



## How to Create and Sustain a BA Practice/The Benefits of a Centralised BA Practice

*“A Community of Practice has been defined as a group of people who ‘share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.”*

(Wenger et al., 2002)

One of the highlights from the May 2022 BAMF survey was that **61% of business analysis happens in a single service or practice**, up from 48% in 2018. So it’s no surprise that the BA practice is a hot topic amongst BA managers.

Craig Rollason and Andrew Leigh ran a session on how to create and sustain a BA practice at the most recent BAMF, which generated lively discussion and feedback, as did Sarah Bullen and Sandra Sheppard’s workshop on the benefits of running a centralised practice in 2017. Here are the key findings and outputs from both sessions, we hope you find them useful.

### HOW TO CREATE A SUSTAIN A BA PRACTICE

Craig Rollason and Andrew Leigh

#### Current BA management models – delegate feedback

*“As a BA I began to discuss common struggles with other BAs, such as sourcing strategies and developing a business case. It was useful to discuss issues as a community. This became formalised and we were recognised as a BA Practice within our organisation. Instead of BAs dotted around with no management, structure or career path.” - Craig Rollason*

*“In our organisation there is a BA Practice, but not all BAs were in the fold at first. Some of the BAs can be hard to persuade to come into the fold!”*

*“We have been going through a period of change. We want to be a BA practice but with mergers etc ... it will be a slow process.”*

*"We do a BA 'health-check' every six months. Our BAs vote on projects with a green, amber and red vote. So we can pinpoint issues."*

*"We have built a BA Practice and helped to educate the BAs in setting boundaries, we currently have a team of 15. They need that 'safe space' to come back to. We went through a restructure and our BAs were deployed into different areas. Our Community of Practice helps us all to stay connected. We are now growing as apprentices come on board."*

*"I am the lead BA of a team of 35 to 40. We are currently reviewing our structure. We work in partnership with Business Architecture and Solution Architecture teams. Communities of Practice need to communicate with each other. It is rare to be able to get all of our large BA team together. We try to have social events."*

### **Critical success factors and blockers to success when creating a BA practice -delegate feedback**

*"I sent out a survey to find out what people wanted from our BA Practice. I sent out 50 and got 3 responses."*

*"I found the survey approach did not work. So now I go in person and try to engage people. It takes time to build trust and win hearts and minds. Buy in from service leadership is crucial."*

*"We rolled out our BA Service Framework, so BAs could go out empowered, telling people what we can offer as a whole team. We try to all use the same language with stakeholders. We have held roadshows."*

*"BA Communities of Practice need the backing of the business leaders and senior management."*

*"If single PMO there is more consistency. If multiple PMOs it is harder to get them all on side."*

*"I went with stories, using real examples to show the impact of BAs. It brought things to life and made it easier to engage people."*

*"We need to say: what do you want from us? And show how the BA Practice can address people's needs. Align with the goals of the organisation."*

*"Context is key. What do the stakeholders want from BAs? Once I helped create a BA Practice by setting the team a goal of creating an IIBA event. This created visible outcomes and a success story for the business leaders to see. You can't create a successful COP without enthusiasm and passion."*

#### **Craig's view – critical factors for success:**

- **Senior leadership understanding of the BA role**
- **A desire for change, preferably expressed in financial terms**
- **Someone prepared/capable/tasked to build the practice.**

#### **How to sustain and grow a BA practice and make sure it is valued – delegate feedback**

*"Mentoring and coaching."*

*"Our team send each other silly GIFs. It's a small thing but it makes a difference. We also meet regularly."*

*"We encourage inter-practice mingling."*

*"We make sure everyone in the team has buy-in to the practice, and feel they have contributed. Mentoring new people is of as much value to the mentors, it refreshes them in their work."*

*"Need to get the right growth, not growth for growth's sake."*

*"It can be hard to make the case for Apprentices and allow that time for training, if too focused on the project work and deadlines. We put 70% of our time into delivery, 20% into the team and 10% into personal development."*

*"It's important to be curious about what is happening elsewhere in the business."*

*"We check to see if our BAs are too much in their comfort zone. Some like to stay with what they like to do, you have to be pragmatic. Other BAs need variety. The leader of the team has to listen to the BAs and let them lean into their competencies and strengths. Equally the leader has to encourage them to train and grow."*

*"Senior BAs need to lead by example and be advocates for Business Analysis."*

*"Build the case for your BA practice. You can share case studies. You need to show the value of the service."*

*"Celebrate success, for example when you have saved money, shout about it and make sure the team feels proud of themselves."*

*"Awards such as the BA of the Year award are a way of promoting the BA role externally in your organisation, if one of your team wins"*

*"If somebody feels part of a community then they become an advocate for the community. This applies to the BA Practice. So how do you make them feel part of the community? Events, perhaps asking different members of the Practice to organise, rotating volunteers, getting them to take ownership."*

*"A positive BA Practice becomes attractive to others, more people want to get involved. We try to have an influx of new and young people to train up."*

