Software
Business Analysis
in Agile world

Agile methodologies started to form in the mid-1990s

and in 2000x they
rocked
software development world

in **2001** arrived the "Manifesto"

Manifesto for Agile Software Dev.

AGILE

- INDIVIDUALS AND INTERACTIONS OVER PROCESSES AND TOOLS
- WORKING SOFTWARE OVER COMPREHENSIVE DOCUMENTION
- CUSTOMER COLLABORATION OVER CONTRACT NEGOTIATION
- RESPONDING TO CHANGE OVER FOLLOWING A PLAN

…and by mid-2000th
majority of IT work was done
using some kind of Agile methodology

BIG
CHANGE

for everybody involved

but Business Analysts
felt the impact
probably more
than others

Why?

traditional BA role

Understanding the **domain**

Requirements management

Bridge between stakeholders and developers

But in Agile world ...

... good portion of these functions are assigned to this guy...

and many BAs in these new circumstances might actually take on Product Owner's role

which is very logical since Product Owners perform such core BA tasks like bridging the communication between the team and stakeholders, knowing the domain and taking care of requirements (aka Product Backlog)

bottom line is that **in many cases**
a Product Owner **is** a Business Analyst
who is **empowered** to make decisions

But how about **regular** Business Analyst?

**Does having a Product Owner
eliminate a need of BAs
inside a Development Team?**

**Cause from the early stages of Agile
there have been the talks that**
"developers can do their own requirements analysis"

Since (due to having a Product Owner) it won't be
such a large task.

And an extra person in the role of Business Analyst
simply gets in the way.

Well...

let's for a moment remind ourselves
of what analysis actually is

*Analysis is the process of understanding needs, finding the root cause of problems and the best solutions for them.

This is a critical-thinking process that considers impacts and ramifications before acting.

It doesn't always leave a paper trail, but the fact that you can't "see" the analysis does not make it any less important or unnecessary.

So even though a dedicated BA role is not a "given" anymore...

... in Agile projects there is **still a lot** of analytical work which has to be done.

Even in those with good Product Owners.

However, **who** and **when** performs the analysis – that might change.

For some projects having a dedicated Analyst makes total sense, while others might just perfectly go on without.

(and all remaining analysis will be done by other Team members)

General rule:

In Agile analytical tasks spread on many teams activities rather than concentrate in hands of one person.

And in some projects there will be no need for a specific person to be assigned for them.

Consider the project in which:

Team is highly familiar with Product's business domain

Team understands the way the Product is used

Team members are highly qualified technical specialists

in such project "traditional BA" may be dropped

in favor of a Devs and QAs with very good communication skills

working with **great** Product Owner

But we usually **don't** work in such types of projects, do we?

Our usual projects:

1 **Big** (both in team size and scope) and **geographically distributed**

2 **With complex domains** usually not familiar and not particularly interesting (at least at first) for Development Teams

3 Done for **organizations not familiar with IT/Agile best practices**

4 With **Product Owner who simply cannot be available 24/7**

Now in **these** kinds of project Teams
so much more analysis should be done -
and having dedicated person makes sense!

Tasks which Agile BA should own

#1 learning the domain

BAs are fully prepared for the task of understanding and constant learning of what the business is about. Up to the level of creating a domain model.

This becomes ever so important if Product Owner is rarely available for the Team. Or if by the contract the Team is supposed to learn the domain.

#2 understanding "why"

Rather then simply implement Use Stories, Agile Team needs to understand business problem, and then take part in coming up with or at least validate the solutions.

This is becomes more critical as Product Owners and managers with experiences outside of IT (to put it lightly) are starting to lead **software** product requirements.

BA needs to maintain focus on this "understanding business problem" task which is also simply called "understanding why".

#3 User Stories detalization

Rarely development teams are working on User Stories containing only in 3 sentences "As… I want… So that…"

In most cases User Stories need mockups, acceptance criteria, design documents, problem statements and/or other details to be discovered and documented.

Busy Product Owners can use help in this department from skilled BA. And then just review and sign off prepared artifacts.

#4 Acceptance Criteria

Acceptance Criteria is the second most important part of requirements process (after a User Story itself).

