Enhance your IT strategy

Digital Leaders

Business Analysis

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NEW CONCEPTS

Peter Sweetbaum, CEO at IT Lab, asks what will the adoption of an adaptive technology model deliver for your organisation.

The burgeoning use of apps in consumer life is fundamentally changing the ways customers expect to interact with businesses, how employees prefer to work, and how organisations use technology. Akin to their social media habits, employees want seamless interactions, using applications of their choice from any device, anywhere, at any time. This trend towards the ‘consumerisation’ of corporate IT represents a paradigm shift which will bring both significant benefits and challenges to organisations.

What is an adaptive technology model?
The truth is, we are already living in an adaptive technology world. For students, nurses, office workers and architects, existing in an app enabled, flexible technology world is easy.

Social media behemoths like Facebook, LinkedIn, Apple and Google have built a user-centric digital world enabling us to pick and choose games, communication tools and travel apps, elegantly hopping from one app to another, porting content as well as individual identities seamlessly. They make it easy, user friendly, secure by design and they give us such a good digital existence, we hardly exist outside of it.

In the corporate world, organisations are rushing towards the explosion of SaaS applications, finally breaking free from decades of costly hardware refresh cycles and nail-biting software version upgrades. However, they are also unknowingly creating a patchwork of unconnected, fragmented and siloed corporate applications, systems and data.

The march towards the consumerisation of corporate technology has begun – and it’s not turning back. Learning how to enable an organisation to seamlessly select, change or swap corporate apps is key to bringing the real flexibility and value that SaaS represents. These business applications will need to work elegantly alongside each other as they have done in the on-premise world before.

Organisations like architects, insurance brokers, housing associations, charities or asset managers are only now assessing how to make this app-driven world work for them. An adaptive technology model is designed to help them take advantage of these emerging solutions and services, as and when they fit organisational needs.

Breaking down silos with an adaptive technology model
An adaptive technology model is a framework which organisations can use to implement and access an interchangeable collection of web delivered services enabling freedom of choice and movement of data between them.

In this landscape, modern, value differentiating IT professionals are expected to act more as business and application integration specialists. An adaptive technology model supports rapid decentralised decision making, unlike a single organisation simultaneously using multiple collaboration tools like Slack, Yammer, Trello and Basecamp, which results in precisely the opposite.

Realising an adaptive technology model
Given the increasing fragmentation of technology, applications and data, how should your organisation manage its widening array of disparate technology services?

How can you make this often-siloed world of systems and services work coherently and cohesively together? To succeed, there must be two core factors in place:

• An adaptive service framework - three key elements that optimise the benefits of the increasingly fragmented technology landscape in which we operate;
• A suite of adaptive technology enablers that make disparate applications and services work harmoniously in today’s corporate environments.

An adaptive service framework
An adaptive technology model is underpinned by a framework of three core elements:

1. Service integration
2. Presentation integration
3. Business integration
Service integration
Irrespective of where an organisation’s technology and services reside, one thing is certain; a coherent approach to integrated services is key to ensuring your business doesn’t suffer from conflicts between increasingly disparate and unconnected elements of your technology stack.

People are the glue that often binds together the processes that rely on your technology. A well-designed service integration model will facilitate, manage and optimise the widespread use of third parties, SaaS services, and public or even private cloud by aligning the relevant service requirements and ensuring a coherent service for users.

Presentation integration
For the user, Presentation Integration is what makes using multiple apps in a work context elegant, simple and attractive to use. Providing a seamless way for your users to access their applications is important. Doing so in a centrally controllable and secure way is what makes operating in an app-driven world tolerable and manageable.

User-centric identity management provides people with a single password and the ability to authenticate all their apps across multiple devices.

Business integration
Behind that elegant front end, there needs to be true application and business process integration. The ability for individual applications and services to work harmoniously to deliver value to the user depends on their ability to co-exist, to communicate, and for the data residing in them to smoothly traverse from one to the other.

Without any one of these three components, the ability to unlock the value of an adaptive technology model becomes challenging, if not completely unworkable.

Adaptive technology enablers
With an adaptive service framework in place, five key technology enablers are critical to implementing an effective adaptive technology model and operating in an app-centric world.

Enabler one: Hybrid cloud services
Given the array of cloud platforms and services available, identifying the optimal environment for your applications and workloads is key, as is the ability to assess when to move or change environments.

Enabler two: Software defined networking
A network solution that meets the unique demands of a SaaS and hybrid cloud world is essential. This provides flexible, optimised networks to quickly and cost effectively deliver services to organisations across the globe.

Enabler three: Identity and access management
The power to elegantly stitch on ‘single sign-on’ solutions with strong identity management tools opens the world of distributed apps and services to security conscious organisations. With single sign-on, a user logs-in once and gains access to the applications they are entitled to use, without the need to re-enter log-in credentials for each application.

Enabler four: Secure by design
Protecting corporate data that resides almost exclusively with third-party service providers fundamentally changes the dynamic of ‘secure by design’. This responsibility extends to and beyond protecting end-points, changing user behaviour, and the security of network end points, through to ethical hacking and penetration testing.

Enabler five: Data integration
APIs have become the standard for bringing different data sets together by enabling the applications they reside in to speak to one another. The API acts as a translator, providing import, export, read and analytical access. Forward thinking businesses have realised that APIs are hugely valuable, strategic tools.

What will the implementation of an adaptive technology model deliver for you?
What does all of this mean for your business, your customers and your users? Developing a technology-led growth strategy in an ever-changing world is a challenge. It’s also imperative if your company is to compete and achieve its true potential. An adaptive, iterative approach to technology will support you to:

- Deliver a consistent and reliable service to your customers;
- Develop your services in line with expectations, using technologies users are most likely to see value in;
- Enable your users to be productive and efficient with technology that supports how they work, and protects the data and systems they access;
- Gain value from digital, by maximising technologies to deliver value-creating products for your business and your customers;
- Empower innovation and diversification outside your industry sector;
- Seek out opportunities in areas where technology is utilised to break down barriers to entry in terms of cost, price and process;
- See technology for the enabler it is and drive your business strategy.

