Analysts Anonymous

Informed comment for the Business Analysis
and Business Change Community

Do your BAs have room to grow?

Evaluating BA practice maturity

In this issue:

10 tips for writing better requirements, the BA Practice Manager view of recruitment: Candidate Attraction, Business Analysis Conference Europe, Why CIOs need Business Analysts, Business Analyst of the Year 2014, Evaluating the maturity of a business analysis practice.

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Contents:

Contents 02

03 From the editor

10 tips for writing better requirements 04

07 The BA Practice Manager view of recruitment

Business Analysis Conference Europe 2014 12

13 Why CIOs need Business Analysts

Business Analyst of the Year 2014 17

18 Evaluating the maturity of a business analysis practice

From the editor

The World Cup is over for another 1,400 days or so – plenty of time for a post-project review and lessons learned report. In the meantime there’s a gap to be filled, so welcome to the latest edition of Analysts Anonymous.

The importance of requirements is well-known and we have some tips on sharpening your skills in this area. High quality requirements are also critical for CIOs wanting successful projects, so they should be very interested in what BAs have to offer. We look in more detail at the case for business analysts.

Recruitment is another topic of interest and we have the perspectives of BA practice managers on this important subject. Staying with BA practices, we have an article on how to assess their maturity. One way of assessing your own maturity as a business analyst is to enter the BA of the Year award – details inside.

Finally, make a date with the BA Conference Europe in September. We have a taster and everything you need to know to be there.

Enjoy the read.

Anthony Madigan
Editor
AA-editor@writethetalk.com

10 tips for writing better requirements

Writing requirements is not a trivial task. Despite many books, courses and publications on this topic, experience shows that those who write requirements have to practise a lot to produce good quality requirements. Katarzyna Kot of Devoteam was asked to review some requirements documents recently and was inspired to write this article about where the problems with requirements arise. She also shares a couple of practical writing tips you can apply to help you come up with better quality, unambiguous requirements.

One of the important functions of a requirements document, and of requirements generally, is to allow and to facilitate communication between a project team and its stakeholders about what a project shall deliver. This communication happens mostly using natural language, which is by its nature ambiguous, vague and imprecise.

To understand the communication problems we can consider the Osgood-Schramm communication model with a sender (person A) and a receiver (person B), as shown in figure 1. Communication begins with a person A who encodes his thoughts into a message. This message is sent to a person B via a selected channel. This channel could be speech but, in the case of requirements, we nearly always use written communication. The message arrives at person B who has to decode it. In order to decode the message the person B has to know the rules of decoding. Lastly, the person B interprets the message (using the rules) to obtain its meaning. Person B may then encode a response and send a message to Person A who then interprets, and so on.

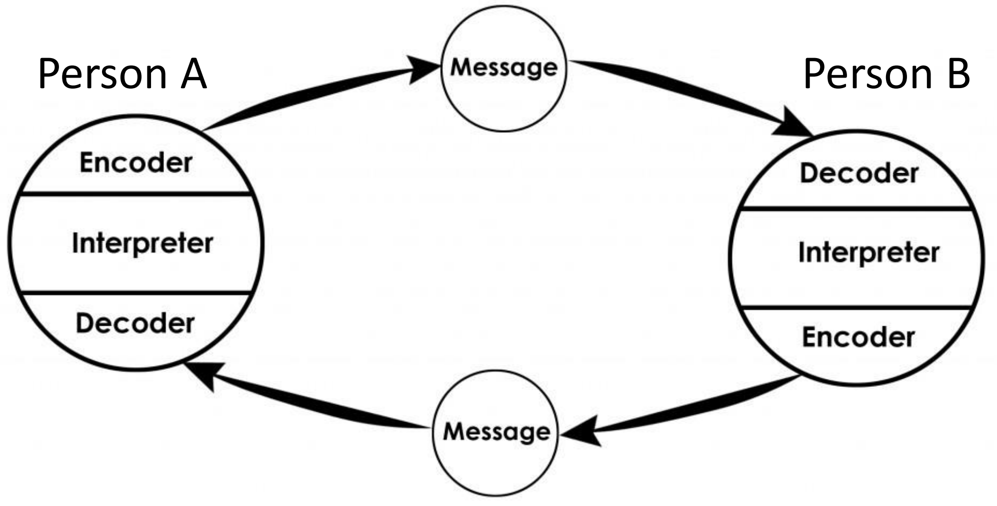

Figure 1: Communication model

Looking at even this simple example, we can see how complicated this communication process can be. There is no guarantee that the decoding and interpretation steps of the message on the side of person B will yield the same result as the encoding and interpretation steps of person A. If person B only knows some of the decoding rules then assumptions may be made; this makes the communication vulnerable to mistakes. Let's imagine two people are talking about a small dog and that person A has a French bulldog in mind. When not communicated properly, person B can decode this message and might interpret that a pinscher is the subject of the discussion. I'm sure you have experienced similar mismatches when discussing requirements with your stakeholders – which is why we all give a nod of recognition when shown the famous requirements swing cartoon (figure 2).

