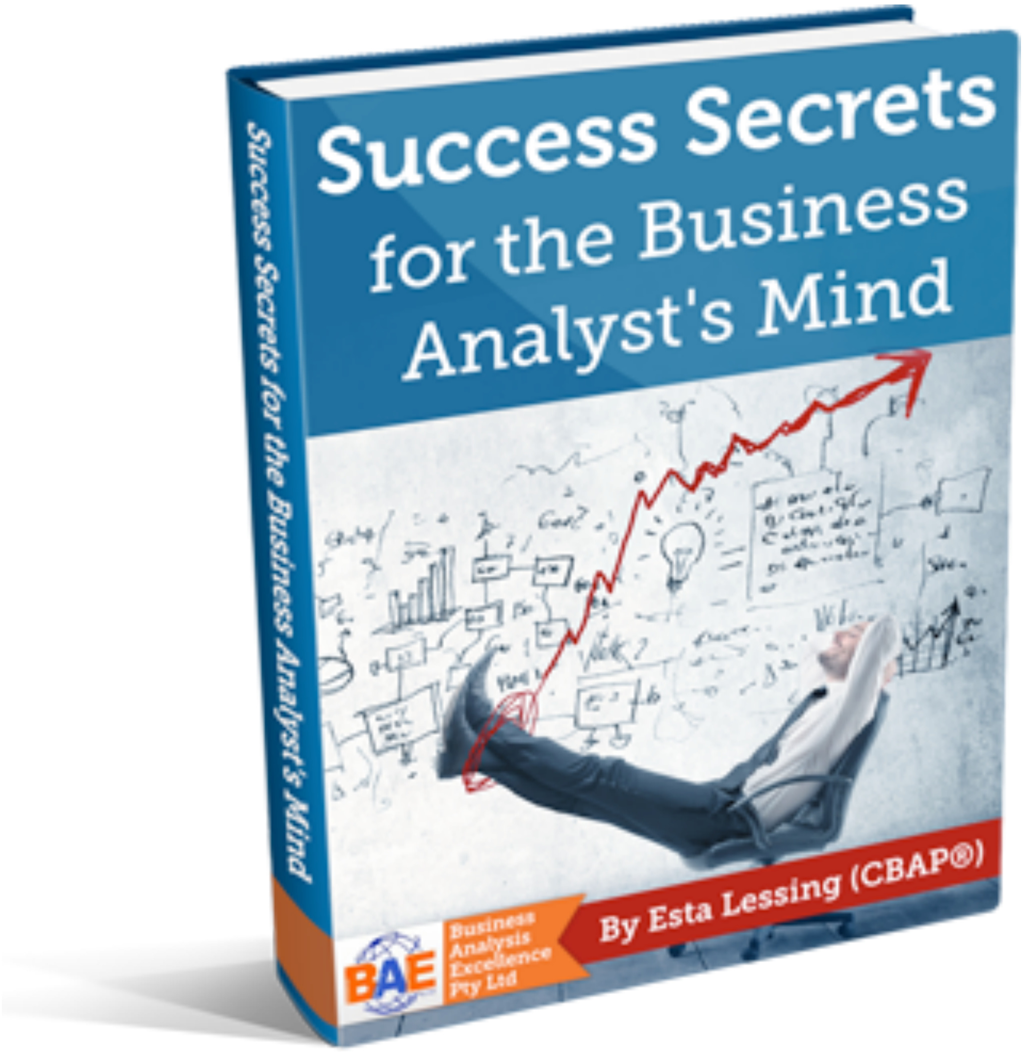

The complete picture of how to achieve an extraordinary business analysis career…

Esta Lessing CBAP®

Contents

Success Secrets for the Business Analyst's Mind

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"If you do what you've always done you'll get what you've always gotten!" Anthony Robbins.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to Tim, my partner and the most dedicated Business Analyst I know. He is also my greatest supporter in everything I do.

Acknowledgements

I hereby acknowledge the many business analysts and other wonderful people who I have learned from in so many different ways during my career as a Business Analyst. It is all these people who motivated and inspired me to start this book. There have been others who challenged my will about who I am and what I want that has helped me to continue to write this book and finally, the one person who made sure I finish this book. You know who you are. Thank you to all.

Preface: What to expect from 'Success Secrets for the Business Analyst's Mind'

This book shows you the path to follow to reach all you Business Analysis career goals with great success. It is even more than that; it covers the steps from when you decided to become a Business Analyst right through to achieving extraordinary Business Analysis career results.

It is a must read for all Business Analysts because it enables you to be a dynamic and high achieving Business Analyst regardless of your experience level. It focuses on your individual Business Analysis career and guides you step by step in how you can reach the next level of your career quickly and effectively.

To be a Business Analyst takes someone with a great sense of adventure for challenges and personal development. We are all on a journey to achieve our dreams and our highest career aspirations and ultimately want to be happy and fulfilled.

The journey you are about to embark on when you read this book is one of learning how you can optimize your Business Analysis career by following these career success principles. This book enables you to define your career goals and learn how to implement the Business Analysis success strategies to reach them. As part of your journey you will also learn the foundation concepts of Business Analysis and receive practical advice on how to find that next great Business Analysis role! You are guided on which courses and certifications will be most appropriate for you to work towards to reach Business Analysis mastery.

LESSON LEARNED

A secret I learned about Business Analysis many years ago is that this profession may have a lot of tools and techniques associated with it but it is very far from a 'cookie cutter' type of profession.

What I mean with this is that Business Analysis mastery is all about learning the foundation skills and then to apply these skills in a slightly different way every time. Every project we work on will be slightly different and our stakeholders will be different in what they need too. We must be flexible and comfortable with change to be successful as Business Analysts. Don't look for a right way and a wrong way when it comes to Business Analysis – simply embrace the gray scale that comes with this job!

Introduction

There are really just three components of your career that you need to pay attention to. If you do this you can be sure you will achieve a successful outcome. Make sure you give all three the key principles the attention it needs and you will be well on your way to Business Analysis career success!

Principle 1: Think and feel goals

Do everything with the end goal in mind. It is imperative for any successful business analyst or any business professional to start their career with the end goal in mind. Where do you want to get to? What would you love to achieve? If you haven't created your end goal yet, then today is a good day to do that!

Principle 2: The right knowledge

Building a Business Analysis knowledge foundation with every opportunity you find would stand you in good stead. You would have heard the saying that 'knowledge is power', this is also very true in your role as a business analyst. Always learn and be a sponge for more information and you will be surprised how far that takes you.

Principle 3: Power of personal leadership

People around you determine your success. As an ambitious business analyst you must always surround yourself with individuals you can learn from. Make sure you find someone or a few more experienced people in your organization who you can model. All highly successful people models themselves on someone that is even more successful.

1. How to guarantee career success

- ✯ The importance of having a career vision
- ✯ How to create your career goals for success
- ✯ Why it is vital to reward your goal achievements

PAT'S STORY

"Success breeds success" – By Mia Hamm

Have you ever been on the freeway driving in the slow lane because you were not quite sure where you are supposed to turn off? Well that is what happened to a young guy called Pat when he was on his way to go fix a customer's printer. He had a rough idea of where he was going but he was not too clear on the exact distance, turn off or name of the company he needed to visit. After a while Pat realized that he will probably never get there unless he actually knows the exact address! He then decided to find a safe place to stop next to the freeway and looked at his map. He also found the appointment details and then realized that he actually knew where this place was just by taking the time to check.

What happened to Pat would have happened to all of us at least once, right?

When you know exactly where you are going and you know the details clearly you tend to drive in the fast lane until you know it is time to turn off. This is the same with people who know their goals and ultimate outcomes. They are focused and driven to achieve that outcome because they know where they are heading. They do not hesitate or reconsider or even stop one moment to look around – they are the ones who achieve results efficiently and successfully!

Do everything with the end goal in mind

You know all those really successful people that we read about, hear about and even see within our own organizations? They all have got one important thing in common. They all have an end goal they are working towards. They have a vision of where they want to end up and what they want to achieve along the way. They also have a clear plan of how they will achieve that outcome or end goal.

To have a successful Business Analysis career you must do what they do. So let's have a look at how you go about when creating your vision or end goal and what other steps you need to take to get there.

Creating a vision

Spend some time to formulate your vision or what I refer to as you end goal. An end goal is a goal that you would just love to achieve, it is an outcome that you will make your heart beat faster, it is a vision of what you would like to see yourself one day achieve. The key point with defining your end goal or vision is that you can feel inside of you how it stirs your heart if you think of achieving it!

So how do you create a vision?

Simply start thinking about what you want to achieve by the end of your career or ultimately your life.

Start writing down vision or end goals for yourself as you think of them. Once you have a vision written down (or a few potentially) you have to ensure you phrase it to be a statement that will mean something on a deep level to you. You do this by using a technique called: "chunking up". Chunking up simply means you read your vision statement to yourself and then ask yourself this question: "So what?". This question will prompt you to rephrase your vision to something that has real meaning to you and it will help you write your statement so that it resembles how you feel about this vision. You write down the meaning this vision has to you if you achieve it.

An example

I might say that my end goal is to be a Business Analysis Practice Manager with 100 Business Analysts in the Practice. This in itself is not something I can 'feel' inside my heart and therefore not my vision or end goal for my career. However, if I reformulate my end goal by asking myself the question: 'So what?", I might rewrite it as: I am helping business analysts achieve their career goals and this makes my heart feel full of love and contentment because I am making a difference in people's lives. This is an end goal.

The reason you want your end goal to be a feeling inside of your heart is because this is ultimately what motivates all of us. We are all made up of emotions and we live by our emotions and that is precisely why it is imperative for you to define your end goal or life vision based on how achieving it will make you feel.

If you don't set an end goal that stirs your heart, you will not be motivated to reach that goal.

So now that you have set your end goal or your vision for your life, let's look at the next steps we need to take to reach your end goal!

Your career goals

Your goals are the 'map' for reaching your outcome or vision. It lays out the milestones or 'cities' you need to get to on your 'map' to be moving closer to your vision or end goal.

You must set your goals with the end goal in mind. The goals you define can be short term (next week, next month or in 3 months), medium term (6 months to 2 years) and longer term goals (2 to 5 years). Also you must revisit your goals every week initially and then every month when you are in the habit of focused on your goals. Remember that your goals will change and you must therefore revisit your goals very often, re-evaluate them and redefine them. You will gain more information as you progress and refine your direction as you work on achieving them. This is why it is alright to also update, refine or even rewrite goals periodically. The key here is for you to revisit the goals often and to always keep them aligned with your overall outcome or vision.

When you define your goals, you must ensure you define them to be S-M-A-R-T goals.

What is an S-M-A-R-T Goal?

S-M-A-R-T is an acronym for your goals attributes. Each goal definition must have these attributes to ensure that they are clear and achievable. Have a look at the description of each letter below and then apply it when you do your goal definitions:

Example goal: "I have completed reading this book in 7 days from today."

S – Specific

An example of a "Specific" attribute would be that you are specific about what it is that you want to achieve, i.e. finish reading this book. You are not saying you want to have looked at this book (that could mean anything from looking at the cover to scanning the pages, who knows?). In this example we use the word "completed reading the book" which is a very specific statement describing what the goal is.

