

Open Space Session: Will the proliferation of the Internet of Things, require Business Analysts to develop more data analytical skills?

As you may or may not know, the topics for the Open Space Sessions were voted on by attendees at the BA Development Day, on the morning of the conference. So when I volunteered to scribe a session, I had no idea what the topic would be about. Boy did I get a doozy!! So, the session that I was assigned to scribe for was:

“Will the proliferation of the Internet of Things, require Business Analysts to develop more data analytical skills?”

Well, the topic name was so long that I missed half of it, so I wasn't quite sure what exactly I was in for 😊 But I thought that maybe that wasn't a bad thing as then I might not be inclined to “jump in” to the conversation and just scribe as that's what I was there to do. And, as I learnt in an earlier session to do with coloured dots, I'm predominantly a Red Dot so I have a job to do – And By Golly, I'm going to smash it!!! 😊

Now, as this is Open Space, people were able to go where their interest took them. As a result, some of the notes that I took were repetitive as people rolled in and rolled out (referred to as being Bumblebees or Butterflies), and some with differing views. Because of this, my report back will follow this format:

- The topic name and starting point
- The raw notes taken from the session
- Slider: What the feeling was in the room when the topic was raised
- Summing up

The topic name was posed as a question, which in my mind has a yes or no answer. So as we're undecided at the beginning, that's our starting point:

“Will the proliferation of the Internet of Things, require Business Analysts to develop data analytical skills?”



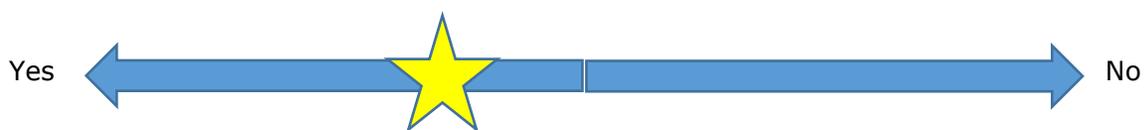
And we begin ...

- Does anyone know what the Internet of Things is?
 - Not really
 - I actually came along as I was interested to know
- It's a real life something that is part of the Internet of Things. For example, each cellphone built after 2011 has GPS built in

Scribe: Tia Rameka

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- How much more of these things can we use every day. These things are available to us. How much of it can we put into our daily reqts or solutions to make things easier for Us.
- Don't think people realise they are using it
- It's about understanding Big Data and what it can be used for. Not necessarily relational database, just information as it is presented
 - So much data out there that you don't realise what it is. Don't understand the capabilities
 - It's probably a technique to start learning what this "thing" is and how we can use it
 - But if it's changing so quickly, how do you know which areas to develop in?
 - Is it just so big that you don't know where to start?
 - Is it useful to the work you're doing at the moment? Or as a research piece of work?
- How many in Government?
 - Need to make things/data available
 - Some organisations want to make things available via APIs and then ppl can do whatever they want to do with it
 - From a BA perspective, what information do we want to make available? Maybe that's the thought process that we need to encourage our business users to have and it's the BA's job to draw that out of the business
- Data important for business to start something new
 - How is data relevant? How is data not relevant?
 - Need background data to do something new/back up your proposal
- Accessing data and being able to linked data back is getting cheaper
 - Data is changing the landscape around you
 - How as Business Analysts (that are looking forward/at impacts) can we not be looking at data



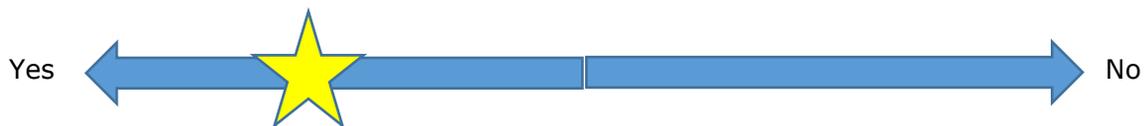
- Security
 - GPS example of analytics
 - Know where I am
 - Know where you are
 - Know our heart-rates are rising
 - Deduces what we're up to
 - Little things can bring down huge networks
 - Example: The Rock FM tells it's listeners that it wants to crash IRD's phone system. So gives out an IRD 0800 number and tells people to continually ring it. They do. The system can't handle the load. System crashes and denial of service is successful
 - Need to consider security for instances like this

- The Internet of Things is still a new thing
 - Don't know the impact how the Internet of Things is going to change things for us
 - The security of the Internet of things is something one has to consider
- Identity and Access Management
 - Device identity vs User identity
 - Is it secure?
 - Does it have access to what it needs/should have access to and only have access to?
 - Should this be device agnostic? Should the security layer be separate from it altogether?
- Consider how other people might use it as they may not have the same motivations as you, i.e., they may have fraudulent or dodgy intentions

Bumblebees fly in and fly away ...

Recap for the new bumblebees to the session:

- Considering the changing landscape, should data analytical skills be part of a BAs skillset?
 - Yes
 - How is it going to add value?
 - Large volume/cheaper access of data over the internet
 - Up to the individual on how they want to build/model framework/data stores
 - Need quantitative skills to know how to apply techniques and draw conclusions



- Suspect that with all the available devices, come complications
 - Expect a number of different scenarios
 - Testing not going to be simple
 - Data that has a rich feel to it will become more complicated
 - As BAs, our assumptions and expectations will be challenged more in future

Butterflies fly in and fly away ...

