

White Paper

Making Business Analysis Documentation Accessible to Stakeholders

WP0033 | May 2012



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This White Paper focuses on the ‘art and science’ of working effectively with business stakeholders during the analysis of an enterprise or when working on projects and how to get them to buy-in to modeling techniques rather than the reading of copious textual documents. I use the words ‘art and science’ mainly because of the natural complexity that arises when working with people. Consider the complexities in parent/child, husband/wife, brother/sister and manager/subordinate relationships. In all cases, individuals no matter how young or old, how learned or not have their own thinking preferences around behaviour, opinions, habits, likes and dislikes, entertainment, sport and how they wish to apply their knowledge and wisdom to their jobs and life in general. Trying to harness these different feelings and views towards a common goal is difficult to say the least. It becomes even more difficult in an organizational environment when you throw into the complexity pool hierarchical job titles, politics, favouritism, unclear job descriptions, unclear work measurements, different skill sets, rewards, ethics, different technologies and so on. Yet this is the situation BA practitioners constantly find themselves in when building the organization architecture domain views and especially when working on a project. Business Analysis practitioners spend the majority of their time working with stakeholders and analysing their requirements, presenting them for review and presenting them to the solution team for development. A stakeholder usually has all their knowledge in their head and seldom is it documented in one place and available for sharing across the organization. Thus they are placed high on the BA practitioner’s radar to build relationships with and to capture their business knowledge and get

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requirements right for a project. Most of the requirements are presented in diagrams, models or prototypes of screens, report layouts that mirror software design specifications.

The most important skill required of any Enterprise Architect and Business Analysis practitioner is effective **Communication**. When communicating to individuals or groups, no matter whether it involves the performance of enterprise architecture tasks or project tasks it must be tailored to suit their interests in order to be effective. The communication of requirements can involve the formal presentation of requirements packages or informal slide presentations, flip charts or white boards. Regardless of the level of formality and materials used to present requirements, each requirement must be analysed, documented and presented using standardized principles and notations that are easy to learn and easy to reuse. The definition of Business Analysis is:

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

A Guide to the Business Analysis Body of Knowledge® (BABOK®)

Who are stakeholders?

A stakeholder is any individual or organization actively involved in, affected by, or influential to the organization’s architecture and/or project initiatives.

Good analysis practice includes the use of **Modeling** techniques to communicate with stakeholders in the business, in IT or those external to the organization such as customers and suppliers. Modeling is the creation of diagrams and text that are representative of a business area and that depict the business area’s relationships to other internal and external components. A **model** is a representation of reality that includes text, diagrams, metrics, and other elements. Measurements are collected at a task level or process level.

The Business Analysis Body of Knowledge® (BABOK®) describes and defines business analysis as a discipline, rather than defining business analysis as the responsibilities of a person with the job title of business analyst (which may vary significantly between organizations). Business analysis may be performed by people with job titles such as systems analyst, process analyst, data analyst, requirements analyst, product manager, developer, QA analyst, business architect, solution architect, data architect, or consultant, among others. Therefore I use the generic term ‘business analysis (BA) practitioner who covers all business

analysis activities from architecture (or enterprise analysis) work with a global view of the organization, to those tasks performed within the scope (boundaries) of a project. In all cases and at all levels of business analysis work, building relationships with stakeholders is fundamental to success as is mastering the art of modeling and using best judgment to determine which modeling techniques are appropriate to use in a given situation.

The best way to work effectively with stakeholders is to understand their motives, personal biases, strengths, weaknesses, working experiences and expertise. The more we know someone, the easier and faster ideas can be communicated. Active listening is another crucial skill for BA practitioners as are well-thought-out questioning techniques. Listening, educating, mentoring and guiding stakeholders to achieve clear requirements and to develop solutions that meet business needs is key to good business analysis practice.

BA Practitioner Roles

Although every organization may be different, there are common roles with which a BA practitioner will be working on a regular basis. The most common roles are:

- Executive Steering Committee
- Executive Business Sponsor
- Portfolio Managers
- Project Managers
- Subject Matter Experts and users
- EA Architect Domain specialists and other BA professionals
- Vendor Consultants
- IT Developers
- QA Analysts
- Usability professionals
- Data Architect/Administrator/Analyst
- Database design/administrator
- And many more.

A subject matter expert (SME) is a person who has a particular expertise needed on a project whether it is expertise on the business side, on the technical side or outside the organization. The acronym SME is popular because it is used to describe anyone who has some form of expertise needed on an EA, IT or business project. SMEs are not created equally so many challenges can be expected with personality types,

working styles and motivations that will either have a negative or positive impact on a project. Understanding and winning over SMEs is not easy but is reliant on the BA practitioner's ability to facilitate masterful and meaningful communication interactions.

Outputs may be produced at any level of communication formality, from verbal discussions (face-to-face meetings; focus group sessions; JAD (Joint Application Design) workshops) with affected stakeholders to being captured into a software tool and placed under strict change control. The form of an output is dependent on the type of initiative underway, standards adopted by the organization and best judgment by the BA practitioner as to the appropriate way to address the information needs of key stakeholders and how to present the needs. Common standards have been created that describe acceptable practices for writing textual requirements (Technical Writing Principles) and creating models or diagrams (Modeling Notations). Different models are used during business analysis efforts which include capturing the attributes or 'meta-data' that is pertinent to the completion and communication of the model.

