

THE MESS IS THE WORK!

I spoke to 15 business analysis professionals about their work, their profession, and reality.

This is a summary of what I learnt.

Introduction

I spoke to working business analysis professionals from around the world. I wanted to understand how they viewed their work, what was working, what wasn't, and what they think comes next.

What came back was messy, human, contradictory, and surprisingly consistent. These fifteen people are in different phases of their careers, work in different countries and sectors, yet independently describe similar chaos, similar challenges, and a similar quiet delight in the work.

It was utterly fascinating.

The result of all of this? Seventeen insights and a strong narrative about just what's going on.

Yeah but why?

Well, I don't want to say that this is entirely the output of a mid-life crisis but, well, why hedge? I realised I'd lost the thread of what I was doing and why, and when I dug into what matters, helping was a common theme (amusingly one shared by many of the business analysis professionals I spoke to!)

To help, *really* help, you need to understand what's happening in the world. Not just what you think about it all, but how others view it.

It took me embarrassingly long to realise the obvious next step: stop theorising and go talk to people!

And thus the concept of this research project was born.

Who am I?

Kia ora hello! I'm Hannah Pearson-Coats.

I am a working business analysis professional, the founder of Jimmy Consulting, and someone who (obviously) nerds out on business analysis. I occasionally write on [LinkedIn](#) – feel free to connect with me there, or you can reach me [here](#).

A big thanks!

Huge thanks to everyone I spoke to, tried to speak to, nattered at, or randomly got involved in this project. You all know who you are and you are all amazing.

The method

I conducted semi-structured interviews (45 – 60 mins) with each participant. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and quotes were analysed, themed, and insights were generated.

Lastly, I validated that each insight could *really* be backed up based on the original transcripts, wrote a description, and this report.

And here we are ...

The participants

Fifteen business analysis professionals. They came from across the spectrum of industries and organisational scale (government, financial services, start-ups, media, multinational ...) Some had been in the role for decades, while others were relatively new.

Two participants had a working relationship with each other (but at very different phases of their careers).

The tools

- Interviews were conducted over Zoom and transcribed using Zoom AI (except for one where I forgot to turn it on and had to transcribe by hand omg).
- Analysis and theming was done in Miro.
- I refined this report using Claude.
- Colleagues and friends' brains were used to proofread and challenge my thinking throughout.

A few caveats ...

This is qualitative research which is about patterns across conversations, not statistics.

No single insight comes from a single conversation; they represent threads that emerged across multiple interviews. If you've done research like this before, you'll know that themes tend to start surfacing at around 5-8 interviews. By fifteen, I was hearing the same patterns again and again. That consistency is itself a finding.

Most business analysis professionals I spoke to were based in the UK, Australia, or New Zealand, so this is firmly a westernised, anglophone perspective of the profession. The BA profession in these countries shares a lot – the same certs, similar culture, same professional bodies, the same LinkedIn (arguments). But business analysis professionals working in fundamentally different organisational cultures aren't represented here, and the findings should be read as anglophone, not necessarily universal.

In addition, every participant volunteered after hearing about the project, mostly through my LinkedIn network. And if you know my writing, you know I have *opinions*. Which means my network probably skews toward a certain type of BA, the kind that is slightly less traditional, more get-shit-done, and more experienced.

Who and how the participants became part of the project matters. A different group of business analysis professionals might have told me different things. In saying that, it was surprising just how consistent the patterns were across the 15 conversations I had and self-selection from my network doesn't invalidate that.

But it does mean you should read this as '*here's what fifteen business analysis professionals told me*' rather than '*here's what all BAs think*'.

Or take this as a challenge to do your own research – and I'd love to read your findings if you do.

How to read this report

The rest of the report is focused on the insights and outcomes from the research. There is one page per insight. Each insight has a short description and a selection of quotes from the conversations. Where relevant, I've linked the insights (many are closely related!)

Three insights stood out as key. These were insights that were highly established based on what people said, and were (in my opinion) the most interesting things I uncovered from this work.

Four insights are marked as supporting. These are insights that are well grounded in the research but less impactful or interesting. These are included because they establish logical foundations for the other insights. **The remaining ten insights form the bulk of this report.** These are not as “*oh dammmnnnn*” as the key insights, but are important parts of the whole narrative I heard.



3 key insights



10 general insights



4 supporting insights

The quotes

Just to be clear, participants spoke on condition of anonymity and quotes are reproduced with permission but identifying details have been removed and lightly edited for clarity but not for content – these are real people saying real things about their real experiences.

