



Launching Your Business Analysis Career: Your Personalized Roadmap To Business Analysis



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LAUNCHING YOUR BUSINESS ANALYSIS CAREER: YOUR PERSONALIZED ROADMAP TO BA

THE DANGER OF GENERAL ADVICE

The main reason people get hung up following conventional wisdom about becoming a business analyst is that conventional wisdom is generalized, not personalized. Yet, often advice is given in a generalized way, even when it's learned from personal experience.

This roadmap is different. It's not based on one story or one path. It's not based just on how I became a business analyst or how one of my mentees became a business analyst. It's a synthesized approach, developed after helping several talented professionals achieve their BA career goals over the last two years and interviewing several more senior BAs about how they became successful.

THIS IS NOT YOUR ROADMAP

Before you dive in, be forewarned that because your career experiences, expertise, and positioning within the BA marketplace is unique, I can't just give you a personalized roadmap. But what I can give you is a step-by-step approach to **building your own personalized roadmap** – one you'll own and understand the ins and outs of, one you'll be positioned to adjust in response to unexpected opportunities that surface along the way, and one that will lead you into the business analysis profession.

YOU ARE TALENTED

Business analysts are a talented bunch and professionals with the passion to become business analysts are no different. If I can hazard just one piece of generalized advice, it would be to let your talents shine throughout your career transition. Leverage this approach, take the actions, but stay true to who you are as a professional. If you mine your talents, leverage your strengths and stay true to your passions, no one will stop you from becoming the BA you want to be.

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THE ROADMAP



1. Build Your BA Knowledge



2. Unearth Your BA Experiences



3. Identify Your Leverage Points



4. Build Your Personalized Roadmap



1: BUILD YOUR BA KNOWLEDGE

The first step to becoming a BA involves understanding what business analysis is and what being a business analyst is. And they are not necessarily the same thing. This is how you begin to cultivate your BA mindset and build core knowledge that will help you become self-aware of your inner BA and find your focus within the BA profession.

BUSINESS ANALYSIS IS...

“...the set of tasks and techniques used to work as a liaison among stakeholders in order to understand the structure, policies, and operations of an organization, and to recommend solutions to enable the organization to achieve its goals.”

Let's emphasize a few pieces of this definition. Business analysis is a collection of “tasks and techniques” that support our role as *liaisons* and enable us to *recommend solutions*. In short, we **solve business problems**. And business analysis includes everything we might do to come up with a solution recommendation.

A BUSINESS ANALYST IS...

A business analyst is *any professional who performs some business analysis activity*. When you look back at that set of knowledge areas within business analysis, anything you've done in your career history to elicit requirements, to communicate requirements, to analyze those requirements, were business analyst activities.

Being a business analyst is not about having the title.

I didn't have that title when I was in QA and I created a process and collaborated with stakeholders on user acceptance testing, but I was still a bit of a business analyst. Kimberley didn't have the title when she built strong relationships with stakeholders and used Six Sigma techniques to find solutions to business problems. Michiel did not have the title when he looked at job descriptions and attempted to do similar activities in his developer role.

Warning: It's easy to get stuck here.

Some get stopped on their path to BA because they invest all their time, money, and energy in training or in a multi-year program to learn about business analysis, and they haven't moved on to the other steps.

YOUR ACTION STEPS

- Analyze the IIBA definition of business analysis and become confident in your understanding of business analysis.
- To learn about different business analyst job roles, look at several business analyst job descriptions each week, compare and contrast the different responsibilities in each.
- Talk to BAs about their job roles and how their career background helped them become a BA.
- Identify key projects and responsibilities from your career history where you were doing business analysis.

In *Launching Your Business Analysis Career*, we support you through this process in 6 lessons.

MODULE 1: PULLING UP THE CURTAIN ON BUSINESS ANALYSIS

How I Explain the BA Role to My Family

Do you have trouble explaining what a business analyst is? Here's how to describe the essence of the business analyst role, using three distinct metaphors.

You Don't Have to Work on a Complex Project to be a Business Analyst

Successful business analysis can look different from project to project. Here's what you must know about the BA role on a project so that you can identify relevant projects from your career history from which to mine BA experiences.