M – Measurable

If we continue with the example above, that goal is measurable because you are saying you want to complete reading the whole book. So you will be able to measure whether you finished reading this book or not by simply looking at which page you are up to in 7 days from today.

A – As if it's already happened

The goal definition must be written in a way that it sounds like it has already been achieved; it is already a fact and completed. In our example above it states the goal as if it has already been completed.

R – Realistic

Also remember that you want to set goals that will stretch you but at the same time you must be able to achieve your goals. It must be feasible and realistic. For example, to finish reading the book in 1 day is not feasible because you have many other things you must do, but finish reading it in 7 days means you stretch yourself in that you must commit a little time every day in order to achieve this goal.

T – Time

The time attribute is important because you need to know by when this goal should be met by you. In our example it says in 7 days from today. In your real life goal definition you will include a date.

Finally, your action plan

You now know what your end goal as well as all your goals to reach that end goal is. What you need to do next is to make a list of all the actions and steps you need to take to achieve each of your goals.

You simply take each goal individually and make a list of tasks or actions you need to perform. You revisit this list every week (or every day if it is a short term goal) and ensure you stay on track for reaching your goal. As you progress through your actions, you will progress through achieving your goals. Remember that no goal will ever be reached without you taking ACTION.

Rewarding yourself

A secret of achieving real and continuous success in your career and also your life is this: Success breeds more success. What does this actually mean? This means that every success you recognize for yourself starts to build a habit for more success. You are therefore by recognizing and celebrating successes, instilling a new behaviour and inherent ability for success for yourself. This is why it is imperative for you to celebrate each success you achieve. So when you achieve one of your goals, make it a celebration and before you know it you will be celebrating your next success!

2. Being the unstoppable Business Analyst

PAT'S STORY...

Before we go any further, let me tell you more about our young friend Pat. He took the brave decision to become a Business Analyst.

"You can't cross a sea by merely staring into the water"

– By Rebindranath Tagore

Pat was working as a customer services representative in a consulting company that supplied printers to other companies right over the city. Pat was often out of the office visiting clients to ensure printers are still functioning as it should. This job was alright but Pat didn't feel like he was really challenged anymore and wanted to find a career where he can learn and grow as an individual. He was also of course interested in being paid more and ideally didn't want to travel from company to company all day long!

One day Pat was busy with one of the printers when he overheard a conversation between two people. He couldn't help hearing the man say to the woman he was speaking to that the company really don't have enough good business analysts. He was talking something about a project and about requirements that needed to be collected urgently for the *project. He also said that they should consider getting some of their existing people converted to become business analysts. Pat wasn't sure what a business analyst was all about but it sounded good and what really excited him was that it sounded like something you can convert to or learn how to become.*

Pat rushed off that night when he got home and started to 'google' the term 'Business Analyst'....

To be continued…

So what does a Business Analyst actually do?

Let's start right at the beginning...what does Business Analysis mean?

There are many different meanings attached to what Business Analysis really is in the corporate world and very often even project managers are not quite clear on the scope of what they are actually there to do.

So what is it a Business Analyst does?
In a very simplified definition a business analyst translates business needs into business solutions.

We can also compare ourselves with bricks and mortar builders, architects or even sales people. We meet the person or family who wants to build something. We then determine they need somewhere to live because they have been set up in a hotel for the last 3 months, it is too expensive, small and the family is under huge stress. After talking to them further we understand it is a house they need (not a flat, tent or farm!) and after more discussion we gather it is a 4 bedroom place with 2 stories and should be painted yellow. In between they decide they also need a bungalow outside for grandparents and if we are lucky we hear they want to change the house colour to be blue before the painting starts! We put our builder's hats on and know this is our job in a nutshell.

The role of the Business Analyst in the workplace

The role of the Business Analyst is best described in terms of the Systems Development Life Cycle (SDLC).

The SDLC is a process or methodology that is widely applied to all projects. It is a series of phases that each project will go through and everything about that project is planned for in terms of this methodology. It can also be compared to anything we do which has a "start, do the work and an end" phase with a key difference that the SDLC has predefined phases. The SDLC consists of a set of specific activities that must be performed during each of the phases. The SDLC is applied more or less in the same way where ever you go.

As a business analyst you will always (if you are in a project environment) be doing your role as part of the SDLC. Your role changes as the SDLC goes through the life cycle. Let's have a look here at what you will typically be doing in each phase.

TASK

It is a great idea for you to look up some further information around the SDLC so that you can have a good understanding of what this is all about. It is a fundamental concept to understand to fully grasp the role of the Business Analyst.

Planning for the SDLC

Strictly speaking 'Planning for the SDLC' is not a phase of the SDLC, however this is a crucial activity that is always done. The Project Manager will typically create a project plan for the overall project and the Business Analyst will contribute by planning requirements activities for each of the SDLC phases.

You will get involved with the following activities in this planning stage:

- ★ Plan for the requirements management approach
- ★ Plan the Business Analysis roles & responsibilities
- ★ Identify who will be involved, who will be your stakeholders
- ★ Plan for the requirements activities that need to be done to achieve the completion of all requirements deliverables. Examples include a business requirements document or traceability matrix.

Evaluation phase

This phase is sometimes called the Initiation Stage but essentially, this is where the cycle starts. An idea or concept is evaluated and a proposal is put forward.

The more senior business analysts tend to get involved during this stage where the 'business need' or 'business problem' is evaluated at a high level. Your role as a Business Analyst here can include:

- ★ Developing a concept statement
- ★ Perform a feasibility study
- ★ Prepare options analysis
- ★ Prepare an impact analysis
- ★ Prepare a cost benefit analysis

Analysis phase

During the analysis phase most of the typical business analysis requirements related activities take place. You will be heavily involved in:

- ★ Requirements gathering – workshop facilitation, interviews, observation, research
- ★ Requirements documentation – business requirements document, requirements traceability document, functional & non functional requirements documents.
- ★ This is where you will also use your modelling skills to document business requirements.
- ★ Requirements validation & prioritization activities
- ★ Start the stakeholder engagement. You will use a lot of your Business Analysis soft skills during this phase!

Design phase

The Design phase is when your requirements are being interpreted by the solution design teams / evaluated by the software vendors.

You role here is typically to:

- ★ Review the solution documents
- ★ Work closely with solution designer and architects to ensure requirements are clear
- ★ Keep the stakeholders engaged to reassure them their requirements are implemented as specified in the business requirement artefacts. In some projects, such as agile projects, this part of the iteration will have close involvement of stakeholder's right through the SDLC.
- ★ Manage the changes to requirements both from the business and from your solution designer's point of view through a change control process. It is a great time to actively start using the requirements traceability matrix!

Implementation phase

The term implementation can be slightly confusing but in terms of what it means here is that this is the "build" phase of the project. The requirements have been designed into a solution which is now being implemented. In some case this is via a packaged software solution and in some cases it is built from scratch. The Business Analyst doesn't have much to do in this phase.

In small teams it can happen that the Business Analyst is asked to clarify requirements or in Agile projects the Business Analyst will be asked to review prototypes. Take note that in Agile projects, there are basically many short SDLCs in one larger project which makes the role of the BA condensed doing all the different tasks in smaller chunks but parallel with each other. Very action packed!

Testing phase

During the testing phase the Business Analyst can assist with reviewing test scripts to ensure all functional requirements are being tested. The Business Analyst can assist with requirements clarifications if required but the role of a Business Analyst is not to actually execute the testing! The testers do all test executions.

PAT'S STORY...

Pat found a lot of good information on the Internet about Business Analysis and after a lot of reading and researching he felt comfortable that this sounded like the type of job for him!

Now he faced the challenge of becoming a Business Analyst. That isn't clearly described in some book about exactly what to do or how to go about it. So he decided to jump in at the deep end and start looking for Business Analyst jobs! He thought, he might get lucky and find a junior entry level no experience required role. He was unfortunately wrong! Pat realised that a Business Analysis role is not going to fall into his lap and he will need to work on some other strategies to pull this off!

Pat was determined and started reading job descriptions on the job websites to get a feeling for what skills they were asking for when Business Analyst roles were advertised. He made a point of learning what these terms meant and he discovered that some of his printer testing skills is transferable! For example, he realised that he has to talk to lots of clients every single day to diagnose the problems they are experiencing with their printers and try to understand what it is they need to fix their printers! Doing requirements *elicitation sounds like pretty much the same skill! It was like a whole new option burst open to Pat, he was so glad about this small achievement! He went out and celebrated that he is making such great progress! He felt great again and ready for this Business Analysis challenge of finding his first role!*

To be continued…

Starting out as a Business Analyst

Lots of people are now thinking of becoming Business Analysts and you may be one of them. The great news for new Business Analysts is it is completely achievable! Most corporate careers can be transferred into becoming a Business Analysis career with relative ease. This is possible because Business Analysts can work within any subject matter area using their pure Business Analysis skills.

How do you change career?

It is important that you realize that although changing your career to become a Business Analyst is very achievable you should also keep in mind that as with everything new, there will be some effort and learning required. You will find some ideas on what you should start doing to get the career change ball rolling!

Get the foundation business analysis concepts understood

You should start reading up on Business Analysis (yes, this book is a great place to start!) and get yourself familiar with the overall role and purpose of the Business Analyst.

If you are able to sign up for a classroom based, digital or online course in one of the foundation type course, then that is a great next step. It is sometimes better to get some exposure to business analysis in the workplace before going for course, but it is not that important.

Attend Business Analysis networking events, mingle with the right people!

- ⋆ Go to local and international Business Analysis seminars and conferences.
- ⋆ Get some practical experience in perform business analysis tasks.

There are various avenues for you to follow to get yourself into a situation where you can get some practical business analysis experience.

Some people use their existing career subject matter expertise to go onto projects as a subject matter expert who will work closely with a business analyst. This is a great way to get into it hands-on because you are effectively 'job shadowing' someone.

There are opportunities out there for Business Analysts who have a strong knowledge in a specific subject area. Once you have done some courses and research you could try apply for a junior BA role where your subject matter expertise is in high demand.

Start telling people around you that this is what you would like to do with your career – the word will spread and an opportunity might come up.

If you are lucky enough to be on a project already, start volunteering to partake in business requirements gathering and documentation activities. This is a great way to get your hands dirty and gaining credible practical experience.

Finding that perfect Business Analysis role

In the previous section we covered how you should set up your career success plan with a vision, goals and actions. In this chapter we are looking at how you would go about finding a great Business Analysis role! This might be one of your goals and this section will provide great information on how you can go about putting your goal into action!

Your Business Analysis resume

All successful business analysts have an up to date resume. They keep it ready and relevant so that should an opportunity come their way which fits in well with the career goals, they can act fast. Another good reason to keep your resume relevant and up to date is because you don't run the risk of forgetting about some really key important achievements and skills you are gaining in your current role.

Making your Business Analysis Resume work for you...

You get only one opportunity to impress someone with your business analyst resume, so try your best to make that count.