The pace of change across the technology landscape is at an unprecedented scale. Understandably, we are seeing clients and users alike lacking clarity and confidence as to when and how to capture the benefit of this change. The objective of an adaptive technology model is to enable organisations to be ready to adopt solutions and services as and when they are ready to do so.
In a project following the BDD approach, the team collects and discusses examples while working with a user story. Examples are used to explore and illustrate the expected behaviour of the business domain. User stories are typically broken down into acceptance criteria or business rules, but these are often subject to misunderstandings. Focusing on examples makes the intention of these rules clear. Examples are concrete usage descriptions of how the application or one of its features should behave.

Examples can take various forms. They can appear as input-output data pairs, sketches of the user interface, bulleted lists of different steps of a user workflow or even an Excel workbook illustrating a calculation or a report. The better the examples you collect during the specification workshop, the easier it will be to deliver the project successfully using BDD.

Once the user story is prepared and discussed with the team, the development phase starts. Using BDD, the teams implement the expected behaviour that was illustrated by the examples. In order to use the examples to drive the development, they are formulated into scenarios. The scenarios can be considered part of the code base of the application, because they are used to verify a specific function of the application.
These BDD scenarios provide useful feedback for the entire team, including the business representatives, so that everybody knows that the delivery is on track.

- They give feedback whether the developers have correctly implemented the scenarios;
- They provide feedback about the solution to and from the product owner and end-users;
- They describe the implemented behaviour, to help business analysts understand existing functionality;
- They provide a signal for the manual testers so they know when a feature is ready for testing;
- They act as a safety net for the developers, by identifying any unwanted side effects of changes;
- They will be part of the detailed documentation of the application, for use by the support team;
- And, finally, they define a domain language that is understood by everyone.

How does the BDD approach allow team members to become leaders?
The collaborative approach of BDD ensures that the team has full ownership of the project and its delivery. To put it differently: It is in the teams’ best interest that the user stories contain enough information to implement them and make sure that the quality is high.

There is no longer just one person driving forward the project; the team can feed back on the best way to meet the requirements. In fact, the team can now suggest de-scoping parts of the requirements that are not financially viable. This approach allows everyone to have a voice, to gain clarity on the requirements and to take ownership so that the team is delivering the best product possible for the end-users.

Why do we want leaders at all levels?
It is not just millennials who want a new way of working. Expectations of what work should be are changing. Employees expect more from their jobs; they want to see a career path, a progression – and it’s not only about their ‘grade’ or title, but whether their job empowers them. The top down approach of traditional management is on the way out. Instead, corporate success is now rooted in creating an environment that encourages and accepts that employees have their own ideas of how to organise their work, how to ensure end users are best served, to break through corporate silos and find creative solutions for tricky problems.

This is a fundamental change in corporate culture. Managers need to let go, and need to accept that leadership can be found at any level, for any task. The job description does not have to be decreed centrally. The change initiative does not have to come from ‘management’, but from those on the ground. This approach will not only save time and/or money. It also gives employees a feeling of ownership; they have an emotional investment in a good outcome, and a closer affinity with the goals of the company. At a time when the war for talent is ever more intensifying, this is an invaluable outcome.

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Companies need leaders
Technology is now advancing so quickly that companies need to be extremely flexible and agile to stay at the top of their game. That can only happen if they use the deep knowledge and experience of all their employees to deliver on their corporate vision. Employees are any company’s best resource when it comes to taking stock and developing better, more streamlined processes. Companies that want to succeed will tell their managers to let go and empower staff to lead.

How can employees move from task doers to leaders?
Changing corporate culture so fundamentally cannot happen by decree. A top down approach will not make everyone suddenly feel empowered. It takes time until people feel comfortable with such new ways of working – and that’s true for both managers and staff. Sometimes it is better to start with where you are, review the landscape, identify the biggest pain points, and slowly begin to make changes. But the stakes are high. Having leaders
Communities are like-minded people with similar interests and needs. This can be anything from having the same role or wanting to learn and share similar things. They give you the opportunity to meet new people, share different experiences and learn new things. They are important as they bring people who would have not normally met together.

They don’t always have to be formal. I have experience of those that form naturally; my example would be a motorcycle racing community, where like-minded people get together to share their knowledge, experience, support and sometimes even bike parts! They don’t need people to manage this, it just happens, which is fantastic to be part of that. Some other communities need time to establish and grow with the hope of getting to that same point eventually.

What value do people get?
Everyone has something they can share, you don’t have to be an expert. So, it’s important to stress that if you are part of a community you can contribute as well! And this is where we start to get value, where different people share their experiences. This can be through a range of different ways, it doesn’t always mean standing at the front and talking in front of a group of people. You can contribute by responding to a question, sharing a tweet, writing a blog, drawing a sketch-note or even generating discussion on your community channel/forum.

How did we approach it at DWP?
At DWP we established a need for a community to bring the business analysts across the department together. We used Emily Webber’s Community of Practice maturity model to help us get started. This included identifying why we needed a community, what problems would it solve, then identifying our mission, goals and what we wanted to achieve as a community within the first 12 months. To help do this we ran a number of sessions and also conducted a survey so people had the opportunity to input their own ideas, making it their community. To provide focus and a reason for forming a community we created our mission and problem statement.

Mission statement:
To be a community, to help business analysts access the support they need, improve our skills and achieve better outcomes for users, DWP and ourselves. You can find helpful guidance on helping teams to define their focus at link.

Why do we have a community?
The role of the business analyst (BA) in the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) has been defined, but still isn’t fully understood. There are a lot of BAs across DWP. We don’t all know who our BA colleagues are, and it’s difficult to meet often and communicate well.

