

Everything About a Business Analyst's Experience with Agile

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Some would argue that a business analyst's role was well-defined before the advent of the Agile methodology. There is some merit to this assertion. Before the establishment and polarization of the Agile methodology, BAs knew what was expected of them like the back of their hands: probe business processes, determine requirements, proffer informed solutions, and relay ongoings to stakeholders and executives.

Suffice it to say that as conventional business operation embraces the Agile ideology, the BA's role is a lot more fluid. Not to mention, it includes things it didn't use to before, like customer-facing and business owner responsibilities.

How exactly does the Agile process work? It was initially designed for the IT industry, specifically software development. But soon, it was discovered that its principles could apply to other areas of business and industry as well. Today, the Agile methodology has been implemented in different sectors of the economy.

The Agile development methodology, unlike the traditional approach, is reactive and self-correcting. This methodology deploys a data-driven, IT-integrated, real-time iterative approach to business. In this case, everyone — stakeholders, product owners, cross-functional teams/developers, and end-users — must work together in an ever-evolving manner to get from objectives and requirements to solutions, and continuous development. Agile encourages evolutionary and incremental planning and implementation, making it very flexible in responding to change.

Notice that the role of a business analyst in agile is not named explicitly in the methodology. This fact begs the question: what is the business analyst role in agile? The fact that the BA's role isn't mentioned expressly within Agile does not mean that it is not needed. It just means that the position is left to the interpretation of the particular companies and industries where a BA might be functioning. It will also depend on if said companies are deploying the 'business

analyst scrum' or 'business analyst kanban' type of business analyst model.

Regardless of the Agile framework's utilization, the critical functions of a business analyst tend to stay the same: Assessment of needs, process planning, process analysis, validation, and modeling. These functions remain the same in the traditional business environment as well.

A Little History of the Agile Methodology.

The heavy-handedness and micro-management of development methods like the waterfall method sparked a response that started in the 1990s. To replace these methods, a suite of lightweight developments began to surface at the turn of the 1990s. These included development methods like rapid application development (RAD), unified process (UP), extreme programming (XP), and Scrum, among many others. A few years ago — 2001 to be exact — all these softwares would come together under the Agile Software Development Methods umbrella.

The software developers who were signatories to the Agile Manifesto agreed on four cardinal values that they believed adequately reflected the Agile software development methods. These values state that:

- Processes and tools are trumped by individuals and communications.
- Robust documentation is not as important as a working and active software
- Contract negotiation falls below customer collaboration, and
- A strict project plan pales in comparison to a fluid and evolving approach.

Areas of the Agile Process's Impact on the Business Analyst's Role.

As stated earlier, the business analyst's core responsibilities remain unchanged, regardless of the business environment. However, in the Agile environment, the methodology determines and guides priority settings.

About the goal of an agile business analyst, there are three broad categories where the Agile process impacts how BAs carry out their work.

Maximizing communication

In an Agile framework, there is an extreme focus on optimal communication, information sharing, and an exhaustive interaction between business processes and IT solutions and tools. In this environment, there is much stronger cohesion across all roles in the methodology: stakeholders, developers, and end-users. This positioning enables everything from user stories, feedback loops, and the end user's perspective to be more reliable.

The agile business analyst serves as the critical link between the stakeholders and the developers. He is tasked with sufficiently understanding the needs of a business and adequately translating it to user stories while making deliverables/end products a priority. By maintaining these links and events, the Business Analyst shows himself as a great balancing act for the entire business process.

Product Roadmap Design

Besides fostering strong communication between human and event elements within an Agile environment, analysts also have the task of drawing the actual roadmap. This roadmap will tell not only how the development process should go but also the particular time stamps on each event. This roadmap also has to maintain flexibility, which is a significant attribute of the Agile methodology.

This involves providing system perspectives, making the business needs into a bunch of functional and non-functional requirements that the technology can understand and implement. There's also the issue of concurrent development phases and testing. Unlike the traditional waterfall methodology, where every stage of development happens one after the other, in the Agile environment, design, analysis, and testing happen simultaneously. The agile business analyst plays a significant part in mapping this operation.

Making sure the Agile team is Focused and On Course

As stated earlier, the agile business analyst's role includes enhancing communication, collaboration, and setting the timestamps and work objectives via a technological workflow. Beyond these, though, it is also the analyst's role to keep everyone driven and focused on getting from concept to product delivery.

This kind of collective focus can be achieved by many Agile frameworks in the market today. This practice is known as modeling. The analyst ensures that everyone — managers/product owners, other analysts, developers, and end-users/customers — all have the same endgame in mind as reflected in the language they speak and the questions they ask.

Using a visual model is most effective in this case, especially when team members are scattered across different locations or working remotely. This model type helps all the human elements in the Agile environment stay in sync in terms of functionality, business value, and user experience.

This responsibility is critical for the analyst to fulfill. Getting a bunch of people with different roles and job responsibilities to come together and focus on the same goal is not an easy task. Still, the analyst and all the members of the team must stay committed and inject this perspective into every step of the process.

Final Words

As stated earlier, Agile development keeps growing in prominence, and with this reality, we need to embrace the changing roles of business analysts, developers, managers, and even end-users.

The popular sentiment that Agile frameworks are sending analysts the way of the dinosaur is not valid. But make no mistake, this is still an evolution of sorts. The type that has expanded the scope of the typical business analyst's job has given him additional responsibilities that were not traditionally required.

In the Agile environment, there is a high priority placed on optimal collaboration, sharing knowledge, and skills transfer. Essentially, a

business analyst in an agile framework should be prepared and willing to be a generalizing specialist.

Every agile team requires all the team members to have truckloads of flexibility, discipline, and commitment in a manner that embraces continuous evolution. These requirements are not an easy feat to achieve. However, with time and an experienced agile business analyst, they should be up and running. In the end, investing in an Agile system will prove to be well worth it, provided everything is done right.

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