Remember that when your potential future employer or recruiter sees your resume or CV, they only see the piece of paper. They don't meet you at the same time (most of the time they don't!) and therefore they must 'judge' whether it is worth meeting you based on that document.

It's true what they say about first impressions...
You would realize that first impressions are crucial in any situation but even more so with your business analyst resume. You are probably one in a couple of hundred people applying for a particular BA job and this makes first impressions even more important. Pay attention to these tips!

You only need to set up your resume once from scratch, so do it properly! It pays in the long run over and over again. Follow these handy tips and look at the sample Business Analyst resume to make this even easier. One last reason why you should pay attention to building an awesome resume is that you will most probably half the number of Business Analysis jobs you need to apply for in the first place!

Tips for a great Business Analyst resume...
The first half of your first page is crucial. Make sure you capture the message of professionally 'who you are' on the first half. If you like a sample resume, fill out the form below

and this will help a lot with ideas on how to do this. It's completely FREE.

Don't make spelling or grammar mistakes. It is an obvious thing to many but I have reviewed my fair share of resumes with some careless mistakes. This doesn’t reflect well on the reviewer’s opinion of what your work output might look like!

Terminology is very important. Use the terms used by the job advertisement. If this means you need to tweak your resume a little to suit this, then do it. It is important and makes it easier for the recruiter.

Make it easy for the recruiter to pick your resume! Again, use the same terms and provide all the information in summary on your first page. Many recruiters never get to the 2nd page, so make that first page count!

You must have a good cover letter. It is easy, effective and can save you a lot of time!

While you create your resume remember to put yourself in the recruiter's shoes. Will you actually hire this person? Will the first page of this resume attack you enough to read further? Ask these questions and you will be amazed at how much it helps you increase the quality of your resume.

Also keep in mind that if you don't mention a particular project, skill or technique you have used before, then the recruiter will not know this. It sounds simple, but again we assume things sometimes without being explicit enough! You know you well, but they don't know you at all!

Your Business Analysis cover letter

Are you applying for a lot more jobs than you actually need to? People don't realize how important the cover letter or cover email is to your job application. They don't really even realize how important the whole resume is! I have looked through many resumes and have read many resume cover letters and have been astounded at how people throw away great opportunities by not presenting themselves well on paper.

Spend a little, save a lot!

If you spend a little time to write a proper cover letter for each job application, you will most likely end up saving a lot of time by applying for a lot less jobs. Follow these very simple but powerful cover letter writing tips and you are set for a much more fruitful and productive job hunting experience.

Tip 1: Tailor your cover letter to each job

Don't complain or discard this one! It is important that you write or tweak your cover letter to be read for that specific job you are applying for. This means you will address the person who is advertising the role by name (if you know it), you will use the same terminology as what is being used in the job advertisement and you will mention the specific job title and reference exactly as it appears on the job advertisement.

Tip 2: Make it as easy as possible for the recruiter
Write the specific role title (as advertised) with its reference number and the date you saw the advertisement in the title of your cover letter or cover letter email. Do the exact same thing in the first sentence of your cover letter; see the cover letter sample for an idea of how to do this. Doing these two simple things will already make it easy for the recruiter because they will know exactly which role you are writing about.

Tip 3: Keep it short, sharp and focused
You should not write more than one paragraph which summarizes your profile and relevant experience to the recruiter. Again, use the same terminology as what is being used in the job advertisement, this is what is familiar to the recruiter and therefore you meet his needs to understand your skills. Remember, a recruiter advertises thousands of jobs and writes lots of job role ads and often they don't know all the relevant terminology for each profession. In the case of Business Analysis, this is no exception. To them a systems analyst, business systems analyst, IT analyst or business

analyst are interchangeable. So if they choose to describe the role as for a business systems analyst, then you phrase you response using the term business systems analyst too. Get it?

Tip 4: Start your profile from the top

This simply means that you need to write your professional profile in a way which tells the recruiter the most important things about you first and then you drill down to the detail. You will therefore state in your profile paragraph what qualification you have, how many years experience in that type of role and which industries you have worked in. See the sample resume cover letter to see how this is done all in one sentence. Now the recruiter knows whether you would potentially be suitable by just reading the first sentence of your profile paragraph. Cool hey?

Tip 5: Drilling down more

After that powerful first sentence you need to keep the recruiter interested. So he / she are searching for 'key words' that matches the job advertisement. Use the keywords in the next sentence. If they are looking for a business analyst with requirements gathering and workshop facilitation experience, then you say that next. Again, look at my example resume cover letter to see how this could be done. The most important tip here is to use as many of the job advertisement's key words in the next 2-4 sentences.

Tip 6: Close on a positive, confident note

You have managed to get the recruiter to read this far which means they would most likely be interested to talk to you. You start the closing sentence with saying that you have attached or included your resume for their reference. You can then perhaps add a line something saying along the lines of that you believe this opportunity sounds like it matches your skills and experience very well. This last closing paragraph should be 1 or 2 lines tops!

Tip 7: Make it really easy for the recruiter

Ensure you include your contact phone number and email address in the signature of your resume cover letter. Again, your focus is to make it as easy as possible for the recruiter to know who you are, why your skills and experience match (by making it match in words!) and how to get hold of you.

PAT'S STORY...

Pat was a man on a mission. He has now spent a lot of time reading about Business Analysis and finding similarities between what he is doing in his current job and how he can transfer these skills to Business Analysis.

Pat even went to see a Recruitment agent called Jennie. He went to talk to her about the best way he can approach finding a Business Analyst job and she gave him some great resume and cover letter tips to use for his applications. She said that she wished all Business Analysts would follow these basic resume and cover letter guidelines because they will all benefit from it and spend half as much time looking for new roles! She also promised to keep an ear out for any junior Business Analyst roles that she might hear of.

It was a rainy day and a cold morning when Pat got a call from Jennie. It has been about 3 months since he started this quest to become a Business Analyst and finally there was a company looking for an entry level Business Analyst!

Now Pat needed to get polished and ready for the job interview! He was very nervous and because Jennie thought *that he was a really determined and keen guy, she offered to help prepare him for his job interview.*

To be continued…

Preparing for the job interview

So you have now applied for some roles with your great looking resume and specifically tailored cover letter and the job interviews are starting to flow in! Congratulations, you have reached the next step towards reaching your goal of landing the next great job in your career!

With job interviews, it is important to realize there is an established format to the interview and the better you are able to respond to the format, the more quickly you'll be successful. This is true in most cases and therefore it is a very good idea to conform.

You can compare the format of an interview invitation a little to a dinner invitation. You know there is a format to the dinner invitation and we all conform quite automatically to it. You dress nicely, you follow the etiquette of the house hold or restaurant by eating things in a specific order (entree, main, dessert) and you converse with the host or hostess in a certain way. A job interview works like this too. You are expected to know some basic things in relation to the interview and the better you know these things the more comfortable you will be once you are in the interview.

Before we start talking about the job interview format more, I would like to explain to you how you should answer each interview question that comes your way. I am explaining to you here how to use the knife and fork at the dinner table!

Perfecting answering interview questions

Apart from having a great open body language beaming out of you, you should also structure your answers back to the interviewer. This job interview questions and answers format applies mostly when you are asked to elaborate on specific experiences you have in doing a particular type of task.

So let's say someone asks you to tell them about a project you worked on where you had to arrange a requirements workshop.

Be a STAR interviewee

Use the S-T-A-R format for answering job interview questions. For each question you are asked you simply answer it by starting with the situation, describe your task, which actions you took and finally what the results were. Have a closer look at each step below:

S – Situation

You use a few sentences to describe the situation and brief background (if relevant) of the specific project. So you start by setting the scene briefly. I literally mean you only use 3-4 sentences to state what the situation was.

T- Task

You then describe to the interviewer what the task was that was given to you to execute. Again, be specific and clear about what it was you had to do. Remember to stay relevant to what the question was when you answer the question. Don't get distracted from that with unnecessary detail which may be irrelevant to the question.

A - Actions

This part of the answer is all about what and how you performed the execution of the assigned task. Focus on your specific actions (and not the group's actions) and describe it using good, positive adjectives. This is your most important part of the answer and you should therefore spend the most time on this part of your answer.

R-Result

Always remember to have an outcome or result associated with what you specifically did. Again, you are able to mention the group's result here too but put all the focus on the part of the outcome or result that you were specifically responsible for.

If you practice this S-T-A-R format with answering a few questions prior to walking into the interview, you will be much more comfortable to answer questions and you wouldn't be too worried about remembering the format. It becomes second nature quite quickly, so make sure you practice!

Another example of how to implement the S-T-A-R for your job interview questions and answers follows below.
Sample job interview question: "Tell us about a project where you had to plan for the requirement activities on a project."

S - Situation
"I was working on an Asia Pacific Project for Company XYZ to implement a new payroll system."

T - Task
"I was responsible to prepare a requirements plan for the entire project and had to ensure all business analysts across Asia were included."

A - Actions
"The way I went about preparing this plan was to start by understanding the number of stakeholders who would be involved in each country and the timeframes I needed to work within. This enabled me to define requirements gathering approach based on a geographically dispersed stakeholder

group. Requirements gathering were done via requirements validation sessions via country-by-country conference calls. Other parts of my plan included describing roles and responsibilities and requirements documentation approach."

R - Results

"I presented the requirements management plan to the project management board and obtained sign off right away. My requirements management plan has since been re-used as a baseline on other Asia Pacific initiatives."

Take note of these points

Note how brief I was in answering the first two aspects of the question, situation and task. This information is very important to 'set the scene' but essentially not what the interviewer is really after. The actions part of the question is framed in terms of what I did specifically. Although it gives some detail, I am focusing on answering the most important aspects of this part of the question. I am saying enough to cover off the answer well without going on and on about it. Finally, in the results part of the answer I focus on the main outcome of my actions which is the re-use of my requirements management plan. There may have been other outcomes too but in this context this is the most important one.

HANDY HINT

Don't give too much or too little detail during the job interview questions and answers, try and strike that good balance. In general, spend about 2-3 minutes on answering any question unless it is a big question where the expectation is to elaborate. Remember that the interviewer can ask further questions if they want more detail about a particular aspect of your answer.

Sample Business Analysis job interview questions

It is a great idea to prepare for a job interview by walking through some answers you might give in a business analysis job interview! Remember to follow the S-T-A-R answering model when you do rehearse answers to these questions! Good luck!

Example theory / fact based questions below:

1. What is the purpose of the Business Analyst within an organisation?
2. What do you believe are good attributes of a Business Analyst?
3. What is the difference between a functional requirement and a non-functional requirement?
4. What are the attributes of a good business requirement?
5. What is the purpose of requirements traceability?
6. When do you use a RACI or RASCI model?
7. How do you ensure your business requirements are of a high quality?
8. What is contained within a typical Requirements Management Plan?
9. Describe the phases of the SDLC. Which phases have you worked in?

10. Describe the difference between a Waterfall based methodology and an Agile methodology.
11. What is a user story in an Agile context and how is it used?
12. What is a use case and when would you use it as a Business Analyst?
13. What is the difference between a functional specification and a business requirements document? How are they related?

