

Career next steps for BA practice leads – BA Manager Forum – May 2016

Introduction

The following notes represent the thoughts and discussion points from two workshop sessions held at the BA Manager Forum event 20th May 2016. A total 80 BA practice leads contributed to the two sessions.

BA Practice leads can occupy positions at the heart of change, take a view across the organisation and hold a set of well-honed management skills. As such, the role can provide a solid platform for a range of future careers. The role though is a comparatively new one and this session was designed to assess the future career options open to practice leaders. The session benefitted from input from senior change leaders on their own career journeys and their assessment of the key factors contributing to career development.

We are also including the presentation slides used by Corrine Thomas in her talk on building a personal brand. These slides are complimented by an article that was published in Analysts Anonymous in Spring 2015 entitled - *Building "Brand me": Making effective career choices by knowing where you want to go.*

Workshop notes – session 1 – identifying higher level career options

The group were firstly asked to consider available career options for BA Managers and to list the suggestions. These included:

The first list of career options received two or more mentions and so appear more popular:

- Business architecture
- Product development/owner
- Business change manager
- Solution architecture/delivery
- Head of change – leadership in broader change role
- Larger practice head of analysis role
- Portfolio manager
- Operational management
- Change management
- Process improvement/continuous improvement (Lean)
- Programme management
- Consultancy

Career options with one mention are as follows:

- Strategic role
- IT Director
- Operations director
- PMO
- Training and coaching
- Process manager
- Commercial Director
- Entrepreneur – own business
- Head of business engagement
- HR
- Enterprise architect
- Head of IS
- Head of technical domain

From earlier research we can add:

- Head of customer experience
- Head of data management
- Head of standards tools and methods
- Management consultant
- Head of digital services

The suggestion was also made that the option exists for practice leads to step back into a BA delivery role.

Key observations on career choices

Career options are many and varied. BA skills combined with proven people management skills opens up a range of opportunities.

The focus of the two groups appears very much to be on business related rather than pure IT roles.

Individual organisations might offer only a small selection of the possible roles. Individuals may then have to consider external moves if they are to realise their full potential.

Change leader input

Three change leaders: Jake Markham, Bally Grewal and Gareth Tupper provided an insight to their own career journeys into expanded and higher level roles. All three structured their contributions under four headings and the highlights of their commentary are below.

Pivotal moments

- The realisation of the value of experience gained in BA and BA leadership roles
- Gaining a breadth of experience and taking on different roles and responsibilities out of your comfort zone
- Preparedness to take personal risks in your career.
- Tackling and delivering on organisational problems

Value of BA/BA Manager experience

- Make complex things simple
- Fluency in business needs and language
- Ability to ask the right questions and problem solve

Key factors

- Accommodating a volume of change
- Seeking and securing high level support and sponsorship for progression
- Achieving a real depth of relationships. These relationships are not purely transactional but are meaningful and purposeful
- Never let process stand in the way of success
- Demonstrate courage and self-belief
- Take ownership for customer needs/experience

Key skills

- The ability to say no
- Personal effectiveness
- Judgement

Barriers

- Trust has to be established for barriers to be overcome.
- Lack of personal responsibility is a common barrier. Don't wait to be asked.

Workshop notes – session 2 – experience, skills, opportunities and barriers to achieving higher level roles

Workshop groups were invited to discuss and list the key factors under four headings that would lead to achieving higher level career aspirations.

It became immediately clear that what might be considered an opportunity or skill in one respect could be considered a barrier if not realised. Some factors identified can then be expressed under several headings.

A useful start point for personal assessment is to understand what organisations need before completing a personal SWOT analysis.

The notes from this group work appear below.

Experience

- Market/industry experience – the broader the experience the better
- Diversity of past projects across different disciplines e.g. marketing, finance etc.
- Working effectively with partners/third parties
- Exposure to other roles/disciplines. Increased exposure within business/operational landscape – possible job rotation
- Taking on higher risk work – moving into areas where little current knowledge exists
- People management
- Use appropriate training courses – keeping focus on own development and fresh thinking
- Shadowing senior colleagues
- Mentoring – seeking out a suitable mentor – external to your own organisation – different perspective.
- Self-evaluation – what do I have – how can I use this?
- Increase financial/commercial awareness
- Increase political awareness
- Increase SME
- Become an expert problem solver
- Use wider life experience in the workplace e.g. wider positions of responsibility, overcoming personal challenges
- Focus more on outcomes than the process
- Knowing when to be agnostic
- Building key relationships/network

Skills development

The group agreed that developing as broad a skillset as possible is advisable. The emphasis for higher level roles will always be on developing personal skills/effectiveness and applying these skills to a variety of situations.

Colleagues may need to be educated on the depth and wider applicability of the BA skillset.

