As a business analyst you need to get people to impart information and share opinions with you, and also to discuss ideas for change. All of these things will be very much easier if the people concerned like and trust you. Those who seem best able to build good working relationships demonstrate a genuine interest in the other person and offer open discussions which build mutual trust and respect. This is the basis for successful relationship building.

Influencing

Business analysts are often involved in suggesting options and, possibly, recommending a course of action. If that conclusion is at odds with preconceived ideas about what is required or if it calls for radical or unexpected action, then the ability to influence is essential. Successful influencing requires careful consideration and a concerted effort. We need to understand the stakeholders and factors that will play a part in the decision. Some are obvious such as the project sponsor, project manager, governance committees, project boards and other steering groups. Some are hidden – networks of colleagues, personal agendas, hidden information. Identifying the stakeholders and understanding the amount of power they exert over the decision-making processes will allow you to target and influence the decision-makers most effectively. Once decision-makers have been identified, you can then define a course of action to take the decision forward. This may involve briefing other colleagues – more senior or representatives on decision-making groups – or influencing business colleagues directly.

The influencing activities need careful consideration and prior planning. Business analysts have to develop an understanding of where the other party stands on their proposal, any likely resistance and the influencing style needed to approach the person or group. For example, some managers might defer all decisions to another group, require all information at a very detailed level or prefer just a high-level summary. Some are interested in all the technicalities, others in just the 'vision' or the 'big picture'. Tailoring the approach is vital for a successful outcome.

The analysis itself may be questioned requiring the business analysts to take or suggest another course of action. This may involve facilitating a round table discussion or seeking support from senior colleagues on the best course of action. This is especially true when the business analyst is caught in the middle of opposing views. It also suggests that another personal quality that business analysts need from time to time is the ability to withstand pressure.

Team working

Business analysts often work in teams. The nature of business analysis work requires collecting information from and collaborating with many groups such as business colleagues, suppliers, project team members and management. As a result, the ability to work in a team is very important. An appreciation of what makes successful teams work will benefit the business analyst who should be able to make use of their analytical

skills to identify any issues and opportunities that will improve how the team works. Key factors for consideration are vision, commitment, trust, capability, accountability, principles, creativity, responsiveness and recognition.

Political awareness

This is a bit like an elephant – hard to describe but you know it when you see it! One way of defining such awareness is to use the words 'nous' or 'streetwise'; they both capture elements of political awareness. Essentially, this means the ability to work out what is and is not politically acceptable in an organisation and being able to use the right organisational levers to get things done. This requires an analyst to know the sources of power and information within the organisation, understanding what is acceptable or not, and tailoring the approach accordingly. Having political awareness, emphatically does *not* mean accepting the status quo; it does mean being astute and using resourcefulness to get results, even in the face of opposition.

Analytical skills and critical thinking

Since the role we are talking about here is that of business analyst, it is clear that analytical skills form a major part of the job but what does this mean in practice? It means not settling for the obvious, not accepting things at face value and not jumping to premature conclusions. It means digging deeper and deeper until the true situation is uncovered and the real problem has been defined. It involves sifting through often-conflicting data and determining which is relevant and which are not, and presenting the results of the analysis in a form suitable for the relevant stakeholders. And it involves challenging received wisdom at every turn: Why do you do this? What value does it add? Where is it done? How is it done? Who is or should be responsible? When should it happen? Is there another way to do this? Some analysts seem to believe that the job simply consists of recording what the users say they want but this will not reap the potential rewards without the active and critical intervention of the analyst. Over time the analyst will be able to assess the level of analysis required for a specific situation. One maxim often used is to conduct 20 per cent of the analysis in order to achieve 80 per cent of the right answer – and then be 100 per cent convincing when influencing the outcome. This doesn't mean taking shortcuts on the analysis; it does mean recognising the key factors and the imposed constraints rather than trying to analyse everything.