If Product Owner is not familiar with IT QA concept or simply too busy – BA can own a task of creating appropriate and comprehensive Acceptance Criteria as well as educating PO in this area.
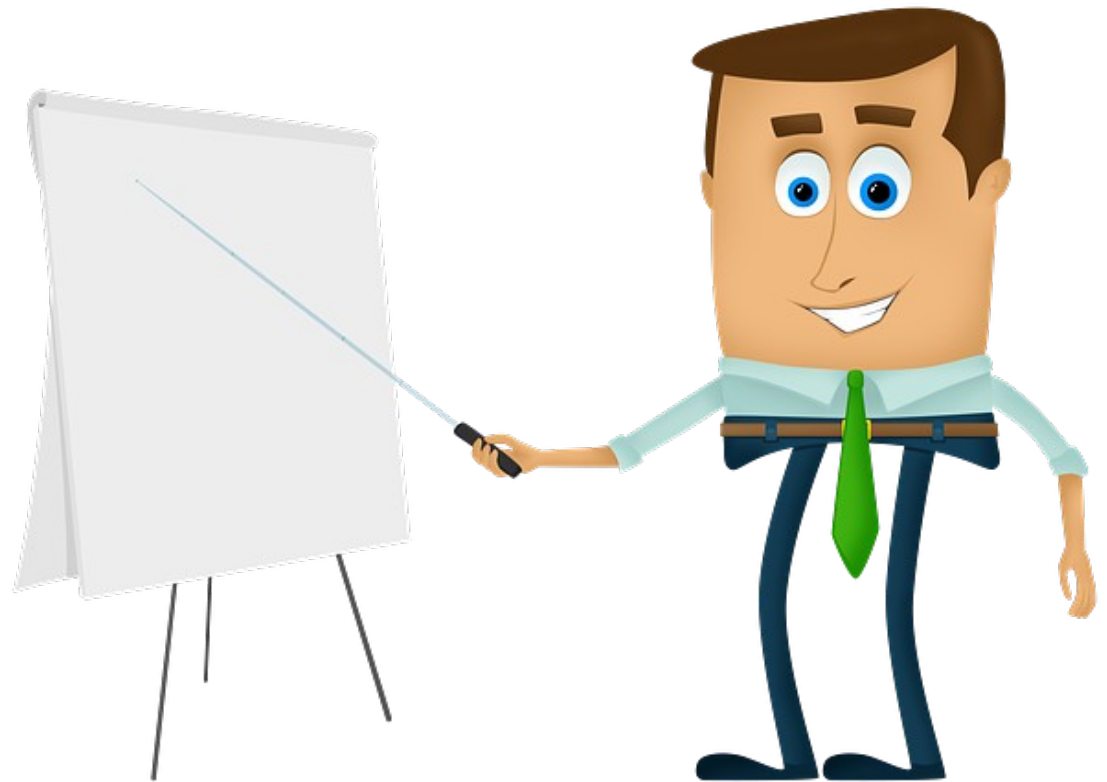
Naturally, any created Acceptance Criteria has to eventually be approved by Product Owner.

Skills for Agile BA

… apart from
all the usual BA skills
which are still needed …

So additionally

in Agile setting
BA should become:

... adaptable

Embrace constant change and be ready to quickly adopt to new ways of work and new types tasks.

...cross-functional

Become a generalizing specialist and, whenever needed, be prepared to take non-BA tasks in e.g. technical writing, QA, engineering design, UI, UX or coding.

...result-oriented

(With support adaptability and cross-functionality) keeping focused on **specific results** and providing **tangible value**.

...excellent communicator

Effective communication between
Team members and stakeholders
is a basis of agile and key of its
success **(or reason for failure).**

(kinda boring)
Summary

Many-many Agile teams still work on the software projects where there is lots of analysis to be done. Such Teams still need good BAs.

But BAs have to rethink way that they approach their jobs. This includes a greater focus on collaboration, on knowledge sharing, on skills transfer, and on becoming a generalizing specialist.

that's it.

Credits and Links

http://www.bridging-the-gap.com/analysts-we-have-nothing-to-lose-in-agile-but-our-boredom/

http://www.bridging-the-gap.com/the-agile-business-analyst-dance/

http://360.rmcls.com/analysis-slows-agile-good-thing/

http://agilemodeling.com/essays/businessAnalysts.htm

http://www.modernanalyst.com/Resources/Articles/tabid/115/ID/1302/The-Experts-Take-on-Business-Analysis-and-Agile.aspx

http://www.batimes.com/steve-blais/what-is-an-agile-business-analyst.html

http://www.infoq.com/articles/agile-business-analyst-role