

A GUIDE TO PM/BA COLLABORATION

Trust and respect are funny things; without the two, relationships are due to fail. When it comes to project requirements, trust and respect are paramount to success. Often, project managers (PMs) and business analysts (BAs) find themselves at odds with each other, partially because they don't understand each other's roles or know how to collaborate and flourish. As a matter of fact, 66.6% of all software projects fail because of poorly written, poorly conveyed, missing, false, and/or misinterpreted requirements. It doesn't even matter how proficient a project management function is; project management functions will almost always struggle or fail when requirements are lackluster. Adversely, requirements documents, no matter how clear and professional they are, will always find difficulties when a project management function is deficient. This is extremely problematic as over one trillion dollars are spent yearly and worldwide on software and software associated services.



BAs are often not appreciated for the important role they play in projects and in enabling business change. This is regrettable as poor business analysis is one of the primary causes of failed and challenged projects. Business analysis is also fundamental in delivering change. If a BA completely comprehends a change sponsor's needs, the analysis process becomes pivotal in resolving issues stemming from stakeholder needs and issues. A partnership between the PM and BA can go a long way in reducing project failure, building functionality that users need and will use, and in delivering value to improve business performance.

For projects to be successful, project managers and business analysts need to collaborate and find common ground. Unfortunately, more often than not, the two roles find themselves at odds with each other. Often, project managers become upset with business analysts; they often believe too much time is being allocated to defining requirements, or that BAs spend more time than they should in the pursuit of excellence, rather than focusing on delivery dates and schedules. The business analysts, of course, have their own issues with project managers, a primary one being their assumption that project managers don't seem as concerned with delivering business value and achieving customer satisfaction as they do.

It is apparent that BAs and PMs have issues since neither group has accurate expectations of the other. This misalignment is clear when PMs believe that the sole role of a BA is defining and documenting requirements. On the other hand, BAs have the impression that the PM's role is just to plan the project and keep it on track. This contradicts the self-impression PMs have; they believe their role is that of a project's communicator, facilitating connections between every part of the project. It appears that the more serious conflicts arise when a role acts or conducts activities that are unexpected.

Another prevalent issue is whether or not the PM/BA relationship is a relationship between peers. In most instances, this relationship has been approached with the BA being subordinate to the PM. However, research has shown that the PM/BA relationship should be a peer-to-peer one. Though a peer-to-peer approach for the two roles is almost always reached reluctantly by PMs, the most successful projects show that there is a real partnership between the two. It is through this lens that we realize that one of the most integral components of a successful partnership is equality.

To help further this partnership, we will examine how Project Managers and Business Analysts can work together to achieve favorable outcomes. Let's start by examining defined PM and BA roles. The PMI Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) defines project managers as being:

Responsible for directing the project's resources; developing the project plan; and ensuring that the project is completed on time, within budget and with acceptable quality. The manager also plays a primary role interfacing and coordinating with customers and management.

Similar to project managers, BAs have their own body of knowledge which was developed and is maintained by the International Institute of Business Analysis (IIBA). In the Business Analysis Body of Knowledge (BABOK), a business analyst is defined as

Anyone who performs business analysis, regardless of their title. BAs have become an extremely valuable resource within most organizations. The BA is an important individual that facilitates the completion of major business analysis activities and ensures the appropriate stakeholders remain involved with the project throughout the duration.

It should be noted that a business analyst is anyone who performs business analysis, and yes this could even be project managers if they perform business analysis activities. If these definitions seem broad, it's because they are meant to be.

Another way to view the differences between PMs and BAs is to treat each as a role, not a title. If you view PMs and BAs as roles, not titles, you realize that anyone can carry out their functions. This way, it becomes easy to think of project managers as the role assigned by a performing organization to achieve project objectives. The BA's role can be distilled to, according to the IIBA, a "practitioner who works as a liaison among stakeholders in order to understand the structure, policies, and operations of an organization, and to recommend solutions that enable the organization to achieve its goals." An important thing to notice when looking at this defined role is the word recommend. The role of a BA is that of a high-level management consultant. BAs are not meant to be business decision makers; their role is that of a trusted advisor.

Even if PMs fully understand or have a working knowledge of BA roles and responsibilities, these two roles will still suffer from trust issues. Just having two roles will naturally create divisions, conflicts, competitive urges, and feelings of personal ownership. PMs have to learn to trust BAs. Gaining trust means PMs need to cease believing that BAs are interested in a process of neverending requirements compiling and have difficulties with coordination, facilitation, and timeframes. PMs should also realize that BAs do not have intentions to create impractical expectations with stakeholders in regards to project responsibilities that endanger timeframes. Additionally, many PMs feel that BAs consistently and inappropriately break the chains of command and approach or have private meetings with sponsors and stakeholders, even after requirements are locked. Most importantly, PMs should attempt to cease perpetuating the fears that BAs do not have the technical abilities to accurately articulate requirements.