Attention to detail

Several aspects of the business analyst's work require detailed investigation. Whether it is uncovering the root causes of problems, defining the costs and benefits associated with a proposed option, defining business requirements and rules or identifying the impacts of proposed changes, the business analyst has a responsibility to ensure that key information is not missed. The key competence here is to have an attention to detail when necessary and to be able to identify when this is required.

Problem solving

Too often business analysts complain that a solution is decided upon without there being a full appreciation of the problem to be addressed. This focus on understanding

the problem before rushing towards a solution is a key tenet of business analysis, – this is where significant value can be delivered. It could be said that a business analyst is at heart someone who likes to solve business problems. There are many techniques and frameworks associated with creative problem solving, and Chapter 4 provides an overview of one such approach, but problem-solving competence requires more than just an understanding of how to approach a problem. There is a need for a problem-solving mindset, requiring curiosity, tenacity and analytical ability plus an open mind that seeks out and evaluates options. Pragmatism is also key to successful problem solving.

Leadership

Leadership is a skill that is often associated with management. However, the fundamental characteristics of leadership – developing a vision, taking ownership of that vision and ensuring the actions to achieve that vision are implemented – can be applied to all types of work. Thus, leadership is highly applicable to business analysis and in this context may be defined as creating a vision of the approaches and options available to address a business issue, advising stakeholders in order to obtain agreement about the vision and then driving the business and IT change process towards the achievement of that vision.

No two projects are the same. Each project has different objectives, constraints and stakeholders, and hence the required approach, skills and resources will differ. It is important to assess each situation on its own merits, decide what is needed and then design the analysis process. This should be within the broader context of analysing business systems not just IT systems. The business analyst needs to consider all aspects of the organisation or business area within which they work, including people, culture, processes, commercial and technical aspects. Getting the vision and actions right requires holistic thinking and rigorous analysis, and positions the project for success with key business stakeholders.

In recent years, the business analyst as a leader has emerged as a common theme in the business analysis and wider business and IT community. For example, the 'expert BA' award developed by the BA Manager Forum requires candidates to demonstrate significant experience in leading analysis initiatives. The potential of business analysis to innovate and transform has in some organisations propelled the role to senior levels with executive level reporting. Different levels of leadership – self, project, organisation and wider world – have been recognised with regard to the business analyst role (Pullan and Archer 2013).

Self-belief

This last quality is one that is often overlooked but is extremely important. It means having sufficient self-confidence – in yourself, in the quality of your analysis, in the relevance of your approach – to be able to withstand pressure, challenge proposals, analyse impacts and sustain your arguments. Self-belief is a key competence for working effectively with stakeholders across the broad range of situations likely to be encountered by business analysts. One lens that may be used to think about self-belief is the concept of 'locus of control'. This is the degree to which individuals themselves believe they control events and affect them. A strong internal locus of control means

the individual believes they can influence the events that happen. This may be compared with a strong external locus of control, in which events happen which the individual feels they cannot control. A business analyst with an external locus could have difficulty in gaining credibility with stakeholders and convincing them of the value they can deliver.

Professional development

A continuous improvement mindset is also critical for the business analyst. This should apply to personal development as well as enabling colleagues and the organisation to develop. This will assist the organisation to focus on ongoing learning, enabling it to adapt to new challenges in today's fast moving business and IT environment. This competence may be demonstrated through various activities such as coaching, mentoring, training delivery, contribution to professional forums and applying for business analysis awards.

BUSINESS KNOWLEDGE

This section considers the range of business knowledge and understanding which is essential as a background and foundation for the business analyst's work.

Business finance

The universal language of business is finance. Whether the business analyst is working in the commercial, government or non-profit sectors of the economy, finance plays a key role in deciding what funds are available and what can and cannot be done. As a result, the business analyst needs to have a good working knowledge of the basics of business finance. This includes a general understanding of aspects such as the balance sheet and income statement (profit and loss account), financial analysis tools like ratio analysis, budgeting and cash flow, the nature of profit or surplus, and the principles of costing products and services. Without this understanding, it is not possible for an analyst to evaluate suppliers, deliver well-thought-through process improvements or evaluate options in business cases.

