International Institute of Business Analysis™

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WEBINAR: Building Business Analysis Capability in a Consulting Business

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Question (Q)	Presenter Responses (R)

1. In your work with Financial Sector clients, have you been involved in performing opportunity/threat analysis of organizations that are well established? How would you recommend approaching this task?

- Personally I haven't been involved in this type of analysis, but our company has had some exposure in this area. One of the projects we have been involved in was for one of the major banks here in Ireland. On an opportunity basis we looked at existing processes in a typical high street bank that now has a very strong online offering, to see where the delays in the handoff between functions and departments were causing undue delays to the end customer. One of these areas was in relation to the need for physical signatures on documentation. By implementing an e-signature offering and rationalizing the process there was an immediate turn around in waiting time which resulted in increased new business.

- So in terms of the Business Analysis roles, process modelling and monitoring, leading to technical and process improvement led to a faster turn-around, new opportunities and higher customer satisfaction.

2. Unlike an in house BA, a consulting BA needs to be able to adapt to different domains and provide value in limited time. How can a consulting BA prepare for this daunting expectation?

- *Be willing to work with what you have.*
- *Remember that this is their problem you're solving and their solution you're helping them to deliver. Don't get too attached to your own analysis and design definitions – you can be a guide, but you have to let your customer retain ownership.*
- *Keep modelling, even if it is in your head. You may not have the scope to produce user stories or fully fleshed out process models, but you should get into the habit of doing them anyway. They are the best way to clarify your own thinking and elicit requirements more quickly.*
- *Don't expect to master everything and have time to read fully into your brief. Prepare as best you can and build strong relationships with your stakeholders so they will help you fill in the gaps.*

Question (Q)	Presenter Responses (R)

3. Do you have strategies to develop collaboration and development plans between BA teams in different continents?

- *Our consultancy is only UK and Ireland based, though we've had occasional engagements in Europe. Strategies for cross border engagement vary – some clients have established full communication connections to the Dublin office, while others use simple video chat and web sharing tools, and others have regular travel between offices. The planning of these things is done as part of the sales cycle or the project initiation phase.*

4. In your experience, which domain lends itself less than others to a consulting BA role? Can you explain why?

- *I don't think there is any domain that is more or less amenable to consulting BA services, but there is a risk with the engagement is long that the consulting BA can become embedded with the client and become more in-house than consulting. This can be addressed by the consulting firm maintaining engagement with the off-site BA and providing rotation opportunities.*

5. How should the consulting BA interact with the subject manner experts when it comes to shaping requirements within a certain business area? What are some behaviours/approaches that should be avoided based on your experience?

- *Everyone is so different that I'm not sure how applicable this is. In our company we've started, just this quarter, developing a "Field Guide to Stakeholders" where we list the traits of our favorite ones (the Visionary, the Leader, the Pedant, the Decision-phobe, etc.) and we've tried to come up with a bulleted list of ways to get the best out of them or de-risk some of them. For instance, with some stakeholders who continually question your approach or the amount of time you want to spend in analysis, a good approach is to stand your ground (without relying on platitudes and clichés to explain yourself). Allowing a stakeholder to talk you into compressing your analysis effort is almost guaranteed to cause frustration, budget overruns and poor relationships.*

6. Can you tell us more about the *BABOK*® Guide book club? Specifically, what are the participation expectations?

- *We take a chapter every other month. In month 1 we read the chapter. In month 2 we discuss via our Yammer group. The only expectation is that everyone contributes 2 posts – one new thread where they comment on some aspect that they agree with and that they disagree with, then they also have to reply to someone else's post where they respond to the challenge. The end of the quarter tends to be a busy month for us, so we haven't got through the entire BABOK yet, but the club is on-going.*

7. Can you describe some of the challenges associated with engaging in agile contracts over traditional contracts for the Consulting BA?

- *The main challenge is that the project delivery is expected to be Agile, but nothing else – the IT budget, steering, etc. remains the traditional waterfall model where all scope is expected to be defined and committed to up front. Sometime the Agile approach has to be abandoned, or we end up with an iterative "Wagile" approach – basically a series of mini-waterfalls. One way of dealing with these challenges is to avoid them: some cultures, some implementations, some organisations aren't suited to Agile and it's better to challenge the decision to go Agile.*

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8. How did/do you motivate 20 BAs to create and support such a successful model?	

- *We have to accept that there is no complete solution – you won't get everyone motivated. It's just life.*

In our company the engagement challenge is not just about motivation:

- *A lot of our BAs are on long term assignment to our clients and in some cases the client is reluctant or even has a policy against their externally sourced staff from participating in "extracurricular" activities. It's much easier for the BAs who are based in the office to be engaged because they are surrounded by the company messaging.*
- *The priority is chargeable work, so the community of practice work can often get squeezed out.*

So some BAs are not allowed to engage and there isn't much we can do about that. For everyone else we've developed a points-based system to make engagement more flexible and it works like this:

- *There are a number of activities that earn you points and we use a SharePoint list for people to record these activities.*
- *Each BA has a target number of points, based on their seniority and it is increased or decreased slightly by their chargeability (which is easy to look up in our timesheet system). The target drops slightly if you're really busy.*
- *Version 1 has a quarterly goal-setting and performance review cycle, so at the end of the quarter it's easy to see how close to their target they got, and 80% of the target is deemed to be within expectations. This feeds into their review.*

The advantage of this system is that the activities can be simple, like posting to the BA group on Yammer, or big, like running a seminar. So, if you are too busy to dedicate time to a large activity, you can still engage by being more active on Yammer for instance.

The BAs invented this system and we are piloting it on behalf of the company – this is our second quarter of doing it this way and it already has had a positive effect on behaviour.