

## Cometh the hour, cometh the BA

### ***The recession is the chance for business analysts to show what they can do***

It is not clear at the moment whether we are suffering from a ‘double-dip’ recession or are just bumping along the bottom of a ‘bathtub’ curve of economic activity. What is clear, though, is that organizations in all countries and all sectors of the economy are facing very difficult times indeed. Public services are having to tighten their belts and do more despite cuts in funding; private sector firms face tough competition from emerging economies; and the third sector has to meet increased demands while at the same time suffering from a drop in support.

So, if you are managing any form of organization, where do you turn for help in trying to deal with these challenges? Well, the external consultancy market is one place and some consulting firms have been securing lots of business assisting organizations in working more efficiently and delivering more from less. But, organizations also have internal resources at their disposal in the form of their business analysts and BAs should be seizing this opportunity to show what they can do to deliver real value.

Let us consider the definition of business analysis in the IIBA® *BABOK*® V2:

*Business Analysis is the set of tasks and techniques used to work as a liaison among stakeholders in order to understand the structure, policies, and operations of an organization, and to recommend solutions that enable the organization to achieve its goals.*

If we dissect this, we can see at once how a BA can provide value to their organizations and help them to weather the storms of the recession:

- Providing a liaison among stakeholders. Faced with reduced resources overall, people naturally become parochial, fighting for their particular department, function or area, probably at to the detriment of the organization more widely. The BA can provide a useful ‘bridging’ role here, bringing the stakeholders together and helping to define solutions that benefit the organization more widely.
- Understanding the structure, policies, and operations of an organization. Defining the overall strategy of an organization is relatively straightforward – increase sales by 10%, cut the workforce by 15%, improve the retention rate for supporters. It is in the *execution* of these strategies that the hard work comes in and it is here that many initiatives fail. For example, take that cutting the workforce by 15%. The temptation is always to make the cuts where it will be easiest, perhaps targeting groups who are un-unionised, whereas the basis of the decision ought to be the effect on front-line services and overall capability. It is difficult for business managers to make these decisions without the analytical support and creativity offered by BAs.
- Recommend solutions that enable the organization to achieve its goals. The first solution that comes to mind may not be the best one. For example, ‘let’s get rid of most of our telesales force and take the orders online instead’. Is this necessarily the best idea? Will all the customers automatically follow us to the internet? Even if they will, how do we manage the transition? BAs can help in three ways here. First, by challenging the initial idea and making that it has been properly thought through. Second, by proposing additional and creative solutions that may be better or offer even greater value. And third, by helping to develop the detailed plans for

the implementation of the solution, including thinking through all the difficulties and risks and finding effective mitigation actions.

However, business managers do not necessarily see the benefits of using their BAs in these areas, even if they understand what BAs do in the first place. Managers have a natural tendency to think that they have all the answers – after all, that’s why they became managers in the first place – and they have to be convinced that they need help which can come from the BA community. To convince them, BAs need to be more pro-active than they often are at the moment. Too often, BAs lurk in the shadows, waiting for someone to ask them to define their requirements for them.

More proactive business analysis involves:

1. Defining internal customer value propositions. The issue here is, what are the diverse stakeholders in an organization interested in and how can the BA assist them in achieving their ends. For example, some people’s primary concerns may be reducing operating costs, someone else wants to maintain a high quality of service, another person wants to increase market share. Value propositions can be defined in terms of finance, quality and timing.
2. Creating a service portfolio. Here, the BAs ‘set out their stall’ – their offerings that can assist their ‘customers’ with their value propositions. A service portfolio sets out the things the BAs can do, the customers they are aiming at and – most importantly – the value that business managers can expect to receive by using the BA’s services.
3. Refining the case for business analysis. As opposed to external consultants – who offer benefits of their own – internal BAs offer: A pre-existing knowledge of the organization, hence being able to ‘hit the ground running’ on assignments; a good understanding of the organization’s business domain; (hopefully) existing relationships with the stakeholders; loyalty and commitment to the organization; continuity for the future; and the retention of knowledge – often a competitive advantage – within the organization.
4. Getting qualified. Qualifications are increasingly important to credibility, especially when dealing with other professionals – engineers and accountants for instance – who *have* to hold professional qualifications. The IIIBA<sup>®</sup> CBAP<sup>®</sup> and the BCS’s Diploma in Business Analysis both demonstrate long-term commitment to the development of professional skills in BAs.
5. Creating a marketing plan. Yes, really! BAs are in no different position to external consultancy firms – they have to make their presence, and their offerings, known to the business managers who could benefit from their services.
6. Selling themselves. BAs need to put themselves about in the organization and evangelize about what they can do. This could involve presentations to senior managers, one-on-one discussions with other managers, lunchtime ‘brown bag’ sessions, articles in internal newsletters and making use of the organization’s intranets and other media.

Key to all this, and especially to numbers 1-3 above, is finding internal case studies that demonstrate the value delivered by the BA community. It’s no use ‘talking a good game’ here; hard-nosed business managers are going to want to see proof of delivery before they entrust themselves and their problems to their BAs. This creates a particular difficulty if your

BA function is new, with no track record to draw upon. One possible solution is to network with other BAs – at this conference and more frequent IIBA<sup>®</sup> chapter meetings for instance – to gather case studies from other organizations that can be used to demonstrate the value of BAs.

But the opportunities are out there. In the coming few years, organizations have got to get lean and mean and make the best use of scarcer resources; and their BAs are just the people to help them do so.

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