6 skills to become a business analyst

As we enter the 4th industrial revolution - the age of information - businesses the world over are bleeding data. Within that data lies the valuable insight of how to enable digital transformations, gain a competitive edge and mitigate risk within an ever-changing market. In the new world, one of the most sought-after roles is that of the 'business analyst'.

Although the precise role differs between organisations, largely, a business analyst is responsible for:

- Finding possible answers to current or future problems.

- Translating stakeholder needs into business outcomes.

- Fostering collaboration across the business.

According to global research from the International Institute of Business Analysis (IIBA), in the US alone, the number of business analyst roles has increased by 747% over the last two years. While in the UK, the role of Business Analyst is listed in the top 20 best jobs for 2020.

The reason why BAs are so sought-after?

Because they make digital transformation easier - something organisations need to undertake in the information age. They also translate complex processes during development and drive change management.

Here in the UK, research from IIBA UK shows that the largest sector employing the most business analysts is 'financial services banking', followed by 'financial service - non banking', with the main services provided being requirements analysis, elicitation and collaboration and lifecycle management.

So, what makes a great business analyst?

1. Technical skills

Straight in at number 1 are technical skills, because how else can you get the job done without them? Research indicates that the majority of business analysts sit within an organisation's technology function. Perhaps unsurprisingly, their recommendations result in software development 75% - 100% of the time.

Therefore, in order to identify the right outcomes for businesses that seek to be successful in the information age, business analysts need to have a sound appreciation with what IT applications are currently available, understand what the key trends are at any given moment and be able to share what the latest technology innovations have to offer.
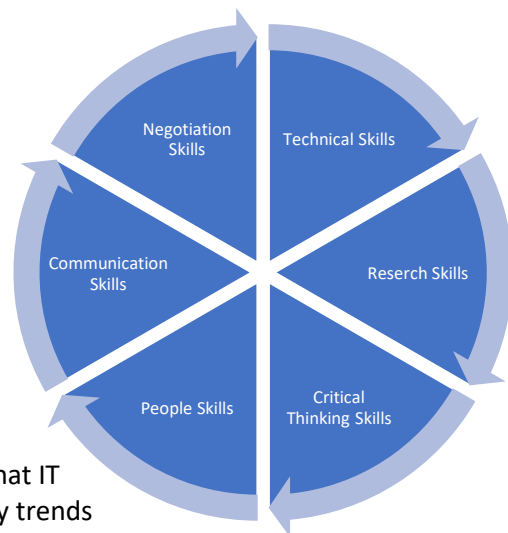
In our modern world, testing software, systems and platforms is perhaps as important as the analytical skills you train to achieve. Indeed, the role of the software testing engineer is as revered and as important to business and IT systems success as the role of the Business Analyst.

Choose to study for a career in business analysis and BCS will ensure that you qualify with the right balance of theoretical knowledge and commercial awareness. From the basics of business change at foundation level, through to modelling business processes and requirements engineering as a practitioner, on to agile, business finance and stakeholder engagement at a professional level and beyond, they will ensure you have the practical skills and knowledge that translate directly to your current role and set you on the path for future career success.

2. Research skills

Every project starts with a problem - a business question that requires careful consideration with several possible outcomes explored before a decision is made.

Identifying and recommending the most suitable outcome is dependent on some actual analysis of the situation, which requires investigation, probing and research. As a business analyst, it's your responsibility to leave no stone unturned as you seek the truth to help the business make an informed decision.

This is going to involve asking the difficult questions, examining strange and different angles and finding the lessons learned from others in your industry. You need to know that when you present your findings back to the business, you're addressing the core problem, rather than the symptoms it presents.

3. Critical thinking skills

Anyone is capable of doing some research and simply presenting what they've found. What differentiates a business analyst is their ability to dig a little deeper and really get to the heart of the issue.

Nothing in life is as simple as 'problem / solution', there's always multiple ways to address each challenge. A business analyst will be able to demonstrate that they have identified various options and explored the most viable ones, including those that venture into more uncommon areas or consider alternative viewpoints.