Commentary

You didn't think I was going to pass up the opportunity to layer on *opinions* on top of the research, did you?

Well I didn't.

In the boxes on the right you'll find my thoughts and comments alongside the insight. You might get a combination of “TOLD YOU SO” type comments, or legit social commentary from yours truly. You're welcome?

Feel free to ignore. These are just my musings.

That's enough faffing, no? So let's get stuck into it ...

THE INSIGHTS

The insights

1. The idea of a “Proper BA” is a myth

2. No, you’re not imagining it – the role really is that misunderstood

3. Almost no one ‘chose’ the role ... it chose them!

4. The BA role has got smaller, dumber, and more specialised

5. Seniority doesn’t mean what you’d expect

6. There’s no space to think

7. Omg is there actually even a role here?

8. We don’t know what the fuck to do with AI yet

9. Organisational dysfunction is a feature, not a bug

10. The techniques that matter aren’t analysis, they’re alignment

11. The real craft is conversation

12. Detail is a trap

13. Doers vs shapers

14. Community is not a nice-to-have

15. The professional bodies are not delivering

16. BAs are relentless self-improvers (and relentless self-doubters)

17. And yet ... BAs love the work



Key insight



General insight



Supporting insight

1 The idea of a “proper BA” is a myth

There’s a persuasive fiction of a “proper BA” that almost everyone believes in, and almost nobody is actually doing on the daily.

Only one of the fifteen business analysis professionals I spoke to thought they were doing "proper BA work" – and that person was doing traditional requirements-driven change work in a classic delivery model for a multinational.

Everyone else? They all had strikingly similar ideas of what a “real BA” looks like – more rigorous, more strategic, more detail-oriented, more aligned with what the textbooks and the certs describe – but all of them claimed not to be “that.”

"If BCS could see what I was doing, what would they even think? Because am I actually a BA? I passed all the exams, but day-to-day is so different."

"I think I'm getting the role wrong"

*"The job isn't as simple as 'here is a structure that will give you the clarity you need, then go and succeed.'
It's just been so much scrappier."*

"I kind of do [think there's a proper BA], and I don't think it's me. And yet I've been BA all my working life ..."

Commentary

The crazy part is that everyone was totally certain that **other people** were doing the “proper job”. Utterly convinced that it was just them doing this random wrangle on the daily and that everyone else was neck deep in ER diagrams and BRDs.

So, if you’re worried that you’re not doing “real BA” work, here’s a helpful reminder: Almost no one is.

Me included.

See also:

- [No, you’re not imagining it – the role really is that misunderstood](#)
- [The techniques that matter aren’t analysis, they’re alignment](#)
- [Doers vs shapers](#)
- [Detail is a trap](#)
- [BAs are relentless self-improvers \(and relentless self-doubters\)](#)

2 No, you're not imagining it – the role really is that misunderstood

Business analysis professionals often feel like they're constantly explaining what they do. That's because they are.

The role is poorly understood at every level – many business analysis professionals themselves didn't know it existed until they fell into it, organisations bring in BAs without a clear idea of what they want from them, and people outside the field have almost no concept of what business analysis involves. This isn't a communication problem that individual BAs can fix by getting better at selling themselves. The role genuinely lacks a clear, shared definition – even within the profession.

"Unless you do this kind of work, it is like, like my friends think [I'm] just on the phone all the time, just on the phone talking, they don't see the work that happens"

"People are still trying to figure out what we're there for. It's just like, 'oh, this project is a mess, probably would benefit from a BA — stick a BA on that and just hope for the best."

"I definitely think the lack of clarity around what people want from the role has got harder."

Commentary

What was surprising to me about this insight was how the lack of clarity appeared to compound concerns people had about how they were performing in the role, and their worries about not being a "Proper BA".

And no, just being better at selling yourself isn't going to solve this ... the solution seemed to be at system level – where people of authority advocated for business analysis and ensured the capability was represented.

See also:

- [The idea of a "Proper BA" is a myth](#)
- [Organisational dysfunction is a feature, not a bug](#)
- [The professional bodies are not delivering](#)

3 Almost no one 'chose' the role ... it chose them

Almost nobody set out to become a business analyst.

They were doing adjacent work — project management, comms, operations — and someone pointed them toward BA, or they stumbled across the title and thought it sounded vaguely like what they were already doing. Several didn't even know the role existed until they were already in it.

