

# Analysts Anonymous

Informed comment for the BA and Business Change Community



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### A note from the editor

Welcome to the Spring edition of Analysts Anonymous, and what a sprightly edition it is.

We have the highlights of a survey of the BA community, and there are articles for you if you are looking to be an Expert BA or would like to test yourself in the world of intelligence; that's business intelligence.

We also have news of this year's BA Conference Europe in September, including a discount for AA subscribers, and details of the 2012 BA of the Year award.

Finally, there's an interesting question for you to ponder: Are good analysts born or made? We'd like to hear your views.

Happy reading.

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## State of the Nation - UK IIBA® Business Analysis Survey 2011

*David Avis and Joseph Da Silva present the highlights of wide-ranging research into the state of business analysis in the UK*

Whenever we're at networking events with other business analysts, people's ears prick up when the discussions turn to "how does business analysis work in your organisation?" We all know what business analysis is, but it's hard to get a picture of the profession in one single snapshot.

*84% of Business Analysts feel that the profession is gaining in recognition.*

The UK Business Analysis Survey was launched in November 2011 to provide just this view, covering areas like techniques, processes, recruitment, training and many others. Sponsored by the UK IIBA and British Gas, the results of the survey create a UK industry benchmark for business analysis for the first time. It provides a picture that we've only had anecdotally in the past and will aid business analysts and those working with BAs too.



We wanted to share with you our thoughts on the survey results; our personal interpretation of what we feel this information says about the state of business analysis in the UK today. Here are the highlights:

- Business analysis is a strong industry, and it's growing. The vast majority of BAs are confident that the profession is growing; they feel valued and, despite the UK recession, are confident in their ability to find a new role at a similar level quickly if they were to lose their current one.
- Diversity across market sectors is incredibly encouraging. Whilst about half of BAs are working in Financial Services, the other half are spread across 54 different industries. Geographic locations show us that BAs are also being employed widely across the UK.
- Business analysis in the UK is a highly professional workforce with over two thirds of BAs having worked in the field for over 5 years and over 80% holding at least one ISEB qualification.
- And finally a measure that we, and the rest of the UK IIBA Board, are incredibly proud of – the UK IIBA is receiving the backing it needs from its members, with 97% of them recommending the organisation to other BAs. It's a headline of which many other professional associations would be envious.

*97% of members would recommend the UK IIBA to other Business Analysts*

But there's still work to do, most notably around the wider communication of what a business analyst actually is. It's vital that we do this to realise the full potential of the role. Over half of BAs feel that the role is not well understood in their current organisation and that's perhaps not surprising when you look at the data showing the many different ways that the role is used (services offered, tools & techniques used, etc.). While it would de-value the profession to pigeonhole BAs, more must be done to ensure that the role is understood in the wider arena. Hopefully these survey results help that.

*Half of all projects are conducted using waterfall development*

To reinforce that point, nearly nine out of ten BAs feel that increasing investment in business analysis within their company or practice would de-risk projects, so we have to look at why that is. If organisations have the opportunity to de-risk projects why are they not taking it?

It goes without saying that the UK IIBA will work to support this agenda and help to increase investment in business analysis by helping others to understand what the role is; that will become part of our strategy over the next two years.

The survey results can be downloaded from the UK IIBA website:

<http://uk.theiiba.org/index.php/about-us/basurvey>

**David Avis and Joseph Da Silva are, respectively, Director and President of IIBA UK.**



# Business Intelligence – another role for the BA?

*James Cadle explores the evolution and application of business intelligence and its relevance to business analysts.*

A lot of organisations are now getting interested in, and even excited about, business intelligence (BI) and it's not hard to see why:

- Some organisations have realised what a wealth of information they have in their various repositories and systems (not all of them computerised of course) and are thinking about how best to exploit this resource.
- Other organisations have become painfully aware of what they don't know – about their marketplace, their customers and their competitors for instance – and are trying to put this situation right.

Before proceeding any further, though, it might be as well to define what I mean by 'business intelligence'. I'm indebted to Martin Maya, of BA Support Ltd, who drew my attention to this rather good definition, from Hans Peter Luhn of IBM, as long ago as 1957:

*"The ability to apprehend the relationships of presented facts in such a way to guide action towards desired goals."*

A couple of things strike one immediately about this definition. First, it's clear that BI is more than the collection of facts (though that is certainly needed); the benefit comes from understanding the relationships – in other words, making relevant connections between the facts.

The second thing is that utilising the information needs to be directed towards the goals of the organisation, whatever they are.