Use Collaboration Tools

Working with stakeholders located in different buildings or geographic areas compounds the difficulty of shared information and communications. This challenging aspect of the work will benefit greatly from the use of collaboration tools such as iServer by Orbus Software. The more adept BA practitioners become at managing information across distances, the more successful they will be. However the tool is less important than the ability to present the information in an accurate and concise way and at the correct level of detail for the different stakeholders. When presenting information to a group for review or approval, a shared view of the information is very useful to 'walk' the group through the model and supporting information. Virtual collaboration is more challenging than face-to-face as the advantage of watching the audience's reaction and reading their understanding is removed.

A good collaboration tool allows multiple users to edit a document/model and to log issues where there are concerns and issues can be addressed by the document/model owner instantly. In this way, time is not wasted in dealing with matters and stakeholders tend to become more confident in the accuracy of the information. Both diagrams and textual representations may be developed or refined in this manner. The more people involved, the more difficult document/model sharing and control becomes however winning stakeholders over is essential to the success of the BA effort, making a collaboration tool an essential resource for BA practitioners.

Use standard Modeling Notations

Most application development methodologies were developed by software developers and focus on how to develop software based on the assumption that requirements are fully understood and approved. This assumption is basically false. Methodologies have spent decades trying to speed up the development process and to steer developers toward techniques and tools that will produce high quality code that is easy to maintain and reuse. They have NOT focused their efforts on ensuring the business needs are clearly understood before designing the software. The reason for this boils down to the complexities and differences between various initiatives and a 'one-fits-all' approach is not possible. A smart methodology would need a sophisticated system to ask thousands of questions about the initiative and based on the responses, recommend the right techniques to use. Thus expert BA practitioners know that most organizations do not use formal methodologies and if they do profess to have one, it is frequently ignored by project teams. A BA practitioner needs to understand that software is made up of a group of objects or components that work together to accomplish a business goal. The interconnections between these components are what make a software system so complex. Each component interfaces with others and expects the others to perform. When combined, the components provide powerful functionality. However when the system's complexity is overlaid with business complexity, customer interactions, Actor permissions, End-user needs etc. the holistic picture becomes extremely complex to communicate with the result that BA practitioners must understand different modeling notations that support different software methodologies such as Structured Analysis, Information Engineering (BPM) and Object Orientation (UML) to communicate accurately to different stakeholder groups.

Mainstream literature recognizes the validity and effectiveness of use cases (UML) as a technique for gathering and capturing system requirements [Cockburn, 2001]. Use case Modeling is a requirements engineering technique aimed at understanding the functional specifications of the modelled system from the perspective of the parties (or actors) interacting with it. The lack of consistent guidelines in use case modeling also contributes to its misuse or misinterpretation [Lilly, 1999]. A Use Case is defined as:

'a description of a set of sequence of actions, including variants, that a system performs that yields an observable result or value to a particular actor'.

Use case modeling is a popular technique for representing the functional requirements of an information system. OO (UML) techniques are compatible with structured techniques; both show requirements in different ways. **Structured analysis separates the data and the**

process considering each one independently, before bringing them together to complete the model. OO techniques consider the data and the process as closely inter-dependent. They are held together in each notation within each class or object.

Flowcharting is a common standard used for structured analysis and workflow models are used to depict process behaviour. Flowcharting and BPM (Business Process Modeling) both follow structured analysis methods and represent requirements from a processing and sequencing perspective.

BPMN (Business Process Modeling Notation) is a common standard used when modeling behaviour or the sequential steps needed to accomplish an end result. Behaviour can be shown at a high level using a Value Chain diagram or at a low or atomic level when communicating activities or tasks that are performed by either a human or a system.

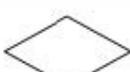
Each BPMN modeling convention type is supported by some common diagram notations which are used to communicate models in a consistent way. (See appendix)

Conclusion

In all cases of analysis work (Enterprise level or Project level) it is the responsibility of the BA practitioners to educate Stakeholders on the recognition and usage of the various standard symbols that are used for modeling. This is necessary for consistent articulation and understanding of the business represented in the model and given the complexity of the stakeholder community. A sophisticated central repository is necessary to maintain template and modeling standards and to help the BA community to work as a tightly integrated team.

Appendix

Standard Flowchart Diagrams

Standard Flowchart Symbol	Name	Notes
	Process	Represents a defined operation or group of operations resulting in a change in value, form, or location.
	Predefined process	Represents a process that is specified elsewhere, such as a subroutine.
	Manual operation	Represents an activity performed by a human .
	Preparation	Represents modification of an instruction or group of instructions made in order to affect some subsequent activity.
	Decision	Represents a decision having a single entry; but possibly where there may be a number of alternative exits, one and only one of which may be activated.
	Data	Represents data in general.
	Stored data	Represents data stored in a form suitable for processing.
	Direct access storage	Represents data directly accessible , the medium being, for example, magnetic disk, drum, or floppy disk.

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