Because of this it’s not easy to develop our skills by learning from each other, so DWP doesn’t benefit from our shared skills and experience. The services we work on – especially Universal Credit – are high priority and affect the lives of millions of vulnerable people. We need to make sure the BAs working on them are highly-skilled, supported and approach their role in a consistent way.

Reflecting
The community has benefited lots of people from across the department and has brought people who would have normally been working in their team’s silo, from across different locations, together. After nearly two years we still have room to grow, but the appetite of the community members is great. During a recent team canvas session the members set their next set of goals and what they want to achieve from being part of the community. The bar has been set high and it has helped to give us a focus on certain areas over the next 12 months, to continue to bring value and to meet the needs of the community. As part of this session people also identified their strengths and what they could contribute by being a member.

Being part of this journey has been fantastic and I feel proud to have been part of building the community at the DWP. It’s been a lot of hard work and takes up a lot of time and commitment, but it’s definitely worth it.

Further information
Nowadays, we are experiencing a very fast-paced business world and it’s becoming harder than ever to cope with such speed. In order to gain a competitive advantage in today’s market, businesses are advised to build a long-lasting strategy.

As the American Enterprise Institute’s report reveals, 88 per cent of firms appearing on the Fortune 500 list in 1955 were not on it in 2014. A proactive strategy was the pathway for the remaining 12 per cent of firms. In the business world, it should be agreed that clients are not buying a strategy, but indeed buying a product placed by a strategy. To keep a client buying it is not enough to have a passive strategy, one needs to develop a new niche market and create value; it is vital to have a proactive strategy.

A proactive strategy has a borrowing base shaped by insightful conclusions and delivered by business analysts. If strategists are the visionaries then business analysts are the enablers. Business analysts (BAs) are certified or qualified by experience to apply business analysis practices. Business analysis is an investigation discipline that includes a range of tools, techniques and models to deliver solutions, execute a business change or introduce process improvements.

In 2013, Ernst Young published a research study about The future of decision-making. The research revealed that 81 per cent out of 285 global executives across the consumer product industry agreed on the need to drive their decision-making backed by thorough analysis. If, hypothetically, three different companies are discussing one of the following strategies, business analysis will help shape the outcome for the right decision-making:

1. Introduce a cost-cutting strategy (fast moving consumer goods (FMCG)
2. Launch a new product (financial services sector)
3. Identify new trends (IT industry)

In the first case strategists of a FMCG company agreed to better compete in a fast-paced market, therefore, agreed to adapt economies of scale during their production stage. Business analysts (BAs) started analysing the proposal by applying Porter’s Five Forces model, and found that adapting economies of scale would attribute to the company’s main product a higher competitive edge in a price war over other competitors.

Senior BAs found further insights by applying a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) matrix that highlighted that one of the company’s strengths is to provide clients with exclusive products and different flavours, which other competitors fail to produce.

By introducing a cost-cutting policy in the production phase, the organisation will increase profits in the short-term. However, in the long-term this policy will impact the company’s strategy to provide clients with exclusive products, and therefore, a market share decline will probably materialise.

The conclusion presented to the board was not to implement the cost-cutting strategy as gains would only be made in the short-term and would harm the company’s long-term profits. Business analysts recognised that the strategists needed to introduce a cost saving and hence recommended another option:

Introducing artificial intelligence (AI) technologies in the packaging line. Such a proposal might be considered as an extra cost in the present, but as an investment for the future it would save in overhead costs further down the line. Business analysts provided a data-driven answer; indeed, the AI technology introduction...
was positively evaluated based on the Net Present Value formula.

In this case, business analysts were to prove the functionality of a strategy seen by the board as an opportunity. Business analysts were able to manage all independencies and found an alternative way to grant the original strategists purpose. The business analysis approach helped executives to deliver a suitable strategy.

In the second case, the board was discussing the launch of a new online payment platform, assuming it to be highly profitable. Business analysts test new hypotheses and not just to confirm the current assumption sponsored by the strategists. The business analysts used the Four Ps model, market analysis and competitor analysis to support their investigation. According to the business analysts’ findings it was proven right that launching a new product would be profitable enough for the organisation.

The experienced BAs at the organisation adapted the 7-S model, developed by McKinsey & Company, to help implement the strategy approved by the board.

And another team of BAs started using Balanced Scorecard to monitor the new product launch strategy and control any potential discrepancies from the original plan. Business analysis was involved in every possible extent in this case, from an initial idea to full execution. Business analysts processed their analysis without any bias; indeed, they are action-oriented in their findings.

The third case might be the most challenging one as the strategists worked in a leading IT company that specialised in CRM software involved with identifying new market trends. In the information era, mobile phones are widely used in the business world, therefore, the strategists were considering implementing a mobile app to satisfy their clients’ needs. Business analysts were told to visit all high-end clients and find out what their expectations would be from a potential implemented mobile app.

The business analysts were facing the biggest dilemma as they had to figure out what the clients would expect from a mobile app and not from a desktop version. A mobile app can’t be as functional as PC-based software, therefore, the BAs needed to include only the necessary functions that clients would use in their mobile devices. The business analysts gathered all the information, analysed all the requirements, and documented all details that needed to be approved by the board, then passed it over to the IT engineers to build the new mobile app.

While gathering information the BAs identified a new function (big data reports) that was not required by any client, but it could represent an opportunity for the organisation in the near future. Therefore, the BAs recommended that the board implement a function that can run algorithms to generate automatic reports and capture new trends, and thus advising sales managers regarding new repetitive consumer behaviour in a specific region.

The strategists approved their mobile app modelling document and agreed to implement their proposed new function. This demonstrates that business analysis can be used as a means to crack the code of the future and to develop a strategic growth plan. After all, a strategy is not just about gaining whatever’s left of profits, but to create new ones. To have the latter is necessary to process the right decision-making backed by data quality.

Business analysis can deliver consistently on data quality and help businesses to switch from being the ‘disrupted’ to becoming the ‘disruptors’.

