

Memoir of the CBAP Exam

Journal on the World's First
Certified Business Analyst Professional
Certification (CBAP) Exam

Business Analysis Article
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So there we were: 15 frightened souls about to embark on the world's first Certified Business Analyst Professional Certification™ (CBAP) exam. We didn't know much about the test when we signed up for the exam. The IIBA™ had quietly posted an offering of the first exam.

As a vocal advocate, instructor and practitioner, I felt obliged to throw my hat into the ring and participate in the first offering. What we knew about the test amounted to this:

- 1. A test will be given.**
- 2. It will be on November 10 in Orlando, United States.**
- 3. There will be questions.**

That was about it. As we got nearer to the test date, a few details were exposed, of the following nature:

- 1. There will be 150 questions.**
- 2. We would have 3.5 hours to complete the exam.**
- 3. The exam is geared toward “senior” business analysts**

Perhaps I should back up a bit. When the announcement was made that the first test was open for applications, I immediately downloaded the application form and went to work. There were only 50 open seats for the first offering, so I felt the pressure to get it in quickly. I needed two signed and sealed recommendations from our previous or current professional positions, so I got those in the works first. Once those were underway, I took to the application form with gusto. Armed with my resume and a rather large pot of coffee, I went to work. You must declare expertise in four of the six knowledge areas. For the uninitiated, the six knowledge areas are as follows:

- 1. Enterprise Analysis**
- 2. Requirements Planning and Management**
- 3. Requirements Elicitation**
- 4. Requirements Analysis and Documentation**
- 5. Solution Assessment and Validation**
- 6. Requirements Communication**

With my specialties selected, I continued filling out the application and went about identifying the business analysis tasks I had accomplished (according to the BABOK™) and the specific deliverables generated from individual projects.



After much diligent work over the course of a couple of days, the application was set to be mailed. My references were prepared, signed, sealed and signed again, and ready for transmission to the IIBA.

Having been a practitioner for well over 20 years (don't ask), and having taught business analysis courses to eager practitioners for a good number of those years, I landed in Orlando full of confidence and irrational exuberance. I had even read through the BABOK V1.6, the reference guide for the exam. Shortly after my arrival, I bumped into a colleague who was aware of my next day's activities. A recognised business analysis expert in his own right, he had already perused the BABOK and had made some interesting observations. He pointed them out to me by way of a pop quiz. "In which knowledge area does the task 'Obtain Requirements Signoff' appear in the BABOK?"

While trying desperately to hide my confusion, I blurted out the first knowledge area that came to mind. "It must be in 'Requirements Planning and Management,'" I responded with all the confidence I could muster.

"WRONG-O," responded my increasingly angst-inspiring friend. "It's actually in the 'Requirements Communication' knowledge area."

My afternoon was already planned out. I was working the IIBA booth, followed by dinner with Marcos, a fellow DC Metropolitan Chapter board member and another candidate aspiring to CBAP-dom the next day. Plan B became to weasel my way out of booth duty and do some good old fashioned cramming. My associates at the booth were very gracious in covering the remainder of the quickly fading afternoon while I crammed.

Dinner time came after I'd gotten through a meagre two knowledge areas. After meeting in the hotel lobby, Marcos and I headed toward the restaurant and wandered past the bar, and who should we find there but several members of the IIBA board, working diligently. Marcos and I immediately crafted a plan to double whatever libations we found on the table to see if we can shake loose some information. And, since a good many of us know that wine is found in the very earliest of roots in the IIBAs formation, we considered the possibility that this could be indeed improve our chances of getting more insight into the joy awaiting us now less than 14 hours away. (A note to aspiring CBAPs: This didn't work, but it was a lot of fun trying.)



Once at the restaurant, and armed with our BABOKs we ordered dinner and began our final exam review. As we pondered what may be on the test, we noticed that we were not alone. Others were also in the restaurant staring quizzically at the familiar-looking document. We chatted with some folks that evening and generally helped ourselves to generate an air of fear and loathing toward our own little cognitive Mount Everest.

Test morning had finally rolled around. The test seating began at 8:00 a.m., and we were forewarned that lateness would not be tolerated. As such, I was there bright and early, and met a few more of the guinea pigs—er, um, aspiring CBAPs—willing to sit for the first-ever examination. When we got into the room to take the test, we learned a few more things, like:

- 1. If your cell phone so much as vibrates loudly in the room, you may be disqualified. After checking my cell for the third time, I decided to have it over with, and just pulled the battery directly out of the phone.**
- 2. If you sit close enough to even think about looking at someone else's paper, you may be immediately disqualified.**

The first test was paper-based, and it brought me right back to the SAT experience...remember the phrase "...and do not open your examination booklet until instructed to do so"? Yup, there it was. For the next three hours it was just me and my test booklet. I think it is safe to say that the 3.5 hours was a sufficient window of time to fully complete the exam. I was one of the later ones to leave, and that's due to the fact that I went over the test a good three times to assuage my anxiety.

Now, some readers are probably also PMPs. The PMP® examination is currently taken via computer, and is graded immediately. Once you push the "I am done" button, the computer grades your test and notifies you of your pass/fail status within the longest 30 seconds of your life. This is not yet the case with the CBAP exam. Because it is a paper test, the papers are sent away for grading and analysis before pass/fail status can be determined. This was a 6-week waiting process. With the PMP exam, there is a known minimum score that you must achieve in order to pass the exam. This is also not so for the CBAP. A complicated analysis process takes place with each execution of the test to determine the "cut score." This score may be different for different test offerings.

The analysis includes an evaluation of each test in the test set for possible bias, opportunity for misinterpretation, and an assessment from business



analysis experts on how many practitioners should be able to get each question correct. I have a small confession to make here. I was a math minor in college, and my eyes even glazed over a little when I heard the description of how this process works. Suffice it to say, the IIBA takes test veracity very seriously and has gone to great lengths to ensure the test is valid, accurate and representative of our industry.

The community of aspiring CBAPs had created a shared e-mail address list when we were in Orlando, and the days leading up to the results were filled with e-mails fishing for information. Eventually, the important e-mail came, it was a joyous moment indeed! I passed! Word got around the e-mail list pretty quickly, and the graduates shared a virtual toast to ourselves as the very first group of certified CBAPs.

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