Another relevant concept here is the question that has been asked since the dawn of the computer age – what is the difference between data and information? Data consists of the raw matter; information is the data organised and presented in a meaningful way. It's bit like bricks, mortar, doors and windows not of themselves making a house; they only constitute a house when the architect and the builder organise them in a meaningful way.

Of course BI, as a concept, has not suddenly appeared from nowhere, and it represents an evolutionary stage. Earlier stages on the route include the initial use of computers to store and manipulate data; the development of enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems that hopefully get an organisation using data in a consistent way; data warehouses to store and supply the organisation's data; and customer relationship management software that analyses (some) data in a meaningful and insightful way. There are also related concepts such as decision support systems and executive information systems.

But BI is more than these things – it is a way of thinking about the organisation and its information that treats the information as one of its key resources and, if it is a commercial organisation, a source of competitive advantage – alongside other resources such as its design and manufacturing capability and the talent of its people.



Three main features of BI can be summarised as:

- Reporting. Good quality reporting enables problems within an organisation to be highlighted before they become too serious and for corrective actions to be identified.
- Data mining. A major challenge with any organisation, and particularly a large one, is that of sifting through vast masses of data to find the real 'gold nuggets' – the key pieces of important information. Business intelligence provides the filters that enable this sifting.
- Support for other business processes.

The key benefits of effective BI can be summarised as:

- A single version of the truth across the whole organisation, thus avoiding all the waste of time and energy that is involved in reconciling data from disparate systems and processes.
- Analysis and decision-making. Quite clearly, the better the quality of information available to managers, the better chance they will have of making the right strategic and tactical decisions.
- In turn, better information enables an organisation to respond more quickly and effectively to changes in its environment.

It enables the organisation to identify its key strengths and weaknesses, as a first step to exploiting the former and dealing with the latter.

- So what might be the role of a business analyst in respect of BI? I think we can identify at least four ways in which a BA has a key contribution to make:
- Finding out what the business's requirements are. This is classic requirements engineering but, with regard to BI, it is clearly important to get behind what managers say they want and to work out what they really need. For instance, a manager may say she needs an exhaustive report on the performance of her division each month but, with a little prompting, she may come to realise that what she really needs are a few key performance indicators that highlight good and bad areas for her attention.
- Defining the data requirements. Again, the BA is in the best position to analyse the data the organisation currently has and what it needs for the future.
- Helping business users to envisage the myriad forms of output that are available and which are the most suitable for their purposes. Scenario modelling and prototyping can prove very helpful here.
- Understanding any business or technology constraints that have to be taken into account when balancing what the organisation would ideally like with what can realistically be achieved.

**James Cadle is director and company secretary of AssistKD.**



# The Importance of Personal Skills for the Expert Business Analyst

*In the last edition of Analysts Anonymous Lawrence Darvill outlined the case for better recognising the higher level, or what is sometimes termed the expert, business analyst. In this follow-up article he provides an insight into the relative capabilities that constitute higher-level expertise and the importance of highly developed personal skills.*

The skills make-up outlined here is based on the findings of a workshop attended by around 20 BA practice leads held in October 2011. These discussions resulted in the circulation of an initial white paper to approximately 50 BA practice leads in November 2011, which saw further valuable input provided.

## Overview

Professional business analysts need to demonstrate competence in three areas: personal skills relating to behaviours and attitude; professional skills relating to techniques and approaches applied within business analysis work; knowledge relating to business in general and their specialist domain in particular.

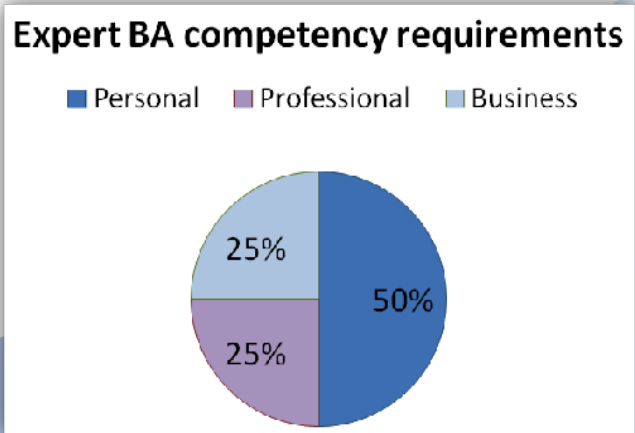
It is vital that all business analysts have this holistic basis for their skills given the range and variety of work they may be required to carry out. However, the relative weighting of the competence areas will vary depending upon the different levels of BA role.