Business case development

Much of the business analyst's work will be to assess the costs and benefits of delivering a project to the organisation. So, when communicating analysis findings, it is important to ensure that you have a view on the financial impact that the project will have. In its own right, IT is only an enabling tool for business benefits to be achieved and a business analysis project may involve other specialists, such as management accountants, to model the business activities and determine how IT can deliver financial benefit. To develop the business case, a basic understanding of finance, as described above, is required. Business analysts involved in business case preparation will need to understand investment appraisal techniques such as break-even analysis and discounted cash flow; these techniques are explained in Chapter 9. Over recent years many business analysts have developed a greater understanding of the benefits and costs of technical solutions. This is a positive development as it enables analysts to disregard costly options quickly, and ensure that they deliver value from their analysis work.

Domain knowledge

Domain knowledge involves a good general understanding of the business domain, or sector, in which your organisation operates. Apart from the general domain, there is more specific domain knowledge, for instance, supermarkets within the retail domain and social care within local government. The reasons why this knowledge is required are threefold:

- It enables you to communicate with the business people involved in the project, using language with which they are familiar – the personal qualities of communication and relationship building also help here.
- It will help you to understand what would, and would not, be acceptable or useful to this business domain; issues of profit, for instance, are unlikely to be of interest when working in a social security department.
- It may enable you to use ideas and experiences – particularly those relating to best practice from an organisation, typically but not necessarily within the same business domain, and apply them elsewhere.

Subject matter expertise

Subject matter expertise is more specific, taking the domain knowledge to a lower level of detail. If working on a particular area such as a specific product line or service, a good understanding of the terminology, processes and constraints is important to establish credibility with the customer. Business analysts may be specialists in particular business domains and have a strong understanding of the subject area. This will enable them to communicate more easily with the business staff and identify potential areas for change or further analysis.

Principles of information technology

Many business analysts do not come from an IT background and say – rightly – that their job is not to be expert in IT-related issues; that, after all, is why there are technical architects, developers and testers. However, the original conception of business analysis was as a 'bridging' role, enabling the communication between the business and IT staff. Given that the majority of business analysis projects result in the use of software applications, a general understanding of IT and software development approaches is necessary so that business analysts can communicate meaningfully with the IT professionals and appreciate their role and contribution to the systems development process. The increasing use of Agile approaches has placed a greater responsibility on business analysts to understand IT and related issues.

The extent to which you will need technical knowledge will depend on the nature of the analysis work being undertaken. Whilst strong technical knowledge is often useful this may be better obtained from those with specialist skills, for example, solution and enterprise architects, developers or external suppliers. The key requirement is that the business analyst can understand the technical terms used by IT specialists and help the business users to appreciate any impacts on the organisation. However, as IT solutions are often investigated by business analysts they should also possess an understanding of IT fundamentals, including areas such as:

- how computers work including operating systems, application software, hardware and networks;
- systems development lifecycles, for example the unified process or the 'V' model;
- systems modelling approaches such as the Unified Modeling Language (UML);
- systems development approaches, for example, the Dynamic Systems Development Method (DSDM) and Scrum;
- the relative pros and cons of developing systems instead of buying them off the shelf;
- trends and new opportunities that IT brings such as big data, software as a service, visualisation, mobile technologies, and how these impact systems and business development.

Organisation structures

As well as improving processes and IT, many business analysis projects involve restructuring divisions or teams – to a greater or lesser degree – in order to remove hand-offs, centralise tasks or improve the customer service. For these reasons, it is important for a business analyst to have a good understanding of the various organisation structures that may be encountered – functional, project, matrix and so on – and of their relative strengths and weaknesses.

