

BECOMING A BUSINESS ANALYST

20 QUESTIONS ANSWERED

A quick guide for
aspiring business analysts



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Dedication

To my sister, Abim, my shining star.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most common questions I get from visitors and members of the Business Analyst Learnings community is, “How do I become a business analyst?”. While there are numerous cases of business analysts (BAs) who have become so by accident, there are also those who have strategically tailored their education and career path to pursue this intellectually stimulating profession. From the first class I attended on systems analysis and design, during my computer science undergraduate degree, I knew analysis was what I wanted to specialize in.

The first job I landed was as a database analyst. I saw it as a means to an end and felt no fulfillment working in the role. I switched jobs thrice before I eventually landed my first business analyst (BA) job. I haven’t looked back since then. Even though the profession, like all others, is fraught with its own peculiarities and issues, the pleasure of doing what I love continually helps me through difficult moments.

This eBook is my avenue for sharing my understanding and experience of what business analysis is in the hopes that people looking to enter the profession will be armed with sufficient information to launch their careers and have key information on what they can expect.

Aspiring BAs are faced with a difficult task: becoming familiar with what it takes to succeed as a BA. Though there’s a wealth of information on how to start a career in business analysis, this eBook provides a streamlined and comprehensive guide that focuses on the essentials, as well as the most common problems prospective BAs run into when starting their careers.

The eBook is organized into 20 questions, each answered in a way that is accessible even to complete newcomers to the world of business analysis. At the same time, it provides professional insight for seasoned BAs.

I sincerely hope that by providing answers to key business analysis career questions, you will be able to draw up a plan to kick-start your BA career and achieve your professional goals.

2. WHAT IS BUSINESS ANALYSIS AND WHAT DO BUSINESS ANALYSTS DO?

There are varying definitions of “business analysis”, with many professions involving elements of business analysis, even though their job titles do not

carry the term “business analyst”. According to the International Institute of Business Analysis (IIBA),

Business analysis is the set of **tasks and techniques** used to work as a liaison among stakeholders to understand the structure, policies, and operations of an organization and to recommend solutions that enable the organization to achieve its goals.

The IIBA also defines business analysis as “the practice of enabling change in an organizational context, by defining needs and recommending solutions that deliver value to stakeholders.”

The BA can identify the need for change, define this need, and facilitate the process of implementing that change within the organization.

In my attempt to provide a comprehensive insight into what business analysis is, I'll define it using this form:

Business analysis involves doing **X** by **Y** to achieve **Z**.

What do BAs do? - X

BAs solve business problems. Solving business problems may sound easy but it isn't. Too many times, hydra-headed problems arise in the organization, with no clear indication of exactly what the main causes are, in what order they should be tackled, and what steps should be taken to resolve them. Since it is all too easy to solve the wrong problem, BAs are brought in to analyze the causes of problems and guide the business in achieving an improved future state. There's no worse thing than starting a project for the wrong reasons, only to realize that what you thought was the problem is not or, worse still, lose track of the problem you set out to solve due to overwhelming or conflicting information.

BAs **define** problems, **evaluate** options, **recommend** solutions, and work towards **realizing** those solutions.

BAs identify unique opportunities for improvement and develop a strategy for exploiting these opportunities, which may not be directly obvious to the business.

How is business analysis done? - Y

Performing business analysis work involves:

1. Learning how the business works. As the saying goes, "You cannot improve what you do not understand". BAs should have a deep knowledge of any domain they work in to be able to advise the business on what steps to take in which direction. They must have a deep understanding of regulations, market trends, solutions, processes, and the peculiarities of the organization.

A BA must **strive to understand stakeholders and their problems, trends in the environment, and constraints (financial, technical, cultural, political, environmental, and social)** that may affect the implementation of any solution.

As part of understanding how the business works, the BA **discusses issues with multiple stakeholders to define the real needs** of the business. BAs also facilitate communication between stakeholders (including the technical team).

2. Recommending customized solutions that will be socially, culturally, and technically feasible. There's no one-size-fits-all solution to business problems. Every business or department is unique and it is the responsibility of the BA to identify the causes of each problem and recommend a **tailored** solution that will address the issues at hand through detailed analysis. The fact that a solution worked in one situation does not in any way imply that it will work in another. It is the role of the BA to ensure that any recommended solution is acceptable to stakeholders and will work in the environment where it is implemented, regardless of the constraints.

BAs should **keep past mistakes in mind when making recommendations to prevent the business from repeating them in the future.** A BA should also **keep the business goals in mind when making decisions and recommendations.** Solutions are generally more acceptable to the business when they are crafted in line with corporate goals and strategy.

3. Identifying the gaps that need to be filled and actions that should be taken to arrive at the desired state. In defining where the business needs to be, the BA draws up a list of steps that should be taken to arrive at the desired state, guides the implementation until completion, and continually monitors the effectiveness of the solution and the value delivered by the solution, even after it has been implemented.

4. Translating stakeholder needs into functional specifications that can be used by developers to build the software (for cases where the solution is a software system).

What does business analysis achieve? - Z

So, what exactly is the end game?

Business analysis, if done effectively, results in the desired outcome. The desired outcome describes the benefits obtained from the fulfilment of the business need that was identified at the onset of the project. There are many outputs of business analysis: deliverables, work products, and actual working solutions. In the long run, these deliverables contribute to creating desired outcomes, which may be increased customer satisfaction, increased revenue, and the like.

Imagine that the company you're working for is a ship. The CEO is the captain and other employees are the crew members. As a BA, you are the navigator. Your job is to ensure that the ship (i.e. the company) will safely reach the destination selected by the captain.

To do so, you manage business requirements, ensuring that they are valid and in perfect alignment with the company's short-term and long-term goals. Requirements cannot be identified or fulfilled without having stakeholders on board, which is another responsibility of BAs—interacting with stakeholders to elicit requirements. Also, part of any business analysis effort is constant verification of the appropriateness of changes and validation of their impact on the company.