As part of that evaluation, you will need to consider the impact and likelihood of each option, questioning *'what if…?'* and considering the risk of choosing, or not choosing, a particular outcome.

Performing a comprehensive assessment of multiple options will give the team confidence that they have made a sound judgement when they make the decision with which option to proceed.

4. People skills

The nature of the role means that business analysts spend a lot of time interacting with different business stakeholders, users, clients, management and developers. Research from IIBA UK shows that workshops and interviewing remained the most popular techniques for extracting information.

Understanding different individuals' opinions, motivations and objectives are essential to successfully balance the array of personalities at the table. Also, knowing where they sit within the organisation, including what they are responsible and accountable for, will help to uncover their risk appetite and help determine how to frame your conclusions and recommendations.

Furthermore, in our increasingly digital world, teams aren't necessarily located in the same office. Today, it's more common for people to work remotely, located anywhere in the world. Being able to manage

relationships both online and virtually could be the difference between achieving buy-in to your proposals or not.

5. Communication skills

People skills go hand-in-hand with communication skills, because if you are unable to communicate effectively, you're never going to reach an amicable conclusion that satisfies all parties.

Within any organisation, people want to feel like they have had their voice heard and that they are kept in the loop. Therefore, the first important skill is listening - and not just sitting there and nodding along, but actively listening. When people feel like you genuinely care about what they have to say, they are more inclined to open up and give the 'warts and all' version of events. This can be invaluable when identifying possible outcomes.

By establishing clear channels of communication, you ensure that everyone is kept up-to-date with the project's progress - the last thing you want is a key stakeholder being asked what's happening and not knowing the answer, it's a sure fire way of stalling the project.

When establishing clear, effective communication channels, it is all about balancing:

- The frequency of when you communicate (for example daily, weekly, monthly).

- How people like to receive that information (for example visual dashboards vs. written reports, or email vs. face-to-face meetings).

- The level of detail they require to feel confident (for example the c-suite might want a high-level 'red-amber-green' status, whereas a mid-manager may want a more detailed technical report).

6. Negotiation skills

Eventually, your team will need to make a decision on the best path to take for the business - that's not always as easy as it may sound.

Yes, you have performed a rigorous evaluation of the problem, explored different ideas and made your recommendation, but there are going to be lots of egos in the room - and as we said at the beginning, everyone comes to the table with different opinions, motivations, objectives and responsibilities.

Having the ability to balance those individual wants with what the business actually needs requires professional persuasion and negotiation. It's a tough skill to master, but one you must if you are to achieve an outcome that everyone embraces, is rolled out across the organisation and becomes ingrained as part of business-as-usual.

Career development opportunities are rife

Training as a business analyst offers a dynamic career that leaves you open to various options, whether climbing the career ladder, taking a side-step into a related discipline, such as business transformation, strategy management or product management, or specialising in a particular domain, like financial services.

By choosing to develop your IT skills with a BCS qualification, you will attain a leading business analysis certification that takes you from foundation to practitioner, professional, consultant and eventually expert.

Discover why over 100,000 professionals worldwide choose to certify in business analysis with BCS

Built on our 25-year reputation for exam quality, integrity and impartiality, our business analysis course is designed by industry experts to ensure the teaching is highly relevant in today's marketplace. As such, our certifications are globally recognised in over 200 countries and align with the leading 'Skills Framework for the Information Age (SFIA)'.

However, the BCS has taken the framework to the next level with SFIA***plus***. Developed to bring the standard framework to life, SFIA***plus*** offers 6 additional task definitions and 8 additional skills resources at each level (all of which are supported by TSG Training). The result is the industry's most established and widely adopted model, which enables employers and practitioners to identify and plan their continuous professional development in line with business needs and market trends.

Discover more about how SFIA***plus*** provides you with transferable skills, identifies a clear progression path and supports you at every stage of your career

Learn the skills you need for a career in business analysis with TSG Training for BA's