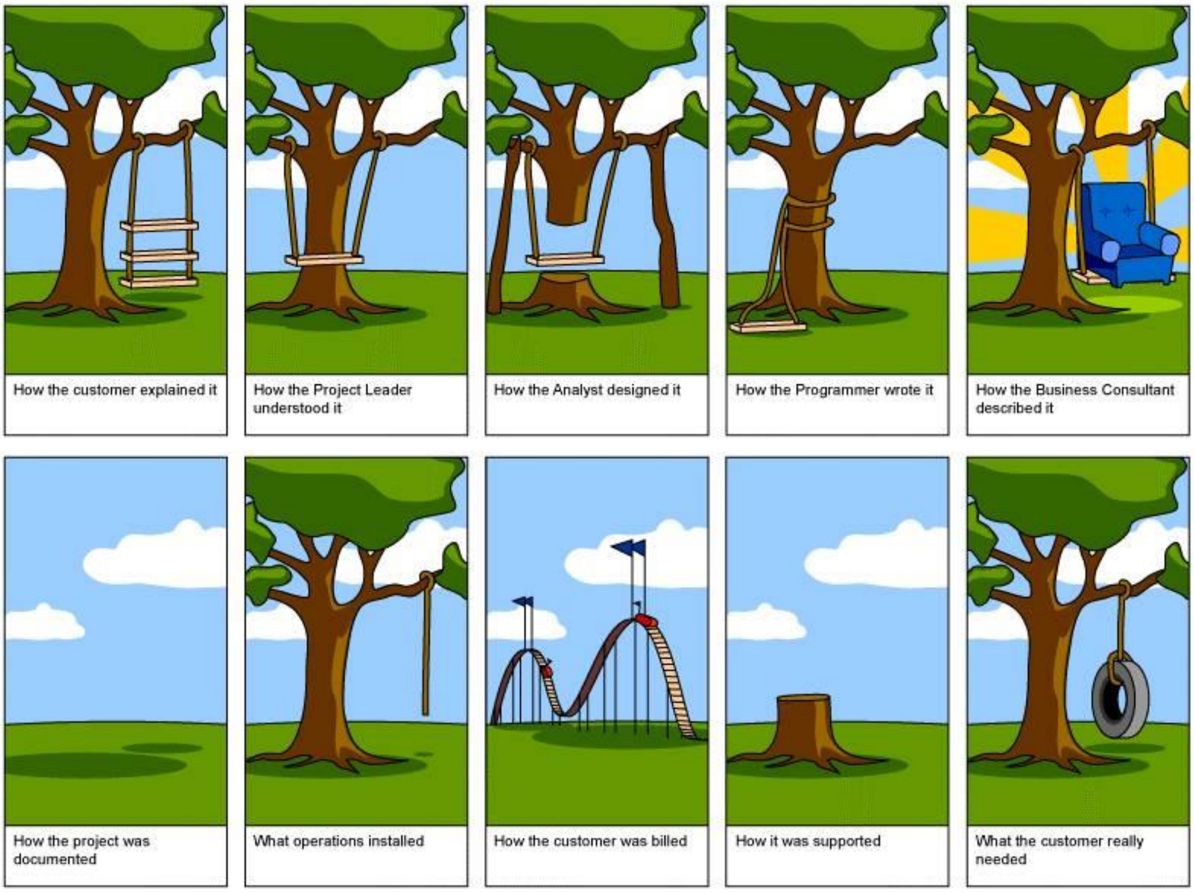

Figure 2: Requirements swing cartoon

There are many reasons for miscommunications including differences in language, culture or personality. With verbal communication, we have the possibility to spot the communication mismatch by, for example, analysing the body language of the receiver. With written communication, such a validation is more difficult if not impossible. Models are very helpful in providing clear views of the requirements from a specific perspective and uncovering gaps in our understanding. However, as a requirements document uses written communication to incorporate textual requirements, it is important to understand how this communication works and where problems can occur.

So, how can we minimise miscommunication when writing requirements? Here are some simple and practical guidelines which you should have in mind:

1. Keep sentences and paragraphs short.
2. Write requirements in the active voice (a does b, not b is done by a).
3. Avoid negative (or inverse) requirements.
4. Write complete sentences with proper grammar, spelling and punctuation.
5. Use terms consistently – define them in a glossary or data dictionary.
6. Use a limited vocabulary – a simple subset of English, avoiding terms that may confuse non-technical or foreign readers.
7. Avoid conjunctions (and, or) that make multiple requirements.
8. Avoid let-out clauses or words that imply options or exceptions (unless, except, if necessary, but).
9. Focus on stating what result the requirement will provide for a stakeholder.
10. Use templates for requirement sentences, for example: *The <system function> shall provide <system capability> to achieve <goal>.* Or *As a <role> I want <something> so that <benefit>.*

Many of us experience problems with requirements, either as an author experiencing stress in formulating them properly or as recipients who have to approve or to implement them. Because requirements are written down in natural language, which is imprecise and vague, there is no simple way to make them "bullet-proof". Using my ten tips can help you to improve your requirements and make them less ambiguous. These tips are simple, and they are certainly nothing new, but they require a lot of discipline to apply properly. If you want to adopt them, choose a couple of them to start with and extend gradually the set of rules you apply as your requirements-writing muscle gets stronger. Remember that practice makes perfect and that striving for perfection, in this case, is not an option.

The BA Practice Manager view of recruitment

Part One – Candidate Attraction

At a recent workshop, BA practice leads gathered to swap notes on recruitment best practice. Around 30 BA practice leads attended the session, working in groups to provide input on the three key stages of the candidate engagement process: attraction, selection and retention. In the search for scarce resources, there was rightly an equal focus on each stage of the process. In the first of three articles, we take stock of the current candidate market and present current thinking on how best to attract talented candidates who will fit with the organisational culture.

BACKGROUND – THE CANDIDATE MARKET

As the value of business analysis gains wider acceptance, so the role is in higher demand with more posts available year on year. Recognition that the BA role at its most mature can be the decisive factor in successful change delivery drives demand for the most talented individuals.

Demand is not currently matched either in terms of sheer numbers of BAs or by BAs operating at the highest level. The candidate market is therefore in both respects in catch-up mode.

One further point to consider is that there is no generally accepted BA career framework with agreed bandings of skills. The make-up of a "senior BA" differs from organisation to organisation. There is then a need to be clear in the skills required when hiring and selecting candidates according to these requirements rather than relying on ambiguous job titles.

This article cannot account for the unique demands of every business or location. However, an in-depth appreciation of how best to attract scarce resources should provide answers for some of the challenges faced by organisations.

CANDIDATE ATTRACTION

The central question to be addressed is just how to attract candidates to our organisation who are both talented and achieve a fit with our organisational make-up and culture.

Early on in the workshop discussion, a useful distinction was made between internal and external resourcing. Internal resourcing, particularly for larger companies, was seen as providing a significant pool of potential candidates.

INTERNAL CANDIDATES

In addition to simply advertising roles internally, some BA practices appear adept at marketing the business analysis role and establishing a broad appeal within the wider business. Some, it seems, "socialise" the BA practice through the course of project delivery, promoting the role as they interact with other functions and, on occasion, actively approaching colleagues to join the practice. Others run more fun-based events with food usually at the centre of things in an attempt to engage with other disciplines within the organisation. BA roadshows, along with shadowing and secondment initiatives, provide a more formal means of educating internal colleagues on the role of the BA and possible career openings.