Supplier management

Many organisations use external suppliers to deliver their IT systems, either on an ad-hoc basis or perhaps through a more comprehensive outsourcing arrangement which may cover whole business processes or even an entire business function. For example, many organisations have outsourced their payroll for several years but some have now extended this to cover much of the human resources work from recruitment to record keeping. The selection and contracting of suppliers tends to fall within the domain of the procurement function. However, for some outsourcing contracts the business analyst may be involved in this work so needs a broad understanding of procurement and supplier management processes. As a minimum, business analysts should be aware of the different contractual arrangements that are available, for example:

- Time and materials – where the contracted party is paid on the basis of the time worked; this is not the elapsed time on the project but the amount of effort employed.
- Fixed price delivery – where the contracted party is paid the price that they agreed for the delivery of the work in line with the original specification.
- Risk and reward – where the contracted party has agreed to bear some or all of the risk of the project, for example, by investing resources such as staff time, materials or office space, but where the potential rewards are greater than under other contractual arrangements.

Business analysts should also understand the supplier management process and should be able to engage with suppliers to ensure that they deliver their services effectively.

Business architecture

Business architecture concerns the knowledge and understanding of how organisations behave with particular emphasis on the systems, processes, management structures, culture and people. Often used in the role of business architects, this 'big picture' insight helps set the overall strategic context and vision within which business and IT change projects operate. This is explored further in Chapter 8.

PROFESSIONAL TECHNIQUES

This section considers the range of business analysis techniques that may be applied during assignments.

Project management

The PMI (Project Management Institute) publishes a body of knowledge that lists several areas of project management activity: the project management context and processes; scope management; integration management; time management; cost management; quality management; human resource management; communications management; risk management; procurement management. Similarly, the Association for Project Management (APM) has a body of knowledge that comprises four sections describing the work of a project manager. Where the project team is small, the business analyst may be required to undertake the project manager role and so needs an awareness of project management techniques and approaches, and have project management skills. Larger projects often employ a specialist project manager but even in these cases, there are some project skills that an analyst should have. For example, understanding project initiation is vital as it allows the analyst to understand, or even define, the terms of reference for the project. It is also important that the analyst understands project management planning approaches – as they will have to work within a plan – and is aware of particularly relevant aspects such as dependencies between tasks, quality assurance and risk management.

Strategy analysis

This covers a range of techniques that can be used to understand the business direction and the strengths and weaknesses of an organisation – or part of an organisation. Strategy analysis is explored in more detail in Chapter 3.

Stakeholder analysis and management

Stakeholder management is a key element of business analysis. It involves the ability to identify, analyse and develop management strategies for stakeholders. For example, the business analyst needs to determine the stakeholders in a business analysis project, understand their views and work out how their interests are best managed. Stakeholder analysis and management is the subject of Chapter 6.

Investigation techniques

Clearly, to get to the root of a business issue, the analyst will have to have a range of techniques within their toolkit in order to undertake an effective analysis of the area. Investigation techniques are reviewed in Chapter 5.

Requirements engineering

This is the set of practices and processes that lead to the development of a set of well-formed business requirements, from which the business and IT solutions can be developed. The topic is examined in Chapters 10, 11 and 12.

Business modelling

Business modelling is an approach to visualising business systems through the creation of conceptual models. Whereas a business system model looks at the entire business system in overview, more detailed process models are used to map and analyse how the business processes actually work and to help identify opportunities for process improvement. The business activity modelling technique is described in Chapter 6 and business process models in Chapter 7.

Data modelling

Analysing the data held and used within a business system affords valuable insights into how a business system operates. For example, what are the data items that are held about our customers and what are the relationships between customers, products and suppliers? The Entity Relationship Modelling and Class Modelling techniques are discussed in Chapter 12.

Gap analysis

The ability to conduct gap analysis is core to the business analyst role. There are many situations where gap analysis is required. For example, comparing 'as is' and 'to be' process models or higher level business activity models with the current situation, evaluating an off-the-shelf package against the defined requirements, and evaluating capability needs against those currently available. This topic is described further in Chapter 8.