At the entry, or junior BA, level much of the work will be focused on initial requirements elicitation and there is likely to be less engagement with stakeholders of any seniority. Where there is such engagement, it is likely that more experienced BAs will direct the work. As a result, the relative weighting will be focused towards the professional rather than the personal or business skills.

More senior BAs will tend to have greater levels of engagement with stakeholders and will be expected to understand the business context in more depth. As a result, the relative weightings will begin to move towards the personal and business areas and reduce the emphasis on professional skills.

At the expert level, the engagement with senior stakeholders and the ability to comprehend business issues increases significantly. The Expert BA needs to be differentiated from the senior BA by demonstrating exceptional ability to improve their organisation and deliver the strategic improvements. The personal skills area becomes the most significant, again at the expense of the specific professional skills.

The suggested weightings for an expert BA are shown in the diagram on the right:





## Personal Skills

These are the behavioural skills that are vital if business analysts are to work effectively with stakeholders. Examples of such skills are: presentational skills, stakeholder relationship management, leadership and coaching.

A distinction has to be drawn between personal attributes, for example enthusiasm or emotional intelligence, and demonstrable skills. While these attributes are essential to develop such personal skills they do not constitute the skills themselves.

Further, it is important to recognise the difference between roles or tasks, and skills. For example, change management is a task requiring several skills and as such has not been included in the list of skills. However, it is envisaged that any BA working within this area would need to acquire a number of relevant skills.

## Professional skills

In considering the professional skills, SFIAv5 skill profiles have been used where possible. SFIA provides a universally applicable and adaptable framework within which skills are defined, enabling assessment of competency. Each SFIA skill is described in overview and then further defined at the relevant levels of competency. The Expert BA would be expected to perform at SFIA levels 5-7 (each defined skill should be performed at least at level 5 but some will be at levels 6 or 7).

SFIA clarifies these levels as follows:

- Level 5 – ensure and advise
- Level 6 – initiate, influence
- Level 7 – set strategy, inspire, mobilise

SFIA is used in many organisations as a basis for creating career development frameworks and detailed descriptions of skill requirements for roles at various grades or bands. Further, senior management and HR managers may use SFIA to provide accepted reference points for benchmarking levels of skill. This approach also enables comparison between roles for grading/salary purposes. Aligning BA skills to a universally accepted framework provides an effective starting point for establishing salary parity with other disciplines requiring comparable skill levels.

Professional skills will include; strategic analysis, benefits management and business modelling.

## Business

The business skills were identified at the workshop and reflect the importance of extended business knowledge for the Expert BA. It is anticipated that some of this may have been gained from working in other aligned roles such as programme or business manager.

Business skills might include market awareness and organisational architecture.



*A copy of the white paper providing a comprehensive list of required skills is available by request from [lawrence.darvill@assistkd.com](mailto:lawrence.darvill@assistkd.com).*

*In a future article we will consider how an Expert BA might be identified and recognised, plus the suitability of potential accrediting bodies.*

*It is worth noting that it is not anticipated that a certification would require an Expert BA to possess the entire set of skills. What is clear is that the emphasis will very much be on the development and achievement of a high level of personal skills. This may be worth further consideration in the light of discussion around Nature v Nurture raised in this month's final article by George Sadler.*

## **Business Analysis Conference Europe 2012**

24-26 September 2012, London

The BA Conference Europe is taking place in London again this September, and there are discounted tickets available to AA subscribers.

Business analysis is growing at a phenomenal pace. Organisations are increasingly recognising the importance of business analysis in achieving successful change and many are investing heavily in developing this capability. The skills and techniques of business analysts are invaluable in shaping and forming business change overall as well as making the most of opportunities presented by new technologies.

The Business Analysis Conference Europe 2012, presented in association with the IIBA UK and BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT, provides an unparalleled networking opportunity for business analysts from across Europe and beyond. It provides an interactive forum where business analysts can meet, discuss and debate the competencies needed to rise to the challenges faced by their organisations today and in the future. The focus for this year's conference is on excellence in business analysis practice and how business analysis relates to other roles essential to business improvement.

### **Conference highlights include:**

-13 pre-conference workshops

- 4 conference tracks:

- BA Fundamentals - for business analysts who wish to develop their knowledge and skills with regard to some of the key aspects of business analysis, including the BA career and the techniques necessary to support it.
- BA in Projects - business analysts spend most of their time working within projects and programmes. This track will explore the positive contributions made by business analysis to the success of change initiatives.





- The Consultant BA – aimed at experienced business analysts who may be in a senior role and wish to extend their knowledge and skills. The track will cover topics in three key areas: professional techniques, personal behaviours and business acumen.
- BA and Beyond - aimed at business analysts who wish to extend their knowledge and awareness of related disciplines. Like any other role, business analysts do not work in isolation. They need to work closely alongside, and in partnership with, specialists in other related disciplines from both business and solution delivery perspectives.