The general view of internal candidates is that they can come to the role with strong SME experience and the right attitude and behaviours to take on a BA role. In these circumstances, professional skills were seen as being far easier to develop compared with personal skills and sometimes complex business knowledge. Some commented that their best BAs had come from within the business with backgrounds in call-centre or operational delivery. Broadening intake to what could be seen as fringe roles could be a valuable long term source of candidates.

EXTERNAL CANDIDATES

An immediate question in respect of external sourcing focused on the use of third-party agencies and/or HR colleagues.

According to the survey conducted on the day, a high percentage of respondents make use of HR to distribute roles and manage responses. Around half of those responding engage HR to make a first cut of candidate suitability.

When third-party agencies were used, the preference was for those with an immediate understanding of the BA role.

THE CANDIDATE MESSAGE

All attendees agreed on the need to give external candidates a detailed understanding of the role and organisational culture. Few, though, could give examples of how this was achieved. Some cited website copy as their main contact point with external candidates. Web copy usually contained a job description with little additional information on the challenges faced or the available opportunity.

The group was interested to learn of one organisation which had produced a candidate information pack specifically targeted at attracting senior BAs into their ranks.

The pack contained detailed role profiles, biographies of star BA performers, outline project descriptions and something about the journey of the BA practice including opportunities for progression. This level of information could be pulled together relatively quickly and would stand out in a crowded market, signalling that an organisation is wholly committed to the engagement of talented BAs.

SELLING THE ROLE AND ORGANISATION

The message to candidates could or should be seen as an opportunity to sell the organisation and the BA role. Group members highlighted the following role features that could be attractive to potential employees.

- **Money:** internal gradings or precedents may place fixed bandings on earnings allowing for little or no flexibility. Attracting candidates purely on the grounds of increased earnings can in any case be ill-advised. Benefits should though be detailed and explained with a salary range given so that any potential for progression is fully appreciated.

- **Work/life balance:** some organisations may offer a more balanced approach to work and home life which can appeal to many candidates. Any flexible working arrangements can be detailed at this early stage.

- **Practice development/journey:** as BA practices mature they may be able to track their progress on a longer term journey. Consequently, they may offer prospective employees a role in helping to develop and shape the practice. This could be of particular appeal to more experienced BAs who may find their knowledge and experience has a higher value in a relatively less mature practice.

- **Training and development:** formal skills development forms part of many candidates' agendas for switching roles. Any information on the scope for skills development should be provided at the earliest opportunity.

- **BA positioning within the organisation:** a job move may stem from frustration at the positioning of the BA within the candidate's current organisation or cycle of change. Aspects such as early stage involvement, or the internal view of the value of the BA contribution, were highlighted as two important selling points.

- **Culture:** this was repeatedly mentioned as being critical in the matching of candidates to an organisation. Although it's an intangible quality that may be difficult to define in writing, it is a key factor in candidates' decision-making. Team qualities such as taking a collegiate approach or mentoring support can be particularly attractive to some candidates.

- **Work rotation:** exposure to various business areas within the one company can open further career opportunities for some candidates. Larger companies might offer different business or product areas within which to operate. Smaller companies with limited BA resource might offer exposure to a wider number of business functions, e.g. sales, finance or marketing.

Capturing early interest with a strong and accurate message was seen as key to engaging the career-minded analyst. Forum attendees also highlighted the value of explaining the selection process at the earliest opportunity. Applicants are then clear on the means of assessment and likely timescales.

Mention was made of the use of social media and the ability to build up a credible and trusted presence in the jobs market. This was seen as particularly useful for larger organisations which struggle to recruit on an ongoing basis and who may wish to establish themselves as a first point of call for serious job hunters.

Interestingly, any start point for a fresh approach to the market could draw on information gained from exit interviews. The exit interview provides immediate first-hand information. Negative responses may contain some opportunity to improve practice working and can shape who may better suit the working environment. Positive feedback can be used to inform the message to external candidates. Either way, this can provide a very open approach on which to base the recruitment of new team members.

ONGOING RECRUITMENT

Large organisations may appear to be constantly in recruitment mode due to the high number of employees they need. Care should be taken to explain the reasoning behind the ongoing recruitment and the selective nature of the organisation. Smaller organisations can have equally unique needs and a six-month recruitment cycle is not unusual for a single role. In both situations, the recruitment message can constantly be updated and refined to include the reasons why candidates to date have been unsuccessful.

CANDIDATE SOURCES

Group members were familiar with some sources of candidate profiles and highlighted LinkedIn as the tool used most often and with greatest effect. Group members had less exposure to other sources of candidate details with HR or a third party agency completing the coverage of the market through available databases and personal networks.

LinkedIn was used to make both direct approaches to candidates and also more subtly to raise the company profile through discussion groups.

While personal networks do exist, few in the group had built their network of contacts beyond their immediate reach. It was highlighted that other practice leads had benefited from more active networking: keeping in touch with former colleagues and connecting with those met at Forum and seminar events. Networking requires a disciplined approach but does pay dividends in the form of a ready pool of contacts that can act as candidates or as a means of referring others. Networking events were seen as an effective means of targeting shortages. An open day or drinks evening was seen as appealing to candidates requiring a more informal or cursory approach to engaging with an organisation.

The group had mixed experiences of converting contract staff to permanent hires. This was sometimes seen as a short term solution with a permanent position a role of convenience in a quiet market. Contractor conversions should always be considered on their merits with most success seen with those with a genuine reason behind the change, e.g. career progression or family circumstances.

Some organisations had benefitted in the longer term from introducing a graduate scheme and blending their approach to building a team. This could form part of a long term approach and something that could be discussed as part of a more strategic discussion on resourcing.

KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH MARKET CAREER POINTS

Market knowledge, for example understanding the career structure or pay levels within other organisations, could be invaluable in positioning a role to appeal to more candidates. Mirroring or slightly enhancing pay bandings could, for example, keep an organisation more in step with the expectations of the first time job mover. Candidates or recent joiners may be a useful source of information in this respect.

SUMMARY

Attracting candidates of the right calibre and cultural fit has to be based on providing detailed information on the role, team and organisation. All available candidate sources should be used with the role being sold effectively whilst setting realistic expectations. The attraction process must be seen as the first important contact with our future colleagues and closely linked to the selection and retention stages of the engagement process.