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References
Manoj Phatak, Founder & CEO of ArtRatio, explains why he thinks business analysis can enable innovation.

‘If I had asked my clients what they wanted, they probably would have said a faster horse.’ Henry Ford, Founder of the Ford Motor Company

This alleged Henry Ford quote is often mistakenly used to reason that we do not need to talk to our customers, because they do not really know what they want. This thinking is essentially flawed. If Henry Ford had hired a business analyst, he might have arrived at a better statement of the ‘real’ requirement, namely:

‘A medium of transport capable of carrying 100kg of persons and goods a distance of 50 km within one hour, without stopping for food.’

Now, if you were to give such a requirement to your late 19th century engineering department, they would need to invent the new concept of a ‘horseless carriage’. This is the very basis of innovation.

The business analyst can foster innovation by defining the requirements in an abstract way to focus on the end-result, without specifying how the implementation is to achieve it.

Another example

• Bad requirement - A drop-down list-box capable of showing a potentially infinite list of media items and allowing retrieval of a media item within x seconds.

• Good requirement – A search mechanism capable of showing a potentially infinite list of media items and allowing retrieval of a media item within x seconds.

The bad requirement specifies how to implement the idea, whereas the good requirement abstracts away from the implementation details to focus on what we are trying to achieve, namely ‘to search’.

If we take the ‘good requirement’ to our solution provider, they will be obliged to find a mechanism that can search effectively through an ‘infinite’ list of media items. Given some thought, they may come up the idea of an innovative new circular search mechanism, rather than a drop-down listbox.

You may recognise this as one of the most profitable digital consumer electronics products of recent times – the Apple iPod. On the other hand, if we had given the ‘bad requirement’ to our solution provider, we might have stifled any attempts at innovation because the engineers would have been forced to work with a drop-down list-box, which may not be as effective at allowing rapid search within a very large group of items.

Instead of an innovative product, we would have ended up with a real turkey of a product.

Still not convinced?

Then consider this court case between Apple Computers and Microsoft. In May 2002, John Platt at Microsoft Research filed a patent to ‘generate playlists for a library of media items via selecting a plurality of seed items, at least one of which is an undesirable seed item.’ Platt’s patent was submitted seven months after the unveiling of Apple’s iPod, but five months before Apple’s application for a patent covering the iPod’s rotational wheel to select media items. Net result: Apple lost this particular court case and their patent application was rejected, because the wording of the Microsoft patent application already covered the implementation of the iPod.

Comparing patent claims to requirements

So, even if you are convinced that writing requirements in an abstract way can facilitate innovation, how far should we go? Well, patent claims take an approach which is somewhat similar to writing requirements (although the end-result is protection of intellectual property, rather than solution development).

Let’s look at some similarities:

• Define the scope of the invention
Several years later, we have now installed electro-optic glass vitrines to protect original maps of the 1815 Battle of Waterloo and a priceless 1888 original Torres Spanish guitar, for collectors and museums across Europe. This innovation came as a direct result of conversations with prospective customers, but they did need to see a prototype first to confirm or refute our assumptions, and to clarify the real requirements.

Enabling innovation

If business analysts are to enable innovation, we must learn to decode the wishes of our customers into abstract requirements that focus on what the solution must achieve, but in a way which leaves open multiple possible implementations. This opens up the design space to ideas which may not have existed previously and hence fosters innovation, both within the multinational as well as for start-ups.

Both patents and requirements should aim for as broad a definition as possible to allow all possible implementations to be covered. So, do business analysts need years of training as patent attorneys do, before being allowed to define up in a court of law?

I believe that business analysts can learn from how patent attorneys build abstract and legally binding descriptions of products as patent claims in order to enforce breadth (and therefore value) to the patent.

About the author

Manoj is a Chartered Engineer at the UK Engineering Council, a Chartered IT Practitioner at BCS and holds a Bachelor’s degree in Electronics Engineering from Southampton University and a Masters in Software Engineering from Oxford University. Manoj is also founder and CEO of ArtRatio, a boutique manufacturer of art conservation vitrines for museums, galleries and private collectors. Further information can be found at: www.artratio.co.uk
The conference this year was a truly international event with at least 28 countries represented by hundreds of enthusiastic delegates in attendance. Over the course of three days, numerous conference workshops were run and several keynote seminars were given by a number of significant personalities including the likes of presenter and 2016 Digital Leader of the Year, Maggie Philbin, blind adventurer Miles Hilton-Barber, Director of Business Design at Capita, Michael Noonan, and best-selling novelist and former IT consultant, Graeme Simsion. And it was with the latter speaker’s presentation that I began my conference experience.

**You can take it with you**

Graeme, who had been a business and IT consultant in a former life, before turning his hand to writing books, was keen to share his own life philosophies saying that it is possible for people to take skills and experiences from their previous careers and make use of them in new endeavours, whatever they may be. He acknowledged that everyone is unique and we all needed to celebrate that fact. However, he did supply the audience with some sage advice regarding the best transferable skills or abilities that a business analyst (or anyone really) could/should have to succeed. These were:

- **Portable skills** – principally unique transferable skills that we have brought forward from our education and life experiences;
- **Meta expertise** – the knowledge that we all need to work as hard at one career as we did in another, and to bring one’s A-game to whichever career you find yourself in at any given time;
- **Scientific thinking** – learn to do your research and respect the scientific approach. In today’s world science has lost some of its currency, but analysts need to recognise the difference between evidence and opinion. He advised that analysts ask about people’s track records before allowing themselves to be influenced by wannabe gurus. Essentially, ‘plausible has to switch over to proven’;
- **Design skills** – one of the rules he’d discovered for himself through his dalliances with scriptwriting was that designs can always be improved, even at the last minute. And a subset of design is creativity and he encouraged the audience to note down the sort of times and situations they felt most creative with their thinking and to better utilise those moments in future;
- **Empathy** – the one things that always improves teamwork, and an often-undervalued skill that allows one to think in other people’s shoes, and enables us to get to grips with other people’s motivations, as to why and how they do certain things;
- **Giving (and taking) criticism** – as an example he used editors, and quoted author Neil Gaiman, who had once said: ‘Editors are always right when they say: “there is a problem”, but not often as to where the problem actually is!’;
- **Reflection** – You will only truly be able to move forward when you learn to reflect on what you have already done in the past. Reflection needs to be a
engage the business and facilitate strategic decisions, to communicate continuously and be able to lead a scrum team;

• Empathy – a BA needs to actually like people and be able to communicate with a wide range of people, from technical to legal, from sales to senior managers;

• Understanding objectives – business analysts need to be pragmatic, and set objectives that are both realistic and tangible.

