

An Overview of Modern Business Analysis

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Background

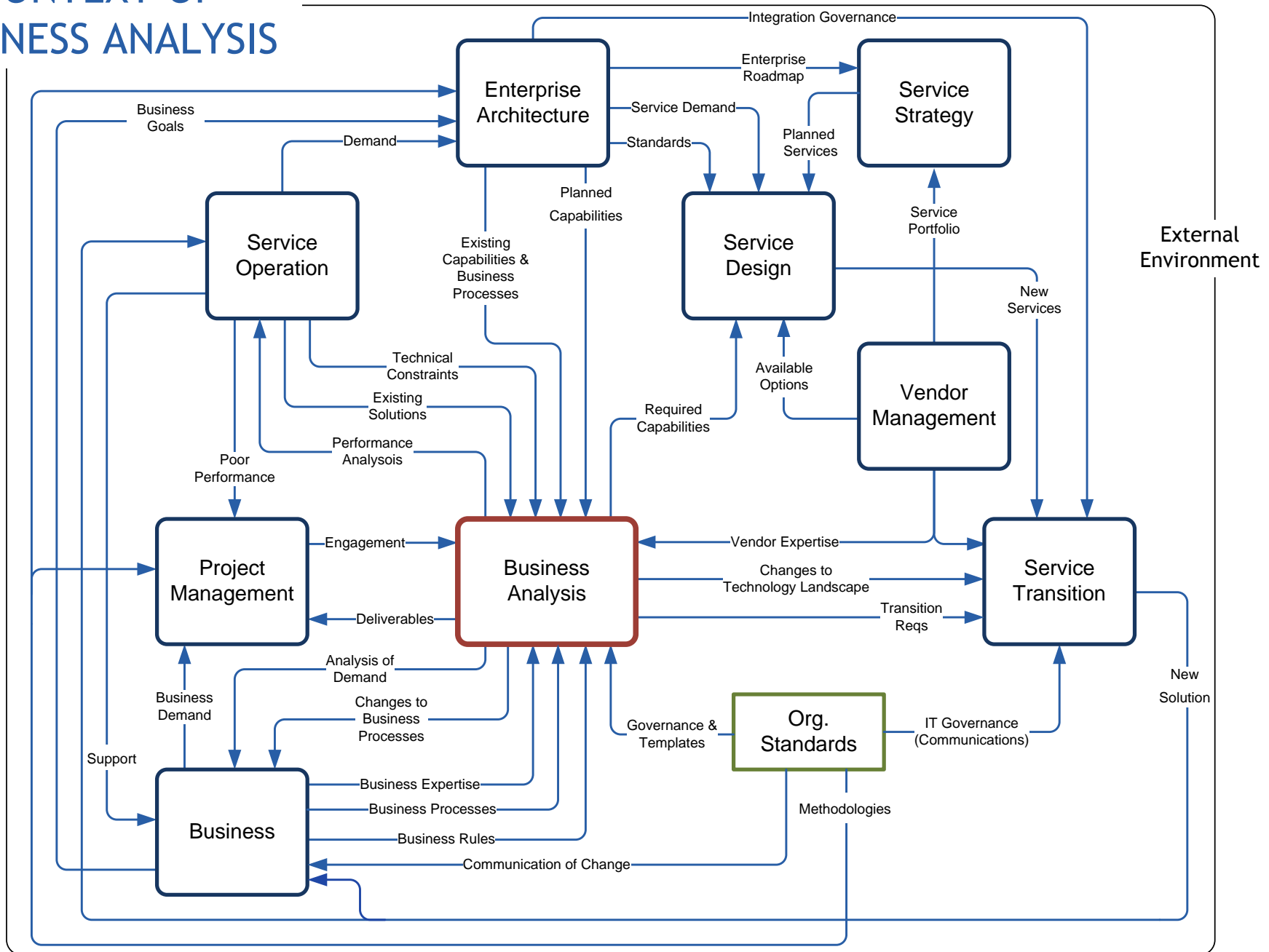
The feedback we receive from our readers and customers indicates that the business analysis framework described in the BABOK guide, while comprehensive, can prove confusing to those who want to get into business analysis or have been performing business analysis duties informally. This paper aims to present a simplified overview of modern business analysis for this audience.