Facilitation skills

The interpersonal skills required for effective facilitation – usually exhibited within the context of a workshop – are those described above. However, there are other qualities that provide the basis for effective facilitation including an awareness of the facilitation process, in particular workshop preparation, plus the ability to apply a range of relevant techniques. The techniques include such approaches as dialogue mapping, day in the life of (DILO), open space technology, brainstorming, mind-mapping, the various uses of 'Post-It' notes, Edward de Bono's (2009) *Six Thinking Hats* and so on. An introduction to the key techniques is provided in Chapter 5. In addition, the 'Further Reading' section at the end of this chapter identifies some useful publications to consult. Effective facilitation usually results from a combination of good preparation, an effective facilitator, clear

understanding of the objectives, 'buy in' from senior stakeholders and the use of helpful techniques given the task, the participants and the organisation context of the situation.

A recent trend is the emergence of visualisation techniques to engage the business audience ranging from strategy level definition through to screen design. In some cases specialist visual authors are used to capture the discussions and create a story. Visual approaches are quick to understand, quicker to explain. Automated tools are available to model different scenarios to avoid redrawing. While the written Business Requirements Documents are still prevalent, a combination of visual and written requirements is becoming more common.

Portfolio management

Portfolio management concerns the development of a management delivery framework through evaluation, prioritisation and delivery of a portfolio of projects required to deliver business strategies. Analysis skills come to the fore here in assessing how portfolios of work fit together, and where the priorities lie, to deliver benefits to the organisation.

Benefits management

Benefits management is concerned with the active planning, monitoring and evaluation of benefits predicted in a business case for a business change initiative. Ultimately, business analysis has the objective of delivering business value which involves ensuring investment is spent wisely, products that deliver value to the organisation are delivered and predicted returns on investment are realised. Benefits management provides structure and insight to projects and programmes, ensuring that the delivery of benefits is planned and monitored so that the value to the organisation is delivered.

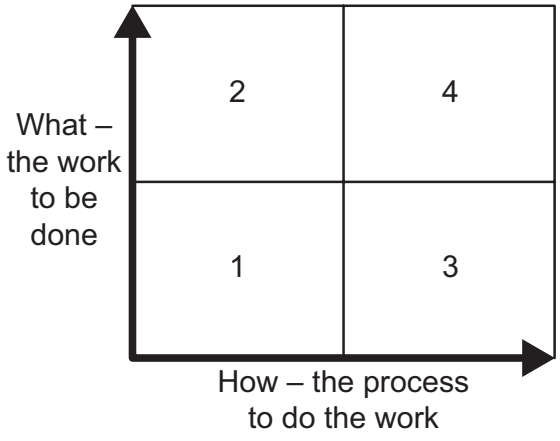
Agile thinking

The development of Agile software development approaches has highlighted the need for business analysts to develop competency in supporting projects where Agile has been adopted. However, there is an additional skill required of business analysts; the ability to enable business agility in order to support the effective use of resources and the delivery of value by their organisations. In essence, business analysts have the potential to provide an agile response to identified problems and opportunities through their focus on understanding what is to be addressed and the evaluation of options. To do this requires a mindset that is focused on addressing issues not following methods, and on selecting the right approach for the situation.

THE RIGHT SKILLS FOR THE RIGHT SITUATION

A key task for the management of business analysts is to ensure that there is a good fit between the skills needed for the analysis to be carried out. Putting a junior analyst in a situation where higher level skills are required can be demotivating and the reverse is also true where an analyst is over-skilled for the work. Figure 2.2 offers a simple model for thinking about the situation and the competencies and skills levels required.

Figure 2.2 Skills analysis matrix



In quadrant 1, the analysis work to be done is well understood as is the process for doing it. So this would be the starting point for a new or inexperienced analyst. For example, defining the requirements for a system where the scope has already been agreed. This may equate to level 3 or 4 in the SFIA framework (see section on Industry skills frameworks).

