

IT RECRUITMENT MASTERCLASS

with Ayub Shaikh

Jedi-level
Interviewing Skills



Interviewing the Business Analyst

Interviewing a Business Analyst with confidence

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**ayub@holistica.co.uk - 0208 279 5350 - Tech Whisperer, IT
Demystified, IT and vertical recruitment training**



Here's a quick primer for those of you who are about to mix it with some of the best Business Analysts on the planet!

Here's what you need to know.

Firstly, understand the duties of a Business Analyst.

In a nutshell

The Business Analyst acts as a liaison between the business user and the IT department and, where necessary, they translate the users' changing needs into a form that IT can begin to understand.

And this all depends on what type of BA you are looking for. Often the BA role can be classified into one of the following high-level categories. So ask them, do they consider themselves a:

- Tactical BA

'Tactical' in business generally implies 'we didn't foresee this situation arising and we need an immediate fix!' Often the roles you recruit for will be BA's in this position. Agile environments also imply the need for the tactical Business Analyst. There is a sudden change or need, and a new prototype system needs to be put into place to alleviate the pain that is currently being felt. In this situation a BA needs to be able to quickly gather **stakeholder requirements** and **User Stories**(clear unambiguous outlines of what is needed from the new system and how it will benefit the business processes). As well as this the User Story often encompasses the '**Conversation**' (which is the dialogue thus far between developers and the **Actors** or different types

of user.). These roles require a 'hit the ground running' attitude and fast response time.

- **Strategic/Enterprise BA**

This is typically what we think of as a BA from the classical Waterfall model approach to building systems that may be large scale projects with long-term implications. An enterprise level problem has been flagged up by a department or division within a company and a well-thought out strategic change needs to be implemented. This is a situation which is going to impact a large number of people and so considerable pre-project work will be needed to verify that the problem is real, and indeed significant enough to warrant a large new implementation of software or IT system. In this situation the BA will be involved in a lengthy process of speaking to users (**Requirements Gathering**), identifying real issues, defining the business case for a new system, and ultimately recommending whether or not to initiate the project. They will end up with a deliverable known as **Feasibility Report** or **User Requirements Document (URD)** and therein will contain the **Project Scope** and the approximate cost, time and resource implications. These BA's will often be treading the fine line between junior Project Manager and BA.

- **Operational BA**

An Operational BA is usually involved with a system or project that crosses across multiple areas or silos of a company. In this situation the system that is being implemented/changed will impact a number of functions within an organisation so this BA's interactive skills will need to be at their peak - even more so than the other types. Also the ability to analyse and make a judgement call as to which issues are more critical based on who they impact more throughout the organisation is key. This role is potentially much more consultative, fluid and requires greater diplomacy to handle the wider audience - since everyone considers their own role and their own department to be far more important and critical than the next person's.

Are they a Technical Business Analyst?

As well as the above, we must also understand that the Business Analyst role is now merging rapidly into the role of the classical Systems Analyst role. The amalgamation of these two can be thought of as the **Technical Business Analyst (TBA)**. So ask them if they have had experience with the **Analysis** phase of a project where a greater technical knowledge is required. Sometimes these BA's will command a higher salary because of their greater technical experience. These can include expertise in development languages for programming, **SQL** (Structured Query Language) for extensive database related duties, and even **OLAP** (Online Analytical Processing) and **ETL** (Extract Transform and Load) for Business Analytics and Data Warehousing environments.

What Are the Personality Traits of a good Business Analyst?

The key characteristics required for the role are:

1. Excellent communication skills.
2. Superb documentation capabilities.
3. The ability to analyse a situation for what it is in a clear and objective manner.
4. Persistence with politeness.
5. Good presentation skills.
6. The ability to interact and empathise with a wide range of audiences.

Which Tools Do They Use?

