

## The top five commercial skills needed to be a great Business Analyst

Have you ever wondered what makes business analysts great at their jobs? There are certain skills and attributes which we have identified in business analysts that separate the good from the great. This quote from Rudyard Kipling sums up what are the key skills needed by aspiring great business analysts.

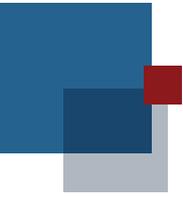
"I keep six honest serving men (They taught me all I knew); Their names are What and Why and When And How and Where and Who."

The business analyst needs to be aware of the What, Why, When, How, Where and Who throughout the project lifecycle; and more importantly, the BA needs to be able to mobilise all those areas to produce a finished product that elicits support and approval from their clients and stakeholders.

We will look in more detail, the top five skills a business analyst needs in order to produce exceptional quality work

**1. Smart Listening**—Even the best finished product/end result is useless if it doesn't match the original requirements or isn't how the customer pictured it. Business analysts need to be able to accurately gather requirements. This means sometimes understanding what the customer is trying to outline before they fully understand it themselves. It is important to understand the expectations of the customer—if the customer is expecting something that isn't delivered, the project will feel like a failure to them, even if you believe it is a job well done. In short, smart listening means being empathetic; empathy builds trust, and trust gets people to both talk and listen. You also need to be able to understand current processes and have a grasp of what it is that they are trying to overcome, e.g. what problem are they trying to solve.

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# INSIDER INSIGHTS

**2. Problem Solving**—It is great if you deliver exactly what the customer asks for, but not if it doesn't address the issue that the project was initiated to address. Business analysts need to have a sense of whether the requirements that the customer is outlining, will actually address the business issue at hand, which in turn must support an organisation's strategic goals and objectives. If not, BAs need to be able to think analytically and creatively of alternatives, or they need to be able to push customers to think of alternatives themselves. This can be done through clever facilitation.

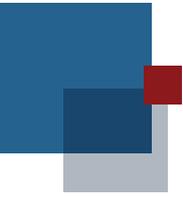
**3. Facilitation**—BAs have to be able to help customers articulate what it is that they want achieve. Sometimes they will need to push for more details and ask questions in a specific way to extract the information. They need to be able to keep people on track during discussions to get the most productive results. When agreeing to certain requirements, they also need to be aware of what is and isn't within the project's scope. Business analysts are NOT negotiators but facilitators of crucial, and honest straight talk, bringing a group to consensus on their understanding of requirements. While a scientific art, is critical to the implementation of requirements.

A way of managing this is by sectioning requirements into 'Must Haves' and 'Nice to Haves.' Customers' expectations have to be managed, through a variety of elicitation techniques, so that they are realistic.

**4. Detail and Organisation**—Good documentation skills are extremely critical. Details are important in process mapping and 'Use Cases.' Traceability is a BA's best tool. Through meticulous and detailed documentation, traceability will ensure that requirements are clear, concise, accurate, unambiguous and demonstrate lineage to and from the originally stated goals and objectives. This will make the executive management that much more supportive where budget, and resources are concerned.

*The top five skills a business analyst needs in order to produce exceptional quality work includes*

- 1. smart listening*
- 2. problem solving*
- 3. facilitation*
- 4. detail and organisation*
- 5. interaction*



# INSIDER INSIGHTS

**5. Interaction**—Last but not least, business analysts need to have great interaction skills. They need to be able to communicate to all those involved with the initiative—to elicit and report on requirements and to keep all stakeholders up dated. A great business analyst will be able to communicate the importance of a project to others, and motivate them to complete it by painting a picture of the benefits. Interaction not only involves smart listening (see above), but delivering the right message, carefully crafted questions, meticulously planned elicitation workshops, and pinpoint precision when it comes to putting pen to paper.

Most importantly, business analysts need to have a positive attitude. There can be many obstacles and misunderstandings on the road to a successful project, so it is vital to stay positive, to demonstrate leadership and to look for that bigger picture.

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