In the next edition of Analysts Anonymous we turn our attention to the selection process.

Business Analysis Conference Europe

22-24 September 2014.

Victoria Park Plaza, London

The Business Analysis Conference Europe 2014 provides an unparalleled networking opportunity for business analysts from across Europe and beyond. It will provide an interactive forum where business analysts can meet, discuss and debate how best to rise to the challenges faced by their organisations today and in the future. It also provides a platform for promoting the business analysis profession and opportunities for business analysts' personal development. Whether you are just starting your BA journey, you are an experienced BA or you would like to understand the role of BAs further, this conference is for you.

Keynotes speakers this year include:

Eddie Obeng: educator, global speaker, author and visionary, Eddie will share his insight on ‘Thriving in a World of Change’.

James Kerr: the author of ‘Legacy’ goes deep into the heart of the world's most successful sporting team, the legendary All Blacks of New Zealand.

David McCandless: the bestselling author of ‘Information is Beautiful’ will share his passion for Data Visualisation.

Suzanne Robertson: a well-known author, instructor, consultant and thought leader, Suzanne brings her considerable experience to bear on the delicate art of communicating within a business analysis environment.

This year there are 12 Pre-Conference Workshops, two of which are full day workshops covering the syllabus, and including the examination, for the BCS Foundation Certificate in Business Change and the BCS Foundation Certificate in Business Analysis.

There are five conference tracks, with more than 40 presentations to select from. The tracks for this year are:

- Establishing your Toolkit
- Extending your Toolkit
- Discovering the Real Business Need
- Business Analysis – At the Heart of Value Delivery
- Transforming the Business

For details of tickets, go to http://www.irmuk.co.uk/ba2014/

Why CIOs need Business Analysts

Research suggests that business performance is improved when there is alignment between business and Information Systems (IS) strategy. However, alignment between the needs of the business and delivered information systems is becoming more complex as business expectations increase. This is a key concern among many Chief Information Officers (CIOs). Business analysts have a fundamental role to play in addressing the issue. Debbie Paul and Lynda Girvan of AssistKD explain how to make the case for BAs from the CIO perspective.

Difficulties persist in ensuring that IS projects are successful. The Financial Times reported on several failed projects where budget overruns ran into millions if not billions of pounds, commenting that 'poor communication – particularly between business and technical experts – is a constant problem' . The report also identified poor requirements as an issue, despite the IT industry having been aware of the importance of understanding requirements for several decades.

Such is the importance of IT to business that many organisations now look to specialist organisations to supply their IT through outsourcing or offshoring arrangements. However, this approach brings its own challenges. Information Week reported that many outsourced IT projects are failing and there is a question about how companies retain adequate control over specialised functionality and critical intellectual property. Another question is whether projects that are succeeding in delivering to time and on budget are meeting business needs. Although the success measures for project management concern the triple constraints of time, cost and quality, research suggests that these process-related criteria need to be supplemented by the outcome-related criteria of learning, value and use if the evaluation is to be comprehensive and accurate . In essence, while the delivery of a system within the required timescale and budgetary constraints provides one measure of IS success, it does not guarantee the usefulness of the delivered solution to the organisation.

A further issue for IS functions is the ever increasing need to deliver business value early. In some organisations this has seen a major shift from linear development approaches to more iterative development/incremental delivery approaches such as Agile. However, Agile is not a silver bullet for information system success. The UK Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Universal Credit project has been reported to have failed because of inappropriate use of Agile, with Computer Weekly stating that "Universal Credit failed on Agile because it was a waterfall contract". The rush to use Agile without due diligence is an example of organisations adopting solutions based on anecdotal wisdom rather than considering the options available and deciding on the best approach for the situation.

Also, many organisations fail to recognise that moving to a new way of working, such as Agile development, is a business change requiring new processes, techniques and skills and, as a result, requires careful analysis, consideration and planning.

BUSINESS ANALYSIS

Business analysis offers a means of bridging the gap between business needs and information system solutions. Business analysts have the skills and knowledge to investigate business situations or problems, and understand the business needs – from strategic through to operational – in order to ensure that the defined requirements enable business/IT alignment. Despite being a relatively new discipline, many senior business analysts offer extensive skills, providing internal consultancy to their organisations. They advise on aspects such as the priorities within the change project portfolio and the most relevant analysis approach to adopt. They can also help to ensure that wise investments are made and solutions are agreed that will resolve genuine business issues rather than addressing more evident symptoms.

So how do business analysts achieve this? Firstly, they work at a pre-project level, uncovering root causes of problems rather than merely documenting stated requirements that will only address symptoms. In other words, they begin by asking 'what problem are we trying to solve?'. Secondly, they listen to what stakeholders say so that their underlying beliefs and values are understood. Thirdly, they consider options in the broadest sense so that they meet business needs rather than immediately assume that software will provide all of the answers. They recognise that not all problems require new IT systems; sometimes the need may be met by redesigning the process or re-training the staff.

It is the responsibility of the business analysts to ensure the effective use of information systems in meeting the needs of the business. Therefore, it is essential that they develop models and definitions of the business requirements and understand the IS requirements within the business context. The V model may be used to illustrate how the business analysis activities align with systems development activities. This is reflected in the extended V model in figure 1.

