

The following is the write up (in note form) from the Agile BA workshop session held at the BA Managers Forum, May 2015

Question 1:

How do you measure the success of the individual BA if they are working within an Agile team when Agile success is based on the team, not individual, output? Are pre-defined BA services useful or will they hinder the Agile BA?

Key Themes:

1. Measure BA value
Through ascertaining the value of the deliverables they produce and also by looking how valuable the product delivered was. Did the product meet stakeholder needs/expectations and deliver business benefit?
2. Use retrospectives to assess BA value in Team
Can assess how the team value BA in retrospectives but might also need to assess this outside of the team too, maybe 1-2-1 with the product owner or project manager.
3. Pre-defined services not useful
Once size does not fit all and so predefined services are not always useful. The agile BA needs to decide what is appropriate to deliver for the project and when, in conjunction with the development team. Can still list services but with the emphasis on soft rather than hard facets (i.e. facilitate user collaboration around user stories, rather than a Business Requirement Document).

Group 1:

- Services should be flexible and adaptable
- Hard to compare a BA working on waterfall to BA working in an Agile environment. Should you compare?
- Focus on deliverables for release goals/sprint goals rather than requirements agreement upfront.
- Throw out concept of 'service' and focus on skills and capabilities
- Could still have a list of services for customers to choose from
- Softer, rather than hard set of services (i.e. facilitation of requirements workshops, collaboration of users for user stories).
- Predefined services not always useful
- Conflict between Product Owner and BA role and responsibilities because roles overlap. Makes it hard for BA.

- Measure success by:
 - Asking other team members (but only if they know what a BA could deliver)
 - Ask for feedback in retrospectives and also outside of retrospectives
 - Judge success on what stakeholders see is being delivered and how they value it

Group 2:

- BA role shifts in Agile so give up on role title and focus on core skills
- BA accountability is important within Agile (i.e. format and manage stories/backlog)
- Accountability needs to be shared amongst the team
- Do you need to measure individual success of BA? Could measure team success. If BA has done job effectively the sprint will deliver the right thing to the business.
- Measure customer satisfaction
- Use analytics to measure the value delivered (i.e. stats of usage of product, which parts of the app are customers using and how often?). Need to balance this with risks raised.
- BA doesn't need to be a requirements guru in agile. Could be scrum master. However, if scrum master then not BA. Agree BA is capable of other agile roles but then not doing a BA role.
- Use retrospectives to gauge success of BA
- BA supports the Product Owner in Agile
- If a BA is not involved then it will be a poorer product. SCRUM does not state that a BA role is needed and this causes problems.
- BAs make things happen, so measure them on this.

Group 3:

- Yes you can have predefined services but how much is produced and when is key to agile.
- BAs still need to engage in earlier deliverables (e.g. vision, scope) and a minimal set for sprint 1 of release 1.
- Measure value of deliverables produced by the BA not amount.
- Measure value of the deliveries at the end of a sprint or even benefits realised.
- Measure individual BA through
 - Retrospectives
 - From outside team asking 'did they make a difference?'
- BA should be the proxy PO (not everyone agreed with this as they are different roles and a BA shouldn't represent or make decisions on behalf of the business)
- BA should own the backlog
 - Make sure stories are sized appropriately

- Manage and gain agreement on the backlog release cycle
- Hard to measure how the individual BA performed
- A BA on an agile project needs to be experienced to be effective. If junior then needs mentoring by senior.
- Above is true of any BA on any project, although if services are predefined then easier for non-Agile BAs to follow. Services aren't and can't be predefined in Agile so reliant on the BAs experience to challenge and choose right approach.
- Business case also needs to be flexible so that funding is flexible and not constrained so much that means you can't be Agile.

Question 2:

How long should an Agile BA deployment be? Can BAs do short term secondments (e.g. 6 weeks) given that working software is constantly delivered and therefore there is a continuum of BA work?

Key Themes:

1. BA being seconded to a team for short period can be disruptive to the team (affects productivity) and the BA may not have time to fully pick up the required project knowledge.
2. It can take at least 6 weeks for a BA to be fully up to speed.
3. Domain knowledge essential
4. Sprints need a rhythm and this takes time to develop.
5. The BA can be the critical factor in fluid working of the team
6. The BA is seen as key team communication
7. The relationship with the project owner is also key.

Group discussions included:

- The theme coming through the session was that short periods of BA deployment was not beneficial to the project.
- BA's are seen as part of the core of an Agile team. The team goes through the cycle of Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, and to switch BA's in and out of the project adds disruption: to the project flow, the makeup of the team and to the business.
- There was split opinion on whether BA's worked under more pressure with a higher expectation on the throughput of deliverables and expectation of team support within an Agile team compared to a more traditional approach.
- Some Agile teams were seen as increasing the pressure/workload of a BA due to the continuous workload and the need to prepare user stories for the backlog of upcoming sprints. Some delegates saw this as leading long term to the burn out of BA's (after 9 months), while others saw this as motivation and satisfaction in the role due to the changing, challenging and speed of delivery of the work – an example given was that in a waterfall SDLC it might take months for a screen to be defined where as in an Agile SDLC it could be two weeks.
- The thinking also indicated that the workload for some was controlled by the teams (the size of the sprints and work needed for the backlog) but maybe not so with others. A further question could have looked at the maturity of the BA practice within an agile environment.
- This led to the discussion around whether you have different types of BA's and who makes a good BA. Some practitioners would vet their BA's to see

whether they were suited to an agile environment while others saw a BA as being able to work on any SDLC.

