BAC, Not As Simple as ABC

By Gloria Seltzer

One IT Manager at the bank recently said to me: "We are facing a BAC (Business Analyst Crisis). There are too many projects and not enough BA's to do the work." With the proliferation of regulatory requirements such as: Sarbanes-Oxley (SOX), Bassel, Qualified Intermediary (QI), Anti Money Laundering (AML), and Anti Terrorism Financing—there is a growing demand for BA's to develop/enhance systems to improve operational process controls and risk management (e.g. market and credit risk) in addition to continuous process improvements and pet projects such as: client relationship management, eBusiness, and Web development.

Léo Lefebvre

Gloria Seltzer

BA's come in many diverse personality types, and I have worked with them all. These types can be categorized as follows:

Type 1: The Social Butterfly
These BA's chit chat all day long with other social butterflies in the office or on the phone, exchanging office gossip, their plans for the weekend, and their life stories.

Type 2: The Web Surfer
These BA's pass time by surfing the Web or playing computer games. Does management believe in walking around?

Type 3: The Buck Passer
These BA's pass the buck by saying "this is not my job." In other words, find some other sucker to do the dirty work.

Type 4: The Chronic Complainer
These BA's complain about their job, their house, their spouse, their children, etc. but will not do anything to change it. They are the perpetual victim of circumstances and refuse to take responsibility for their lives.

Type 5: The Used Car Salesman
These BA's talk up a storm to impress people, and get the job, but are not be able to construct a sentence with proper grammar, correct spelling, and understandable message. Should they be attending business writing classes?

Type 6: The Work From Home
These BA's claim to work from home, but when you phone or Email them, there is no response until they return to the office. Ever wonder where they were?

Type 7: The Busy Bee
These BA's look busy, shuffle paper all day, and stay late for the sake of appearance, but produce nothing. Do they work for the government?

Type 8: The Yes Man
These BA's say "yes" to everything requested under the sun to please the masses, but do not deliver.

Type 9: The Secretary
These BA's record what everybody said in meetings, cut and paste emails and pass them off as business requirements/system specifications. They live in a fool's paradise where ignorance is bliss and they don't know what they don't know.

> "People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I do not believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and if they cannot find them, make them."
> George Bernard Shaw
> 1856-1950, Playwright

Type 10: The Know It All
These BA's assume everything is simple because they do not understand technology—where the devil is in the details. They are from the business and demand things be done immediately, and conclude that everybody in IT is stupid, lazy, and ripping off the company.

Type 11: The Prima Donna
These BA's hog meetings by asking a zillion questions. They ignore the body language of other participants rolling their eyes, staring at the ceiling, or checking their watches constantly, wanting the meeting to be over. They are their own worst enemy as they expose their ignorance and destroy their own credibility.

Type 12: The Narcissist
These BA's are in love with themselves and think they are God's gifts to mankind. They think the project cannot live without them because they are the best thing since sliced bread. Guess what? The company and project will go on long after they are gone, for better or worse.

Type 13: The Masochist
These BA's are perfectionists and nobody and nothing is good enough for them. They punish themselves and other people by being overly critical in their impossible pursuits.

Type 14: The Schizophrenic
These BA's behave like Dr. Jeckle in front of their managers but act like Mr. Hyde when they are not around. They take credit for other people's work and pass blame to others.

Type 15: The Nazi
These BA's think they are in the military and do everything by the rule book. They follow form, but have no substance, creativity, or imagination.

Type 16: The Mudslinger
These BA's throw mud at the wall and see what sticks. They think performance is measured by weight and generate tons of paper (like a blizzard in February) with the hope that "if you cannot dazzle them with brilliance, then baffle them with BS."

Type 17: The Microscope
These BA's cannot see the forest for the trees, and can only see the leaves. When you ask what time it is, they explain how the clock works. They are lost in the deep end and cannot conceptualize, summarize, communicate, and present key information to management.

Type 18: The Procrastinator

These BA's keep saying "I'll do this tomorrow." When tomorrow runs out and the due date for deliverables finally arrives, they are panic stricken, totally disoriented and disorganized, do not remember anything, and have not done anything. They remind me of my classmates who did not study the whole year, but tried to cram everything the night before the examination.

Type 19: The Facilitator

These BA's have a deep understanding of business, systems, and technology, ask pertinent questions, listen well, and find the path of least resistance to deliver high quality business requirements/system specifications. Their documents are clear, concise, precise, and easily understood by the business and the technical team. The focus is on quality instead of quantity, because "less is more." These BA's are as rare and as precious as diamonds.

Type 20: The Leader

These BA's have the attributes of the Facilitator and a Level 5 Leader, who is:

- A visionary (who can predict what will happen to the project and take preventive action—or failing that, plan for contingency)
- Emotionally intelligent
- Socially intelligent (personable and sociable)
- Passionate about excellence
- Positive and optimistic
- Instinctive, spiritual and inspiring
- Curious and daring
- Conscientious and committed
- Hardworking and determined
- Resilient under adversity
- Honest
- Full of integrity, humour, and humility
- A thinker (inside and outside of the box)
- A communicator
- A team player
- A lifelong learner, and
- A Coach/mentor (who shares wisdom with other team members to enable them to realize their potential)

They are the ideal BA's. "Ideals are like stars. We cannot reach them, yet like mariners—we chart our course by them."

Conclusion

IT is facing a BA crisis today because the majority of BA's have the title but they do not function/perform as BA's. Baby boomers who have achieved the Facilitator/Leader level with hard and soft skills which took years to build are close to retirement.

While some organizations may be fortunate enough to recruit Facilitators/Leaders, the Facilitators/Leaders are often victims of their own success. They do a good job in analyzing complexity and integrating simplicity in their documents. This leads their management to falsely believe that the work is simple and their services are no longer required. When their organizations realize their mistakes and want them back, they have moved on to other organizations.

Technology, platform, computer language, communication protocol, terminology, methodology, and techniques may change, but the business processes remain the same because human nature remains the same. The BA skills such as conceptualization, communication, presentation, requirements gathering, systems analysis/design, prototyping, etc. remain somewhat constant. The challenge to the BA is the increasing complexity of the business and systems environment, with third-party vendors and outsourcing.

My first Systems Analyst job was with Imperial Oil. They believe great teams begin with great hires. They came on campus to recruit top Engineering and MBA graduating students. They are achievers, and the company saves lots of money on supervision. I remember my Systems Manager's words: "Once you understand the business processes, manual or automated, you can work anywhere. The only difference amongst organizations is the information content." He taught me well, and Imperial Oil taught him well in finding the right circumstances. **TUG**

Gloria Seltzer holds Bachelor of Science and Master of Business Administration degrees from McGill University, Montreal and a Certified Management Accountant designation. She has been in IT for over 30 years, as a Business Analyst and Project Manager. She can be reached at Gloria.Seltzer@sympatico.ca