Most job interviews have straight theory based questions which are simply fact based and a test to see that you know the important key facts about the Business Analysis profession. There are not many of these questions and you don't need to use the S-T-A-R format with these types of questions. Simply state the answer back in a clear and factual fashion.

Behavioural based questions

The behavioural based questions are the most popular questions in an interview and it is also the type of question you will always use the S-T-A-R answering format for. Make sure you practice some of these questions to ensure you feel comfortable to relay the answers back on the day.

Example behavioural based questions:

1. Describe a time when you had to deal with a stakeholder that just didn't want to participate in one of your requirements workshops and tried to sabotage it. What did you do?
2. Describe a situation when you were unable to deliver one of your requirements documents on time. What did you do?
3. Describe a time when you had to win a difficult stakeholder over to accept the project change that will affect his/her department. How did you do it?
4. Describe a time when you were in a project where change happened constantly without any change control to requirements. How did you deal with this situation and how did you overcome the associated challenges?
5. Describe a time when you had to deal with stakeholders at all levels of the organisation. How was the message different?
6. Tell us about a time when you needed to gain approval for one of your business requirements documents but a stakeholder kept on delaying or postponing meeting with you. How did you go about obtaining sign off in this type of scenario?
7. As a business analyst, describe your ideal project environment. If you have a specific example, please include that in your description.

8. Describe a time when you introduced a new idea or process into a project or department and how it improved the process or situation.
9. Describe a situation where you had to mentor a colleague on any tool or concept. How did you approach this?
10. Describe a time when you had to facilitate a requirements gathering activity where your stakeholders were not located in the same city. If you haven't done this before, describe to us how you will deal with this type of situation.
11. Describe a situation where you used business analysis techniques to gather business requirements from stakeholders. Which techniques did you use and why did you choose those techniques?
12. Describe a time when you were responsible to plan and facilitate a requirements workshop. How did you go about it?

Another type of behavioural based questions is hypothetical scenarios that the interviewer would sketch and request a response to. These scenario's are normally based on real life scenarios within their company and they are testing whether you would fit or respond a way that would work in that environment. Don't hesitate to request more details or ask questions of them to clarify what exactly they mean in case the scenario sounds vague. The more you can understand the real scenario, the better placed you would be to answer this type of question.

Example hypothetical scenario based questions:

1. Consider this scenario: You are faced with requirements set which was not clearly defined and not signed off. You are expected to get these requirements into an acceptable state and get it signed off. How would you tackle this problem?
2. You have 5 business analysts to manage on a large business program. They are all new to the project. Describe what you will do as a business analysis lead to get them up to speed and working productively quickly.

During the job interview

You have got the job interview appointment all set up and now you should get yourself well prepared. The good news is, most interviews follow the format described below and if you follow a few basic guidelines you will do very well!

Be ready, before the interview!

You would have received the location, time and interviewer(s) names before the job interview day. Remember to take all your contact information, including the recruiter's phone number with you.

Make sure you pretend the interview started even before you walk into the interview room. Be professional, neat and ready from the moment you step into the company offices where you will be having the interview. First impressions are (almost) all you've got!

What to expect during the interview...

Once you are called into the job interview room you will be facing the interviewers. In general there are 2-3 people interviewing, but seldom more than that. Make sure you shake everyone's hand, make eye contact and give each interviewer a friendly smile while you are being introduced. It is important that you give each interviewer equal attention when you start answering their questions.

They will normally have a little bit of 'chit chat' with you. They typically asked whether you found them OK. Even if you got lost, you answer – Yes, thanks. It was easy to find. You sound competent! Whatever they say in this first initial engagement, you must be positive and confident in your response – do not sound doubtful or unsure of yourself even if something horrible happened to you on the way to the interview! This is part of your first impressions and it only takes a minute or two – make the most of it!

Some 'warm up' topics are introduced
Then the lead interviewer will explain the format of the session. They will typically say that the job interview will last approximately 40 minutes, they will provide you with company background and then they will normally tell you what types of interview questions are coming up. In a formal interview they will tell you who will be asking what types of questions.

They tend to ask you at this point whether you know much about the company. The expectation here is that you just give a few high level points to show you do know what it is all about and you can mention a few general statistics you may know. The idea is just to show interest without necessarily knowing it all. No one expects you to know it all. They are expecting to be the ones to give you more detail. They will then give a company overview and typically end up with where the role you are interviewing for fits into the organization. This part of the interview sometimes happens at the end of the questions too.

The 'meaty' part of the interview

Typically before the actual questions start you will be asked to tell the panel a little about your professional background. (They may refer to your resume or your cover letter at this point). They would like to know where you have been and what you have done. You should keep this brief, succinct and sequential. Before you start this, you should tell the panel which sequence you will follow. You can say something like: "My career started in 1997 in Johannesburg when I worked for the Stock Exchange. Thereafter I moved to a role at Andersen Consulting who transferred me to London in 2000........" Keep your early experience very brief and say a bit more about your relevant experience and your more recent experience.

Now the questions start! With each question you should follow the S-T-A-R format when you answer. Make eye contact with the person asking first and then engage with the other interviewers while providing your answer. Remember that most of an interview is people deciding whether they like you and whether they think you can fit into their culture. The content of answers are also important of course, but you manner and ability to build rapport counts for a lot! Be prepared for the questions about where you see your career going as well.

Closing of the interview

At the end of the questions part of the interview, you will be asked whether you have any questions. It is good to ask one or at most two questions about the role you are interviewing for. Another suggestion is to ask them to tell you about the team you might be joining. These questions should be short and sweet but nevertheless indicate an enthusiasm for joining the team. Don't start talking salaries unless the interviewer brings it up and be vague and let them start the specifics!

Finally, remember to thank every interviewer for giving you the opportunity to discuss the opportunity with them.

Who should you work for?

Choices, choices!

It is great to be a Business Analyst with a Business Analysis career! We have so much variety and choice when it comes to the industry or subject matter we choose to work in. As a true Business Analyst we can really work within any industry, any project based on any subject matter at any given time of our careers. There is hardly any reason why a Business Analyst cannot do this. Do you feel that you can do this? If your answer is 'no', I would say that you are standing in your own way, definitely not your chosen career path.

Reality however is that we will at best work within a few industries during our business analysis career. A combination of human nature and comfort zone causes us to choose our business analysis jobs within an industry we have worked in before or which is fairly similar to previous industry. I am talking for the general population of Business Analysts here, not for YOU of course! You are reading this book because you are passionate about your Business Analysis career and this means you are not afraid to challenge yourself! My advice, make the most of your Business Analysis career and "chop and change" industry every now and again. Ask me, it enhances your business analysis skills and is so much more interesting than becoming a subject matter expert in just one area.

3. What every Business Analyst must know

- ✯ Key Business Analysis concepts
- ✯ Requirements elicitation and analysis knowledge awareness
- ✯ Project management skills for Business Analysts

PAT'S STORY...

No, Pat was unfortunately not successful with that first interview but he found a Business Analyst role about 4 weeks later. The role was with a small company looking for a Business Analyst with some printing background because it was a publishing house doing projects where this prior knowledge Pat has will be very useful to them.

Pat was over the moon to be in a real Business Analyst job after all his efforts and learning but he did realise that he will need to work on his pure Business Analysis knowledge foundations now if he ever wanted to progress to another more senior Business Analysis role.

Pat was absolutely determined to make his new career a great success and vowed to learn a new Business Analysis skill every *day by spending at least 20 minutes reading up on a new tool or technique! Pat kept doing this every day and he was gaining more and more confidence in this ever-growing new career path.*

One day Pat bumped into one of the other Business Analysts, Cathy, in the kitchen area of his new company. She was talking to their Project Manager about things he didn't have a clue about. It sounded like he should know what this stuff was all about but he suddenly felt quite uninformed and everything sounded much harder and involved than anything he has learned so far.

"**I look back on my life like a good day's work; it is done and I am satisfied with it.**" – Grandma Moses, an American folk artist.

Instead of allowing the feeling of despair to take hold of Pat, he and walked up to Cathy and asked her whether she would please explain to him what traceability meant. She was delighted to and in the process Pat found himself his first ever mentor!

To be continued…

Building a Business Analysis knowledge foundation

As a new or experienced Business Analyst it is very important that you lay a solid foundation of Business Analysis knowledge. The reason this is important is because if you have a good foundation in Business Analysis you can simply add more specific skills and tools to it as you gain more experience. Although the Business Analysis profession is very accessible to people who want to make a career change, it does require Business Analysis specific skills and knowledge.

Business Analysis foundation knowledge

Systems development life cycle

You have learned in the previous pages of this book the basics of what the SDLC is all about. It is worth me saying again here that you must understand the role of the SDLC and how your Business Analysis role slots into this methodology. Everything you will work on will be in the context of the SDLC, even if you work on agile projects.

Problem solving

An integral part of being a business analyst is to be faced with problem solving in some shape or form. Most commonly it is the scenario where a problem or current situation is described to you and most often than not the business will give you an idea of how they believe the problem should be solved. So you might wonder what I am doing here then. The business poses the problem and they provide the solution too, so what is the purpose of the Business Analyst then?

Good question. This is what makes our jobs interesting and challenging and also multifaceted. We have to analyse the problem the business states further to understand the root cause of the problem. We then formulate their problem back to them in a more structured fashion and this often changes the solution they came up with in the first instance.

A great methodology to use is the Soft Systems Methodology (SSM). This is a problem solving methodology that helps tremendously in identifying the root cause of the problem and also in coming up with a structured problem statement which can be taken forward to determine the real options to consider for the project or program of work.

What is requirement engineering?
Requirements engineering is a collective term which describes the activities included in requirements gathering (or elicitation), requirements analysis, documentation, prioritization and validation.

Requirements tools & techniques
Are you doing your Business Requirements the right way? During all my years of doing business requirements engineering and analysis on a wide variety of projects I have always managed to find a new challenge and a fresh new topic to learn more of. You may look at my Business Analysis education and think I follow lots of specific methodologies and must be doing business analysis strictly according to the book – after all in many Business Analyst courses that is what you get taught to do! It is however quite the opposite with me.

Sure, in the earlier years of being a business analyst I have wondered about which tools to use for which purpose when doing business requirements work and often had doubts about whether I was "doing it right"! These days I only apply what is required and often it is only a fraction of what is prescribed by a tool or technique in a book.

One of the aims of the business requirements game is to learn when to apply a particular methodology (such as Agile) or technique more based on professional intuition than any specific prescribed process. It is important to remain very flexible in your working style but at the same time stay focused on using the most appropriate tool or technique for any particular situation. As much as we tend to think each project is different, they are all also very much the same. With gaining more experience you will learn how to be flexible in your approach to meet the needs of the stakeholders but also remain very effective. This is what makes this profession highly rewarding and diverse.

Understanding the business need

Before we jump into too much detail around specific tasks for us as Business Analysts lets discuss the wider purpose of what we are here to do. Let's sketch a scenario where you are placed on a large program of work which has just kicked off...