In quadrant 2, the analysis that needs to be done is not clearly understood although there is a standard approach setting out how it should be done;this would be allocated to a more experienced analyst. For example, a new collaborative/social media technology might be introduced into the organisation which has a pre-defined way of being deployed. However, the organisation is not sure which are the high value areas in which it should be deployed and have engaged a business analyst to conduct a feasibility study. This may equate to level 4 or 5 in the SFIA framework (see section on Industry skills frameworks).

In quadrant 3, the analysis that needs to be done is understood although it is not clear how it is to be done. As with quadrant 2, this would be work for a more experienced analyst. For example, the organisation may want to move from a variety of packaged systems solutions to a single ERP system, however, the way to achieve this may not be clear if the organisation has never attempted this before. This may equate to level 4 or 5 in the SFIA framework.

In quadrant 4, neither the analysis to be done nor how it is to be done are understood. This type of work is for the highly experienced and skilled business analyst and may require the analyst to adopt a consultancy role. In this example, the brief can be as vague as 'we need to reduce costs', 'we need to improve sales', 'we need to innovate more' etc. As a result, the analyst may need to define how the work is to be performed, manage senior stakeholders through the process and facilitate the organisation to think about what it is trying to achieve. This would equate to level 6 in the SFIA framework.

HOW CAN I DEVELOP MY SKILLS?

Earlier sections of this chapter have identified a wide range of skills that a business analyst will eventually want to master and the list may appear to be rather daunting. The first step in developing as a business analyst is to understand the skills required of a business analyst in your organisation. This should include an assessment of both the current and future skills required. Your HR department or line management may be able to provide an outline definition of the requirements for the business analyst role; there may be an internal career development framework available that sets out the skill requirements for different roles and grades. Alternatively, an existing framework such as The Skills Framework for the Information Age (SFIA) can be very helpful. This framework is described more fully in the next section.

Essentially, there are four ways in which business analysts can develop their competencies:

Training

This is particularly useful in developing professional techniques, business knowledge and, to some extent, personal skills. Classroom-based training can be an efficient approach to acquiring skills and knowledge and enables learners to practise their application in a relatively safe environment, with a tutor on hand to offer support, guidance and encouragement. It also allows participants to share knowledge and experience which helps to enrich the learning experience. Some training courses lead to industry qualifications, such as those offered by BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT. Industry qualifications are discussed later in this chapter. A recent development in the UK is the 'Expert BA Award', an award that recognises the business analysts operating at senior levels within their organisations and is assessed against many of the skills identified within this chapter.

Self-study

Self-study is an excellent way for analysts to develop their business and professional knowledge. There is a wide variety of reference books available, including many on topics relevant to business analysis such as process modelling and requirements analysis. Publications that help develop business knowledge include the *Financial Times*, the *Economist* and the *Harvard Business Review*. Such self-study will help broaden and deepen the analyst's understanding of the business world. The internet also provides a wealth of resources including specialist websites, articles and blogs.

Workplace experience

This provides an opportunity to use and improve techniques and to deepen business knowledge and it is also the best arena for a business analyst to develop their personal skills. The performance of most analysts improves over time as their experience grows but this can be heightened and accelerated if working within an organisation that operates a formalised skills development programme using coaching or mentoring. If this is not available, it is useful to identify more experienced business analysts, possibly from other organisations, whose work you respect and who might be able to spare some time to support you.

Industry engagement

The business analysis profession has expanded rapidly in recent years resulting in the development of professional bodies that offer services to support business analysts. BCS has offered certifications in business analysis since 1999 and published the first book (Business Analysis, 1st edition) on the subject. The International Institute for Business Analysis (IIBA®)is a professional body providing certifications and networking opportunities. Representatives from BCS, IIBA and AssistKD organised the first conference dedicated to business analysis. Both BCS and IIBA run frequent events where business analysts can engage with their peers and each organisation runs an annual industry award to celebrate the work of business analysts, further raising the profile of the individual, organisation and profession. Attending events and conferences, obtaining certifications and promoting the business analysis profession through presentations and articles, are excellent ways to develop skills and acquire knowledge.