Keynotes including:

- Tony Buzan, Mind Maps for Business – Delegates will find out how to use Mind Maps to assist them in their business and personal lives. Delegates will learn the latest tips and tricks from the originator of the technique.
- Ben Goldacre, Bad Science - We are all vulnerable to being misled. "How do you know?" Hear how bad science can influence your business thinking. Ben specialises in unpicking scientific claims made by scaremongering journalists, government reports, pharmaceutical corporations, PR companies and quacks.
- David Clarke, Chief Executive, BCS - Will the Business Change Profession be up to the Challenge of the 5th Wave of Computing? David is widely acknowledged as having transformed BCS into the customer-service oriented professional body for the IT and Communications profession it is today.
- Christine Ashton, CIO, BG Group plc - Hear What Innovation Means for the Rapidly Changing Business Environment from the person responsible for the global delivery of information services and the development of strategies and solutions that continuously improve the group's ways of working at BG Group plc.

An opportunity to learn from the successes and challenges of other organisations. Case studies and contributors include American Express, British Gas, Centrica, Ernst & Young, GlaxoSmithKline, IBM, ITV, John Lewis, Lloyds Banking Group, NFU Mutual, BG Group, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, Shell Nigeria, Skandia/Old Mutual, Specsavers, Syngenta, Totaljobs Group, UK Government, Virgin Media and Waitrose.

Visit the [conference website](#) for the full conference programme or e-mail [customerservice@irmuk.co.uk](mailto:customerservice@irmuk.co.uk)/call IRM UK on +44 (0)20 8866 8366. For a 10% discount on your conference ticket, quote discount code AA10 when you register.



# Business Analyst of the Year 2012

AssistKD are delighted to announce their association with IIBA® UK Chapter and sponsorship of The Business Analyst of Year Award 2012.

The Business Analyst of the Year Award 2012 will be given to the person who has demonstrated the most significant contribution to improving organisational performance during the previous year. The Award will be presented at the BA Conference Europe to be held in London on 24-26 September 2012. The winner will be selected from five finalists, who will all be given free entry to the Conference.



In this Olympic year, the themes of the Award are based on the Olympic motto – Citius, Altius, Fortius, which translates as Faster, Higher, Stronger. In relation to the Business Analysis of the Year Award 2012, the motto represents:

<b>Faster:</b>	How has your work helped your organisation to respond more quickly to the challenges that face it?
<b>Higher:</b>	How have you assisted your organisation in achieving more or providing better services to the organisation’s customers?
<b>Stronger:</b>	How have you contributed to making your organisation more resilient and adaptable to changes in the business environment?

Martin Pearson, Marketing Director of AssistKD, sponsors of the award for the sixth year running, explains the decision to continue their involvement: “We sponsor the Business Analyst of the Year Award for three primary reasons: first, we believe that business analysis is an important discipline, offering significant advantages to organisations; second we believe that the business analysis community deserves recognition for the work it carries out; and third, as a specialist company we have worked with a wide variety of organisations and know that there are numerous knowledgeable, experienced and talented business analysts whose achievements should be celebrated”.

If you or a colleague would like to register your interest in the Business Analyst of the Year Award 2012 and receive further information please contact [chris.martin@assistkd.com](mailto:chris.martin@assistkd.com), call 01844 211665 or visit [www.assistkd.com](http://www.assistkd.com)



# Good BAs: Nature or Nurture?

*George Sadler, a manager in Change Delivery at npower, has posed a question on which many, I'm sure, will have an opinion: **are good business analysts born or trained?***

*"I am a firm advocate of nature over nurture," says George. "By this I mean that exceptional business analysts are born with certain traits, each of which has equal weighting in my view: persistence, resilience and a need to know."*



George's first school report commented that "the guns of the Western Front wouldn't move him" and he was a voracious reader of Look and Learn, a weekly educational magazine of the time. Is that evidence of a propensity towards business analysis or just a coincidence?

A current discussion in the Modern Analyst group on LinkedIn echoes this idea. It suggests that the majority of all business analysts have common elements in their personalities (based on a study of Myers Briggs type indicators. Use this shortened link <http://ow.ly/aBrw9>, login to LinkedIn and scroll down to the 'What's your personality type?' discussion to read more or even take a test).

Do you agree with the idea that business analysts are born, or are the capabilities learnt? We'd be interested to hear what you think – email me on [AA-editor@writethetalk.com](mailto:AA-editor@writethetalk.com).