As a first step, we identify and engage with the key stakeholders. Have a talk with someone, a formal stakeholder interview or even a problem definition workshop, but it is essential to start the hunt for more information on 'the business need'. Find the people or person who raised this need, talk to them first. The key stakeholders are those groups or individuals in the organization that is affected by the current business problem and who will be affected by us introducing a solution to this need or problem. We will use various requirements gathering techniques and review many types of materials in a quest to understand their need or problem. Example stakeholders often include: department heads, business area managers, operations staff and of course your own project team members who may have information too!

Typical other sources of information of the business need or problem to find during this activity can include business cases, process documents, existing systems and artefacts such as invoices, application forms and so on. There are many different ways that we go about trying to understand what the business need is. A lot of collateral (more specifically referring to the Soft System Methodology as an example) will refer to this activity as the process of gathering information to understand the "unstructured" version of the business problem we are aiming to fix.

Translate the business need into an objective, clear and specific language.
Once we have gained a grasp on what the business need is, we start to translate and interpret that need into a more structured problem, need or description of our scope. Very importantly at this stage we document the business need into a language (business requirements, software requirements or functional requirements), which can be understood by the business. We don't dive into any technical modelling or 'analysis speak' but where appropriate we will use techniques to illustrate the problem.

By now you would have used a decision making model to choose between methodologies and decided which one will best fit your business requirements management on the project.

This key step of clarifying and drafting the business need can include diagrams such as use case diagrams, activity flows or process models to express the problem. These are great tools to use to demonstrate an understanding of a business problem's current state and assists you in ensuring there is clarity around what the business need is that is being addressed. This step is iterative and involves a lot of discussion, rewriting, redrawing and finalizing of what it is we are trying to solve.

TIP

A handy tip here is for you to always get to the bottom of WHY is something a problem.

Determine where we are going

Once we clarified, expressed and agreed what the current business need is, we start the process of brainstorming ideas of how we can address this need (really start to gather business requirements in earnest). What is the stakeholder's nirvana, what do they believe they need to address the problem. Again, this process involves you engaging with all the stakeholders and getting people's views in the most appropriate way. This can include more business requirement workshops, stakeholder interviews or even doing market research for relevant trends and products.

IMPORTANT NOTE

You will find that the business stakeholders will start with the solution and often start providing software requirements way before stating and understanding the root of the problem of business need. It is your job to get to the problem or business need first!

Another very important point related to this is that you must learn to steer the stakeholders away from 'how' (solution) they think problem should be solved and get them to articulate 'what' they need to improve or change to solve the business need or problem.

Manage change of business needs in our project

Another very important part of the role of business analysis on any project is to manage the change of requirements right from the very start of any business or technology project. It doesn't matter whether you are on a waterfall based project, or whether you are on a closely managed agile project the one thing that you will be managing is change. Change happens to business problems, change happens to requirements for a solution and change happens just because. All projects consist of a myriad of people and where there are people, there is constant change. It is well worth your while to plan for how you will manage change to your business scope, your requirements and once you start implementing a solution, how change will be managed then. If you don't manage the change factor on your project, you may be swallowed whole now!

Build solid relationships with all stakeholders

Leaving this crucial point to last in this section is definitely not because it is least important. It is in fact because it is most important! If you don't have good relationships with the business stakeholders, your project team stakeholders and the supporting technical team stakeholders you will most likely fail. You will not be able to do any of the above three important tasks effectively and business requirements efforts will not be as good if you neglect building strong relationships with everyone involved. This is a key factor – know who all your stakeholders are, engage with them often, build strong rapport with primary stakeholders and keep communicating. You will build trust this way and it will make your work easy, rewarding and best of all you will deliver high quality output.

Requirements elicitation techniques

Requirements elicitation is one of the business analyst's biggest and most important tasks. The objective is to elicit the needs and requirements from stakeholders. You will find that you use a mix of the requirements elicitation techniques described in this book and the mix will be different for every project. Always consider what suits the project best before you choose a technique to use. Below you will find a summary of each of the main requirements elicitation techniques to provide some context on what each is about and when you should use it.

Technique 1: Requirement interviews

This requirement elicitation technique is probably the most common way of eliciting requirements from your stakeholders. When you perform a requirements interview keep these points in mind:

Introduction to the interview or meeting

Once you introduced yourself to the interviewee you should first provide them with background on the project, the project scope and timeframes. It is also often useful to tell them who suggested you talk to them and why you would like to talk to them. If you know they may feel threatened by the project's objective, find something positive to say which can put them at ease. Building rapport with your stakeholders here will stand you in good stead during the rest of the project.

Format of the meeting or interview

Now that you have set the scene, you should also highlight the scope of your requirements elicitation questions. Tell them for example that you have some questions about the overall purpose of their department, then you would like to talk about their most important business processes and finally if they could discuss their current system with you. You must also tell them that you are more than happy to answer their questions as you go. If they sound comfortable with your approach, they will feel more at ease with you which means you will get great results.

Questions

There is a skill in asking requirement gathering questions the right way. A few tips here would include:

Ask open ended type of questions. Try to avoid asking 'yes' or 'no' type questions. Example questions could start like: "Could you please describe your daily tasks you perform to prepare the salaries for month end?" If this question is too high level for them you could try: "How do you know what each person's salary will be each month?", "Where do you find that information?", "How long does it take you to do everyone's salary pay slips?", "Why does it take THAT long, what do you have to do?"

Drill down to detail or pull up to higher level questions. In general, some people tend to talk specifics and focuses on exceptions. Other people talk contextually and in general and hardly ever delve into specifics. Use questions such as: "So in general terms, would you say the payroll system is inadequate?" if they tend to focus on a specific small aspect of the system which might not do what they need once a year! This type of question will 'force' them to pull out of divergence. The opposite also happens where you might need someone to be more specific. An example question could be: "Is it the report processing specifically that causes the system to fail?" and so on.

Talk to the right stakeholder to get the right outcome. Depending on the level of stakeholder you are talking to, you will find that different people talk about a problem in different

terms. If you need to understand the overall business process from a high level, it is probably not a great idea to interview the person performing a small part of that process.
It is a good idea to prepare more questions and plan your requirement gathering interviews well. Be prepared for each interview!

Technique 2: Requirement workshops
I personally love using workshops to elicit requirements but I would never walk into a requirement gathering workshop without some pre-written requirements or concepts at a minimum! Why? There are several reasons why I would plan my workshop carefully:

1. The more structure you can give a workshop the more focused your session will be. If you don't have an agenda or any pre-developed materials to run the session with you will find that there might be a lot of ideas and activity in the session but it will most likely be of a poor quality.
2. Know who is coming to your workshop. This is important because everyone who is coming will have their own ideas of what they want to get out of it. If you don't have a clue who they are, how will you be able to plan for meeting their expectations or ensure their objectives are met? In an ideal world, meet everyone before the requirement gathering workshop for a short

chat and understand their views of where they see the project going!

You as the facilitator can control the flow of a workshop with so much less effort if you are prepared and have planned the session than if you walk in blind. You will also appear more professional, in control and your stakeholders will trust you.

Benefits of a running a requirements workshop
People have to justify their views in front of a larger group of stakeholders. This often helps with eliminating nonsense type requirements you might get if you only do one on one interviews.
Discussion of each topic refines and clarifies the requirement. Your requirement quality is typically much higher at the end of a workshop than a one on one interview.

Workshops are a great vehicle to strengthen stakeholder 'buy in'. Involving people in a group set up to discuss a topic of common interest does wonders for stakeholder support in the project.

Disadvantages of a running a requirements workshop
It takes more effort to plan, co-ordinate and prepare for.

You don't always manage to get all the right people in the room at the same time. (Idea here: Schedule more workshops and rerun the same session multiple times!)
You may need more time for requirements gathering activities but the upside is that your requirement quality is typically higher.

Technique 3: Research and observation
I put these two techniques together because they walk hand in hand a lot of the time. As a business analyst, it is a great idea to always include some of this technique into any requirement gathering activity.

To job shadow or observe someone means that you need to go sit with them for a few hours or days and observe how they perform their jobs. There is nothing like experiencing the practicality of someone's day-to-day job. It becomes 'real' to you and you will translate and write your requirements with the people doing the actual jobs in mind.

When you do choose to use 'observation' as a method of requirements elicitation, keep these things in mind:

- ⋆ Build up a picture in your mind (or on paper) of the end-to-end process a person follows to perform their average day in their job.

- ★ If they allow questions, be selective and careful not to delve into too much detail with your questions or digress into a path of an exceptional circumstance.
- ★ People will focus on what doesn't work naturally, so you will get the picture fairly quickly once you spent some time with someone performing a job function or executing a business process.
- ★ Try and gather samples of forms, user training manuals and documented procedures that they follow to perform the role.
- ★ Very important aspect of observation is to see what the system they are using is capable of, watch them use it, which parts of the process is perform manually and if possible try and understand the 'why' it is done that way.

Always remember to thank people who spent time with you! Build rapport when you are with them because you never know when you might need to get back to them with more questions or observation requirements.

Documenting requirements

Requirements should always be documented. However, the method of documenting requirements is changing depending on which type of project you are working on. Waterfall based projects uses requirements documents (as it is described here) and agile (iterative) projects use user stories to drive requirements. The requirements are still being fully documented in both methodologies just using different methods!

The requirements document is the primary traditional artefact that a Business Analyst produces on a project. It is in some companies being replaced with requirement management software packages (or used in combination with a requirements management software package). Agile projects do not produce requirements documents in the way it is described here, as they use user stories to manage all the requirements on the project!

There are also still many organizations out there that use a requirements document as their basis for capturing the business requirements and hence it is still relevant and very useful to master the skill of creating high quality requirements documents.

The perfect requirements document

The requirements document can never be perfect unfortunately. It is used in waterfall based projects and therefore most requirements documents are out dated before someone actually reads it! It is though a very valuable tool for documenting requirements in a lot of organizations. It is also often pivotal to the project to both go to business case or progress into an analysis and design phase, depending on their company methodology. This page will give you tips for how to manage your requirements document in terms of feedback and approvals.

Who should review and approve the requirements document?
A good place to start when determining the readers (reviewers and approvers) of your project requirements document will be your stakeholder list. Focus here on both the requirements specific stakeholders but also some other high priority stakeholders for the project. Although it is important to involve the correct people in providing feedback and approvals, you should really try and keep this to a minimum number of people.

How do you gather feedback from reviewers?
A quick way is to do a walkthrough session. Send your requirements document out to all reviewers a week before (if you have luxury of time) and schedule a couple of walkthrough sessions. Ideally capture people's feedback there and then and update it online there and then! This is ideal. If you need to send them an electronic copy, try and get them to use a requirements feedback form instead of making direct updates. Make it clear when you expect to have all feedback in and if your stakeholders are tardy in responding (which they often

are!) give them a call and ask whether you could schedule time to walk them through or answer any questions.

Getting that approval!

First talk to your project manager and determine which approvals are really critical for the project to be able to progress. They normally have a sub set of key people that really need to approve from a steering committee perspective. There are sometimes people on the approvals list that is not that crucial to get approvals from or you could accept delegations. Once you know who the key people are, rope your project manager in to help you chase approvals with more senior people. I am of the strong belief that our requirements document is a project deliverable and not technical our responsibility to chase! I am sure some Project Managers will disagree...you decide.