- Interesting though was a comment that “I get easily bored so agile suits me because of the frequency of change”, personally I can relate to this as this is a trait of mine. So does this personal trait lend itself to being more suited to the agile way of working? Should we be looking to add personal traits into criteria around the way we recruit if we are looking to specialise in a particular SDLC
- A couple of the organisations Waitrose and Lloyds use agile teams as being the way to introduce graduates and new entrants to the BA practice and would look at 12 and 6 month periods of exposure as part of their initial development. This gives them the chance to experience the full SDLC working closely with developers and testers.
- The feeling generally was that BA's would be on the Agile development team as long as they were needed or until there was a suitable time where the team could be changed. This came from the time taken to obtain the required level of business knowledge, the time taken to up-skill and time taken to build the working within the team to gain the “fluidity” needed which might not happen until the 5th or 6th sprint.
- Short periods of BA activity was seen as beneficial when BA's who were SMEs in certain business fields/knowledge were brought in to aid the project but were not part of the core team.
- Agile way of working left BA's with less time to hide and forced them to deliver a higher quality work due to the timescales of delivery. In a traditional approach if the BA was not accurate with the requirement process there was time for a change to be made, not so with a sprint.
- The concept of a BA being able to work in any environment brought out different views. Some would say yes and that their BA's would be expected to do so. While others would carry out assessments to see whether the BA was suitable or predisposed to working in an Agile way.
- This was in fairness not delving into the area or flavour of agile that was being practised but kept to a broad view of agile in general. The maturity of practice was also not indicated which again with the experience of the BAs could have an impact on any conclusions gained and views submitted.
- Some saw that BAs could be used early in the set up and incorporation of the development team in order to get things started but would not be seen as the BA who works as part of the team long term (sort of extra resource to get the team a better start like to help build up the initial requirements backlog).
- The term “Agile BA” also irritated some as they questioned the need to differentiate. Should a BA not be working in an Agile way anyway?
- The thought of Agile SDLC for a BA meant that a BA would find it easier to plan ahead for backlogs ensuring that work was available for the developers and also ensure that requirements that needed extra analysis could be planned so as to start that analysis earlier in order that they were ready for the required sprint.
- The point was raised that in some organisations that a BA was seen as the sole resource of that team and so could be underutilised especially if some of the BA's time could also be allocated to other ongoing projects.

Question 3:

Can the BA practice itself apply the agile mind-set of continuous improvement? If so how?

Key Themes:

1. Collaboration
Applying the agile-mind-set to CI within BA Practice requires collaboration with other disciplines/practices/parts of the organisation and should not be done in a siloed fashion.
2. Retrospectives/stand ups
The ability to reflect and learn quickly, rapid learning and response to learning, making time for meetings but not too much!
3. Visibility/Backlog
The ability to see/share initiatives and their progress, and to be accountable for their delivery
4. Flexibility/Reprioritisation
The ability to change the path of improvement in response to increased knowledge or some external stimuli
5. Sprints/slices/iterations
Approaching initiatives in sprints, delivering little and often, can be used as a means to introduce change into the practice.
6. Driving innovation via agile mind-set/committed individuals
driving improvement of practice as a whole through small number of committed individuals

Group 1

- Yes – tackle our initiatives as small slices/backlog
- Use of retrospectives on Practice Changes
 - Ability to apply learning quickly
usually lessons learnt are too late/too slow/not shared
 - Ability to drop if deemed non-value add
 - Use of experiments to trial change
 - Need to classify – good/bad/ugly
 - Scrum concept of “Bad Smell”
- Balance between project work and practice work an issue as generally unfunded
- Use of KanBan for practice initiatives
- Use of Product Owner to validate
- Application of agile manifesto to documentation
 - Doing/not documenting/fitness for purpose/traceability
- Meeting Approach – use of Stand ups
- Collaboration instead of silos – reduce duplication
- Noticed change in tolerance to non-agile work – preference to work in “agile” way
- Visibility of BA value on projects through use of tool to manage backlog and allow everyone to contribute
- Use of time boxing /timeliness/Reprioritisation

Group 2

- Yes
- Difficult to undertake when 100% utilisation needed
- Agile can be applied to building domain knowledge, informal training, driving personal interest group knowledge
- Ownership of BA deliverables and process and CI in agile way leads to rapid response to feedback and rapid sharing of ideas
- Drive innovation through “agile-mind-set” – less prescriptive than Balanced scorecard
- CI in BA Practice - impact on PMO/PM/ etc
 - Need to drive community of practice and share across disciplines
Technology/lines of Business etc
 - Drive mind-set of change through collaboration
- Empower teams to take risks – need learning reflection with this
- How much change? How much stability is needed?
 - Change by stealth/experiments
- Holding of practice initiatives on backlog and prioritisation on regular basis
- Alignment across practices
- Visibility of change, being held to account

Group 3

- Y & N – not just agile for CI – ongoing
- Iterations/Sprints of improvement
- Committed individuals leading practice
- Use of BA working sessions – sharing best practice
- BA Practice and embedded BAs (business owned BAs) – need to keep all aligned through cross-organisation sharing
- Not mandating change – using relationships and flexibility
- Fit for purpose documentation
- Need for cultural change
- Sharing common understanding
- Use of objective setting to drive CI in Practice – not one size fits all
- Use of SIG – cross organisational learning, third parties, networks
- Need for parameters/standards/constraints particularly where regulatory work
- Visibility of change for support and collaboration
- More regular feedback and responses – need to make time for this
- Keep and change?