*"It takes time to grow a BA practice."*

*"If an organisation has challenges, professional development can suffer. It is all 'deliver, deliver'."*

*"Have fun! In our team we create an engaging work environment and it makes a difference."*

*"Is there a budget for professional development? Can you raid the training budget to grow and develop your team?"*

**Craig's view on how to sustain and grow a BA Practice and make sure it is valued:**

- **Quality of service from BA Practice (Customer view)**
- **Promoting the value/performance**
- **Make it a great place to work (retention).**

**Andrew's view:**

***"Look at your organisation and how many BAs work there. How many are staff and how many are contractors? Think of the cost of too many long term contractors. Make a business case supported by the finance director if necessary. Mentor the BAs on your team."***

#### **KEY TAKEOUTS ON HOW TO BUILD A BA PRACTICE**

- Have a 'terms of reference' setting out purpose, objectives, outcomes, scope
- Get the backing of senior management
- Build allies for a BA practice – for example PMO's may have data or insights on the impact of poor BA delivery that a practice might address
- Create stories and case studies – real world examples of how BA work has helped organisations to help sell the idea
- Define benefits/business outcomes from a business practice
- Use our own BA skills to build a business case for a practice
- Ensure you engage with the ideas with enthusiasm and passion for the role. People need to believe you

- Ensure the practice idea is supported with key stakeholders who can be advocates – stakeholder management. What's their perspective and why will a BA practice model help them
- Ensure alignment to organisation strategy and context – why is a BA practice a good idea now? What strategic issues with the practice help address

### **KEY TAKEOUTS ON HOW TO SUSTAIN A BA PRACTICE**

- Drive resourcing – ensure a good pipeline of talent and skills the organisation needs
- Use performance feedback as input for developing the skills across the practice – are there new common themes from feedback that can be used in training and development plans
- Share case studies – improve visibility and understand across the organisation
- Celebrate success – promote great work and inspire people to improve and join the practice
- Create advocates – find people who have benefited from outside the practice to promote the idea
- Create community sessions – get everyone involved, encourage knowledge sharing as part of professional development
- Ensure there is good pipeline of talent and resources to bring ideas and new thinking
- Link the practice session/engagement to induction processes to help new entrants get up to speed, feel part of the community
- Get a good balance of face to face and online – online only make it more difficult to build relationships and engage other members of the community
- Recognise and try to balance project delivery with professional development – not easy in stressed organisations and projects – recognise that professional development is part of the role, not an add-on
- Secure a budget ensure funding development activities and professional events
- Ensure as a BA leader you yourself create an interesting, engaging environment that help people to be good at their roles and want to be part of the practice.

### **THE BENEFITS OF RUNNING A CENTRALISED BA PRACTICE**

#### **Sarah Bullen and Sandra Sheppard**

A centralised BA practice sits on a spectrum, from informal to formal. The informal practice is usually initiated by members to create a central pillar for IT and change, is driven by enthusiasm (and cake) and relies on the passion of joint enterprise. On the formal end of the spectrum the practice is centralised and led by a senior professional BA and creates a formal structure for resourcing, defining standards, recruitment, capability and development. The dimensions of a centralised practice include a capability focus, with professional engagement, career progression, consistent recruitment, professional leadership and continuity of management.

The assumed implications are that a centralised practice:

- ✓ deals with fast paced and messy change through horizontal communication
- ✓ creates and retains motivated and enlivened staff
- ✓ holds organisational memory
- ✓ increases BA team capability
- ✓ makes the best use of management time
- ✓ relies less on external resources

The workshop examined the pros and cons of running a centralised practice from three different perspectives –the **organisation**, the **practice leader** and the **team member**.

### Organisation PROS

Consistency of service and potential added value/ cost savings.
More consistent delivery to business expectations – repeatable practice (use of tools and techniques)
Improved stakeholder engagement
Retention – lower recruitment costs and knowledge retention
Flexible and centrally controlled resource pool - prioritisation of resources across areas according to business demand
Healthy professional debate making for continuous improvement – promotion of best practice
Cost effective management structure
Economies of scale
Reduction in managing BA time for other managers
BA development is looked after by specialists
Enables the organisation to better measure and then uplift BA capability – creates a centre of excellence
Portfolio view – joining the dots - de-duplicating effort across the organisation and risk mitigation
Distinct BA role profile – recognition internally and by other businesses. Greater understanding of the BA service proposition
Greater control over BA resources
Builds internal capability – more and longer-term ownership of business problems
More focused use of external consultants – lower costs
The opportunity for greater early-stage and strategic analysis representation – doing the right things
More appropriate use of individual BAs and wider access to talents

### Organisation CONS

Time on practice development seen as ‘dead time’ – i.e. not billable
Perceived overhead cost as not focused purely on project delivery. Increased running costs of managing BAs
Lack of direct control for project leaders and perception of resource constraints
Can give rise to separate pockets of contract resources if COE not seen as supportive (doing their own thing)
Process for requesting resource can be seen as a barrier
Removes focus of management of BAs in a business area
Internal competition for the best resources
Potentially less responsive intervention (even though more reasoned)
Overly prescriptive ways of working/lack of flexible approach Size of a centralised practice can appear too large; a single group/high cost with people sometimes “on the bench”
Cost of Practice Lead an overhead
Difficult to measure value/tangible benefits of the centralised practice
SPOD – Single Point of Dependency – wider delivery quality may hinge on the skills of the practice leader