INDUSTRY SKILLS FRAMEWORKS

SFIA is the major framework setting out the definition of skills, and levels of competence, for the information systems industry. The framework includes six categories of skill including strategy and architecture, business change, and solution development and implementation. Each category contains definitions of relevant skills with between one and seven competency levels for each skill; these definitions can be used to build descriptions of the skills required by a job role such as business analysis, at the required number of levels. The levels are numbered 1 to 7: level 1 is Follow, 2 is Assist, 3 is Apply, 4 is Enable, 5 is Ensure, Advise, 6 is Initiate, Influence, 7 is Set Strategy.

Skills Framework for the Information Age (SFIA)

SFIA is owned and maintained by The SFIA Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation whose members are:

- BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT (BCS);
- e-skills UK – the Sector Skills Council for Business and Information Technology;
- Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET);
- Institute for the Management of Information Systems (IMIS);
- the IT Service Management Forum (itSMF).

SFIA is used worldwide in all sectors of industry and government as the preferred framework for defining the skills required of IT professionals. The licence to use the framework is free of charge, though the Foundation requires a royalty from those using it to support a commercial offering such as consultancy services. The SFIA Foundation accredits consultants and partners, and provides training in the use of the framework.

The Business Analysis skill

The Business Analysis skill in SFIA is part of the 'Business Change' skill category of the SFIA framework. The SFIA description of the Business Analysis skill is:

> The methodical investigation, analysis, review and documentation of all or part of a business in terms of business functions and processes, the information used and the data on which the information is based. The definition of requirements for improving any aspect of the processes and systems and the quantification of potential business benefits. The creation of viable specifications and acceptance criteria in preparation for the construction of information and communication systems.

Business analysis skill levels are defined at levels 3, 4, 5 and 6. SFIA provides a more detailed definition of the skill requirements for each competency level of a given skill. For example, Business Analysis level 5 is described as follows:

- takes responsibility for investigative work to determine business requirements and specify effective business processes, through improvements in information systems, information management, practices, procedures and organisation change;
- applies and monitors the use of required modelling and analysis tools, methods and standards, giving special consideration to business perspectives;
- conducts investigations at a high level for strategy studies, business requirements specifications and feasibility studies;
- prepares business cases which define potential benefits, options for achieving these benefits through development of new or changed processes, and associated business risks;
- identifies stakeholders and their business needs.

Other skills in the SFIA framework that are likely to be used to describe the skill requirements for business analysts include:

- business process improvement;
- stakeholder relationship management;
- requirements definition and management.

INDUSTRY QUALIFICATIONS

There are two examination bodies offering professional qualifications in Business Analysis in the UK. These are BCS and IIBA.

BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT

BCS offers a range of certifications for business analysts covering the subjects of business analysis, change management and consultancy. There are three levels of certification and those particularly relevant to business analysts are described below:

Foundation Certificate in:

- Business Analysis (described below);
- Business Change;
- Commercial Awareness.

Practitioner Certificate in:

- Business Analysis Practice;
- Requirements Engineering;
- Benefits Management and Business Acceptance;
- Modelling Business Processes;
- Systems Modelling Techniques.

Higher qualification:

- Diploma in Business Analysis (described below);
- Diploma in Consultancy.

BCS Foundation in Business Analysis

The Foundation in Business Analysis covers the broad range of BA principles and techniques and is based upon a subset of topics contained within this book.

BCS International Diploma in Business Analysis

Candidates will be awarded the Diploma once they have passed written examinations in four subjects, two of which are compulsory and two selected specialist modules, and have passed an oral examination covering the Business Analysis Diploma syllabus.