Bhavesh finished off by saying that to become an agile business analyst one needs a mind-set change, and an ability to reuse old skills repurposed for a new world.

Beyond the boundaries
Michael Noonan, Director of Business Design, Transformation, Capita, began his keynote address with a quote from another speaker he’d heard: ‘Better steal well than invent badly.’ Michael’s main question for the delegates was: ‘are we still relevant?’ and asked people to consider if their organisation and services were still relevant today. He then went on to talk about the disruptors and how, for example, supermarkets had disrupted the way we now shop, but that the disruptors of today will themselves be disrupted by those of tomorrow.

His solution to all this disruption? To develop offerings that cut across the core and macro level business and to

systems thinking
Adrian Reed, from Blackmetric Business Solutions, had other things on his mind though – namely parking in Portsmouth! He used a significant parking problem as a good way to illustrate some of the principles of business analysis.

He thinks of business analysts as perfect pathfinders in an everchanging world and he acknowledged that many analysts find themselves being parachuted into a project far too late for them to make a real difference to the outcomes. However, he did think that BAs can help themselves by using tools from the world of systems thinking. He said: ‘As analysts, we know the word “system” is not just about IT, it’s about all the rest of it too. You need to watch that you don’t displace a problem, but need to address it at root.’

‘A good business analyst prepares data to help their argument’, he said, ‘but politics often gets in the way, and no one likes U-turns.’

He then went on to talk about oscillations of effects on projects, whereby there is an almost stop-start effect in project progress caused by changes in policy and in company thinking, and these ‘oscillations’ cost money and create a spaghetti mess of a problem for analysts to try and unravel.

Adrian also spoke about the danger of the allure of thinking that people’s issues are linear problems because it’s simpler to think in those terms, but this can create the illusion of progress and frequently ends in further project oscillations along the way, as analysts labour under the misapprehension that they are making progress with their ‘just do it’ approach, but this is just folly, a bit like the on-street parking situation in Portsmouth!

Are BAs relevant in an agile team?
This was the question Bhavesh Vaghela, from TSB bank, posed for himself to answer, and he started off by saying that it’s not the fastest or the strongest that survive, but the most agile and able to adapt.

Bhavesh then spoke a little about the Waterfall approach, which he felt still has a place in project management, but less so in high tech, faster-paced environments. He then went on to question what ‘agile’ was and stands for. He sees the agile process as being both collaborative and flexible, but also, he sees it as a methodology that senses change and can adapt with it. And, he noted, one of those changes is having business analysts become trusted members of a scrum team. BAs, however, will only gain that trust by developing several key skills that sit well in an agile environment. These being:

• Decision making – learning to embrace uncertainty and have a willingness to try new approaches;

• Leadership skills – to be able to

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stood for years, especially now that we’re entering a world where digital is no longer just about IT, but about networked change; a new ecosystem, if you will.

He finished by saying: ‘We need to transcend traditional boundaries and drive the digital transformation agenda towards the connected disruptive model. Challenge yourselves and rethink your traditional methods – now is the time we need to revision.’

Automatic for the people
Melanie Byrne and Roger Ashwood, from SQS Ireland, fired up attendees by explaining how robotic process automation (basically software robots) can mimic user behaviour at both the front and back-end of a process, and can, therefore, take on some of the repetitive, repeatable processes that many staff reluctantly have to churn through when their minds/skillsets could be set on performing more interesting tasks elsewhere.

Byrne explained that robots were ideally suited to activities that were:
• rules-based with structured inputs;
• repetitive traditional processes;
• high volume transactions;
• connected to process advance/quality issues;
• where one has fluctuation in demand and/or back-logs.

They are also suitable for organisations looking to automate processes that they are nearshoring, after having previously offshored for a while. Ashwood emphasised that robots can’t create a work-space ‘utopia’ and aren’t suitable for everyone, but could be part of a full change programme, rather than for smaller projects. Plus, any projects with a ‘robotic’ element need to have full IT buy-in from the rest of the organisation. Such programmes must be maintained in the long-run, and need to be realised as an ongoing full consideration.

Byrne was keen to inform delegates that one needs to understand your organisational landscape before employing robots, and there’s no point in automating an unsatisfactory process; they need to be optimised before being automated using robots. ‘Remember’, she said: ‘rubbish in – rubbish out!’

Fulfilling your business potential
The final keynote of the conference was given by the incredible Miles Hilton-Barber, a blind adventurer and life analyst, whose motto - ‘the only limits in your life are those you accept yourself’ - resonated loudly throughout the course of his seminar.

After admitting that he’d spent much of his life with a ‘victim mentally’, he changed all that in 1999 at the age of 50, by completing a 150-mile ultra-marathon across the Sahara Desert. Since that first challenge Miles has undertaken many remarkable adventures and extreme challenges including man-hauling a sledge across 400 kilometres of the Antarctic and becoming the first blind pilot to undertake a 55-day, 21,000-kilometre flight in a microlight from London to Sydney.

His message to the business analysts gathered in the great hall, at Central Hall in Westminster, was to make the most of life, both in and out of work. He also advised delegates not to wait for circumstances to change before starting a project because conditions will never be optimal, so sometimes it’s better to just weigh up the risks and go for it.