### Practice Leader PROS

Ability to articulate and sell/educate on services/value/project function
Feeling of recognition of building a team – awareness and respect for role – more examples of what ‘good’ looks like
Ownership of consistent standards (process & people) to drive competence
Ability to engage staff as professionals and focus on development
Increased sharing of knowledge in the team
Team can use COP to identify dependencies and lessons learnt
Reduces ramp-up time
More efficient recruitment as standards in place and the role is defined
Consistency of approach (tools, techniques)
Less duplication of effort – greater visibility
Ease of control of resources
More professional governance to ensure quality
Raise the profile of the BA role and educate on services
Consistent management of BA resources.
Easier to pilot/research new approaches/techniques
Ability to simplify delivery processes
Reduction in single points of failure – ongoing support
Potential for reduced conflict across a decentralised function

### Practice Leader CONS

Trade-off when focusing on team development and achieving consistency against urgent project delivery
Perception of the role as an overhead – continual justification needed • For the individual manager – potential dilution of “doing” BA skills.
Responsibility and accountability for BA delivery can be assigned to the one individual – only as good as the leader
Allocation and rotation of staff to develop breadth of skills and business knowledge can be at the cost of meeting business needs
With increased competence, BA responsibilities may extend into the earlier stages of the lifecycle. Potential increase in resources.
Creating a knowledge sharing culture difficult to achieve

### Team Member PROS

Work and career objectives guided by someone who understands the role – dedicated line management
Professional support structure
Opportunity to learn from others
Exposure to wider/holistic view of work across the organisation
Clearer definition of the BA role
Belonging to a specialist team – sense of community
Greater opportunities – breadth of knowledge
Increased professional identity and confidence
Greater standardisation/consistency of approach
Better organisation of individual time and exposure to different business situations
Greater possibility for mentoring



Effective leader with a voice at senior management level
Framework to operate within
Consistency of tool use
Organisational knowledge easier to access e.g. knowing who to approach
More access to coaching environment
Greater recognition of professional achievements

### Team Member CONS

Conflict between project delivery and best practice – finding time to contribute to the practice v work demands
Much can depend on the ability of the Practice Manager (not always a former BA)
Time commitment. BAs often chargeable and little time to utilise professional development opportunities
Not part of supportive business teams – weaker business relationships
Perception that BAs need to be embedded in the business areas supported to deliver high value
Disconnects with wider organisation and constraints on who an individual can work with.
Potential conflict with project leaders/PMs
Small fish, big pond!
Forced to be involved in development initiatives even if not interested – out of comfort zone
Have to be a team player – harder for those that prefer to work on their own. Some BAs see it as a distraction
More difficult to find a single area and specialise
Supporting multiple projects, can lead to less overall productivity due to ‘context switching’
Not everyone wants to be treated the same – introvert vs extrovert and skill sets/interests differ
Limited to BA activities as opposed to opportunities to try/extend into other roles

### Financial considerations/benefits

Less wastage in terms of BAs “sitting on bench” – better management of resources and improved utilisation
Synergies in terms of recruitment, training and development
Cost controlled centrally so easier to measure and more accurate budgeting
Cost of Lead BAs doing management activities (false economy)
Professionalising through certification and potential for improved delivery
Reduced duplication of work across the portfolio
Retention – greater job satisfaction and career planning therefore lower recruitment/consultancy fees
Easier to recruit others as you have a good reputation in the market
Reduction on potential for single point of failure
Active management (performance, progression)
Best practice standards and consistency of work improved
Less rework due to improved delivery – more consistent approach (measuring reduction in change requests)
Shortens analysis loop due to re-use of materials and existing team knowledge
Visibility and measurability of team cost
Economies of scale, holistic approach e.g. GDPR
Reduced overhead of scaling, less reliance on third partners
Cheaper, more cost-effective contracts with partners – centrally negotiated

Controlling the amount of and shaping change (earlier engagement and greater scrutiny of initiatives)
Reduction in the cost of errors in analysis due to better processes etc.
Cost avoidance of other roles having to manage BAs
Re-use of materials, artefacts and requirements
QA element of skills capability
Easier to get BA's to work on multiple projects
Holistic benefits – team have "go to" like-minded colleagues (cross-training and knowledge transfer)
Ability to set standards across projects e.g. ownership for consistency of customer experience
Economies of scale through training courses
Less overlap of roles/duplication of effort
Lower cost of recruitment – time and fees
Able to deliver at pace and allocate timely and skilled resources. Speed of delivery allows business benefit to be realised faster – impact on ROI
Focus on doing Bas doing suitable work and not using expensive resources for project support/administration
Time saved on artefacts creation
Potential for subject matter expertise to be sourced and allocated to tasks, better experience for the business