But trust and respect is clearly a two-way street, and BAs should also alter their perceptions of PMs. Firstly, BAs need to realize that PMs are not unwilling to investigate and analyze stakeholder needs at a high level. And, contrary to most BAs' popular beliefs, PMs can and do understand the complexities of defining, analyzing, and managing requirements. The concern BAs have here is that if a PM doesn't comprehend the intricacies of managing requirements they might feel compelled to hurry a BA through his or her process. Also, BAs seem to fear that PMs view them as helpers assisting with requirements but owning nothing. This only increases tension as BAs often think that PMs move from project to project, leaving BAs holding the bag and dealing with sponsors or consequences.

Fortunately, these common misconceptions shared by project managers and business analysts hold little truth. In fact, if PMs and BAs can overlook these issues, there is plenty of room to improve collaboration; PM and BA responsibilities, after all, overlap in so many places. Both positions have responsibilities in regards to scope, though PMs are generally more concerned with the project scope and product scope, and BAs concentrate on the solution scope. In regards to requirements, PMs can find themselves tasked with collecting them, while BAs work with requirements management plans, documenting requirements, and tracing requirements. Both positions also have to be excellent communicators. PMs find their responsibilities in the management of communications and stakeholders. BAs have to handle the communication issues that come with stakeholder identification and BA communications plans.

While business analysts are playing a pivotal role for many organizations, the business analysis profession is in its relative infancy. What is expected of today's analyst varies widely from organization to organization and from project to project. In some organizations, the business analyst simply writes requirements and does nothing more. In others, the business analyst plays a strategic role and advises management on strategic issues. In the past, many business analysts focused only on IT solutions. However, today the business analyst is NOT confined to just IT solutions; the BA's task is to define solutions which help the organization achieve its goals.

At Enfocus Solutions, we have defined the role of the business analyst as:

1. Analyzing and documenting organization problems.
2. Evaluating options and recommending solutions for organization problems.
3. Eliciting and documenting business and stakeholder needs.
4. Identifying and engaging stakeholders.
5. Defining solution requirements.
6. Facilitating collaboration between business and development teams.
7. Enabling business change and transformation.
8. Ensuring the solution delivers business value.

Please note that we chose to use the term organization problems rather than business problems, as business analysts can be involved in organizations such as non-profits and government. Organization is the term being used more and more in IIBA literature, such as in the BACCM and the BABOK Version 3 currently being developed. Deeper analysis and understanding of a BA's responsibilities can be instrumental in providing project success. Let's examine how business analysts are involved in a project.

EARLY PROJECT INVOLVEMENT

Business analysts are often involved earlier in the project than a project manager. This is because business analysts are needed to document the problem, determine the cause of the problem, and determine the best course of action to proceed. After this, they can then prepare a business case and assist the project sponsor in getting funding for the project. After the project is funded and the project is initiated, the BA then works with the PM to get the project underway. It is common for BAs and PMs to collaborate with project scoping and defining business needs, expected deliverables, and outcomes.

Also, senior project managers and business analysts might be asked to conduct market research, benchmark studies, or competitive analysis surveys. This input can help an executive team with their strategic planning. Even if this collaborative effort doesn't occur, BAs and PMs need to have a firm grasp on the enterprise's strategic direction in order to understand how new initiatives can fit with the strategy of an organization. It is also very useful in building the business case and managing information relevant to business opportunities.

BA/PM relationship expert Kathleen B. Hass has noted many places in each stage of business analysis where there are opportunities for PMs and BAs to collaborate. For example, there are more than a few places in the early, solution analysis phase where BAs and PMs are encouraged to collaborate, and these include:

- Conducting feasibility, benchmark, and competitive studies
- Creating the business case, scope statements, preliminary time, and cost estimates
- Conducting risk assessment and risk response planning
- Establishing project priorities
- Managing stakeholders
- Getting the right people involved and excited about the potential project
- Partnering with senior IT architecture team to create the solution's "vision"

BUSINESS ANALYSIS DELIVERABLES

Project managers always think in terms of what deliverables will be produced and when are they due. Below is a typical set of deliverables for Business Analysis.