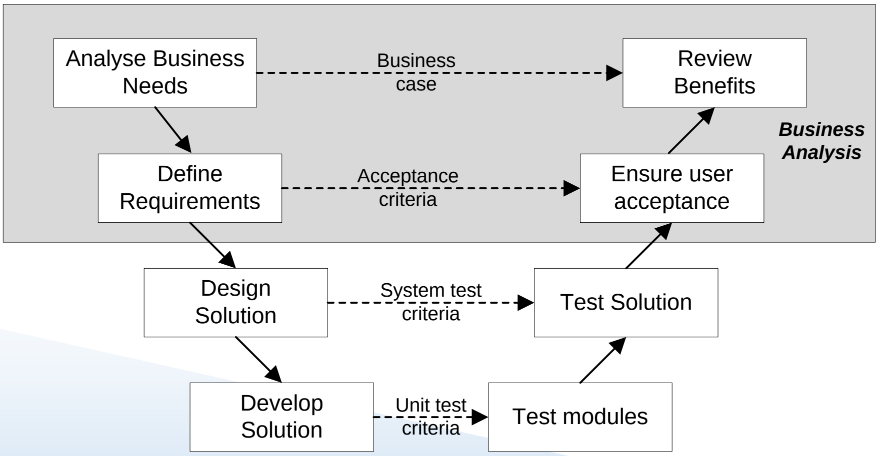

Figure 1. Extended V Model

As shown in figure 1, the work of the business analyst provides the requirements documentation and criteria that form the basis for the acceptance of the delivered solution. While surveys have identified several reasons for project failure, requirements definition is cited frequently as a major issue. For example, a survey of 99 IT projects identified requirements determination as a source of problems in 31% of projects. While the impact of ill-defined requirements is well documented, without a holistic understanding of the entire business situation it is not possible to determine the best way forward. Too often the need to elicit business requirements is recognised but the solution envisaged is focused on software without sufficient recognition of the surrounding business context. In effect, the nature of the solution has been determined before defining the requirements and without consideration of alternatives or more holistic solutions.

This is a common theme which is predicated on an assumption that requirements are elicited and defined for the sole purpose of developing or enhancing software. However, in many situations, a software system may not be the only possible solution, or may form only part of the solution, if the business needs are to be met. It is vital that there is understanding of the problem, the business domain and the factors inherent in the particular business situation. After all, the business problems may be resolved, or partially-resolved, by non-automated means. Failure to consider a broader business context may result in requirements that are ambiguous and incomplete.

Business analysts use a rounded approach that extends beyond information systems to incorporate aspects from the broader business context such as process improvement and people change. One of the key approaches used in business analysis is to take an all-inclusive view using models such as the POPIT™ model shown in figure 2. This approach is used to ensure the business processes, organisational policies and structures, and people are aligned with the information and technology.

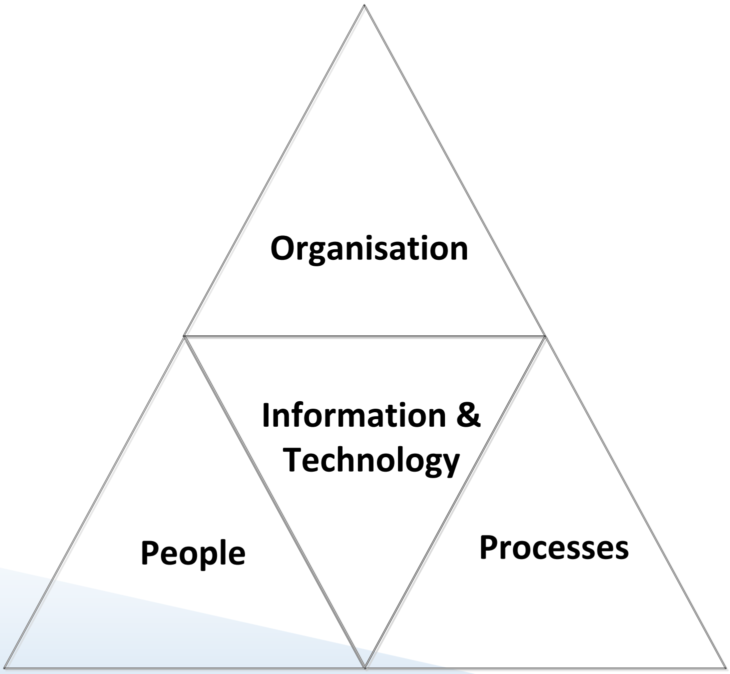

Figure 2. POPIT Model

CONCLUSION

The purpose of information systems is to enable the delivery of improved organisational performance through IS and process improvement, and to achieve this the IS function must offer the capability to investigate business needs and formulate feasible, relevant solutions, each of which may require changes to any combination of systems, structures, processes and people. Requirements must be firmly based within the business context, and benefits must be analysed such that the enabling IS and business changes are established. This requires the holistic, analytical approach which is central to business analysis work. Given that alignment between the needs of the business and the delivered information systems is often difficult to achieve and the results imperfect, it is vital that organisations employ skilled business analysts who understand the business context. The business analysis specialism has never been more relevant in today’s business world.

Business Analyst of the Year 2014

Are you the Business Analyst of the Year 2014?

BAOTY 2013 winners Clare Coomber and Dale Jacobs receive their awards from England cricket captain, Andrew Strauss.

The award this year will be given to the person who has demonstrated the most significant contribution to improving organisational performance during the previous year. The Award will be presented at the BA Conference Europe to be held in London on 22-24 September 2014. The winner will be selected from the five finalists, who will all be given free entry to the Conference (worth over £1400 each).

In your application you are asked to describe your role on a project (or projects) to illustrate your capability in line with three main themes: analysing problems, engaging with customers and negotiating.

ANALYSING PROBLEMS
What analytical skills have you employed to get to the real business issues and the most effective solutions?

ENGAGING WITH CUSTOMERS
How have you developed effective working relationships with your business customers?

NEGOTIATING
How have you used your negotiating skills to reconcile different views and secure successful outcomes?

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A WINNER?
The winner of Business Analyst of the Year 2013 was shared between two Business Analysts that the panel was unable to separate: Clare Coomber of Allianz and Dale Jacobs of Asda.

DOWNLOAD YOUR APPLICATION FORM
[Click here](#) to download your application form. The closing date for entries is 18 July 2014. Please send your completed forms to lawrence.darvill@assistkd.com.
See more at: http://www.assistkd.com/knowledge-hub/business-analyst-of-the-year/baoty-2014/

Evaluating the maturity of a business analysis practice

BA Manager Forum

At present, there is no universally-accepted benchmark for a business analysis practice against which practice managers can assess their own organisation. AssistKD have worked with a number of clients in this area and, in this paper, James Cadle from AssistKD shares ideas for others to use and build on in developing their own approaches.

Standards currently available

Although there are no universal benchmarks, various standards have emerged which, when combined judiciously, can allow us to assess the maturity of a business analysis practice. These include:

- The Capability Maturity Model Integration (CMMI)
- The Business Analysis Maturity Model™ (BAMM)
- The POPIT© model

We examine each of these in a little more detail below.