Sometimes you need a few senior stakeholders' sign off too and they may not have been very involved in the process of gathering and reviewing requirements during the documentation phase. You deal with this situation by offering to provide them with a summary walkthrough of the requirements document. You can present this summary in an executive style presentation pack – talking their language. When you do the actual walk through session with them always also have to complete requirements document handy.

Ask whether they have any questions or concerns. If they can't commit to approval as an outcome of that walkthrough, ask them under which conditions would they be ready to provide approval.

Requirements traceability

Why should you trace requirements?

There are a few reasons why it is necessary to trace requirements through the system development life cycle regardless of what methodology you follow however the two key reasons are:

- Keeping track to of progress of requirements in the SDLC.
- Helps you manage requirements change.

Let's look at each of these reasons a bit closer...

Keeping track of requirements during the SDLC

As a Business Analyst you are responsible for ensuring requirements are being delivered as requested, it is important to use a requirements management tool which will link your individual requirement to agreed scope items and the subsequent SDLC phases. This way you will always know whether a requirement is on track to be successfully implemented.

When you start having a lot of requirements, it becomes more difficult to manage and track progress of each requirement, and this is when linking a requirement to the other stages in the SDLC becomes really important. The business stakeholders love coming back to the team and they want to know what happened to "their" requirement they wanted. If you have all traced clearly, you can tell them exactly what is happening with their requirement quite easily...

Helps you manage requirements change

The other reason for managing your requirements with a requirements management tool for traceability is to manage and trace the changes made to requirements. For example, you will find that as the SDLC progresses there will be some requirements that change. This could be due to many reasons but often it is the business stakeholders' changing their minds and sometimes it is a project decision based on more technical reasons. The bottom line is, you need to keep track of what changes are made to each requirement. You do this via your traceability management tool or a simple requirement management matrix.

A few factors to consider when planning your requirements traceability approach:

- Which tool will you use to manage your requirement traceability?

- Sometimes people simply use a MS Excel traceability matrix template to capture the tracking information. More sophisticated requirements management tools, such as Calibre RM, could be used to manage this too.

Who will be responsible to manage the requirements traceability?
It needs a champion and central point. In some projects, you may be long gone (i.e. reassigned to a different project) by the time requirements are being tested and therefore you are not there to update the traceability matrix – You need to consider who can you hand this over too if you are not around for the full SDLC.

When do you start the traceability process?
Depending on your method of capturing the traceability information, this could vary slightly. A general accepted practice is for you to establish your traceability using the signed off business requirements. Any changes post business requirement's sign off will be managed via the traceability (and change request) process.

PAT'S STORY...

Pat was spending about 2 hours a week with Cathy learning new skills and just asking her to provide feedback on some of the work he has been doing. It has been great since he met Cathy because he has learned some great practical skills and she is a wonderfully patient mentor.

One day Pat came up with this question to Cathy: "Cathy, I am still at a loss as to why you sometimes speak to the project Manager in what at times sound like a complete different language! What is that all about?"

Cathy then tells Pat that it is simply her way of communicating with the Project Manager in his language using her knowledge of Project Management. She said to Pat not to worry, it isn't strictly Business Analysis and therefore he can learn that one day when he has time.

Pat told Cathy: "I have time today! Please?"

To be continued…

TASK

Find a buddy and create a mock project. Then practice these three techniques together using your mock project topic. It is great fun to do and once you did it, you will find yourself using it on every project.

4. Secrets of strong stakeholder relationships

- ✯ Your inner personal leadership skills
- ✯ Mastering interpersonal communication
- ✯ Stakeholder management
- ✯ Workshop facilitation skills

PAT'S STORY...

Pat has been a Business Analyst now for almost a year and he is currently working on the biggest project of his short Business Analysis career thus far.

He has been working really hard and learning his tools and techniques really well but some days he just feels like he is not getting through to people! Pat feels like he just hits a brick wall with some of the stakeholders and now that he is on this bigger project he is really feeling it.

Pat went to Cathy recently (she has moved to another floor so they can't catch up as often anymore) to ask her what else can he do to improve his outcomes. He explained to Cathy that some people are hard to understand or they seem to simply always be a stick in the mud when it comes to requirements sign off time!

Cathy looked at Pat and said that it is time for Pat to move to the next level of his Business Analysis career and work on his 'soft skills'. She explained that this is the invisible, intangible skills that every Business Analyst must master. She told Pat that when he masters these skills that he would have reached the pinnacle of being a truly successful Business Analyst.

Pat looked at her slightly confused and said: "Sure Cathy, I don't really know what you mean exactly but I am all ears"

To be continued…

The people around you determine your success

Truly extraordinary Business Analysts spend a lot of time developing their Business Analysis soft skills. They work alongside extraordinary people who have a mindset for success. They work on leadership skills, behavioural competencies and stakeholder relationship building to name a few. Another term for behavioural competencies is really just simply 'soft skills'.

So what are soft skills?

Soft skills are simply the set of skills we use to communicate with people in a variety of different types of situations. You may need to present a slide show to a group of people or you may need to discuss a stakeholder's concerns around a particular set of requirements. In both these cases, the soft skills are the skills you use to communicate effectively in both these scenarios. There are many levels of soft skills and also an endless opportunity to keep on getting better at it. The more you work on shaping and sharpening your soft skills, the more you will notice fantastic results when you perform you role.

In order to really be the best you can be in both your soft skills and also your more technical skills, you need to frame your mindset to achieve the successful results.

Do you know how powerful your mindset is?

Most of us will say - yes I can imagine it is powerful but we will not truly understand or consciously realize just how powerful it is. My suggestion to you is to stop for a second, think about this, it is something which can have a huge impact and change your life for the better easily...

So what is a mindset anyway?

Your mindset is the angle or view point you choose to see the world from. You will either be a person who sees the world from a 'reactive state' or a 'pro-active state'. In essence this means that you will either blame the world for what it is doing to you or you will choose to learn from what ever happened and take the best from it. Yes, it is a bit of glass half empty or glass half full stuff.

Just hang in there and read these next few paragraphs, it is really worth "getting" it.

Above the line or below the line living

Below the line or being in a re-active state

To live below the line with your mindset means that you tend to focus on the past and past events. You will often blame something that happened in the past for the way you feel towards the future. This means you will react to anything that happens to you today in a way that blames the past. It also means that you do not take responsibility for your actions or feelings about things that happen. You are blaming the outside world for the way you experience life. Lastly, you don't take control of anything; you let the environment control you and your feelings. An example of this could be: 'One of your colleague business analysts believes that the reason they are unhappy in their job is because the people they work with are unfriendly and their deadlines are unachievable.'

Above the line or being in a pro-active state

To live above the line with your mindset is to be proactive and live in the present moment. You do not blame anything from the past for how you experience your life today. You are responsible for your own actions and feelings and are in control of how you are feeling at any time. In general, people who live above the line are much more light hearted and they deal with harder things that happen much easier. They manage to see things for what they are and pro-actively live their life from that perspective. When you live above the line you do not allow the environment or outside world predict to you how you are going to react to a situation.

An example of this could be: 'This same colleague business analyst as above realizes that the reason that they can't meet their deadlines is because they did not plan the requirements activity properly in their requirements management plan. Instead of becoming unhappy and experiencing everyone as unfriendly, this person will address the issue with a discussion with their project manager. This person takes full control and responsibility for the situation and do not react and blame other things. Instead of being 'unhappy' for days, the situation is rectified and the business analyst can move on.'

We are just human!

No one person can live above the line all the time, but you can learn to live above the line most of the time. The beautiful thing of living above the line most of the time is that you will soon find it more and more difficult to live (or allow yourself) to go below the line. Take this page seriously and think about it – your daily job as a business analyst can even be more fulfilling if you start living above the line much for often.

Stakeholders

Who are they and why do you need them?

We use our soft skills constantly when we interact with our stakeholders. It is therefore a great idea to develop your soft skills just as often as you do your more Business Analysis specific knowledge. You will understand by now that if you have really strong soft skills, the 'hard skills' look after itself. Stakeholders come in various shapes and sizes and they all have a slightly different role to play on your project. As you would know they are sometimes quite hard to love, but trust me, it pays in the long run.

Follow these basic tips as a guideline when analysing your project allies and enemies!

Identify your stakeholders

Always make a list of all your stakeholders on your project. Anyone who is affected by the project outcome or directly involved will be deemed a stakeholder. In some cases this could mean people or companies outside your organization. Example stakeholders are the business sponsor of your project, business managers and anyone who will use the system (if it is a system you are implementing). Government bodies or suppliers can also be important stakeholders.

Prioritize your stakeholders

It sounds a bit bad saying you should prioritize stakeholders but you need to understand which stakeholders will have a high impact on your project's ability to succeed if they didn't feel 'the love' from the project. Other considerations when prioritizing is the number of stakeholders involved in a particular stakeholder group. For example: If you were building a banking product for consumers and you didn't include the call centre who will be servicing that product in your project, you may end up with a large number of stakeholders not supporting the launch of the new product because they have not been involved. This means the product may fail in the market which will be disastrous to the project outcome!

Determine your stakeholder's mood

Most of the time we have a good idea about whether a particular stakeholder or stakeholder group is supporting the project or not. If we realize at this early stage that a stakeholder might be difficult to manage and especially if they have high impact priority, we give them more attention! Do not avoid them. Involve them early on and make a point of fully understanding the impact your project will have on them, their role and their department. If you understand their point of view fully you will be in a much stronger position to manage the relationship with them.

Engage with stakeholders

You will need to work out (at least in terms of requirements activities) how you will engage with your stakeholders. It is imperative to your relationship with your stakeholders that you use effective communication. You find out who you should approach to ensure you have the right stakeholder representation within your requirements workshops and other requirement gathering activities. Agree an engagement approach with your project manager prior to going out to see stakeholders. A single uniform message coming from the project is critical for the 'image' of the project in the wider community of the business.

"A man is literally what he thinks" – By James Allen

Understand your stakeholders.

Now that you have a list of prioritized stakeholders and you know how you will engage with them, you need to plan how to find out what makes them tick! Why? It is the simple concept of making people feel as if they are 'loved'. You do this by demonstrating your soft skills in some way with your understanding of their special interest on the project or their view on a certain topic. If you know where they are coming from and you show that it matters, you will go a long way in gaining that stakeholders buy-in with your requirements workshops, requirements document approvals or simply just have some support in the business for your project.

Building great relationships

This soft skill is the one that will make your job seem easy and very enjoyable. Some people are more natural 'rapport builders' than others but the good news is that everyone can learn to be great at this! As a business analyst you will communicate with a lot of stakeholders during your career and this often involves getting their 'buy in' into what you and your project team are trying to achieve. So let's look at a great way you can ensure you get your stakeholder's buy in.

The three times affirmation

This technique is a very easy rapport building technique and works a treat. What this one is all about is simply you asking three consecutive questions which the stakeholder answers 'yes' to. You do this during your first few minutes of being with the stakeholder because it is all about you setting up a warm engagement session with them.

So how do you do this in real life?

