

BA Manager Forum Workshop – The benefits of running a centralised BA practice

The below notes were produced following a workshop at the BA Manager Forum held in November 2017. Attendees were invited to discuss the pros and cons of running a centralised practice from three perspectives (organisation, team member and practice leader). The group then went on to consider more of the specific financial benefits that could form part of a business case in support of the centralised practice. These notes can be read in conjunction with the slide show for the workshop that provide further background and case study information.

Group Discussion – The pros and cons of running a centralised practice.

	Pros	Cons
The Organisation View	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

- 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
- 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

	Pros	Cons
The Practice Leader view	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

	Pros	Cons
The team member view	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

Group discussion - Making the business case for a centralised practice

The financial considerations/benefits

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.