

Business Analysis: The Foundation for Business Success

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Note: This article is based on Kathleen Barret's keynote address at the Building Business Capability (BBC) 2011 Conference.

One of the most important messages I want to share is that performing effective business analysis is essential for organizations to succeed in the new world order. Doing business the way we used to simply doesn't work anymore.

So how are companies to survive and succeed? Here are three key areas on which to focus:

- **Continuous operational improvement** – looking at operations and implementing incremental improvements
- **Innovation** – going beyond incremental improvement to invent and develop breakthroughs
- **Improving your ability to adapt** – changing the way you change and improving the way you adapt to change


Change is one of the biggest challenges facing organizations today, and the key to change is business analysis. The discipline and profession of business analysis will change the way organizations change. But the fact remains: change is overwhelming.

Business analysis helps companies know how to change—it is a structured way of recognizing, formalizing and implementing change. How you and your organization take advantage of the changes in the marketplace will position you to be more successful and competitive.

I read some interesting research from Deloitte ([Shift Index](#)) about how the global marketplace is impacting Fortune 500 companies. In the past, a company's tenure on this prestigious list could last as long as 75 years. Today, the average time a company spends on this list is about 15 years, and that is quickly dropping to five. And it is not just the Fortune 500. Companies that many of us have dealt with on a regular basis are also failing. Blockbuster and Research in Motion (RIM) are two recent examples of organizations that lost sight of the changing marketplace. They decided to do things the way they've always done them—to their own detriment.

In the current global economy, instead of thinking strategically, many companies are just reacting. While that is one way to handle change, a much better approach is to systematically integrate the business analysis discipline throughout your organization, from strategy to implementation, and across multiple roles.

Organizations will evolve and improve by showing employees in every department how to apply the principles and practices of business analysis to their job each day. This will help them better understand their challenges and opportunities and think critically about how they can be addressed. Effective business analysis, applied across the enterprise, will change the way organizations change.



You can see it working in companies that were on the brink of financial disaster. Both Ford and GM, two companies that were close to, if not on the brink of bankruptcy, reassessed what they were doing, and decided a new approach was required. These automotive giants may argue it wasn't the business analysts who made the difference, but I would argue it was the business analysis discipline, applied throughout their organizations, that is helping them re-establish themselves as leaders in their industry.

Companies of all sizes need to imbed business analysis into their organizational infrastructure and mindset. Understand why they exist – their vision - and what it means to the products and services they offer. Who are their customers? What is their value discipline? How do they deliver those products and services to the market? What is their competition doing? How is the market evolving? What needs to change to ensure ongoing success? These are the fundamentals of business analysis—and business—and organizations that understand and apply them will continue to succeed.

You may now be thinking to yourself that all sounds good, but what does that mean to me?

Lead by example. Apply business analysis within your organization to show how effective it can be and help to create a culture of business analysis thinking. Don't be afraid to be a great BA—step up and push the envelope. Demonstrate the principles and power of business analysis.

It helps to have a formal BA community within your organization, but even if this is not available you can still make a difference. Get together with five colleagues and agree to create a common way of performing your daily tasks. You can start to change the way things are done and drive improvement. Ask your stakeholders to promote the value of your new approach, and reach out to your manager to show your successes. It may not be a quick win, but once you begin to achieve positive results it will be recognized. The most important step you need to take is the first one!

I was deeply saddened to hear about the recent passing of Apple founder Steve Jobs. Was he a business analyst? No. Did he apply business analysis? Absolutely!

Jobs had a clear vision of what he wanted to deliver. He was an innovator—if something was missing in the market he saw an opportunity to not only meet the need, but to do it better than anyone else, with brilliant simplicity and beauty of design. He knew that it was important to be true to your goals, to have a clear understanding of who you are and what you're all about. Your customers will understand and will demonstrate their appreciation by supporting your organization.

As a BA, when considering your company's products and services, put yourself in the place of the customer. What do you like, what don't you like? You too are a stakeholder and what you think is important. If you see an issue, don't be afraid to speak up.

As a manager, how do you support your BAs? Document their success. Take the results to your department head or vice president, demonstrate what your team has done and present the cold, hard facts, the results of business analysis. The more you can validate your team's successes, especially in today's challenging business environment, the more credibility you will gain for business analysis in your organization.

Try it. It works.