In addition, there are bodies of best practice encapsulated in, for example:

- Business analysis certifications, notably from BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT and IIBA®, The International Institute of Business Analysis
- Business analysis publications*
- SFIA, the Skills Framework for the Information Age
- UML, the Unified Modelling Language

*With regard to these, some care needs to be exercised when considering the plethora of books on business analysis that have appeared in the past few years. Some of these are excellent and provide useful guidance but others seem to be based on a very narrow view of business analysis, in effect confining the BA role to that of requirements engineer.

THE BUSINESS ANALYSIS MATURITY MODEL™

This model is shown in figure 1 and was developed by AssistKD as a framework for thinking about (and assessing) the way that the BA role has matured in recent years.

The model considers two aspects of the BA's role in their organisation – the scope of the projects they are asked to undertake and the authority they can bring to bear to influence policy and direction. Combining these two, three main positions can be identified:

SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT	Here, the BA is making relatively localised changes to improve the operation of an IT system. Such work is worthwhile and necessary but the effect is confined to the area of study, often to a particular department or function.
PROCESS IMPROVEMENT	Here, the BA is considering, and advocating changes to, the wider business processes within which a system is used. Such work clearly has a greater effect on their organisation and brings about more extensive changes.
BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT	At this highest level, BAs are working with senior management to think about fundamental questions such as how can strategy be best implemented in the organisation. Such work has the potential to bring about significant change in the direction and scope of the organisation's operations.

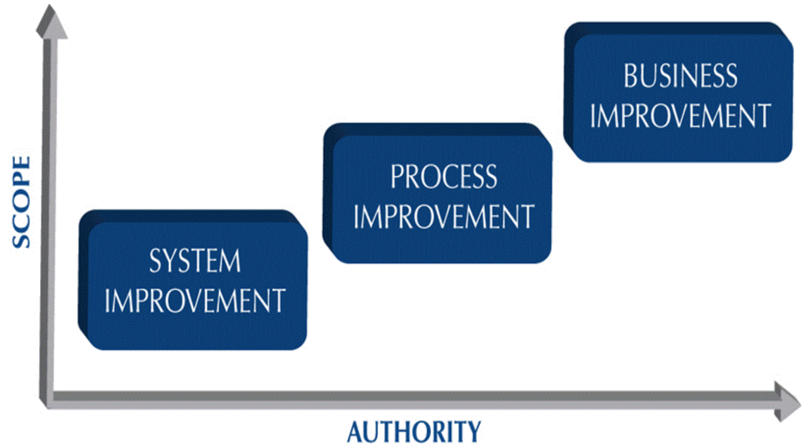

Figure 1: Business Analysis Maturity Model™ (BAMM)

Good work can be done by BAs at all levels of the BAMM but the higher-levels at which the BAs work, the greater maturity and capability in the BA practice

THE CAPABILITY MATURITY MODEL INTEGRATION (CMMI)

The CMMI was developed at Carnegie Mellon University to assess the maturity of organisations' software development processes but the concept has now been widely employed in other spheres. The CMMI model is shown in figure 2.

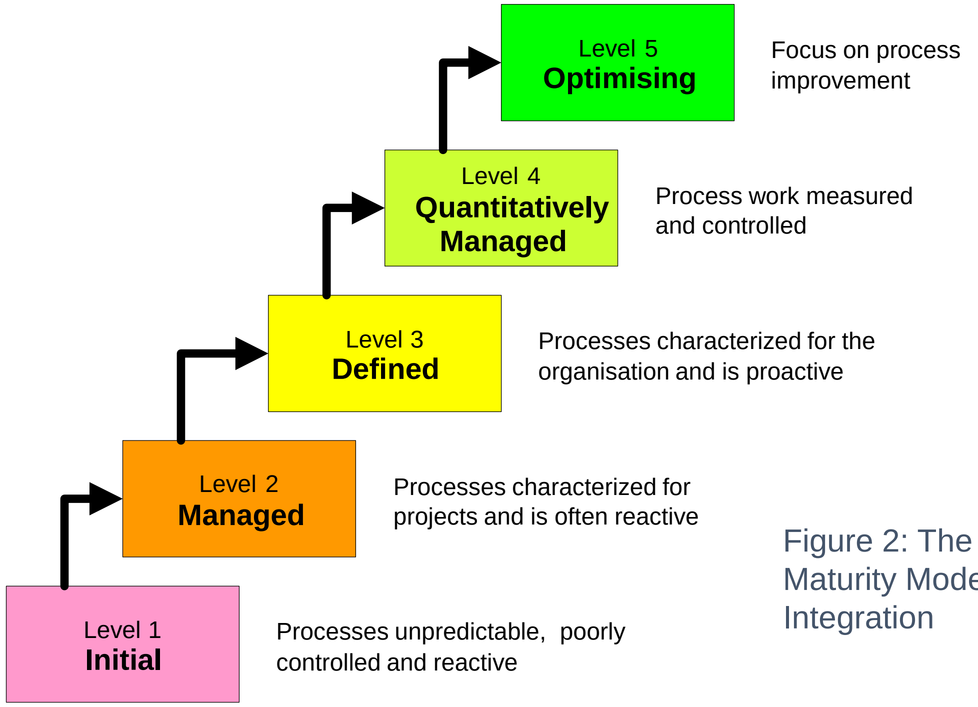

Figure 2: The Capability Maturity Model Integration

The levels of the CMMI are:

1	**Initial**	At this initial level, the organisation's processes are rather ad-hoc and the results are both variable and very dependent on the skill and knowledge of individuals.
2	**Repeatable**	Now, processes have been defined (at least at the project level) and so the results are more consistent. Even so, processes are defined in reaction to new situations, rather than being planned for.
3	**Defined**	The organisation has now defined processes that should be used across all projects, tailored as necessary to specific project needs.
4	**Managed**	Work is now measured and departures from planned practice are investigated and acted upon.
5	**Optimising**	At this highest level, we have a 'learning organisation' where results from projects are fed back into a process of continuous improvement.

This standard CMMI approach needs to be adapted to the business analysis environment and AssistKD has developed a BA-centric version for use in maturity assessment.

