The Far Away BA: 
Business Analysis tips for pulling it all together without being there at all

Jourdan Arenson

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How I got into IT and got to work from home fulltime as a BA

1. I became a father.

2. The Internet boomed.

![Image of a man holding a baby and a graph showing NASDAQ 1998-2002.](www.bond-bubble.com)
My Work-from-home Station

The Far Away BA:
Business Analysis tips for pulling it all together without being there at all

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Abstract

For Business Analysts who help build in-house IT systems at large global corporations, system requirements are usually not simply there for the “gathering.” Often the BA has to lead an expedition of requirements discovery across the continents to drive out the needs of stakeholders in Europe, Asia and the Americas.

And if the organization has a chaotic history of mergers and quirky system integration, it’s likely business partners and users are overwhelmed and overwhelmed by the complexity of their users systems. The end result is that the project may include more projects than the dev team can possibly look at, much less build. Yet the BA may need to track enough details on all projects in the pipeline, so the dev team can get working on any one.


My rules for working from home

1. Never work in pajamas.

2. Always respond quickly.

3. Ask: “What must I do for people to put up with me working from home?”
Why I Like the BA Role

- I don’t have to come up with the goals for the system (the Business Team does).
- I don’t have to build the system (the Dev Team does).
- I do help the two teams articulate and agree on what we are going to build.
What Happens in a Software Engineering Project:

- Lots of people collaborate to build a complex software system.

The BA Role in Software Engineering

- Make the required complexity as clear and simple as possible.
- Make the collaboration as efficient and pleasant as possible.

Consensus and collaboration is more important because with distributed teams it is easy for team members to:

- mistrust others
- avoid problems
- point fingers, and
- be defensive

- BA’s unique position to advocate and foster collaboration.
BA’s Role as Advocate for Each Side

- Watch for poor Biz/Dev relationships stemming from a power differential.
  - When Biz has the upper hand, Dev can be forced to take on more than it can handle (aggressive stance).
  - And sometimes Dev can use unnecessarily complex processes to fight back (passive-aggressive stance).
- Don’t take sides, but be advocate for Biz and advocate for Dev.
Advocate for the Business Team: Requirement Discussions

*Wait for the hot air to condense, show what’s left, and build on that.*

- When conversation is going in circles because there is no clarity or consensus on one particular aspect of the system.
  - Condense hot air under the pressure pertinent details.
  - Use a BA modeling technique to crystallize and distill the aspect of the system everyone needs to agree on.
  - Use crude mockup to provide a concrete hypothesis to explore.
  - Document implementable details, not noise.

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ROE Roles
- Front Office ROE Fill Queue
- Back Office Roles
  - Repair
  - Approve Cancellations and Repairs up to ___ USD
  - Back Office ROE Fill Queue
```
Advocate for the Development Team

• Like a tourist in a foreign land, learn enough about programming languages to get by:
  o object oriented and relational database concepts
  o useful when talking with business partners to set expectations
  o confident when talking with developers about code and requirements

• *Faire la mise en place*
Julia Child Explains

• All well-trained chefs prepare their mise en place, the term for setting all the food and equipment needed out on the work space and prepping them before beginning to cook.

• It is absolutely necessary in the fast and hectic atmosphere of a restaurant kitchen.

• When everything is there, it makes cooking so much faster and easier.

(Child 1995)
Mise En Place: Raw Ingredients
### Mise En Place: Prepped Ingredients, Ready for Coding

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Agile means never having to say you’re certain.
Waterfall Conversation: The Mutually Confident Phase

After writing massive Requirements Document and filling in lengthy Project Plan

**Business Team:** This business requirements document represents what we want you to build.

**Development Team:** This project schedule promises when we will deliver it.
Waterfall Conversation: The Finger-Pointing Phase

After requirements and scheduling predictions prove flawed

**Business Team:** OMG. It’s taking longer than you said!

**Development Team:** Yeah, well, your requirements were not complete. You didn’t tell me about everything I needed to build!
Key Difference with Agile

- There is no expectation that anybody will make excellent predictions.
- We embrace the **biological fact** that the human mind truly sucks when making predictions about complex projects.
Thinking, Fast and Slow by Daniel Kahneman
“The Planning Fallacy”

• The confidence that individuals have in their beliefs depends mostly on the quality of the story they can tell about what they see, even if they see little.

• We often fail to account for the possibility that evidence that should be critical to our judgment is missing—what we see is all there is.

• Our associative system tends to suppresses doubt and ambiguity.

(Kahneman 2011)
The Agile Conversation

*After brainstorming requirements on whiteboard*

**Business Team:** This is the kind of thing I need you to build. Features A, B and C are the most important. D, E and F are still important but they can come later.

**Development Team:** That’s cool. We’ll spend the next iteration building A. After that we can see whether you want to change your mind.

That’s cool.
Advocate for Myself: Challenges

- I rarely see people face-to-face.
- Nobody reports to me, so I have no management authority.
- How to guide and influence my colleagues toward:
  - pleasant collaboration
  - around staggering complexity
  - for multiple projects
  - all running at the same time
Advocate for Myself: Reputation

I want my colleagues to see me as the guy who

- Is fluent in the details.
- Raises, tracks and brings issues to resolution.
- Updates documents, in pretty much real time.
- Is methodical and comprehensive, but relaxed about it all.
- Is the calm face of the Dev team that says:

  “We can do this. But we are going to do it right. We are not going to be hasty and frantic. We are going to be methodical and comprehensive.”
Advocate for Myself: Make Conscious Effort to Get Organized

When people with whom you interact notice that—without fail—you receive, process and organize in an airtight manner, the exchanges and agreements they have with you, they begin to trust you in a unique way. (Allen 2001, 225)
An Even Greater Benefit
(One That Allen Doesn’t Mention In His Book)

• While details are off my *conscious* mind, they are sorting themselves in my *unconscious* mind.

• Based on good news from recent scientific understanding on how the mind works *better* than we might think.
Incognito: The Secret Lives of the Brain
by David Eagleman
Laboratory for Perception and Action
Baylor College of Medicine

• [When you suddenly see a solution to a problem,] your brain performed an enormous amount of work before your moment of genius struck.

• When an idea is served up from behind the scenes, your neural circuitry has been working on it for hours or days or years, consolidating information and trying out new combinations.

(Eagleman 2011)
Advocate for Myself:
Make Effort to Get Unconscious Organized

Organized + Unconscious

Getting Things Done
The Art of Stress-Free Productivity

IncoGNito
The Secret Lives of the Brain

David Allen
David Eagleman
Organized Unconscious

Log all the details so:

- My conscious mind doesn’t worry so much, and
- I prime my unconscious so it can carry on with these details while I go on to the next thing.

For major deliverables

- Do this in real time, as I discover the details.
- Find right spots in tracking system or documentation set.
- Express details in clearest, precise language as “notes to unconscious.”
- Spend time re-reading the old details, and muse about a new organizing principle or solution.
- Forget about it and move on to the next thing.
- Keep a note pad by the bed.
References