- PDD - Problem Definition Document
- CGA - Capability Gap Analysis
- SSD - Solution Scope Document
- BAP - Business Analysis Plan
- BC - Business Case
- BRP - Benefits Realization Plan
- BRD - Business Requirements Document
- SNA - Stakeholders Need Assessment
- SRS - Software (System) Requirements Specification
- TRD - Transition Requirements Document
- SAV - Solution Assessment and Validation Report
- SLR - Service Level Requirements

SOLUTION SCOPE VS PROJECT SCOPE

Both PMs and BAs also find that though they are both involved with scope management, they proceed in different ways. If the two positions are organized and adhere to expectations, the collaborative process can be smoother and mutually beneficial. PMs should focus on the planning of project processes, to start with. Next, they should concentrate on integrating the BA approach, as well as deliverables, into the actual project and tasks necessary in delivering a service or product. The BAs' responsibilities in scope management should instead concentrate on defining and the project scope, with specific attention spent on features necessary for characterizing products or results. Also, BAs should make certain that the business analysis approach and deliverables align closely with the project.

Project managers and business analysts can also collaborate better in scope management, even though the terminology differs in Pmbok and Babok. One way collaboration can be tightened is by establishing

defined planning roles. For example, PMs should be the ones focusing on the planning of project processes. In addition to this, PMs also should be the ones focusing on integrating the BA approach and deliverables into the actual product and the labor required necessary for delivering products, results, or services. On the other hand, a BA should instead focus on the planning (and defining) of the product scope, specifically the functions and features that typify products, results, or services and the BA approach and deliverables connected to the general context of the project. If business needs are to be met, BAs are needed to identify, recommend, and/or promote scope changes, but they should avoid making actual commitments; it is the responsibility of PMs to manage the project scope.

Many project managers and business analysts seem to have difficulty grasping the difference between project and product scope. The paragraphs below help to clarify the differences and responsibilities.

- **Project Scope:** Project Scope includes all the work needed to create a product, or deliver a service, or generate a result. Project Scope is all about the project; it defines the work required to create and deploy the product. The project scope statement is prepared by the project manager.
- **Solution Scope:** Product or Solution Scope are the characteristics, features, or functions of the product or service to be built. Solution scope is all about the solution to be implemented: how it will look like, how it will function, and others characteristics. The product or solution scope is prepared by the business analyst.

The purpose of the solution scope is to conceptualize the recommended solution in sufficient detail to enable stakeholders to understand which new business capabilities an IT business solution will deliver. Written correctly, the solution scope will create a shared vision. For enterprise projects, the scope statement is often written based in terms of the impacts on people, processes, and technologies. The solution scope is often validated in the capability gap analysis.

Creating a shared vision concerning the business solution at this point in the project will help the requirements elicitation process stay focused, significantly reduce scope creep, and reduce timelines thereby freeing up resources sooner and increasing stakeholder satisfaction. A well-defined solution scope significantly increases the probability of a project success.

Not having a clear understanding of the differences between solution and project scope increases the possibility of conflicts, particularly in regards to project scope. Project managers can find themselves fighting against those additional functions and features that can provide a negative impact on a project's schedule or cost. The business analysts don't want to delay progress; they just recognize that the proposed changes will be instrumental in meeting the key stakeholder's requirements.

COMMUNICATIONS AND REPORTING RELATIONSHIPS

If project managers and business analysts want to manage communications, there are approaches that might improve issues between the two. To start with, it must be understood that PMs are charged with all project specific communications related to project management. This means that a BA should then concentrate on work that includes stakeholders affected by solution requirements. If BAs have direct reporting responsibilities to a business domain, they find it necessary to facilitate continuous communications with said organization. And, because these communications affect stakeholders, stakeholder lists become important documents for the shared project.

Perhaps one of the most obvious ways to improve relationships between BAs and PMs is to improve communications between the two groups. If communication roles are defined early on, this can be mutually beneficial. For example, it should be understood that PMs are responsible for every project related communication with every project stakeholder. BAs, however, should concern themselves with stakeholders who are directly affected by solution requirements. If a BA directly reports to a business domain, then they should also manage continuing communications with the company. Also, as these communications include stakeholders, a stakeholder list (or register), is a crucial record for PM/BA collaboration. If using a stakeholder list, easily understood boundaries need to be agreed upon and instituted, such as:

- Who builds it?
- Who uses it?
- How does it get used?
- When using the list, what are the basic rules of communication?

There are so many communication issues that can arise during PM/BA collaboration. One issue is the Project Sponsor. Since the BA had the relationship first, it is often difficult to transition this relationship to the project manager. Below is a suggested approach for clearly defining communications responsibilities between the PM and BA.