He also warned of an evidential issue, which he termed FEAR, or, to explain his acronym – ‘false evidence appearing real’, meaning that with so much information around it’s sometimes difficult to ‘see the wood for the trees’ and be overwhelmed by indecision. After all, failing to try is worse than failure.

He finished off by saying that it’s important to have a common vision in business, since a united front makes for a more convincing argument than having people working separately in silos. And, if it does go wrong, don’t give up since some of the best things originate out of adversity, so always persevere with your project, even when things are going wrong.
Adrian Reed, Principal Consultant at Blackmetric, argues that the ‘bridging’ analogy of business analysis is long past its prime, and that BAs should continue to play up the holistic and strategic nature of their roles.

I suspect many people reading this article will, at some time in their career, have had the challenge of explaining what business analysis is. We’ve all had that dreaded moment when we meet someone for the first time, tell them we’re a business analyst, only to be met with a blank stare (often with a slight look of confusion... ‘business...what?’). I am sure that we have all developed our own elevator pitch to explain the value that good business analysis enables, and I’m sure many of us regularly adapt and refine that pitch, to try to convey the richness and breadth of the BA role.

In the dim and distant past, it was common to hear people use the ‘bridging’ analogy of analysis. Perhaps you’ve heard (or even used this) yourself. There are many variations, but one that is commonly used is: ‘Business analysis is the bridge between the business and IT’.

Whilst this statement has its uses, it is certainly very succinct and conveys at least some of what good business analysis can achieve, in reality it describes only part of the BA role. And there is a danger that this analogy may be setting up misconceptions.

The trouble with the BA bridge
To explore the trouble with the ‘bridging’ concept, let’s take an example outside of analysis. Imagine you saw an advertisement for a private doctor’s surgery. The advert has an authoritative looking doctor smiling, and a number to call to make appointments. Beneath the telephone number, there is a strapline: ‘Doctor J. Jones: The bridge between the patient and the pharmacy’.

Now, I don’t know about you, but if I was visiting a doctor I’d want to know that she could provide a range of treatment options, perhaps being able to refer the patient to a whole range of different medical specialists. Of course, prescribing medication (from the pharmacy) might be appropriate in many cases. Yet in others the patient might need surgery, further diagnosis or scans, blood tests or even just advice on their lifestyle. Something in the patient’s environment might have changed which is causing problems. Perhaps a new job is causing stress, which is causing a lack of sleep, which is causing exhaustion and tiredness, leading to comfort eating and weight gain. Only by taking a holistic view of the patient will the problem get solved. Approaching the problem with a preconceived idea of what the treatment will be sounds rather dangerous.

By limiting themselves to ‘being the bridge’ between the patient and pharmacy, the doctor has inadvertently placed themselves in a restrictive box. Even if they actually offer a wider range of treatment options, they will likely always be viewed as the ‘pharmacy doctor’. They will be viewed as the place where you go when you want a prescription, a place where you go when you want a medicinal remedy. In fact, they may find that patients come to them with a particular prescription already in mind (‘Come on doctor, I just need a prescription for this new drug, won’t you go ahead and write it?’). The box is self-fulfilling and self-reinforcing: once this identity is set, it is very hard to shake off.

A crucial consideration is that the bridging analogy may, inadvertently, re-inforce an ‘us’ and ‘them’ mentality. It divides business from IT.

Getting out of our own box
I’m sure many of us will have occasionally felt like business analysis has its own
‘box’. Stakeholders occasionally perceive us as ‘something to do with IT’ and ‘only needed when there’s IT change’. The ‘IT to business bridge’ analogy reinforces this box. Every time it is uttered we build another layer of misunderstanding about the breadth of the BA role. We reinforce the box that sometimes constrains us, and the misunderstanding about the breadth of our role grows.

The reality, of course, is that business analysis is extremely broad and holistic. Whilst some BA practitioners may focus on specific niches, the breadth of the discipline provides a varied and interesting career. Business analysis can involve anything from understanding the external environmental factors that are affecting effectively if the users are not trained and if the business processes are not adapted to utilise it.

I’m sure we’ve all seen situations where end-users have developed ‘workarounds’ because the IT system they were given did not meet all of their process needs (and little thought was put into how the processes would be changed to accommodate this).

Breaking down silos
Another crucial consideration is that the bridging analogy may, inadvertently, re-inforce an ‘us’ and ‘them’ mentality. It divides business from IT. Now, of course, there may be some situations where organisations are that separate and

We still need to be ensuring that the change or project is aligned to strategy, that the requirements are clear and agreed and are within scope, and that they are on-track and are ‘on-benefit’.

**Conclusion: Knowing our value**

As a profession, business analysis has a wide breadth and we have a whole range of tools at our disposal. Yet, we often face the challenge of misunderstanding – where stakeholders haven’t worked with BAs before (or haven’t yet appreciated the breadth). We can help enable the creation of so much value in organisations—and having our ‘elevator pitch’ ready (and getting beyond the bridge) is crucial.

Thinking and talking beyond the bridge is essential.

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**Further information**

A version of this article was originally published on Adrian Reed’s blog, [www.adrianreed.co.uk/2016/04/21/its-time-to-ditch-the-bridge/](http://www.adrianreed.co.uk/2016/04/21/its-time-to-ditch-the-bridge/) and is reproduced with permission. Article © Blackmetric Business Solutions Ltd. Readers interested in a more formal definition of business analysis may find the following references useful:

The overlapping nature of business analysis and business architecture: what we need to know

The concepts of business architecture and business analysis have many things in common, which bring beneficiary synergy and impose challenges to organisations that employ both concepts. This article reveals differentiation, functionalism and serviceability as some of the critical factors which influence the challenges and confusion that are posed by the parallelism of business architecture and analysis. It also examines the implications of parallelism, which both concepts bring into an organisational environment.