5 Key Elements of Business Analysis You Don't Want to Miss

Prepare yourself to answer unexpected questions about business analysis by breaking down the IIBA definition of business analysis and describing its key parts.

- Where “technology” fits into the IIBA definition, even though it’s never explicitly stated.
- How BAs might be thought of as surfacing an understanding that did not exist before.
- The essential elements BAs must learn about an organization.

How Business Analyst Job Roles Impact Your Career Transition

The business analyst job market is messy. Learn why not to get bogged down in the nuances of the role by identifying the common types of business analyst roles. Leverage our sample job posting repository and learn how to independently analyze different business analyst roles.

How Your Career Background Can Help You Become a Business Analyst

Identify strengths from your career background that will directly support your transition into business analysis. We'll discuss how:

- Developers Can Have People Skills
- Subject Matter Experts are Often “Almost BAs”
- Technical Writers do *Some* Business Analysis
- QA and BA are Two Sides of the Same Coin
- Yes, Even Sales Professionals Have Transferable Skills
- The Path from Manager to Business Analyst

The Value of Your BA Competencies in the 21st Century

People don't stay in the same careers forever anymore. Consider what BA competencies will do for you 5, 10, 15, maybe even 20 years from now. Learn why business analysis skills will make you “untouchable” or less likely to be affected by outsourcing and off-shoring.



2: UNEARTH YOUR BA EXPERIENCES

You don't see a lot of BA jobs out there today that don't require experience. And you may not feel that you have any relevant experience. You might be wondering, "How am I ever going to qualify for a BA position?" It seems sort of like a chicken and egg scenario.

The good news is that if you've been in a professional role for a few years, it's most likely that you have some experience to build on. So before you start figuring out where to go next and what courses to take to bolster your BA knowledge, take stock of your current experience and strengths in business analysis. This is where you begin to deepen your self-awareness of your inner BA and find the gems upon which you'll be able to build a strong positioning.

HOW YOU QUALIFY FOR BUSINESS ANALYST JOBS



What this formula tells us is that you can take your past experience, add your new knowledge of business analysis and identify new marketable qualifications that will support your positioning in the BA job marketplace.

YOUR ACTION STEPS

- Read a book or participate in a course on the fundamentals of business analysis.
- Leverage what you learn about business analysis to mine your relevant projects and responsibilities for marketable BA qualifications.
- Evaluate past documents and deliverables you've created and determine if they are examples of requirements specifications.
- Remember the meetings you've attended and identify the BA activities that you were involved in.
- Start evaluating your current job role or other opportunities to expand your experiences or introduce more formal business analysis techniques.

In *Launching Your Business Analysis Career*, we help you unearth your business analysis experiences and identify the most relevant elements of your career history in 8 lessons, covering the most essential BA activities for junior and intermediate business analysts. We'll help trigger your memory by breaking down each area of business analysis and providing relevant, real-world examples from inside and outside formal BA roles.

MODULE 2 – UNEARTH YOUR BA CAREER HISTORY (YES, YOU HAVE ONE!)

If You've Ever Asked "Why?" Then You Have Elicited Requirements

Elicitation is one of the most fundamental BA activities. It essentially involves discovering information about a project from stakeholders, documents, or existing systems. You'll identify career experiences that provide a testament to your elicitation abilities.

- What you must know about asking "why?" *with finesse*.
- The 9 techniques BAs most commonly use to discover and gather information.
- Why learning to separate elicitation and analysis might be the most critical skill you develop.
- 3 ways you may have used elicitation techniques without being a BA.

Why Enterprise Analysis is Within Your Reach

There is significant project risk in not doing enterprise analysis, yet even many self-proclaimed BAs claim not to do it. You'll be able to describe what it means to scope a project, from business need to solution approach. Learn how the 5 steps of enterprise analysis really work from real-world scenarios and by listening in on an expert role play. With this context, you'll be able to identify your relevant enterprise analysis experiences and position yourself for more advanced business analysis roles.

5 Analysis Techniques Almost Everyone Uses

Describe the "analysis" in business analysis, often considered the most intellectual aspect of our role. List the common analysis techniques that business analysts use, and identify experiences from your career history when you performed analysis.

