Research Paper

Business Analysis or Requirement Gathering is not for Techies

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Abstract: Business Analysis is specialized skills in Information Technology and Software Engineering. But it requires human relations, business management and communication skills with little but of technology understanding.

In my career I have taught Business Analysis. I am suited for that role because Business Analysis - or Requirement gathering - is a role in corporate sector that falls between Information Technology and Business. And since I am both a technology professional and a Management professional , I was eminently suited for that role.

Business Analysis or Business Analyst, does not mean analysis of Business or someone who analyses Business. Business Analysis is a work profile in Information Technology or Software Engineering. Business Analysis is the process of identifying needs and identifying solutions to business problems, especially information technology solutions.

In software engineering or information technology, there are various stages in development irrespective of whether one adopts the traditional waterfall method of development or a modern agile system of rapid iterative development. Stages in software development processes are requirement gathering, software design, program coding, testing, deployment and maintenance.

Now requirement gathering should be so easy. After all requirements gathering requires a software developer to find out from business users, what it is that they want. However, software developers were so technical that they were not able to communicate with business users. And business users had inadequate knowledge of technology and hence were unable to communicate with software developers.

Hence requirement gathering as a stage of software development suffered due to disturbance in the communication process. It is almost as if business users were speaking French and software developers could only talk in English. Hence one needed a go-between, a person to arbitrate, a person to liaison between business users on one hand and software developers on other hand.

Enter the Business Analyst. Just as a Real Estate agent liaison between the seller of real estate and buyer of real estate, a business analyst liaison between the business user who has to specify requirements and software developers who have to understand requirements. A Business Analyst has the business, technology, communication, and relation skills to extract requirements from business users and pass them to the software developer.

Earlier software development was a very generalist profession. The same person was used for gathering, design, coding, testing, and deployment. Now Requirement Gathering is done by Business Analyst, Design is done by Solution Architect, Coding is done by Programmers and there are Testers to do Testing.

Business Analyst is a very business-like work profile, in what is a technical profession. Hence the attributes of a business analyst and training and processes for business analyst are specialized requiring specialization.

Now each software development process has a specialized business analyst and days of techies - technology geeks - doing business roles has passed by. Business Analysts are as important in software development as Project Managers.

Business Analysts require a different set of skills compared to other roles in software engineering and information technology. Skills required by Business Analysts are:
1.   Business skills
2.   Communication Skills
3.   Interpersonal Skills

4.   Technical Skills
5.   Facilitation Skills.

       Many institutes and universities provide training in Business Analysis. Chief among them is the International Institute of Business Analysis or IIBA. IIBA has its course and certification and a book - Business Analysis Book of Knowledge - BABOK.

       Of course, besides IIBA there is the German IREB - International Requirements Engineering Board. IREB has requirements gathering courses and certifications. Finally, Requirements Engineering and Business Analysis are one and the same thing.

       Many universities offer degrees, diplomas and certificate courses in Business Analysis. Many technology professionals laterally shift to Business Analysis depending on their aptitude even as many people with Business backgrounds enter information technology and software engineering through Business Analysis.

       Of course, it is not within the ambit of this essay to provide all the training for Business Analysts. Suffice it to say that a Business Analyst has as much chance of becoming a CIO as much as a Project Manager or a Solution Architect.

       The profession of Business Analyst occupying such a central stage in Information Technology and Software Engineering is testimony to essential and inherent Business Orientation in the Technical and Engineering profession.