What skills does a BA need today, tomorrow and 2026?

Whether you are trying to enter the profession, already in it, or hiring someone into a BA role, ensure you know what skills to build or look for to be successful.

There are some fundamental skills required to be an effective Business Analyst and these skills transcend the time period you work in, the level of the profession you are at and any specialisation you may be in. These skills don't change, but how you apply them changes.

A degree of proficiency in popular business applications and tools is expected – for example, knowledge in the current word processing, drawing packages, spreadsheeting and presentation packages.

The importance of soft skills should not be underestimated – listening skills, problem solving, analytical thinking, flexibility, the ability to understand the entire problem and to be able to break this into chunks, emotional intelligence to be able to understand the customer's perspective.

Domain knowledge can be a disadvantage - you become the SME and can lose objectivity. However, knowing the language of the domain and being able to apply the relevant standards is a useful skill. Building relationships with your colleagues having domain knowledge, for example Developers and Testers, is pertinent. Additionally you need the ability to use the right framework to ensure the information you gather and provide back to your stakeholders is appropriate and understandable.

Previous work life experience and the skills gained should be applied to the BA role - most people find themselves as BAs though luck and happy circumstance, and the previous experience provides a great perspective that differs for each individual.

Regarding current developments, there are changes to the BA role arising from the move to off-the-shelf packages. These include an increased emphasis on scope, context, deliverables, timeframes, organisational fit and strategy. There is less bespoke development and a need for business flexibility and a willingness for the business process to change to fit the package, to gain full advantage of the low cost and upgrade path that off-the-shelf packages provide. The BA must be able to identify and articulate the trade-offs and highlight to the business the value to the business in being flexible. Questions to guide BAs in this environment are "am I adding value?" and "can I add more?". Where there is an incomplete fit between the package and the desired use, the BA has an important role in providing feedback and influencing the decision makers.

As technology develops, teams are becoming more virtual and working across geographies and time zones. The work-day is no longer be structured 8-5, there is an increased reliance on tools to enable teams that are geographically distant to work together, and working remotely is becoming more common. There are challenges with this and new skills to develop in learning how to be efficient from home, ensuring you keep in contact with your workplace and team and remaining current with new technologies and trends by upskilling.

As we imagine the world in ten years, we can see that the role of the BA will gain in importance and an increased awareness of the value of analysis will emerge. The role will remain a specialist role – there is a certain distance and objectivity the BA provides that a business unit needs. The relationships the BA builds across the silos of the business help both the BA and the business areas. A developer may help a BA increase their technical knowledge, a BA may help others

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develop their analysis skills, and the analysis the BA provides may help a business unit understand their real problems. The BA should empower their stakeholders to be more objective, to be aware of all the options available, and to be able to distinguish between what they want and what they need.

As we move into an increased technological world there is a need for BAs to embrace their inner geek – the geek world is becoming our world. A few years ago concepts such as cloud services and the internet of things were either not widely understood, or didn't exist. The increasing speed of change means that a thirst for new knowledge is critical for success.

One of the emerging trends and a new role is that of a UX Designer and BAs will increasingly need to work with them. We need to see the value in this role and work with these designers to ensure that especially when we are involved in developing a commercial product, that it is a beautiful product that potential customers want to use. This change in considering the user interactions has leaked out into the wider world of the BA, and now we need to tell stories, to get customers to imagine what their life will look like after we deliver a product that we hope will become crucial to their life. This is where Apple has excelled – they have imagined things people didn't even know they wanted. We do need to keep one foot back in reality however, whatever is imagined and promised needs to be able to be delivered.

There is an emerging awareness of the need to measure success – this can be thought of as an extension of traceability. This may mean a broadening of our role – it does not stop when the product is delivered, and we need to highlight to stakeholders that the measure of success should be considered from early on. We can use our skills to make suggestions on how to do this. Do we do an impact assessment of the change? A post-implementation review? A benefits analysis to determine the true benefits to the business once the project is complete?

As a BA you need a wide range of skills but you need to apply what is appropriate for the environment you are in and the audience you have. Take your customer on the journey – ensure they understand why they want to travel the path and the benefits they will gain. They can ensure the continued momentum of the change and make the whole experience infinitely more enjoyable and ultimately be champions of the change.

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