- How to decide if your whiteboard drawings and documents would be considered analysis deliverables.
- Learn how 4 common analysis models are used. Compare sample deliverables to your own work to find unexpected parallels.
- How requirements prioritization, the 5th technique, keeps you from wasting your time.

The Most Common Types of Requirements

If you are going to be a business analyst, you will be creating requirements documents. In this lesson, we bring in requirements expert Adriana Beal to discuss the most important types of requirements (functional, non-functional, and even business requirements) and how

requirements are organized into specifications. She'll give you a step-by-step approach to determining if you've documented similar types of requirements in the past.

Little Known Ways to Validate and Verify Requirements

Many requirements errors are the result of the business not buying into the requirements in the first place or ineffective communication of the requirements. You'll identify 4 techniques business analysts use to ensure that requirements are correct and complete. After listening in on an expert role play you'll hear how these conversations play out in the real-world and be able to match up conversations you've participated in to further identify your validation and verification experience.

How Business Analysts Manage Requirements

Describe the techniques and tools BAs use to manage requirements and identify experiences in your career history when you managed requirements.

- How good BAs ensure the requirements are actually used by the right stakeholders.
- Why good things come in nice packages and so do your requirements.
- How the right attributes can help drive informed decisions.
- How traceability ensures we do nothing more and nothing less than is absolutely necessary.
- Why nothing stays the same and how the BA supports change management.

Make ROI Real – 4 Ways BAs Help the Business Embrace Change

We do not achieve the ROI on a project until the change is realized – this means that the technology is implemented and/or business users are doing something different than they were before.

- Why this often overlooked aspect of the BA role is rising in importance.
- The most common techniques BAs use to drive change.
- Identify how you have ensured the business embraced change.

The BA in the Project Lifecycle

After completing this lesson, you'll see how the BA practices we've described fit into different project lifecycles and characterize even your informal project experiences into the most common lifecycles. We'll discuss:

- The Big Requirements Dump of the Waterfall Process
- Breaking the Requirements Down into Iterations
- Becoming Agile and Breaking Requirements Down into Very Small Chunks
- What Are You Wearing to the Ball? A Note on Formality



3: IDENTIFY YOUR LEVERAGE POINTS

Because the BA profession is so diverse, business analysis responsibilities are not always the most critical or the only critical qualifications for your first BA job. But instead of chasing around the latest fad or IT skill, identify the qualifications you already have and the contexts in which they will be valued by business analyst employers. Identifying your leverage points will help smooth your path to business analysis. Through this process, you gain even deeper self-awareness, build the basis for stronger positioning, and you begin to narrow your focus.

ACTION STEPS:

- From the job postings you are reviewing each week, build a list of relevant qualifications that may include:
 - Industry Experience
 - Business / Functional Domain Experience
 - Solution Domain Experience (Applications, Tools, Technologies)
- Compare your qualifications (years of experience and depth of knowledge) to the qualifications you find in job postings.
- Build an inventory of your strongest soft skills in:
 - Communication
 - Problem-Solving
 - Relationship-Building
 - Big Picture Thinking
- For more context you might also talk to recruiters, interview local business analysts, and ask questions in the LinkedIn forums about the relevance of your background or the relevance of specific skills.
- Using your research, narrow in on your most valuable leverage points in the marketplace and add them to your positioning.

In *Launching Your Business Analysis Career*, we walk you through 6 lessons, each covering a core qualification that has been the stepping stone for others into their first business analyst roles. You won't find unique strengths in all the lessons – but that's the point – your specific qualifications will make you unique and be part of your BA positioning.

MODULE 3 – QUALIFICATIONS THAT CAN HELP YOU LAND YOUR FIRST BA POSITION

You Don't Have to be a World-Class Facilitator to Have Valuable Communication Skills

Communication is the most essential underlying BA competency. In fact, it's so important, you'll often find people mistaking the BA role for a "communicator" or "translator" role.