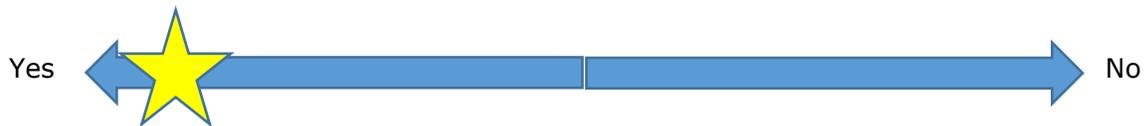
Recapping the question for new butterflies

- As with other group, most don't know what "Internet of Things" is
- Explained by new butterfly as:

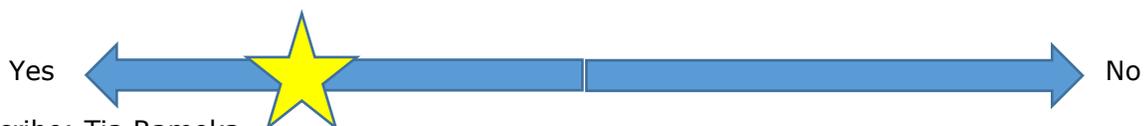
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- Your fridge “knowing” when you are low on milk, and adding it to a shopping list for your next delivery
- Just like anything, as a BA, if you have an interest (e.g., process modelling, data analysis), you’ll generally pursue that interest
- Having data analytical skills is a good thing
 - Helps make informed decisions which are evidence based
 - Data analytics gives you the ability to make informed decisions

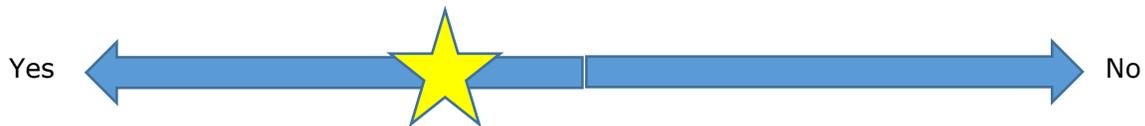


- Depends on the maturity of your business and industry capabilities
 - Can use data to derive insights
 - Understand patterns and trends based on analytics
- Do you use applied analytical frameworks or methodologies at your work, in your current environment?
 - Have used data analytics tool based on business events
 - Have seen others (Data Analysts) do it
 - They did get better at asking the right questions
 - They got confident in fronting conversations with end-users, but had a downside as it looked like IT were answering on behalf of the business. Still need to bring your Business in to make those business decisions
 - Then would the BA role with data analytics be more about helping to get the right questions asked/answered, rather than being a user of data analytics tools. And presenting information
- Real work scenario
 - Future operating model
 - Understand what data is there
 - Use data to model scenarios
 - Data tells the business what they want
 - “Techies” doing their stuff, then BA relaying to business how they can use that data
 - Didn’t really have Data Analysts, just BAs and Consultants
 - Are business onboard?
 - Yes. Excited, but don’t know what they want or how far they can take it
 - With data analysed, business can decide/make informed decisions
 - Need to consider the benefits and how to use it practically
- Data would be the input and what you want from data itself is information. Analysing data (true data analysis) is not a fundamental role of a BA. BAs analysing data seems odd



Bumblefly and recap time ...

- Not sure data analytical skills will need to develop anymore than now
 - We already research data for what we are currently doing
 - Might change the way we access or get data from



- Depends on the org structure
 - Constraints in getting data "yourself" as other teams within an organization do that (Data Analysis team) so you have to go through the right channels to get the data
 - It seems a waste that you can't call on that skill due to this constraint
 - Maybe in the Initiation phase, data analytical skills will be helpful as raw numbers can help business make decisions
- Does anyone work where they get data from the "Internet of Things"?
 - Not a lot of answers
 - Useful but not all organisations have the structure/ability
 - Predict/profiling based on "attributes" i.e., age, gender, culture etc
- Rolls Royce example
 - Aircrafts were using Rolls Royce engines and collecting/tracking live data on IoT which triggers emails etc when the engines need servicing
 - Data analysis is a niche skill, handy to have, don't think it's needed in day-to-day BA role
 - Could have frameworks in place
 - Learning/teaching how to use tools
 - Knowing the questions to ask



- Not all businesses will have the Internet of Things
 - Advantage that companies like Amazon have is because of their Internet of Things. Companies who don't have it are disadvantaged
 - Advantage of Tech company vs Non-Tech company
 - Insights derived from data
 - Make the right decisions
 - Become more profitable

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- Leaving things till the last minute when designing systems
 - Designing reports last minute, may not capture right data to analyse and determine “success” or whatever it is they need to analyse
 - “Missed the boat”
- Is BA role not really data analysis/analytics but more making sure the data is there to be analysed?
- Start with deciding/defining what are the key measures for success and work backwards from that
- Development driven by analytics



And there you have it folks – Back where we started. Very interesting session and great to see some contrasting views, which I think were helped along by the freedom to “fly” into a session and give your take on the topic, without being swayed by what was already discussed, as you may not have been there to hear it. In my humble opinion, it gives a true reflection of a person’s stance on the topic.

Summing Up:

- Not all attendees knew what the Internet of Things was, but were interested to find out
- Differing views on whether BAs need data analytical skills in their everyday role
- A strong indication that BAs need the skill to guide business in understanding data and the role it can play when making business decisions
- Some tips on what to look out for when dealing in the Internet of Things realm
- I’d like to be a Bumblebee ☺