

## **Elevating the Role of the Business Analyst**

***This article is the first in a series discussing how progressive organizations are moving away from today's traditional requirements approaches to a business specification-centric approach.***

Over the last several years the business analyst role has garnered increased recognition within the marketplace. The push towards business agility, increased compliance and regulatory requirements, exorbitantly high IT costs, outsourcing and new technology enablers are the drivers behind organizations taking a closer look at their business analysis competency.

This recent surge of marketplace activity around business analysis methods, techniques, training, bodies of knowledge and professional certifications are all part of this wave of interest.

While many of the above activities are steps in the right direction and the discipline of business analysis is long overdue for the attention it deserves, there are significant short comings with today's business analysis approaches that hamper the ability of many organizations to accelerate their time-to-market delivery of services and products while dramatically reducing the costs involved in making business behavior changes.

For organizations to achieve any significant gains in business agility and reduced IT costs through increased business analysis capabilities they must position themselves to adopt a business-level specification that is void of technical details. This business specification must be an abstraction that accurately represents an organization's business behavior in a way that can be maintained by business analysts and understood by the business.

***Traditional business analysis approaches don't address the need for business analysts to retain ownership of the business concepts once they are implemented in an automation solution.***

Today's thinking doesn't address the need for business analysts to continually be able to directly specify and maintain business processes, business rules and the underlying business terms that these depend upon. The result is decreased business agility associated with not empowering the business analyst with ownership of these elements.

Over the years, the business side of the house has ceded much of its understanding and control of detailed business knowledge to their IT counterparts. This has been a natural evolution because many organizations rely on automated processes to support their business behavior while IT has the engineering perspective along with the necessary tools to automate the complex behavior of the business.

Conventional wisdom holds that, as requirements move to the design function, IT processes transform the business analyst's work into a product that, if all goes well, delivers the outcome that the business desires. But this approach does nothing to preserve a business's ability to understand the business behavior internal to the delivered solution. This loss of fidelity to what the Business Analyst specified is the key barrier to the ability of organizations to maintain their agility.

***This loss of business control of key business-level concepts results in the business forever being beholden to the IT organization by requiring them to extract the details of the business operations every time they need to understand and potentially change the business behavior.***

Soon after business analysts hand-off their requirements to IT designers, they often become relics of no practical use. This is because when requirements are signed off and complete, most often, they are not really "done". After the hand-off, IT designers go through an arduous process to eliminate all the gaps left by the business analysts in their attempts to communicate what the business wants without actually representing how the business will behave.

Through these hand-offs and translations the key business concepts that make this detailed business behavior understandable are stripped away and replaced by the IT constructs necessary for the effective operation of the automation solution. By ceding the design of this business behavior to IT designers, these technical representations become the only accurate representation of the business behavior. They will be revisited time and time again in a never-ending cycle of rework as they are re-translated into fragmented pieces of functionality the business needs to understand while they wrestle with implementing business change.

On the business side this often manifests itself in the painful reality of IT outsourcing efforts where the business attempts to deliver complete specifications to outsourcers while they no longer have access to their collaborative IT architecture and design partners to fill in the gaps within the business requirements.

***The move to business-level specifications is a necessary transformation to eliminate the dysfunction and rework created by continually ceding control of business knowledge to IT.***

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, only through the development of technically agnostic business specifications can significant business agility and reduced rework be achieved. These business-level specifications are an abstraction that represents an organization's business concepts and behavior in a way that can be maintained by business analysts and understood by the business. This eliminates the need to use IT resources to deal with the stream of relatively small business changes where IT adds no value, but are forced to be involved because the business knowledge is hopelessly intertwined with IT automation constructs.

By allowing business analysts to understand and control the business specifications that execute these kinds of changes directly, we end up eliminating the hand holding that IT resources provide and, as a bonus, we end up being able to respond more quickly to the need to make these kinds of business changes.

The incremental tweaks to business analysts' skill sets occurring with today's traditional requirements training will not put an organization on the path to increased business agility and reduced rework. The move towards business specifications requires re-addressing the roles of business and IT while redefining their collaborative partnership. Within most companies there are deep convictions as to the roles of business and IT along with organizational barriers that impede business analysts from gaining a clear understanding, let alone the ability to maintain an organization's true business behavior.

A roadmap is necessary for organizations to understand how to advance business analysis capabilities in a direction that will move the business analyst from their

current role as a “go-between” to a role that defines an accurate and detailed representation of how the business behaves.

In the next article, "The BA Gap Analysis and "To-Be" Business Analyst", I'll provide an overview of a business analysis maturity model that is a roadmap for how an organization can evolve its business agility while reducing rework which, in turn, results in lower costs for business operations.

#### Author's Bio

David Heidt is a Managing Partner with Enterprise Agility. He helps tailor business analysis frameworks where integrated business processes, rules and automation specifications are keys to increasing business agility and reducing operational costs. As a frequent presenter at industry conferences, he has authored numerous white papers and articles in the areas of business process analysis, business rules management and bridging the gap between business & IT. He is instrumental in the roll-out of the Business Analysis Maturity Model and the Business Analysis Framework which guide mentoring and leadership activities for clients in the areas of business analysis, rules-driven business process management and business process transformation. As a Certified Business Analysis Professional (CBAP) he is a faculty member at Northwestern University and a member of the OMG's Business Architecture Working Group.