This matters because it means the profession isn't attracting people deliberately – it's catching them by accident. There's no clear pipeline, no obvious entry point, no moment where someone thinks "I want to be a BA" the way they might think "I want to be a developer" or "I want to be a designer." The role relies on word of mouth, luck, and supervisors who happen to spot the right aptitude.

"I figured out I was a BA without knowing what it was."

"My supervisor suggested that because I have excellent communication skills and can see organisational structure, hey, BA sounds like a really good fit for you. How about you shadow the BA in this team? See if you like it. And I really did, so kept going!"

"I was finding these roles that sounded interesting, and I didn't know business analysis was actually a thing. It just sounded so vague, I thought it was just a title people made up."

Commentary

Yup, the accidental BA is really **A Thing**. Moving on.

See also:

- [No, you're not imagining it – the role really is that misunderstood](#)

4 The BA role has got smaller, dumber, and more specialised

Many business analysis professionals – especially the more experienced ones – talked about how the business analyst role has gotten structurally smaller and more boxed into execution work: documentation, requirements, tickets, and admin.

The strategic conversations happen elsewhere, with POs and product managers, and BAs are handed the output. Where the role used to operate holistically and horizontally across the business, involved in strategy, what's happening in practice is steadily narrowing. Several described hitting a ceiling with nowhere to go — no career pathway, no invitation to the table, lower expectations of what the role can contribute. Increasingly specialised and confined.

"It just seems like they've dumbed down the BA role completely, and there's a lot of people now who are just like, 'oh yeah, that's what I do, I just write tickets.'"

"We're very much confined to teeny tiny little areas, focusing on very specific things and very specific outputs — we kind of act a little bit more specialist"

"The average BA is more introverted, more shy, less inclined to speak up than the BAs of 20 years ago who were seen as people who knew all the stuff, had the answers, or knew how to get the answers."

Commentary

Aha! It isn't just me that thinks this! The role *has* constricted over the years!

The impact of this is significant – this makes it far harder to be noticed, promoted, and make genuine change. Ya can't be listened to when you're not at the table.

See also:

- [There's no space to think](#)
- [Organisational dysfunction is a feature not a bug](#)
- [Seniority doesn't mean what you expect](#)

5 Seniority doesn't mean what you'd expect

The business analysis career ladder doesn't represent a change in the kind of work – it just represents more of the same work at bigger scale.

Senior BA means more documentation, bigger scope, more stakeholders but the same fundamental posture: you're handed decisions and asked to execute. The BAs who described doing genuinely different work – shaping direction, seeing across the organisation, influencing strategy – hadn't gotten there by climbing. They'd gotten there by stepping sideways, expanding their own scope, or simply being given responsibility that outstripped their title.

"Reading senior BA descriptions, I'm like, that sounds so boring. So much documenting. They just give you work, you do the requirements – and that's just not what I enjoy about the job, and not where I think I actually work best."

"Current official title is Senior Business Analyst. The role is actually lead BA, because after I'd been there a couple of weeks, they were like, hey, you can lead this work – which is great, except for the pay."

"There is no upward thing, you know, and that annoyed me and disappointed me, because I thought, well, hold on, where's my career gonna go?"

Commentary

The upshot – seniority just gets you more of the same. Climbing the ladder is not how you gain influence.

See also:

- [Doers vs shapers](#)
- [The BA role has got smaller, dumber, and more specialised](#)

6 There's no space to think

Every BA I spoke to described increasing pressure to deliver – not enough people, not enough time, no breathing space.

This isn't unique to business analysis, but it compounds everything else: relentless delivery pressure reduces the ability to step back, think strategically, or push for something better making it harder to make the jump to a more strategic role, or to demonstrate value beyond the basics.

"We're all a little overworked"

"I still wrote down 15 things on my to-do list. And at the end of the day, I got 1 or maybe 2 of them done, because there's all these side conversations and stuff. So the frustration is that you're always swimming in stuff."

"When I started it had a structure around it. It was expected that we did the work – always squeezed, but still some allowance. Whereas now, sometimes it's almost like, 'yeah, we don't want you to do this.'"

*"There's no breathing space. **No breathing space at all.**"*

"Ultimately, if senior people want things for other senior people, you gotta do them."

Commentary

This was one of those insights that was not actually that insightful, but I've included it because it really did come across in every single one of the conversations I had ... I mean I know, we're all experiencing the insanity of late stage capitalism and we're all squeezed to do as much as possible, in as little time as possible, but I was hoping at least one of us was having a chill time. Sigh ...

