

Managing Business Analysis Services: A Framework for Sustainable Projects and Corporate Strategy Success;

By Barbara Davis (J. Ross Publishing, 2013) (232 pages, \$54.95)

Reviewed by James R. Brady, PhD, MPA, MEd.

Target Audience

As an analyst, consultant, educator, and business owner, Ms Davis has been very active in the development and growth of the "Business Analyst" (BA) profession. Her book reflects a concern that there is more positive publicity being disseminated on the quality of BA activities, training, and professional certification schemes than is justified by the actual operational impact. In spite of the establishment of the International Institute of Business Analysis (IIBA) and the issuance of a BA Body of Knowledge (BOK), she suggests that a standardized set of professional best practices for the BA field is still lacking:

"Over the years, I have worked with, mentored, trained, managed, and interviewed hundreds of business analysts. What I am about to say may shock you: Approximately 99% of the analysts that I have worked with and assessed are missing some of the most critical steps in requirements. Nevertheless, do not blame the analysts. They are missing these steps because business analysis is still a collective practice, and not a formal profession with standardized tasks, metrics and tools. Many analysts are simply borrowing tasks, tools, and techniques from other development areas." (page 15)

Consequently, her book "... highlights what is wrong with business analysis that is creating inconsistent, less-than-optimal, or catastrophic project results." (page xiii). She says that the suggested improvements outlined in her book will benefit not only Business Analysts (BAs), but also Chief Information Officers, BA managers, BA consultants, BA recruiters, and Project Managers. The book covers BA vendors and consulting firms, as well as BA staffs within technology-oriented organizations.

Strategies for Moving BA Forward:

The author stresses that it is not enough to just develop and hand over a new package of technology or BA services to the client. The end-users of the new services should be made active partners in developing the proposed action designs and in adapting these to the client organization's particular resources and conditions. She suggests that there should also be organizational systems to support continuous improvement and innovation in BA programs. One way of doing this is to create a "Center of Excellence" (COE) to help the organization better recruit, train, utilize, and reward the Business Analysts and other staff involved in new products or projects.

Many BAs now float around the organization without having a specific home base or career progression tract. This situation may also result in their being assigned to perform new tasks for which they are not adequately prepared. A COE might also be used to better link BAs and other staff members to share skills and provide more effective and profitable services and products.

Although Ms Davis cautions that a Center of Excellence is not a panacea, her personal experience in setting up such a BA center for a Fortune 500 consulting firm was positive. She reports that the company's BA portfolio "...**grew from approximately \$500K to more than \$8 million within two years. The trust of the account managers, customer base, and vendors that supplied us with additional business analysts increased as well. Most importantly, the impact that this assessment and shift in management had on the business analysts themselves was immensely positive. Their confidence and loyalty to the company increased exponentially because they suddenly knew where they belonged and what was expected of them.**" (page 7)

She discusses how the venerable "SWOT" analytical framework for assessing company managements can also be useful in identifying the Strengths/Weaknesses and Opportunities/Threats of current BA models. She reports that current "Weaknesses" of the BA profession include the following:

- (1) Proliferates flawed practices,
- (2) "Not using consistent improvement principles",
- (3) "Deliverable satisfaction subjective, unquantified", and
- (4) "Lack of career planning". (See pages 3-24 and Figure 1.2).

Subsequent chapters cover what she calls "Key Takeaways" for readers to address current BA problems. These include:

- (1) an optimized BA model,
- (2) better strategies for managing "resources" (she is usually referring to human resources, especially BA staff),
- (3) more integrated models for delivering BA services, and
- (4) a step-by-step plan to help concerned managers in "...implementing new practices across business and technology organizations."

Reviewer's Assessment: First, I should point out that I am not directly involved in the relatively new Business Analysis profession. However, many of the author's ideas for program improvements and staff development seem quite relevant to the international and cross-cultural projects and programs that I have worked on. It would be interesting to hear how some of our other readers feel about the book, especially those currently involved in Business Analysis.

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Reviewer Rating of this book (4 1/2 out of 5):  — James R. Brady, 9/2013