POPIT©

The POPIT model, shown in figure 3, was developed by AssistKD to illustrate the holistic nature of business analysis work.

Figure 3: The POPIT© model

While we recognise that many BAs spend a lot of their time improving processes through the use of technology, effective business change – as shown in the second and third levels of the BAMM – requires them to also consider the changes needed to the structure of the organisation and to people and their jobs.

SFIA

Finally, the Skills Framework for the Information Age provides a means of defining and assessing competence in the field of information technology. Somewhat similar to Bloom's taxonomy, SFIA identifies different levels at which competence can be defined and assessed, as shown in figure 4.

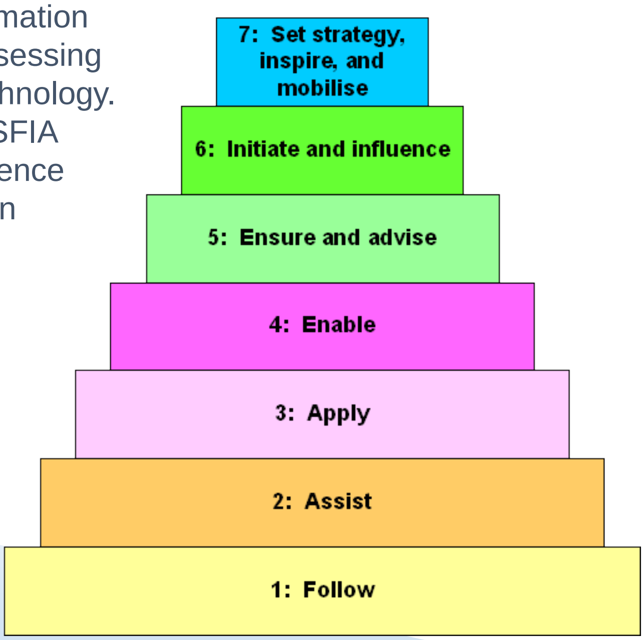

Figure 4: SFIA levels

The levels defined for business analysis within SFIA are these:

3	**Apply**	The BA operates under general supervision and uses discretion in identifying and resolving complex problems and assignments. They usually require specific instructions with their work being reviewed at frequent milestones, but can determine when issues should be escalated to a higher level.
4	**Enable**	A lead BA works under general direction within a clear framework of accountability and can exercise substantial personal responsibility and autonomy. They can plan their own work to meet given objectives and processes and can influence their team and specialist peers internally. They can have some responsibility for the work of others and for the allocation of resources.
5	**Ensure and advise**	A senior BA works under broad direction, being fully accountable for their own technical work and/or project/supervisory responsibilities, receiving assignments in the form of objectives. Their work is often self-initiated and they can establish their own milestones, team objectives, and delegate responsibilities. They have significant responsibility for the work of others and for the allocation of resources, making decisions which impact on the success of assigned projects.
6	**Initiate and influence**	A senior BA has a defined authority and responsibility for a significant area of work. They establish organisational objectives and delegate responsibilities and can influence policy formation within their own specialism. They make decisions which impact the work of employing organisations, the achievement of organisational objectives and financial performance, developing high-level relationships with customers, suppliers and industry leaders They contribute to the formulation of IT strategy, creatively applying a wide range of technical and/or management principles

A POSSIBLE WAY FORWARD

None of the frameworks described above provides, in its entirety, a ready-made way of assessing the maturity of a BA practice. However, in working with various clients in this area we have found that, by combining elements from the frameworks, a workable and robust approach to maturity assessment can be created. This approach is illustrated in figure 5.

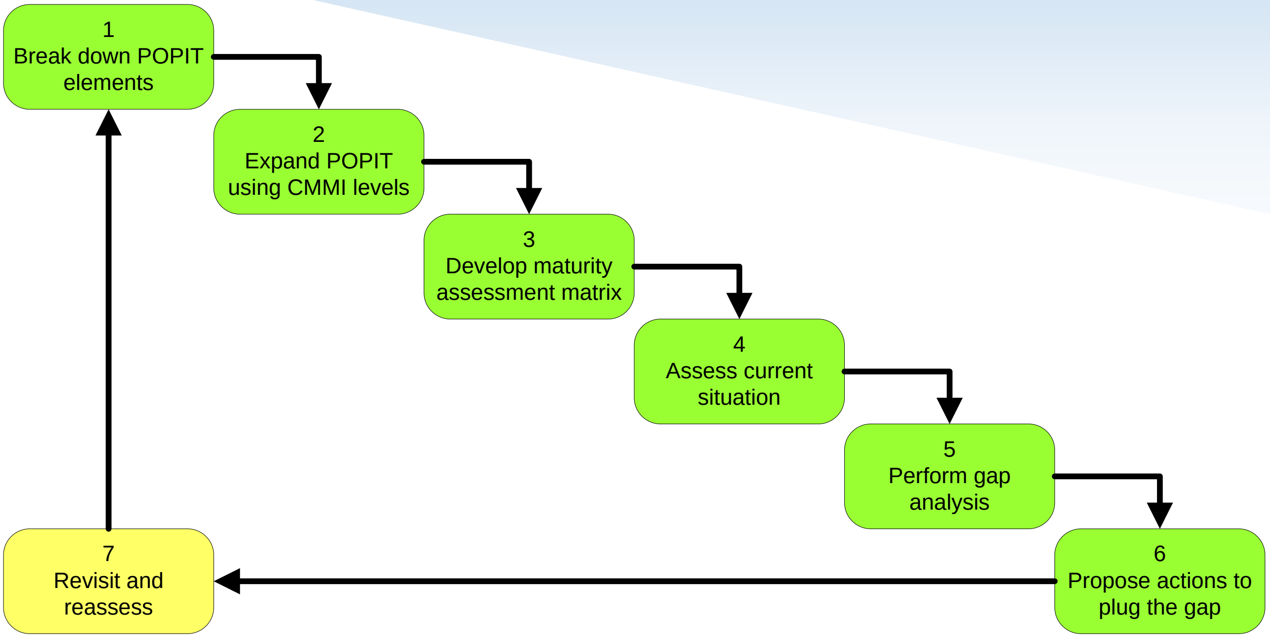

Figure 5: An approach to BA maturity assessment

The stages in our approach are these:

1. **BREAK DOWN POPIT ELEMENTS**

Each of the elements of the POPIT model (figure 3) can be broken down to consider what a BA practice should be capable of doing in this element. For example, if we take the process segment, we could divide it into:

- The analysis lifecycle
- Techniques
- Deliverables
- Quality assurance

This breakdown must be tailored for each BA practice because of the differences in the type of work it undertakes. For example, one practice may be very focused on requirements work while another may undertake more strategic assignments.