In practice this pressure acts as a compounding factor to all the other things going on ... most notably, it is much harder to prove your value at the bigger things when you're slammed.

See also:

- [Organisational dysfunction is a feature not a bug](#)
- [Detail is a trap](#)

7 Omg is there actually even a role here?

The relevance of the business analysis role is no longer clear – even by those who espouse the value.

The overlap with PM and PO roles is visible and growing. The core skills – breaking down problems, facilitating, building shared understanding – are increasingly seen as things everyone should have, not things that warrant a specialist. And the AI discourse, whether accurate or not, is reinforcing the perception that the role is expendable.

The ambiguity of the role and the general misunderstandings about it certainly don't help – it's really bloody hard to defend something that nobody can clearly define.

"Is the BA role still the role of the BA? Is the BA role needed? Or do we all as BAs need to start thinking, what is our? in a new world what is our role? What do we shift to? What do we pivot to? How do we make sure we are staying ahead of ourselves and not write ourselves out?"

"I'm starting to lose confidence... I'm wondering if the BA role is not even that useful on a lot of teams anymore."

"In a perfect world, if more people were to have business analyst skills, we wouldn't need business analysts."

Commentary

I was asked this question in some way shape or form by everyone I spoke to, even those who were utterly crystal clear on everything else.

It was like once you got a business analysis professional talking, after a while the underlying uncertainty would creep out ... are we going to be all replaced by AI, should we all be POs now? Should I get technical training?

What's next for us all?

I'm not immune – this whole project is my attempt to answer this for myself.

See also:

- [No, you're not imagining it – the role really is that misunderstood](#)
- [We don't know what the fuck to do with AI yet](#)
- [The BA role has got smaller, dumber, and more specialised](#)

8 We don't know what the fuck to do with AI yet

BAs are using AI. Like, right now, today – as a thinking partner, a first draft, a way in when they don't know who to ask – but nobody's figured out what that means for the role.

The same BA who champions AI for their team gets properly defensive when someone else uses it to do BA-ish work without them. Orgs are promoting AI use while also claiming that 'you're responsible for whatever it spits out' – with zero guidance on where the line is. And the familiar refrain 'they'll still need us for the human stuff' maps right onto the skills that are already undervalued and hard to define.

The upshot? AI isn't clarifying anything. It's just making the ambiguity worse. Fun times.

Commentary

Despite what the BA-influencers would have you believe, no: we don't have this sorted yet. There was huge variety of thoughts and positions on AI and the uncertainty, fear, and amazement was self-evident.

Which broadly sums up how I feel about it all personally.

See also:

- [Omg is there actually even a role here?](#)
- [There's no space to think](#)

"I don't think people are going to feel too comfortable with that coming from a bot"

"I'm a little uncomfortable around the fact that everyone is responsible for the AI content that they use"

"It's almost like you've got to know the answer before you then ask AI, which is a little bit counterintuitive to me."

"The menial tasks – we're not going to be business analysts so to speak. We're going to be AI prompt engineers"

"I'm massively advocating for the use of AI to give us a bit of breathing space. But equally, when I see other people using it in ways that encroach on what my team should be doing, I get really defensive and shoot it down."

9 Organisational dysfunction is a feature, not a bug

Every BA described some flavour of organisational mess ...

No pipeline planning, no clear vision, power struggles, frameworks applied in name only, leadership making it up as they go (and then changing their minds). This isn't an obstacle to the work: **it is the work**. Much of what business analysis professionals do day-to-day is navigate dysfunction that nobody else is dealing with. The messier the organisation, the more critical the BA becomes – if you can cope with the ambiguity that is.

"The groundwork just hadn't been laid. I had to retroactively go back and try to get those pieces put together, but without offending the leadership that thought they had a vision when there really wasn't a vision."

"My boss is really bad at saying no. He'll invent projects as well — he'll just turn up and go, 'well, we just really need this now,' and you think, I'm sure we told you we weren't doing that."

"A lack of direction is often a challenge"

"Everyone wants to hold their little patch of space – there will be an argument about who's going to build it, who's going to fund it, where the power lies."

"Sometimes you feel like you're just shouting."

Commentary

It's easy to conclude that it's just *your* house that is messy, and that there is a bunch of "Proper Business Analysts" doing the work correctly!

There's not. All of us are dealing with system level challenges. This isn't what is in the way of the work – it is the work!

And wrangling the mess is actually where the biggest opportunity to make yourself seriously indispensable is.