IIBA CBAP/CCBA

The International Institute of Business Analysis (IIBA®) has created the Certified Business Analysis Professional™ (CBAP®), a designation awarded to candidates who have successfully demonstrated sufficient experience in business analysis and have passed the IIBA® CBAP® multiple-choice examination. The CBAP® may be used towards the BCS International Diploma in Business Analysis as an exemption towards two of the modules. IIBA also offer the CCBA® certification which requires candidates to pass a similar examination but demonstrate a lower level of experience.

SUMMARY

Competence development is the most important aspect of career development for any professional. This chapter has sought to categorise and describe the most common skills required of a successful business analyst. Every organisation will have a different

interpretation of what a business analyst does and the levels of business analysis work. If you wish to develop and improve your performance it is important to understand the range of required skills, identify your competence in each skill area and then take the relevant learning opportunities.

Historically, business analyst jobs and qualifications have focused on the construction of systems that 'meet business requirements'. This has meant that the focus is on collecting requirements in an organised and logical fashion that are then used to select or build systems which meet those needs. The need for people who can do this is now a lot wider and there is much more emphasis on the importance of this task, often as a result of the sourcing options available to organisations. Where external suppliers are used, defining IT requirements is even more important, particularly where they are located in another country – offshore sourcing as this is known. Critically, the stakes are being raised higher for IT projects; IT departments that cannot show or communicate how they add value are becoming an endangered species as more and more IT-aware people enter business organisations. Business analysts can only survive and evolve if they offer a broad set of skills that demonstrate how they can identify, analyse and develop options for adding value to their organisation.

It is in the area of personal skills that perhaps the biggest challenges lie for business analysts. Anyone working in business change is only too aware of the apprehension, and even resentment, that change projects engender. So, business analysts face a major challenge; they need to use all of their personal skills to invalidate the stereotypes and overcome opposition, and work with their business colleagues to deliver the business improvements their organisations demand.

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USEFUL WEBSITES

www.baleadership.com

www.bamanagerforum.org

www.batimes.com

www.bcs.org

www.iaf-world.org

www.iiba.org

www.sfia-online.org

www.thebusyba.com

APPENDIX 2A

SFIA and SFIAplus description of Business Analysis skill Levels 3/4/5/6

Level 3	Investigates operational needs and problems, and opportunities, contributing to the recommendation of improvements in automated and non-automated components of new or changed processes and organisation. Assists in defining acceptance tests for these recommendations.
Level 4	Investigates operational requirements, problems, and opportunities, seeking effective business solutions through improvements in automated and non-automated components of new or changed processes. Assists in the analysis of stakeholder objectives, and the underlying issues arising from investigations into business requirements and problems, and identifies options for consideration. Identifies potential benefits, and available options for consideration. Works with clients/users in defining acceptance tests.
Level 5	Takes responsibility for investigative work to determine business requirements and specify effective business processes, through improvements in information systems, information management, practices, procedures, and organisation change. Applies and monitors the use of required modelling and analysis tools, methods and standards, giving special consideration to business perspectives. Conducts investigations at a high level for strategy studies, business requirements specifications and feasibility studies. Prepares business cases which define potential benefits, options for achieving these benefits through development of new or changed processes, and associated business risks. Identifies stakeholders and their business needs.

Level 6	Takes full responsibility for business analysis within a significant segment of an organisation where the advice given and decisions made will have a measurable impact on the profitability or effectiveness of the organisation. Establishes the contribution that technology can make to business objectives, defining strategies, validating and justifying business needs, conducting feasibility studies, producing high-level and detailed business models, preparing business cases, overseeing development and implementation of solutions, taking into account the implications of change on the organisation and all stakeholders. Guides senior management towards accepting change brought about through process and organisational change.

APPENDIX 2B

The list of skills related to the Business Analysis skill provided by SFIAplus:

- benefits management;
- business modelling;
- business process improvement;
- change implementation, planning and management;
- data analysis;
- organisation design and implementation;
- requirements definition and management;
- stakeholder relationship management;
- system design;
- usability requirements analysis.