- Cull out your strengths in verbal communication, which may include active listening, the ability to ask "stupid" questions, running meetings that are "work" (i.e. productive), and being able to draw out non-engaged participants.
- "A picture is worth a thousand words" is especially true for business analysts. Learn how your visual communication skills will make you a stronger BA.
- Getting it down on paper is often the most tangible part of a BA's job. Learn which written communication skills will set you apart.

Getting the Big Picture: The BA as Advocate or Advisor

You'll see why a big picture perspective is so important for business analysts and why business analysts are sometimes thought of as advocates for the business. You'll be able to identify your strengths as a big-picture thinker who gets the point. For this lesson we bring in project strategy expert Kent McDonald, co-author of *Stand Back and Deliver*.

How to Win Over Stakeholders and Influence the Delivery Team

As a business analyst your success depends on the input of others. Building relationships with business and technology stakeholders is key to being a strong BA. You'll identify your strengths in building relationships and be able to leverage time-tested tools to improve your relationships right away. The person who could help you become a BA could be one relationship away.

It Can Pay to Be the Expert

Identify unique areas of expertise in your career background that could help you jump ahead quickly into your first business analyst role.

- Make the link between the organizations you've worked in and for and the industry expertise you bring.
- How the people you've worked with and the departments you've worked within can also give you unique areas of expertise to leverage.
- How solution domain expertise is valued in the marketplace and how to generalize experience with a proprietary system.
- How broad exposure to multiple businesses and industries can improve your positioning.

Are You a Great Problem-Solver?

Even if you are inexperienced in the project lifecycle, it's doubtful you've never solved a problem. Prepare to position your problem-solving experience in a BA context.

- Why problems are mini-projects and therefore a potential goldmine for your positioning as a BA.
- What types of problems a BA is typically responsible for solving.
- If you come from a technical background, then you might need to relearn problem-solving in a business context.
- Listen in on an expert role play and hear first-hand how a BA handles a requirements problem that crops up during implementation, helping you dig further into your problem solving experience.

What You Really Need to Know About Technology

Most formal business analyst jobs involve working on IT projects and in the 21st century technology is becoming a strategic part of the business. Define what it means to understand “enough about technology to be dangerous” and, therefore, be successful as an IT business analyst (even if you don't have an IT background).



4: BUILD YOUR PERSONALIZED ROADMAP

Once you cultivate an awareness of business analysis and discover your qualifications both within business analysis and beyond, then it's time to set a BA career goal and build your roadmap to achieve it.

This might seem simple. After all, you know you want to become a BA. But because the role is so multi-faceted, **your goal will need to be more specific to be realistic**. You'll also need to put a time frame around it and ensure that it is achievable given the time and resources you have to invest in your career change. Then, of course, you craft a plan to get from “A” to “BA”.

YOUR ACTION STEPS

- Set a specific, realistic, and time bound business analyst career goal.
- Complete a BA self-assessment and determine your strengths and gaps relative to your BA career goal.
- Based on interviews with other BAs, explore potential paths into business analysis and choose 1 or 2 paths that will best work for your career situation.

- Craft a plan to accumulate the knowledge and experiences you need to fill in your key competency gaps.
- Explore opportunities within your current organization to be promoted to an existing BA role or fulfill a newly created BA role.
- Solicit support from your manager, colleagues, and professional network to achieve your plan.

In *Launching Your Business Analysis Career*, we help you set your BA career goal and build your roadmap in 10 lessons.

MODULE 4 – CLEAR YOUR PATH INTO BUSINESS ANALYSIS

If You Don't Set a BA Career Goal Now, You'll Regret It Later

If you don't know where you are going, how will you ever get there? Start by identifying the most essential pieces of your business analysis career goal.

- The 3 most important questions to ask yourself about your BA career goals.
- How to capture a clear intention that enables you to make good career decisions.
- Why your goal will help you avoid clearing an unnecessarily wide path to business analysis. Your path should look like a well-groomed hiking trail, not a major highway.

How Close Are You to Being a BA?

By now you'll know more than most other inexperienced BAs about the profession and, quite honestly, many experienced BAs as well. With this knowledge you'll complete a truly informed self-assessment and determine how your qualifications stack up against the type of BA you want to be.