- Personal skills were listed repeatedly and included:
 - o Influencing
 - o People management
 - o Leadership
 - o Coaching skills
 - o Commercial acumen
 - o Political awareness
 - o Communication – higher level audience.
- Self-belief/awareness
- Developing others/talent development and being happy to see others succeed
- Consider delegation to free up time for personal development. Everyone benefits.
- Creativity

- Ability to succinctly present arguments – keeping it simple
- Gravitas
- Curiosity
- Have something to stand for
- Ability to sell yourself – your value
- Innovation
- Diplomacy and making it positive
- Collaboration – open to new ideas (team and peers)
- Networking
- Higher level stakeholder management
- Resilience
- Emotional intelligence
- Architecture – technical skills
- Strategic view and awareness.

Opportunities

Overall it was seen that individuals at this level should be able to develop opportunities rather than waiting for them to appear. This might be achieved by:

- Building networks/relationships – internally & externally
- Be ahead of organisational changes/restructures (large organisations) – when new roles come available
- Finding problems/challenges you can solve
- Developing transferable skills – readiness for roles you aspire to
- Drive change – shake up status quo
- Use advocates
- Increase knowledge sharing
- Volunteer for additional responsibility
- Take on secondments
- Take advantage of blurring of responsibilities within Agile delivery
- Have a go – be bold!
- Learn to flex your style of approach
- Use insight and access available to BA Managers on planned change
- Develop true consultative approach
- Make yourself visible/higher profile
- Know and appreciate the real business agenda
- Transform your function/set up a new function that has wider value
- Take any opportunity to gain exposure to senior management
- Take involvement in transformational change
- Build credibility by delivering real value

Barriers

Many barriers were seen to be self-imposed and discussion quickly turned to overcoming them rather than dwelling on problems. Self-belief was seen as the main barrier to achieving higher level roles. Other factors/barriers are listed below:

- Culture e.g. PM seen as senior/lead role rather than BA
- Not changing management behaviours
- Lack of vision/strategy
- Lack of understanding of BA role – possible dumping ground
- Budget time constraints for self-development
- Adding proving value all the time
- Waiting for people to move (dead man's shoes)
- Being overly helpful
- Lack of early stage involvement
- Not stepping outside of comfort zone
- Poor credibility
- Perceptions of the BA role – pigeonholed
- Lack of ambition
- Lack of opportunity
- Lack of support/sponsorship. People leaving organisation.
- Personal circumstances e.g. family commitments.
- Time for self-development
- Absence of change limiting exposure
- Flat organisation structure

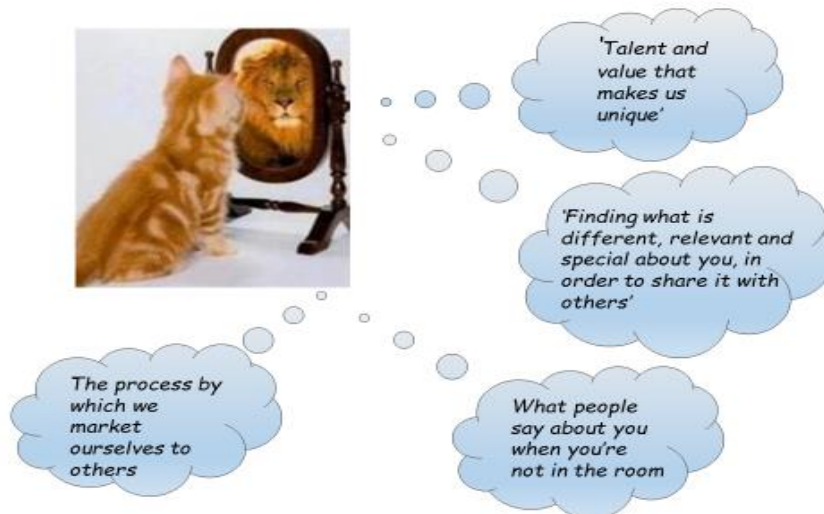
Personal branding

Corrine Thomas volunteered to condense a past workshop on personal branding into 15 minutes of input (a tough ask). It was hoped that attendees would at least begin to think of their personal brand. A useful prompt is for individuals to reflect what people might say about them when they leave a room. Her slides are below with a longer article on the same subject added to the end of this document.



BA Manager Forum
20th May 2016

Corrine Thomas
Choices Coaching Ltd



Your brand/image needs to be managed proactively. Consider major bands such as Nike and the Virgin organisations. Consider then the personal brands of personalities such as Richard Branson.

It's not enough to do your job well and hope others will recognise and appreciate this.

In a highly competitive world it makes sense to make sure your strengths are evident to those who matter.

Finding your Career Sweet Spot



Work satisfaction is driven by 3 factors:

Interests

Skills and abilities

Personality

Achieving a good mix of these 3 factors makes for a fulfilling and successful career.



Our values are in our sub-consciousness yet they drive our behaviour.

Values are powerful motivators.

Awareness of values and the part they play in our day to day lives enables us to enjoy a fulfilled life.

Our daily activities contribute towards or undermine our values.

Organisations may have formal values – whether or not people are motivated by these depends on how they have been introduced.

Values conflict, is a continual source of challenge to effective communication.