- The PM is accountable for all project-related communications.
- The BA is responsible for communications involving project stakeholders who are affected by the solution requirements. When BAs have direct reporting responsibilities to a business domain, they also maintain ongoing communications with that organization.

Because communications involve stakeholders, the stakeholder list becomes a critical document for the project that both the PM and BA are heavily invested in. Clear boundaries need to be in place, including how it is built and used, and what the rules are for communicating with people.

REQUIREMENTS MANAGEMENT

Project Manager and Business Analyst relationships can also be bettered through easy requirements management improvements. For example, after their role has been defined for a specific project, A BA generally becomes responsible for managing and owning requirements elicitation, analysis, and documentation. This is all done under the watchful eye and leadership of a PM. The BA then must craft a requirements plan that is able to feed into the project management plan. After locking in requirements, BAs will then find it necessary to use a traceability matrix to trace requirements through each remaining project stage. This means the BA will inevitably trace requirements through design, testing, user acceptance, and closing stages. The BA, while under direction from a PM, will also find it necessary to become occupied with change requests. And, while under a PM's supervision, a BA should be consistently involved with change requests, as well. Another point that can improve requirements collaboration for BAs and PMs is that the BA should organize and lead user acceptance test activities. This is a way of making certain that the eventual solution meets the requirements provided.

Requirements are often baselined. Once the requirements are baselined, the BA traces the requirements through the remaining stages of the project (Design, Build, Test, User Acceptance, Delivery). Requirements will inevitably change during the course of the project. Changing requirements almost always impact the project and require a related project change request. The BA is actively involved in change requests under the supervision of the PM.

Here is a list of opportunities for BA/PM collaboration that can occur during the requirements processes:

- Conducting requirements elicitation workshops
- Determining the number of iterations of requirements elicitation, specification, and validation
- Determining the appropriate lifecycle choice
- Developing the project management plan
- Conducting trade-off analysis for the requirements and solution trade-offs
- Balancing the competing demands
- Validating requirements
- Prototyping
- Updating the business case
- Planning and facilitating the control gate review, signoff on requirements, and go/no decisions

USER ACCEPTANCE TESTING (UAT)

The goal of UAT is to validate that the solution is of sufficient quality to be accepted by the users, and ultimately, the sponsors. It is helpful to think of quality as the degree to which the deliverables meet the stated and implied requirements in such a way to produce a usable system. As applicable and appropriate, the BA organizes and leads the user acceptance test activities as a means of ensuring that the requirements are met in the delivered solution.

A common misconception regarding UAT is that it is a discrete segment of the software development lifecycle that falls somewhere between system testing and deployment.

In the business analysis world, we will broaden the definition of UAT. Think of UAT as the idea that the user should be represented in every step of the software delivery lifecycle, including requirements, designs, testing, and maintenance, so that the user community is prepared, and even eager, to accept the software after it is completed. Taking this role significantly reduces project risks and allows defects to be caught much earlier in the process saving significant cost and effort.

Times when PM/BA collaboration is expected or common include:

- Developing the test plan and test approach
- Validating activities to ensure the solution meets the business requirements
- Reviewing test results and dispositioning identified defects
- Conducting defect root cause analysis and determining the appropriate corrective action
- Managing issues
- Managing Stakeholders
- Facilitating the go/no go decision to deliver

LATE PROJECT INVOLVEMENT

After the project is completed, the BA stays on to work with the business to ensure that the benefits are realized. The Business Analysis lifecycle is generally much longer than the project management lifecycle. In some organizations, the pre-project activities are performed by a project manager and the benefits realization activities are performed by a portfolio management office; however, it should be noted that these activities are business analysis activities even though the role may be performed by someone with a title of project manager or portfolio manager. In these cases, the project manager or portfolio manager are playing the role of the business analyst.

Late in the project, PMs and BAs can collaborate over:

- Prioritization of enhancements
- Root cause analysis of performance and value attainment issues

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS FOR WORKING TOGETHER

Below is a list of recommendations of how BAs and PMs can work together.

1. Clear, documented, and mutually agreed roles and responsibilities for business analyst and project management activities. When roles aren't clearly defined, blame is often thrown around.
2. A business analysis plan should be developed that specifies the BA deliverables that will be produced. The deliverables in the plan should be incorporated into the overall project management plan.
3. Develop and implement mechanisms to promote constant and open communication. This has to occur early in the relationship and might take courage.
4. Openly discuss the reporting relationship. Is the BA a peer or subordinate to the PM?
5. Both roles should actively engage the business sponsor.
6. Build a partnership based on mutual trust and respect.
7. Work through conflicts with clear and frequent communications.