The findings from the study are intended to reduce the negative impacts that the confusion and challenges have on processes and activities in organisations that employ both concepts in parallel. By Tiko Iyamu, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Cape Town, South Africa, and Monica Nehemia-Maletzky, Irja Shana, Namibia University of Science and Technology, Windhoek, Namibia

A study on the relative importance of underlying competencies of business analysts

Business analysis is a key factor of project success or failure in information systems. The objective of this paper was to identify which competencies a business analyst (BA) needs, and analyse their importance and priorities. A literature review yielded 6 competency dimensions and 30 competencies. Based on interviews with 12 experts and analytic hierarchy process analysis, the writers analysed the relative importance and priority of each business analysis competency. They identified an importance-perception gap between stakeholders in different positions.

The outcome can be used as the selection and development criteria for superior BAs that are responsible for solving business problems using information systems solutions. By Joon Park and Seung Ryul, Graduate School of Business IT, Kookmin University, Seoul, South Korea

Tapping the existing business analyst talent pool for BI analysts

Globally, more organisations are investing in business intelligence (BI) capabilities. Accordingly, the need for competent and talented BI staff is increasing. Although many organisations already experience a BI resource shortage, experts predict it will be a significant challenge for organisations in the future, globally and across industries. This article focuses specifically on the BI analyst role, identifying the often overlooked opportunity to fill BI analyst needs from the existing pool of traditional business analysts. This includes highlighting the similarities and differences between the traditional analyst and BI analyst roles, as well as providing an explanation of the hard and soft skills required for success in a BI analyst role. By Pam Clavier, project manager and business analyst, and Harman Brar, management consultant at Decision Streams

Business analyst, cost engineer, project manager and systems engineer compared - a key word analysis of current job descriptions to analyse project management related job roles and responsibilities

This article presents the extension of a research project conducted into the project control functions of job titles in project management, including business analyst. It includes a description of the business analyst role. The research was designed to help develop a quantitative analysis employing an empirical method to determine what the marketplace is looking for today when employers advertise to hire project management practitioners or project management support professionals as team members, understanding that as the marketplace is looking for today when employers advertise to hire project management practitioners or project management support professionals as team members, understanding that as the marketplace...
changes, by using ‘big data’ analysis tools, we can keep a close pulse on any changes in what the marketplace is seeking when posting job adverts.

By Paul D.Giammalvo, Senior Technical Advisor to PT Mitratata Citragraha, Jakarta, Indonesia

Source: PM World Journal, January 2017

Business analysis—an essential competency of project management

This article is an interview with the secretary and chair of the Project Management Institute (PMI) Davidson Frame. He talks about the importance of business analysis in making sure customers’ needs are truly met. It ensures that the uniqueness of each customer’s requirements is reflected in the project solution at the start and throughout delivery of the project. He also discusses the respective expertise and skills of the project manager and business analyst, and cases where one person might do both roles.

PMI is planning to create a full-consensus foundational standard in business analysis to expand on the information provided in its practice guide (due to be published in 2017).

Source: PM Network, August 2016

Project management forum focuses on business analysis

Insufficient requirement management, a core part of business analysis, is a key factor in the failure of many projects, according to PMI China managing director Bob Chen. Business analysis is therefore increasingly prominent in project management, he said at the PMI Project Management Forum in China in July 2016. Other speakers reinforced this view and talked about requirements management. Talks also covered career planning and the expected rise in demand for business analysts in coming years.

By PMI China Volunteer Team

Source: PM Network, November 2016

Mixed methods research: insights from requirements engineering

Requirements engineering (RE) covers the process of eliciting, analysing, specifying, validating and managing the requirements of software systems. RE needs to understand the people and the context within which specifications and decisions take place. Hence, RE research opts for qualitative research, but a quantitative approach is equally important, as some studies may need to measure certain variables and confirmed existing theories.

Mixed methods are therefore attractive, and this paper highlights some insights of adopting mixed methods in RE, based on three mixed methods research projects. By Rozilawati Razali, Fares Anwar, Marfizah Abdul Rahman, Fatin, Fitizahi Ismail, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia


Impact of requirements elicitation processes on success of information system development projects

Requirements articulating user needs and corresponding to enterprise business processes are key to the successful implementation of information system development projects. However, the parties involved in projects frequently are not able to agree on a common development vision and have difficulties expressing their needs. Several industry experts have acknowledged that requirements elicitation is one of the most difficult tasks in development projects. This study investigates the impact of requirements elicitation processes on project outcomes depending on the applied project development methodology.

Source: Information Technology & Management Science, December 2016

Clear legacy roadblock for a digital future

Nearly half of IT assets in organisations are in need of modernisation, according to the findings of a survey of 40 financial, industrial, government and IT services organisations by the University of Surrey. There is digital disruption in every sector of the economy with the explosion of mobile devices and real-time transactions underpinned by cloud services. To tackle legacy issues to improve the business, pointers suggested include step-by-step changes, and using modern tools. The growing maturity of cloud services and ever richer sources of software packages mean that legacy systems can be modernised without large scale programmes to rewrite them.

By Andy Nelson, former UK government CIO, and Roger Camrass, visiting professor at the University of Surrey, UK

Source: Computer Weekly, October, 2016

Transformation trends

This article discusses skills and best practice in effective change management. The writers look at understanding the changing environment and how to analyse it, and how organisations are now often employing an agile approach to change management. They also discuss the key
Having a hot shower. He also says better decisions are made when people are at a comfortable temperature and are not hungry. He advises that most people are biased towards liking what they know, and to be careful to factor in that bias when making a decision. If a decision is reversible, people are less likely to be stressed about it. People tend to make decisions based on beliefs and not data, so using data alone to influence them is unlikely to work.