This high-level breakdown can be further decomposed until specific assessment criteria are arrived at. For example, if we take 'Analysis lifecycle', we might decide that issues to be addressed here are:

- The scope of the lifecycle used in the organisation
- Business analyst involvement in the lifecycle
- Stakeholder engagement in the lifecycle
- Requirements definition.

2. EXPAND POPIT USING CMMI LEVELS

We next need some scale on which to assess the maturity of the BA practice against the POPIT-derived criteria. We can assume that all organisations are at least at CMMI level 1 (since, by definition, they have a BA organisation that they wish to assess) so, for this example, we shall just concentrate to CMMI levels 2-4. We may assess the capability for ‘Scope of lifecycle’ like this:

Level 2: Repeatable	A standard lifecycle exists and the analyst’s role in this is defined. Tailoring of the analysis phase is done at project level.
Level 3: Defined	The standard lifecycle is consistently tailored across the organisation from a standard start point using guidance provided.
Level 4: Managed	Any changes to the lifecycle are undertaken in a consistent and managed way, and these variations are documented for audit purposes.

This provides a series of benchmarks against which the organisation’s current maturity can be assessed.

3. DEVELOP MATURITY ASSESSMENT MATRIX

This is simply a checklist that can be used to examine and score the organisation – and also perhaps the BAs within it – against the benchmarks developed in stage 2. It is perhaps obvious but worth stating that the definitions must be such that clear decisions can be made about the levels of maturity against each benchmark.

4. ASSESS THE CURRENT SITUATION

Now, the actual assessment is performed using the assessment matrix and the benchmarks.

A highly visual way of representing the results of the analysis is as a ‘heat map’, as shown in figure 6.

Figure 6 shows that this organisation is at level 2 in all areas, levels 3 and 4 in some areas and has achieved level 5 in terms of job descriptions.

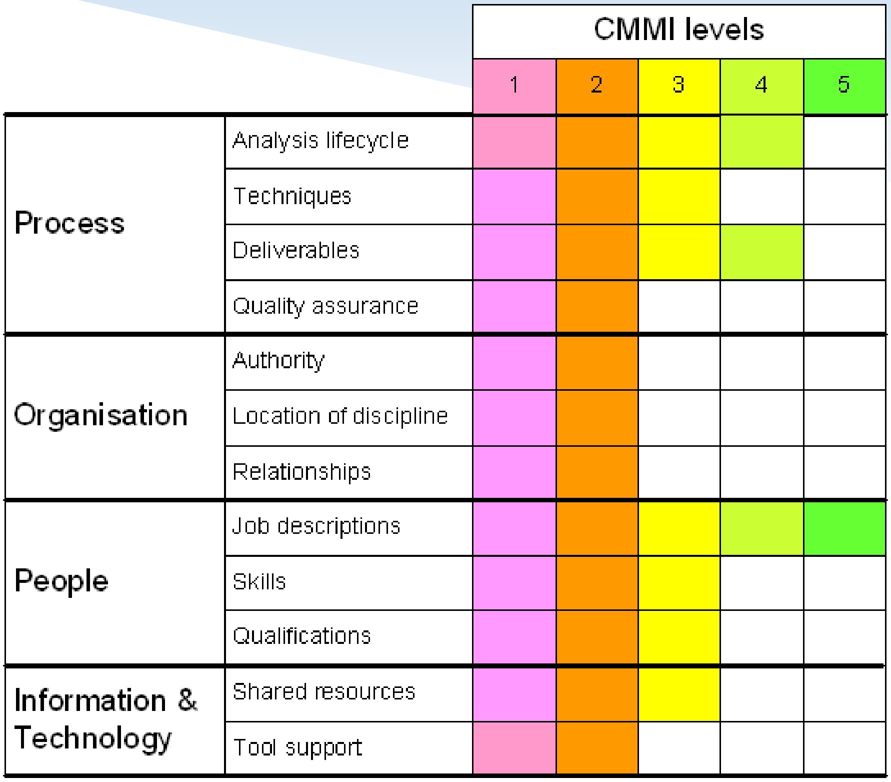

Figure 6: Maturity assessment heat map

5. PERFORM GAP ANALYSIS

The BA practice now needs to decide at what level they want to aim in each of the benchmark areas. It is not the case that they will necessarily want to achieve level 5 in all areas and they must decide what is a realistic target given (a) the nature of the BA work they undertake, (b) what the wider organisation expects of them (and will allow them to do), and (c) the capabilities of the existing BAs or the likelihood of recruiting others with different skills.

6. PROPOSE ACTIONS TO PLUG THE GAP

The BA practice must next develop proposals to plug the gap between the assessed current position and the desired position they have defined for themselves. The ever-useful POPIT framework can be used here too, for example:

Organisation	Some re-structuring may be needed to bridge the gap, for example to introduce new levels of senior BA management or a matrix structure to match the available BA resources to project demands.
Process	New processes, standards and procedures may be required to further standardise the way BA assignments are carried out and to provide guidance for new and developing BAs.
People	Additional training may be required for the existing BAs and/or it may be decided to recruit more BAs with different skills. It may be decided that requiring all members of the practice to achieve recognised qualifications (for example, the BCS International Diploma in Business Analysis) will assist in the standardisation of BA capability.
Information and technology	Finally, new support tools, for example CASE tools or facilities to share knowledge and experience, may be identified.

7. REVISIT AND REASSESS

No BA practice can be frozen in time as the circumstances within which it operates will change and evolve. Therefore, the practice must, from time to time, take stock of its position and reassess where it is and where it wants to be.

SUMMARY

This article provides the outline for an approach to the maturity assessment of a BA practice based on the work we have carried out with and for our clients. It is based on established and well-understood frameworks and must be tailored to the specific demands and aspirations of each practice.