Business Analysis Context

A good way to provide some clarity is to start with the context in which business analysis is performed. The diagram on the next page shows that business analysis is part of a bigger picture. It interacts with project management where a project has been initiated to address either a business need or poor performance of an IT solution that impacts business.

A BA works closely with an enterprise architect, technology and business stakeholders to properly understand the problem, specify business requirements and deliver the agreed business analysis documents. All business analysis work is governed by organisational standards, methodologies and approaches.

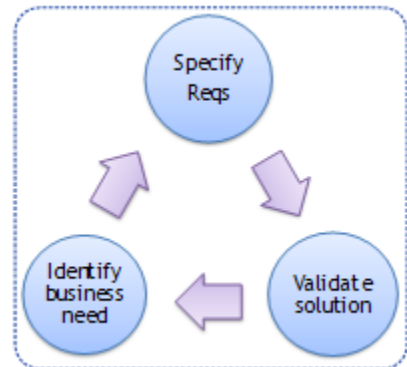
CONTEXT OF BUSINESS ANALYSIS



Business Analysis Practice

The bulk of BA activities can be considered to cycle within the triangle on the right. The delivery of a solution to the identified business need takes place over several iterations of these activities.

Once the solution is built, the BA is also involved in the facilitation of its deployment.



Each of these activities is described in more detail below.

Activity: Identify Business Need

A project is initiated where a problem has been identified by stakeholders. The project manager engages a BA to carry out business analysis, specify requirements and support the management of the project.

My practical advice to you is to read the project initiation document carefully to get the initial understanding of the problem. Work closely with the project manager to get as much project background information as possible. Build a team with the PM and other stakeholders.

The next step should be to familiarise with the business domain and its common terminology. This knowledge is required to successfully engage business stakeholders and to use meeting time with stakeholders effectively.

When these steps are complete, plan BA activities, estimate the duration of each task and allocate sufficient time for peer and business reviews and the final approval of the BA artifacts.

Conduct analysis of stakeholders, develop a communication plan, and determine how requirements will be managed during the project. Align your plans with project plans.

In the course of your work you will interact with enterprise architects, IT infrastructure staff and business stakeholders to understand the real problem, outline the current state and the existing capabilities.

When you've articulated business goals, conduct gap analysis to determine what new capabilities are required to satisfy the identified business need. The required capabilities define project scope, project approach and finally, solution scope.

Activity: Specify Requirements

The required capabilities serve as a foundation for specifying requirements (business, functional and non-functional). These requirements need to be documented and communicated to all involved stakeholders. The artifacts developed by the BA support both project management and solution design. You may interact with vendors where either a solution or its components are outsourced.

When specifying the requirements, you need to capture assumptions, constraints (business and technical), dependencies with other solutions and components, business and market rules relevant to the solution. At this stage, you will refine your understanding of the business need as more details surface from interactions with stakeholders. This information has to be thoroughly documented to support project scope management and issue resolution. Communication of the specified requirements should be a high priority task for you.

Potential solutions have to be discussed and evaluated within the project team to check whether they satisfy the identified business need.

Activity: Validate Solution

Once the selected solution has been developed and validated against acceptance criteria determined by the business, you will evaluate the readiness of the organisation for the changes associated with the new solution.

My practical advice is to map the specified requirements to business processes and solution components to create a map of changes within the organisation. It helps a lot your interactions with business end-users and decreases resistance to changes.

To introduce the new solution into the existing business context, you need to specify the transition requirements to ensure that business activities will be interrupted as little as possible and the business data will be transferred into the new solution where required with minimal to zero losses.