Typically the average BA will use tools that help

- Document and help collate, organise and present their findings to stakeholders and management. These will include those that you yourself use, such as **Google Docs, Excel spreadsheets,** and **PowerPoint.**
- Describe the current system precisely. So BA's will also have **data modelling** tools on their CV. These software allow a BA to clearly define and model how data flows in the current or future system. Tools such as **Microsoft Visio** and **UML (Unified Modelling Language)** are popular here. The result is a clear picture as to how functionality might be improved with the new system. A data model might look like this

Data modelling tools (also known as CASE tools) can create a number of different types of Data Models including

1. Use Case Diagrams
2. Interaction Diagrams
3. Activity Diagrams
4. Sequence Diagrams
5. Deployment Diagrams

Some interesting questions for you to bring into play in a Business Analyst interview

You can use all of the above to create interesting interview questions for yourself. Here are some more below which worked really well for me and impress the hell out of the candidate when you ask them:

Which techniques and methods have you used most frequently in your last roles to elicit business requirements?

This is huge. The answer will tell you the size and scope of the projects they were involved in. The answer should fall into two main categories:

Collaborative Interaction - these are often more time intensive, free-flowing and imply that large scale customer feedback and buy-in are required for this potentially new product implementation.

- Face-to-face interactions with individuals.
- Focus Groups
- Requirements Workshop
- Brainstorming and Idea Reduction
- Role Playing

Restricted Interaction - these methods *kind of* imply that a decision has already been made at high level in principal but that more precise information is needed with regards the technical issues at play. They channel very specific activities and outcomes.

- Observation and Job Shadowing. Allows you to precisely find out a role function.
- Prototyping. Creates mock products to try out.
- Online surveys and Questionnaires.

Which environment do you prefer to work in... Waterfall, Agile or DevOps?

This of course will give you an indication of the level of exposure they have had within certain methods, and their flexibility in adapting to other environments. BA's who have only worked in structured Waterfall type environments can have a hard time coming over to the often more stressful Agile or collaborative DevOps set-up.

Which steps do you typically take to avoid vague, incomplete or ambiguous feedback in Requirements Gathering?

This is huge, as Stakeholders often interpret the nature and importance of their function in different ways. The English language is full of nuances and subtleties and a good BA will need be able to clearly define the importance of an existing and potential software's features. Answers here would include

a) I create a Terms Glossary

This is an easy way to make sure that everyone is speaking the same language regarding that product and it's benefits.

b) I avoid Non-Testable Words

Non-Testable words are those words that can be interpreted differently by different users. They also are hard to quantify and therefore measure clearly. Examples include

Happy, satisfied, minimize, optimize, robust, 'et cetera', flexible, intuitive

You can't test any of the above in a clearly measurable way and so they are too weak to use in the language of requirements gathering.

c) I create Visual Models

This would mean they clearly create data models using tools such as Visio or UML (see above).

How do you gain a sufficient understanding of an industry in which you previously had no experience?

Weirdly enough this is not just about researching and reading around the industry literature. The answer should have terms that are more concrete such as

"I would start by creating a Data Modelling, Business Entity Diagram, or Context Modelling Diagram."

So this would get back to precise tools. Ask them to give examples of if they have had to do this in the past to familiarise themselves with a new sector or business model.

And finally,

What do you understand by the 90-9-1 rule and how have you as a business analyst taken advantage of it?

This is a really sexy rule! A good BA will be aware of this. It assumes that in a community of users there are typically three groups of users. They are:

- **90% of users are just lurkers.** They just go with the opinions put forward by the other two segments. Online, they read blogs and are swayed by the majority but will not voice a strong opinion of their own.
- **9% are active and confident when it comes to voicing their true opinion.** They are power users. They are vocal in meetings, active in forums and will air their views on blogs.
- **1% are thought leaders.** They will not only have an opinion on a product or concept, they will even have radical new ways of thinking about a situation and will be able to introduce lateral ideas to solve the problem. Ideas that the other two groups may not feel confident in voicing.

There you go. I hope that helps.

See you at the events!

Ayub Shaikh

Managing Director. Holistica Consulting.