

Business analysis and requirements engineering: the same, only different?

Bibliographic data

The paper was written by Jason Rubens, and goes by the name “Business analysis and requirements engineering: the same, only different?”. It was published on the 11th of April 2007 by Springer.

Theme of the paper

The paper approaches the role of **business analysts** by comparing it to the role of requirements engineers, particularly from the author’s own point of view considering his line of work.

Synthesis of the paper

In the paper, it is stated that there is an evident **overlap of the work done by business analysts and requirements engineers** but the business analyst’s role includes **other activities** besides the ones in the scope of requirements engineering.

The author acknowledges that his particular line of work reflects in the essay as different backgrounds might affect the perception of the roles of business analysts and requirements engineers. In his opinion, even if with similar backgrounds, it would still be hard to reach a common understanding of what it means to be a business analyst since its concept is loosely defined in the industry itself.

The business analyst takes part in a **wide range of practice areas** as part of the **system development life cycle**, which would be *functionality, business strategy, process, finance, organisation and change management*. Essentially, the role of the business analyst focuses in analysing, codifying or implementing change to the business in a way that the **delivered solution meets the client’s business needs**, i.e., that the obtained solution offers some **business value**. This follows regardless of the delivery method.

Business analysts should be engaged in the whole system development life cycle as to expand the focus of the requirements they create.

They manage the human side of the requirements process considering they are supposed to be the bridge between the developers and the clients. Since they work in direct contact with all the individuals involved in a business, they are in a unique position to manage the client/IT relationship so the developing team knows exactly what the client wants and works in that line and so that the client’s expectations are managed in a way that maintains their trust in the end product.

At last, business analysts provide expertise in both business and technical domain so they are aware of all limits and opportunities and can balance between what the client wants and what can actually be achieved.

It is the author's opinion that the IT industry does not yet acknowledge the full potential of business analysts but is progressing in this sense and the role of the business analyst must be sold to client stakeholders so their value can finally shine through.

In conclusion, the business analyst's role, as perceived by the author, includes the practice of the requirements engineer and also other vaster areas, with a particular focus on the delivery of beneficial change to the client's business.

Questions and reflection

Q1: If the business analyst's role not only overlaps with the work of a requirements engineer but actually involves many more areas of practice, will not the increase of recognition of the business analyst's job, as wished by the author, reduce the need for requirements engineers? In which aspects do they both have something different to offer so that both continue to offer value?

Q2: At a point in the paper, it is stated that the business analyst should hold expertise in both the business domain and technical domain, which includes knowledge on the client's business, competitors' businesses, industry-wide trends, techniques used in the industry, capabilities of technology being used and so on. If their job description is so wide but keeps the notion of expertise, does it not undermine the entire foundation of college degrees which are, for the majority, focused on one single area? Where do BAs go to achieve the status of experts in all of these different areas? Is it something they learn through experience only? If so, doesn't that mean that any person can become a BA and does this notion not support the very same thing the author tried to contradict which was that the tasks of a BA are something any team member should be able to perform?

As far as these questions go, I believe the answer to them, for me, relies on the same basis of my opinion of this paper.

I think the author has a biased view of the role of a business analyst, which is understandable considering he is human and humans have a tendency to look after number one, i.e., to try to enhance their work so they appear more hardworking, busy and competent than others. The author is clearly trying to make a statement so his line of work becomes more respected in the IT community.

Although this human tendency is understandable, we expect journalists to stay true to facts and leave their own opinions outside of their articles. In this line of thought, I think the author should have followed their example and tried to abstract himself from his personal inclination or, at least, attempt to disguise it a little better. The praise he offers to the business analyst's role just seems a bit over the top and devalues the role of requirements engineers. I think it would have been possible to praise his job without having to do it at the expense of another.

Personally, I think the aforementioned questions are what come to anyone's mind when reading this paper but I mean these questions not as something I truly need answering to but more as indignant rhetorical questions, which is why my opinion of the paper answers them all already.

Despite my very negative view of said paper and author's approach, I do think I have a better understanding of the business analyst's role now and I truly recognise the need for one

in a business. I think the work of the business analyst and the requirements engineer is complementary and both have something to gain from working in partnership. That being said, I do not think a business analyst should hold expertise over all the business and technical domains' aspects, particularly considering that different businesses mean different industries and technologies, but I do expect one to be a person who is versatile, with basic knowledge in different areas that allows for more in depth learning whenever faced with a new project.

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