Building “Brand me”: Making effective career choices by knowing where you want to go



Corinne Thomas of Choices Consulting and Coaching shared her experience of the “Brand Me” workshop at November’s BA Conference Europe and how everyone can make the best choices for career and development. Lawrence Darvill sat in on the session and his account, with Corrine’s later input, is below.

Business analysts may not be the best career planners, and working in a maturing profession may not always provide the clearest career pathway. And so I was pleased to see a workshop at the September European BA conference about assessing “Brand me” and making effective career choices.

Thinking about famous brands such as Apple or Virgin is a useful start point for anyone considering brand: what it is and how it can be thought of from a personal perspective. Brands are often demonstrated in terms of sales and marketing and are all about creating emotional connections and associations between a person and a product or company. When it comes to personal brand, it is all about how to portray yourself to others and what you want to be known for in both your professional and personal life.

Brand is very important to your career, whether you work for others or run your own business; people are evaluating you all the time. A personal brand is about the first impressions that come to mind, the values you espouse and then the impression you leave with people. Another, perhaps daunting, way of looking at this is to consider what colleagues say about you when you leave the room...

Your brand needs to be managed proactively. It's not enough to do your job well and hope others will recognise and appreciate this. In a highly competitive world it's sensible to make sure your strengths and interests are evident to those who matter. Brand also makes you think about the element of control you can exercise in determining how you are perceived.

Core elements

When thinking about the core elements of your long term career, it's useful to consider the three main factors that drive work satisfaction: interests, skills and abilities, and your personality. A good mix of these makes a fulfilling and successful career.

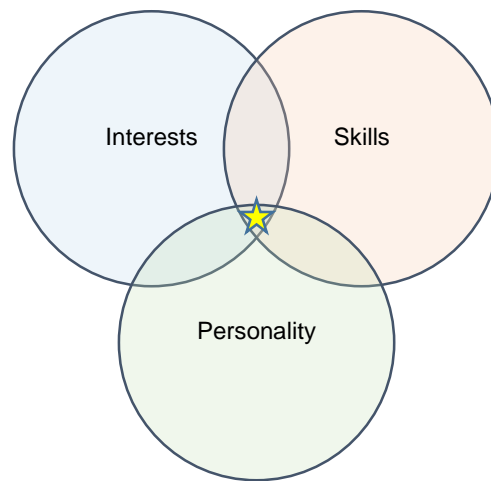
As a group, we were invited to undertake a career discovery exercise plotting the peaks and troughs of our respective careers along a timeline. At each high or low point we were invited to highlight the characteristics of those occasions and what made them highs or lows. Themes quickly emerged from this exercise: skills, abilities, interests and personality.

The make-up of career sweet spots and low points was a light bulb moment for most of us in the session. Some had not perhaps appreciated the importance of management culture in our decisions to move jobs. For many, lack of progression or interesting work was a decisive factor. It's a simple and yet revealing technique for highlighting what is important in our careers.

Some attendees drew out a journey that incorporated moves outside of the BA profession. This was seen as a likely benefit for individuals who could have an opportunity to pick up fresh skills and different perspectives on delivering successful change. It was noted that core analysis skills can form part of many career paths and the more the BA skillset was appreciated the better!

Making the right future decisions will never be easy but an appreciation of your career sweet spot provides a useful start point.

Career sweet spot



Looking at the **skills** make-up of the business analyst role it is worth making use of the AssistKD career manager tool, BCS career planner or the IIBA self-assessment tool. All the tools provide a skills make-up of the business analyst at different levels, so you can plan your career with future development in mind.

Career planning needs to take account of what genuinely **interests** us and not what may simply be the fashion of the day. Equally we might be able to rule out what does not interest us. The business analysis profession is very broad, so there is plenty of opportunity to seek out what is of particular interest and build a career around it. This could be as a generalist or as a specialist, whichever fits in better with personal interests, values and talents.

Assessing **personality** requires an honest appraisal of our personal make-up. Are we an introvert or extrovert? Do we work better with a big picture or in the details? Are we motivated by working with people or are we drawn to processes and systems? Are we task or relationship orientated? These questions prompt choices that may well govern the environment we work in, e.g. a highly regulated environment may not suit the more creatively minded BA.

Here's a useful question to ask yourself: when you are working at your best, what does it look like? Ask others what phrase they would use to sum you up - it can give you insights into how you are perceived and what brand image you are portraying to others.

What I and other attendees perhaps hadn't fully appreciated was the importance of our value set in our careers. Our values drive what is important to us in our daily lives and are largely unconscious. They become very noticeable, though, when we are in a situation where there's conflict with our personal values. This can lead to frustration, boredom, anxiety and stress. Some roles, organisations or situations may lead to a conflict with our values of honesty, ethics, quality and integrity. It is useful to identify our key values and what we are willing to compromise on (if anything).

Summing up

Having a thorough appreciation of our skills, interests, personality and values enables us to make decisions on our career choice and development. This is the start point for actively shaping and taking control of our own brand – “brand me”. We then have a chance of showing the world what we want to be known for and identifying the best pathway for our talents.

END.