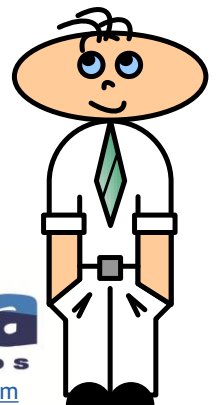
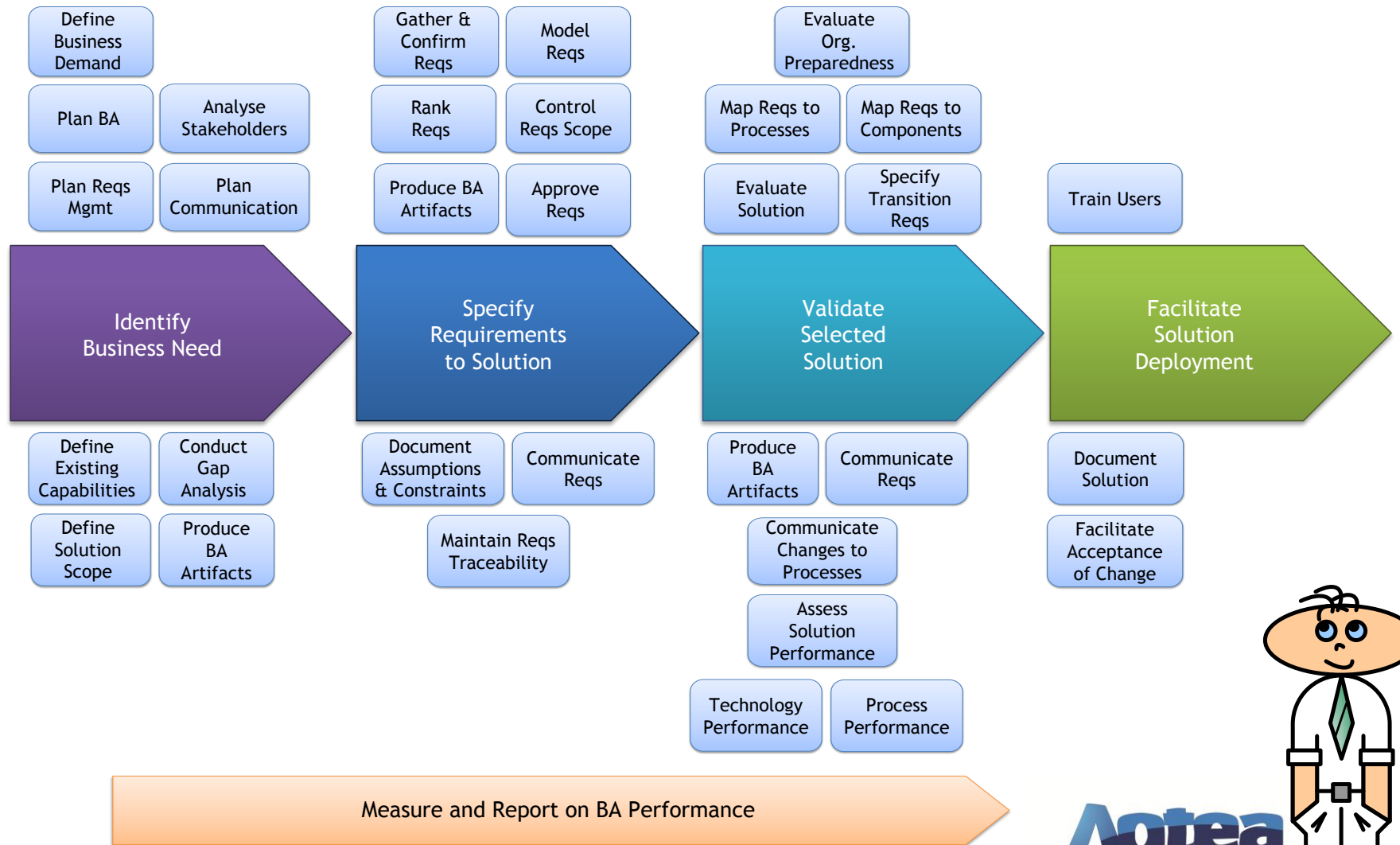
The developed solution is tested before deployment to ensure its stability and a minimum of defects. The performance of the solution (new business processes and technology) is measured to confirm that business requirements are satisfied. Any defects should be documented and resolved prior to the final release of the solution into production.

Activity: Facilitate Deployment

The tested solution is released to the business in accordance with organisational practice. Communication of the release supports the deployment process and mitigates the risk of disruption to the normal business activity. The BA facilitates the deployment by helping to train business users and develop documentation on the delivered solution using the BA documents produced during the project.

All the activities and the tasks they are comprised of are summarised in the diagram below.

PRAGMATIC BUSINESS ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK



Conclusion

The described way of doing business analysis is common in large companies. The BA has great opportunities to facilitate improvements within the organisation through clear articulation of the need and well-specified requirements.

The iterative approach to business analysis improves collaboration with stakeholders, helps specify requirements, avoid costly rework, and deliver the required capabilities in a timely manner.