OK, let's say you are about to do a stakeholder requirements interview. You can do this when you walk in the door (and some of it you do already anyway!). You ask the person whether they are comfortable where they are sitting. You then ask them whether they are ready for the interview session to start and finally you ask them whether it would be alright for you to ask him/her some questions about their work practices. In all three these cases the stakeholder would have answered 'yes' and you would have a great start for great rapport! You will now see you can ask other types of questions too, the bottom line being that you ask three different questions consecutively where the answer is yes / good / well thanks every time.

Finally it is a fantastic tool to use when you know a stakeholder may be more resistant to discuss certain things. By building rapport this way, you get them to agree with you essentially three times before delving into the real topic for discussion. This will make them much more likely to agree / accept your suggestions or requirements questions in a positive way.

Benefits of using this simple technique

You are able to use this technique with an individual or with a group. This means it will work really well in a requirements workshop set up too.

You can use this technique quite seamlessly when you are on a conference call too. You don't need to see the person to build rapport.

You can use this technique in everyday conversation with anyone of your stakeholders. Next step – go try this! This is just one of many great rapport building tips you can teach yourself in minutes.

Understanding why stakeholders do the things they do

A few pages ago I talked about the fact that all of us see the world in a slightly different way. We have noticed this during our lives in different scenarios of our lives and we tend to probably notice people who have a more extreme variation from our own view of the world. In any case, there is some very interesting information available which explains why we all see the world a bit differently.

Before I tell you more, can you imagine a reason why it will be useful to know why your stakeholder sees something in a different way? Or would it even just be useful to know that they see it in a certain way? If you know someone sees things in a certain way then you can tune into that and communicate with them in a way that makes most sense to them.

THOUGHT

Do you think that this might make a difference in the results you get when talking to someone by sharing and understanding their perspective?

Reasons why we are all seeing the world a bit differently

Each one of us has a variety of different 'filter' we use to absorb all the bits of information, which is streaming our way every millisecond of our lives. Just out of interest, there are 20 million bits of information streaming towards you every millisecond and you need a way of filtering and making sense of all the information!

As human beings we can merely absorb about 7 chunks of these millions of bits of information and this means that we have to decide which bits of information are we seeing and which bits are we discarding.

How do we filter all these bits?

We use a few different 'filters', which includes our beliefs about life, our values, our 5 senses, our memory and our experiences. Based on those 'filters' we choose which 'chunks' to see, hear, feel, smell and taste. This means that if we don't know what something means based on these filters we apply,

we tend to not place it in our selected seven chunks and therefore simply discard that information. Make sense?
So each of us have a different set of beliefs, values, experiences and we also have different preferred senses for absorbing information. Some people use their hearing much more acutely than the next person and they respond really well to hearing information.

Someone else tends to 'switch off' when there is a lot of information being spoken and they only really respond well with pictures. They would probably not include a lot of noise or sounds into their chunks of information they choose to accept in and therefore rather focus on more visual pictures of things.

Your beliefs

Another key filter we all use is your belief system. We all have certain beliefs about everything. This chapter will only touch on beliefs and what it means really briefly because it is a big topic, which would be best suited for another day.

However, I will tell you in summary what a belief is. Beliefs are what people believe is true and what is not true. For example: If a stakeholder is always sceptical and hard to deal with, it may be that something happened once in the past which created a belief which he now believes is a true fact in general terms. Perhaps this stakeholder had an experience of a similar project, which cost him his promotion. He may now believe that every project is doomed and he will only loose if he invests his time and effort in it. This might explain why he is so hard to deal with? If you can uncover what a belief is someone carries with them, you have a chance in indirectly helping that person change that belief by demonstrating the contrary is true. This may assist you in improving the relationship with this stakeholder. Another example of a belief could simply be that you believe you have a great memory. That is a great belief to hang to!

Your experiences

Let's talk a bit more about how you use your experience to filter 'chunks' of information. Have you ever spoken to a stakeholder about some requirements and all they ever refer to is how they do something in their job or in their company? They don't seem to see the bigger picture or seem to care about anyone else's requirements? It is because they are choosing to only 'filter in' the chunks of information which they have experience of. They are not including anyone else's views or requirements because they simply don't have that experience and therefore the only know what they have experience of. Does this make sense?

So coming back to why we all see the world a bit differently. It is a combination of our 'filters' and because we all have our own unique beliefs, values, preferred senses and experiences we will always see the world differently to the next person.

Your senses

Tips to know which of the 5 senses people prefer!

It is really only seeing, feeling, hearing and thinking that you need to start taking notice of. If someone says: I see what you mean – guess where their preference lays? Or if someone tends to say: "I hear you" or "That sounds great" you will know they have a strong sense of hearing. Thinkers would often use the word "think". They would say that "we need to think that through" for example.

All of us use all our senses. We all relate to hearing, feeling and seeing but most of us have a stronger preference for one of these main senses!

You will now see how it is possible for us as Business Analysts to develop a sense of what someone else prefers or where they are coming from with their view points. This will help you understand why someone is perhaps not responding to your documents very well (they don't like reading lots of words, they prefer pictures) or why someone is always just referring to their relevant requirement scenarios. This will assist you to adapt your communication style with people and in this way achieve must stronger relationships and better results with your requirements.

Workshop facilitation secrets

All workshop facilitators should keep all these points in mind when they do a workshop. It applies to all types of workshops, not only requirement gathering workshops. Take these secrets to heart and you will be surprised at your workshop attendees' positive responses.

We all want to be loved

Building rapport even before the requirements workshop with each attendee will guarantee the workshop has the best chance for success! Even before the requirement gathering workshop takes place, make sure you as the facilitator meet or at least phone each attendee! Have a chat to them about their understanding of what the session is all about, try and determine what is important to them, gage how they feel about the content or simply about the fact that they are expected to attend. You can even just simply call them to confirm they can make it and whether they have any questions prior to the session. By doing this first very basic step of engaging with each attendee individually you would have build good rapport that will take you a long way to being received with an open engaging audience.

We all want to belong

An easy way to make someone feel they belong is to recognize each individual in front of everyone else during the workshop facilitation session. We all love feeling special and especially so if we are recognized for something positive in front of a larger group. As part of your pre-workshop rapport building you would know what is important to each individual. Make sure you use this during the session – the earlier in the session you can do it, the better. Ideas for doing this would be to point out something good or constructive about each attendee's input they may provide.

We all want to learn

Stretch people by choosing a format for the requirements workshop, which will require them to participate in some way. Use posters, small group tasks, report back to the group – even just let them get out of their seats to do something. If people feel that they were contributing actively, they will also feel they got value for their time spent! This will have a great impact on how they feel about your requirements and it will build confidence in them that all requirements were considered thoroughly.

It is not about you

You may be the one standing up and leading the workshop, but guess what – it is actually not about you for anyone in the workshop. When you run the requirements gathering workshop remember that it is about your attendees or requirement stakeholders. It is not about you, your nerves or what you can get out of it. It is all about the value you can deliver for the people attending the workshop. Focus on delivering as much value to the attendees by ensuring you are very well prepared, the workshop is structured, you use different tools to stimulate conversation and you keep on track with your objectives for the session.

PAT'S STORY...

Pat came into work feeling a bit sad this morning. He has been working hard on his personal leadership skills and also the very key interpersonal communication skills that Cathy has explained to him. He has seen great results and it has certainly paid off for him especially lately. So he should really feel very proud and excited because today is the day that Pat is moving on to a new job.

The reason Pat is feeling a bit sad is because he has formed such strong relationships in these last months at the publishing company. He feels he must stay loyal to them *because of all the opportunities they gave him but at the same time he has fire of career passion burning which is now leading him to a new place.*

Not only did Pat get a new role as a Business Analyst in a large corporation but they have offered to send him on formal training courses with a view to get certified as a Professional Business Analyst. It is a fantastic opportunity and he can hardly believe he has come all this way in just 2 years.

Cathy is on her way up to his floor to come and say her goodbye. It is going to be hard to say goodbye to his first fantastic mentor but he is ready and open to meet his next mentor. His only hope is that he or she is as wonderful and patient as Cathy.

The End.

5. The road to achieve Business Analysis mastery

- ✯ Business Analysis further education paths
- ✯ Business Analysis professional certification routes

Which Business Analysis course is right for you?

Lots of people ask the question, which course is a good business analysis course to get started with when learning business analysis?

This seems to be a common question among new business analysts or experienced business analysts who haven't done a lot of formal training before. It is a very good question because it is not obvious. There are many Business Analysis courses out in the market but only few courses covers the overall foundation concepts of business analysis. If you are looking for a good solid foundations course in business analysis, I would suggest you look at the course content before signing up.

The Foundation Business Analysis Course

The course content of a good Business Analysis foundation course should include the following types of topics:

- Problem Analysis – the Soft Systems Methodology is a foundation methodology for being able to recognize a business need or problem, it guides you to break it into 'root cause' statements and builds a structured problem to take to your next stage of your analysis.
- Stakeholder Analysis – The course content must also cover stakeholder analysis techniques. Ideally it will cover how to identify and manage your stakeholders.

Business basics will be included, such as learning how to formulate a mission statement, goals and key performance indicators. This is a key factor for any business analyst to understand because this sets context for any future analysis work you will do. Other business tools you will learn about include PESTLE and SWOT Analysis.

Software Development Life Cycle (SDLC) – This forms the backbone of a foundation business analysis course and is the framework for explaining not only the SDLC itself but how business analysis fits into this life cycle.

An overview of requirements elicitation and management should be covered too but the focus of this course is not to delve into too many of the details around requirements elicitation and management.

Finally, a good foundation Business Analysis course will also touch on the main modelling techniques. These include data modelling and process modelling primarily. Again, don't expect to become an expert modeller at the end of this type of course.

So you may notice that a good foundation course in Business Analysis doesn't necessarily include much about requirements or modelling techniques yet! It is important that this course covers all the foundation concepts of Business Analysis and touch on every major topic that you can expect to come across in your career as a Business Analyst.

The Requirements Engineering Course
Other good courses to start with include Requirements Engineering courses. These courses will teach you about requirements elicitation techniques such as workshop facilitation, requirement interviews and observation. It will teach you about writing good requirements, managing all your requirements, requirements traceability and managing change to requirements. It is a great type of course to attend either after you've done the foundation business analysis course or you can do these two types of courses in close succession.

The Modelling courses – when do they become useful?

Once you have started doing more requirements related tasks on a project you will develop the need to learn some core modelling techniques. You will start to find that your stakeholders will need to see workflow, use case type diagrams or data related diagrams when talking to you about the finer details of their requirements. Having said this, as a Business Analyst you need to keep in mind when presenting stakeholders with diagrams that they will most likely not want to see highly technical diagrams either! You will learn with experience how to judge what level of diagram your stakeholders feel comfortable with. Remember, although a picture says a thousand words, there will be stakeholders who doesn't want to look at any formal Business Analysis diagrams. You do however need to master the skills around modelling to ensure you are able to document your requirements in a way that the more technical teams can understand too.