By Wesley Higbee
Source: AMA Quarterly, Spring 2017

Changing for the better? Living with the inherent paradox of change
Change can engender strong feelings, resistance and protests in individuals, according to this writer. He describes Gestalt Therapy, which resulted in the paradoxical theory of change, which was used by tennis player Arnold Beisser after he was left disabled by polio. The article explains how approaches to facilitating and leading change need to be considered for changes to businesses. In adopting new ways of facilitating and guiding change, people may need to consider developing a keen understanding of individual beings, of organisational and communal intentions, and re-grasp the role of opportunity.
By Darren Dalcher, National Centre for Project Management, University of Hertfordshire, UK
Source: PM World Journal, January 2017

The value of emotional intelligence in transformational change
Organisational change often fails, according to this article, but success can be made more likely by viewing change as a continual process, rather than a discrete event. The writers advocate having multiple supporters of change at various levels in an organisation, rather than having one leader directing it. They also advise on how to structure teams, and how to use emotional intelligence to manage conflict. They give ways of winning over those resisting change, and explain how positive conflict drives communication, innovation and team development.
By Daniel Jensen and Mark Bojeun
Source: AMA Quarterly, Spring 2017

The impact of change management in enhancing the effectiveness of companies’ performance
The rate of competition in today’s business is moving very fast due to changes in technology, services and products. This has made experts of change management emphasize the importance of establishing readiness for change in organisations in addition to having crafted various strategies for creating successful change management. The latter is crucial to any organisation today in order to survive in the highly competitive business environment. This paper looks at change management and its effect on companies’ performance, highlighting the challenges on the way to effective change management.
By Samiah Alrumaih, University of International Business and Economics, Beijing, China
Source: European Journal of Business & Management, 2017

Emotional pitfalls, in change management
Change is stressful, and stress makes people feel strongly, which can lead to rash decisions. This writer therefore recommends taking time to de-stress, by, for example, cuddling with a pet or having a hot shower. He also says better decisions are made when people are at a comfortable temperature and are not hungry. He advises that most people are biased towards liking what they know, and to be careful to factor in that bias when making a decision. If a decision is reversible, people are less likely to be stressed about it. People tend to make decisions based on beliefs and not data, so using data alone to influence them is unlikely to work.
By Wesley Higbee
Source: AMA Quarterly, Spring 2017

Enterprise-wide transformation programs do not succeed without change management!
This article discusses the significant factors that can affect the success or failure of organisational change including people and cultural perspectives, maturity of organisations and the triggers for change. It looks at changes at the portfolio level, the programme level and to projects, and includes a change impact matrix.
By Sankaran Ramani, GRT Consulting LLP, India
Source: PM World Journal, January 2017

Get full value from data analytics programmes
Most organisations are a long way from using their data and analytics effectively, according to a McKinsey Global Report in December 2016. It highlighted the biggest barriers to success are more organisational than technical with finding and training staff being the most significant obstacle. Another key issue was developing a coherent business intelligence strategy. The article recommends making sure data is available and having the right mindset. It
Webinar: make the case that CX transformation is both important and urgent

Customer experience (CX) is finally gaining the attention it deserves, with 84% of companies seeing CX as a higher priority than they did two years ago. But there’s a disconnect when it comes to executing CX transformation, and the underlying issue is a lack of executive buy-in. To make the business case for CX improvements, there are three key elements: urgency, impact, and direction. Forrester data shows that improving CX improves profitability; in fact, the revenue growth of CX leaders is 5.1 times that of laggards.

OVUM

Analyst opinion: evaluating the shift to digital transformation in 2017

Last year, Ovum’s ICT Enterprise Insights 2016/17 program, a primary study with senior ICT executives at more than 7,000 enterprises, found most industries and markets are still in the early or midstream stages of digital transformation. While the majority of firms (around 85%) have at least embarked on some sort of programme, less than a quarter consider themselves well advanced or complete. Ovum’s 2017/18 ICT Enterprise Insights program is currently in the field, with insights into 2018 available from the start of October. However, a sneak peek based on a sample of 3,500 enterprises suggests that while the importance of digital transformation has been evaluated, the rate of progress is perhaps not as strong as it needs to be.

By Daniel Mayo, September 2017

GARTNER

Report: capitalising on your business ecosystems economy: a Gartner trend insight report

Organisations are increasingly focusing outward on their business ecosystems to fuel innovation. To capitalise on these opportunities, CIOs must develop a proactive strategy for engaging in their business ecosystems, and select the right mix of business and technology to support this strategy.


The key to business transformation is culture

Cultural issues are at the root of many failed business transformations, yet most organisations do not assign explicit responsibility for culture. To reap the benefits of digital business, leaders must take a ‘culture-first’ approach to business transformation. Substantive business transformation is something members of the organisation must do together, and it begins with culture. Since IT leaders are unique in working with people across the enterprise, they are prime candidates for being agents of cultural change. It is, however, a very personal commitment, requiring leadership, presence, time and energy. Most importantly, it cannot merely be a formal exercise.

By Susan Moore, May 2016

FORRESTER

Blog: Data commercializers do it differently: it’s best to be prepared

We know that the data economy is going to be huge. Data fuels innovation, and having that unique data point (or ‘alt data’) brings incremental value and competitive advantage. Demand for data is exploding. More and more companies are interested in jumping on that train and selling their data. But how? Forrester’s Business Technographics Data and Analytics Survey tells us that companies commercialising their data invest in programs, processes and tools to prepare their data. They establish data governance programs, improve data privacy and security, implement data quality and governance technologies and use as-a-service tools for data preparation and data quality.

By Jennifer Belissent, September 2017

Includes an example of how investment management provider JLL uses data analytics.

By Cath Everett

Source: Computer Weekly, May 2017

Putting data to work: winning approaches to BI analytics and reporting

Business intelligence (BI) and analytics were at the top of corporate agendas in 2016. The competitive environment is intense, and business leaders are demanding they have access to greater insights about their customers, markets, and internal operations to make better and faster decisions – often in real time. There have also been dramatic changes with BI and analytics tools and platforms. The three Cs – cloud, consolidation, and collaboration – are elevating BI and analytics to new heights within enterprises and gaining newfound respect at the highest levels.

By Joe McKendrick

Source: Database Trends & Applications, October/November 2016

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