Three Paths and Two Side Turns into Business Analysis

Choose which of the most common paths and side turns followed by those who have been successful in launching business analyst careers are most applicable to you and your career situation.

- Learn what one path you never want to wait passively around for.
- Decide whether or not you want to learn to swim by jumping in the deep end.
- Explore the lowest-risk, but slower, path to business analysis.
- How to evaluate whether your current organization could benefit from a new business analyst – i.e. you.

Crafting Your Roadmap

While planning is not going to make you a business analyst, a general idea of where you are headed and how you will best accomplish that goal will make your transition faster and help you break down roadblocks along the way.

- Whether on index cards, in a provided Excel template, or in a mind map, getting your plan down on paper will help you see the big picture.
- Use your plan to decide if your career goal is realistic.

How to Expand Your BA Knowledge

Compare and contrast different learning opportunities within business analysis and select the combination of opportunities that suit your learning needs and style. Access an organized collection of additional references to leverage as part of addressing any competency gaps.

How to Expand Your BA Experiences

Identify opportunities to take action and build new career experiences and decide if your current job role provides opportunities to become a BA. Access a list of ideas to build BA experiences, at work, through volunteering, or at home, by competency area.

How to Build Mutually Beneficial Relationships

Learn from relationship-building expert, Kimberley Heath, about how she built the professional network that helped her land 4 different positions in 2 years, culminating in a full-time BA job. Learn how she meets new people, cultivates her network, and leverages her network to find new opportunities.

What's Your BA Story?

You'll be able to share your convincing BA story with other professionals, recruiters, and hiring managers and start spreading the word that you are ready to become a business analyst. Crafting your story will **boost your confidence** in yourself as a business analyst.

How to Talk about Your BA Career Goals with Your Manager

Prepare for a confident conversation with your manager about your business analysis career goals and determine what support you might have within your current organization.

Getting the Most Out of LinkedIn

You could very well meet your next manager, a future colleague or the right person to help you with your next project on LinkedIn. But first, you need a great profile and the skills to grow your professional network. We'll get you started in this lesson.

Build and Sustain the Career Transition Momentum

Career transitions are tough. Before we close out the course we'll share some tips for getting moving and sustaining your momentum. While it might appear that persistence is an inborn trait, it's entirely possible to train yourself to be persistent.



YOU CAN BALANCE THE SCALES

When breaking into business analysis, it can seem that everything is stacked against you. Following this action plan will help you build a personalized roadmap and balance the scales, if not even tip them generously in your favor.

Launching Your BA Career will help you accelerate your career transition, avoid blind alleys, and give you everything you need to build your personalized roadmap into business analysis. Find us at <http://mybusinessanalysiscareer.com> to get started today.

HERE'S WHAT A FEW *LAUNCHING YOUR BA CAREER* MEMBERS HAD TO SAY:

"The structure of this course and the personal feedback from the instructors was invaluable in helping me to explore applicable career experiences, identify action steps, and encourage me to continue on my path to business analysis.

Even if I do not end up in business analysis, this course has helped me identify my marketable and transferable skills and will undoubtedly benefit me in my next job search." **-Andrea Tinnen**

"I've worked with Laura in her BA Mentor program, as well as the My BA Career learning program. In both, I found Laura's knowledge around the technical and "soft" skills of business analysis exceeded all expectations. In the My BA Career program, the information was presented in an easy to understand manner and very instructional.

To anyone looking to move into the BA field or wanting to improve on their skills, I would highly recommend Laura and the programs she offers!" **-Rick Hengehold (just found his first BA job!)**

"I'm finding your lessons a great review for me as a business analyst who was never really formally trained. The lessons will help position me better for the next opportunity as well as help in the interview process." **-Charisse Arenas**

"Laura Brandenburg has become someone I mention to colleagues as someone who has provided me with invaluable tools for furthering my career. She is more than a cheerleader. She has common sense and she knows how to apply it. She's sensitive about when to give advice and when to elucidate the kernel of truth she just knows you have in you.

I'm experiencing the most forward traction in my career goals in the past few months, partly due to Laura's class. Highly recommend it and her to reach your goals." **-Elianna James, CTFL**

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