Unified modelling language or UML

A good place to start these days for a Business Analysis modelling course topic is at the Unified Modelling Language or more widely known as UML. It is important to note that this is not a methodology but a unified language using different models. The great thing about UML is that you can choose what you learn about first because it consists of a suite of different models with clearly defined purposes. There are some very good business focused models to start with when you learn UML such as use case diagrams and activity diagrams. In all my experience as a Business Analyst those are probably the two most important UML diagrams from a business analysis perspective to learn about when dealing with your non-technical audience. The fantastic thing is that the more technically minded architects and developers all understand UML really well and can translate your diagrams into their technical models seamlessly. Other good UML modelling to understand is the object or class model and also the sequence diagram.

Business Process Modelling Notation (BPMN)

BPMN based courses are good to do if you are planning to work on large business process transformation programs or if you would like to specialize and become a Business Process Analyst. This is the industry standard and an accepted business process methodology to follow. Lots of companies use this standard and therefore it is great course to put on your resume.

Specialized Courses

You may be shouting – but what about agile? Yes, agile. That is a great specialization to consider when you develop your skills as a Business Analyst. Agile courses are in high demand and lots of people are very interested to develop their skills in this. That is absolutely fantastic and should be pursued.

Something to keep in mind though is that at the moment (and this might change in future) there are two camps of projects: Those who are agile (or aspiring to be) and those who are more traditionally waterfall based. If you like to work at highly interactive and shorter bursts of activity on a project or program, go with agile! It essentially uses the SDLC but manages the cycles in a highly controlled but really short and sharply fashion which allows very good response times with business requirement change. People, who go onto true Agile projects, will not easily return to other more traditional ones. There is however still a huge market for more traditional project which has lots of other highly rewarding attributes as well.

Soft skills courses

As business analysts we really must remember to include soft skill courses into our development plans. We depend heavily on our relationship building skills to perform our jobs and the better we can get our interpersonal communication skills, the more rewarding our outcome will be. Consider doing a presentation skills course, a rapport building course and it is always a good idea to include a leadership skills course too.

The truth about face to face training

You don't need to be in a classroom based training course to be able to do your required Business Analysis training. Don't get me wrong, it is great if you have the money or your company is willing to pay for a classroom based training course but these days there are many alternative ways to also develop your Business Analysis knowledge.

So what else can you do for training then?

Well, I would like to start by saying that I have been lucky with classroom based Business Analyst training. I had my university degree and multiple ISEB and other classroom based courses to attend and covered the whole classroom based training thing from every possible angle. Now this enables me to tell you that it is not strictly necessary for you to attend a classroom training to be able to be trained as a Business Analyst. It makes things easier because you are presented with all the learning on a platter, but it not a requirement to be successful when gaining your Business Analysis education.

Great, let's look at some alternatives to Business Analysis classroom based training:

- Reading books and online articles

Some really good books are available on Business Analysis which can assist you in getting to grips with Business Analysis or specific interest areas of Business Analysis.

- Attend webinars and Business Analysis talks in your city.

If your city doesn't have talks you can attend regularly then there is always the online webinars to attend.

- Learn 'on the job' from an experienced Business Analyst

This is a great practical way to learn new skills. Start by reviewing their documents and then have a go yourself to either write the requirements or to draw the diagrams!

- Ask questions in online forums

There are some really good BA forums out there. I recommend LinkedIn; they have a very strong Business Analysis group community! Find a group that suits your needs, and join them. Make sure you follow the group etiquette when you start a discussion!

- Do online courses or buy "How to" DVD's on specific topics.

There are some good online courses starting up which is also a nice flexible way of being trained. These courses gives you the flexibility to do them when you have time (unless it is real time online course of course!) and you can be based anywhere in the world! Again, as with everything, this may require some research before you invest money in these courses.

Which Business Analysis certification is right for you?

There are a few business analysis certifications in the industry now which have developed during the last 10 years or so. It is great for Business Analysts because it is developing our profession in the industry and it's bringing it up to par with Project Management and other professional careers. Every year that goes by, these certifications are becoming more prominent and better known. It is great idea to get certified as a professional Business Analyst. Let me explain the main certifications out there and give you a clue as to what they are, where they come from and what they can mean to you in your market place. Just so you know, I hold the CBAP® certification and also hold 5 ISEB Business Analysis certifications. I was also part of the CCBA® exam review committee, so have some insights there too.

"None of us can change our yesterdays, but all of us can change our tomorrows" – Colin Powell

ISEB Business Analysis Certifications

These certifications are developed by the educational stream of the British Computer Society's (BCS) ISEB. They have a good variety of Business Analysis courses and you can roll it up into a Diploma if you so choose or you simply do the individual certifications if this is what you want. This Business Analysis certification is well known in the United Kingdom (UK) and hence a good solid path to follow in terms of certifications if you live in the UK. A good idea is to search your local country's job search websites and see whether they ask for ISEB certifications and therefore know about the ISEB certifications in your industry. I do know that there are other countries that also support the ISEB stream of certifications and therefore it is a good idea to do your research locally to see whether your country is one of them. You should do this local check for all the certifications described here because it's a good rule of thumb to get certified by a professional body which is also recognized in your country.

Choose the ISEB Business Analysis certifications if:

* You want to pick specific topics to learn about and get certified in that topic individually.
* You are new to business analysis or haven't really ever had any formal Business Analysis training before.
* You are based in the UK or a country that recognizes the ISEB range of Business Analysis certifications in the industry.
* You are able to attend online or class room based courses prior to sitting the certification exams. Make sure you work through sample exam questions for the ISEB certification exams.

Disadvantages to keep in mind

- With the ISEB certifications the content is not based on one single source of business analysis reference materials.
- Most business analysts would need to attend an ISEB endorsed class room based course prior to attempting the exams. This potentially can become quite costly, especially if you have to fund it yourself!

The International Institute of Business Analysis (IIBA) Certified Business Analysis Professional (CBAP®) designation

This certification requires a lot of pure business analysis experience and is heavily based on practical hands-on experience in a wide variety of knowledge areas. It is like the "crème-de-la-crème" of business analysis certifications internationally. It was the first Business Analysis certification developed by the International Institute of Business Analysis, better known as the IIBA. This certification is best tackled as part of a CBAP® study group.

IIBA Certified Competent Business Analyst (CCBA®) designation

They have recently (in the last 2 years) launched a mid level Business Analysis certification, called the Certified Competent

Business Analyst (CCBA®). Both of these IIBA certifications are based on knowledge coming from the Business Analysis Body of Knowledge (BABOK®). These certifications are being compared to the PMI project management certifications in terms of level of professionalism and level of experience required. They are both very good certifications to pursue if you are based in the USA, Canada, Australia, Singapore and some other predominantly English speaking countries. This certification is also best tackled as part of a CCBA® Study Group.

Choose the IIBA CCBA® or CBAP® certifications if:
You want a dedicated international Business Analysis institute to endorse your certification. The IIBA is becoming the most recognized Business Analysis institute in the world and many large corporations are starting to integrate the BABOK and Competency models into their organizations.

You are a mid- to senior level business analyst (with a minimum of 3.5 years experience) and want your career path to develop into a Professional Business Analyst with a recognized qualification to boot!

You want to be one of only a few in the world! There are still less than 2000 CBAP® certified business analysts in the world, which makes it a very exclusive certification to have which gives you the competitive advantage when it comes to job interviews! You don't need to attend special courses prior to attempting one of these exams. You simply study the BABOK®.

Disadvantages to keep in mind

For both these certifications the Business Analyst have to learn the BABOK in its entirety. This can be very daunting and time intensive for some Business Analysts to do.

There is no suitable IIBA certification for entry level Business Analysts. You need at a minimum 3.5 years of pure proven Business Analysis experience to attempt the CCBA® exam.

Other certifications exist too but the above 2 options are your most prominent certifications for Business Analysts today!

The following few sections will discuss these certification requirements in more detail. Read them, be aware of each certification's requirement and decide whether this is something you would like to attempt or aspire to in future years if you don't already qualify.

ISEB Business Analysis Certifications

As mentioned earlier in the discussion around the ISEB certifications, these certifications are great because it is modular and can be tailored to your specific career path as a business analyst. Having completed many of these certifications myself, I can confidently say that they are very relevant and of a very high standard. They are certainly based on industry best practice and practically applicable in your real project life!

Some specific ISEB certification types are listed below:
Foundation based certifications
These are great internationally recognized certifications to obtain before delving into anything too specialized. It provides a great foundation for Business Analysts who are either just starting their careers or experienced Business Analysts with limited formal qualifications.

- IT Enabled Business Change
- Business Analysis
- Commercial Awareness

Entry Requirements: No specific entry requirements to sit the exams for foundation based certifications. Although it is recommended to do an online, self help or classroom based course, this is not mandatory.

Practitioner based certifications
The ISEB practitioner based business analysis certifications are allowing you to choose which areas you would like to steer your career path down.

- Certificate in Benefits and Business Acceptance
- Certificate in Business Analysis Practice
- Certificate in Data Management Essentials
- Certificate in Modelling Business Processes
- Certificate in Requirements Engineering

Entry Requirements: No specific entry requirements to sit the exams for practitioner based certifications. Although it is recommended to do an online, self help or classroom based course, this is not mandatory.

Higher Qualification

If you wanted to obtain a higher formal Business Analysis qualification, this is the ultimate outcome of all your ISEB certifications. It has minimum requirements of certifications to be completed and entails an oral exam with a designated ISEB examiner. The oral exam is based on your ability to apply your knowledge to your role as a Business Analyst in practice.

BCS International Diploma in Business Analysis

Entry Requirements: There are some entry requirements, which you should research before embarking on this ISEB Business Analysis career path development journey.

6. Closing Reflections

I trust you have enjoyed reading this book and that you have learned from my experiences. Business Analysis is a fantastic career with great challenge and enormous scope for professional development. My closing remarks are simply:

Embrace the opportunities this career provides, take pride in your results and always be focused on your end goal.

With Sincerity

Esta Lessing

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About the Author

Esta Lessing is a Coach of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) and Certified Business Analyst Professional (CBAP)® currently living in Melbourne, Australia.

Esta started her career out with the Johannesburg Stock Exchange in South Africa where she worked as a Technical Analyst on the trading floor 1997. She changed her career shortly after that to take up her very first Business Analysis role with Arthur Andersen in 1998. She was selected to work on a variety of EMEIA based projects early on in her career which allowed significant European travel and she gained valuable global project experience. After a few very long trips to London, Amsterdam and Germany she decided to move across to England where she continued her role in the London based head office. Esta spent a total of 6 years in London working for both public sector and private sector companies as a Business Analyst. She not only studied with the London University during this time but completed 5 BCS ISEB Business Analysis certifications. After all those long winters, she decided to migrate to Melbourne Australia in 2006. Esta certified as a CBAP shortly after arriving in Melbourne.

Business Analysis career coaching, mentoring and development programs have been an integral part of her experience during the last 6 years. Esta remains in Melbourne where she is now running her own Business Analysis Consultancy company, Business Analysis Excellence, aspiring to assist thousands of Business Analysts worldwide with her skills and experiences gained as a Business Analyst and Professional Career Specialist.

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