See also:

- [Doers vs shapers](#)
- [The real craft is conversation](#)

10 The techniques that matter aren't analysis, they're alignment

Most of the BAs I spoke to had stopped (or never really started) using formal analysis techniques – SWOT, PESTLEs, five why's etc ...

They had tried them because that's what a "proper BA" would do but they just didn't generate the value they hoped for, or they seemed designed for a simpler world than the one they were in. The techniques that were used have something in common: they're not really analysis techniques. They're alignment tools. They work because they get people into a room and expose what everyone assumes but nobody has actually confirmed. The value isn't in the structured thinking and step-by-step approach, it is generating a shared view of the situation.

"No one was reading it. People didn't seem to care."

"I was so excited when I learned about [CATWOE] ... But I never used it. It just took ages, and then wasn't bearing the fruit I had hoped."

"I feel very much more relaxed about not knowing a named technique or approach. I'm old and cynical enough to know that if I have a conversation with someone and ask what the problem is, and try and work out some sort of solution that's good enough."

"Root cause analysis and 5 whys — it's never one thing. I just have not found that to be particularly useful, especially in complex systems. It's interlocking factors."

Commentary

I was actually hoping to pick up a bunch of really excellent tools and techniques from my chats that I could deploy in my day-to-day. I did **not** get that.

Instead I got a pretty clear message: all these formal techniques are pretty fucking irrelevant to the real work.

Some passed muster though: Context diagrams and as-is/to-be models were frequently mentioned as useful for alignment – having something to point at and get feedback on is incredibly useful.

See also:

- [The idea of a "Proper BA" is a myth](#)
- [The real craft is conversation](#)

11 The real craft is conversation

When business analysis professionals talked about what actually works and the stuff that moves things forward nobody described a technique. Instead, they talked about storytelling.

They described building trust, sitting with someone and reflecting back what they need, wrangling alignment across people who see the world differently. Several described it as closer to facilitation than analysis. One BA put it plainly: the job is telling a story — who is this for, what's the problem, can't you see how broken this is?

Formal business analysis techniques are simply hygiene factors. The real craft is in the conversation.

"Techniques come and go. It's all about being able to be a good person in the situation and have the right conversation ... If you're able to sit there with a person, make them feel acknowledged, reflect back to them that you know what it is they want — I think that'll get you through, whatever the situation is."

"So much of the work is the narrative — who is this for? This is the problem we're trying to solve. Imagine this person, this is what they do now. Can't you see how inefficient that is? It's just telling a story."

"The CBAP stuff's important, but to me, that's like a foundation — it's like when they say, 'you've passed your driving test, now actually learn how to drive.'"

Commentary

All the human stuff matters much much more than our fancy analysis techniques. The perfect RACI doesn't matter at all if you can't navigate the conflict between the platform and the ops team.

It's hard to really ring-fence conversation and storytelling as a craft though, which is perhaps why this isn't a commonly held position.

See also:

- [The idea of a "Proper BA" is a myth](#)
- [The techniques that matter aren't analysis, they're alignment](#)
- [Detail is a trap](#)
- [Doers vs shapers](#)

12 Detail is a trap

Several business analysis professionals articulated a deliberate trade-off between depth and scope.

They talked about stepping back from prescriptive detail, trusting their teams to own the specifics, and using the space that was created to look upward and across. No one abandoned the detail entirely — everyone agreed they still needed to understand the shape, the risks, and how it all fit together — but they stopped being the person who owned the minutiae.

In return they got scope, influence, and the ability to see patterns across the organisation. This process of “letting go” appears to be a key step on the way to becoming a shaper.

"Stop digging so deep — you don't need to worry about everything that's going on, just focus on what you're doing."

"Software developers are smart and super creative. I realised there was just no point in being prescriptive."

"I'm not great at detail, but I'm great at detail to the extent that I have to know how things fit together. I need to know until I understand the flow and the shape of things — and then I'm happy to let other people do the detail."

"I've basically relinquished a lot of that other stuff to other team members, which have empowered them to own a lot more of their own work, and have less handover. And that has thus freed me up to look outwards from the team and go, okay, where else in the project lifecycle can I contribute a bit more to ..."

Commentary

This was surprising! Most of us — me included — consider grasp of the details to be table-stakes in the analysis game. But that might not be as true as we think ...

Letting go of the little shit seems to be how to build space to deal with org dysfunction and gain influence. Or at least, this is how most “shapers” did it.

See also:

- [Organisational dysfunction is a feature, not a bug](#)
- [Doers vs shapers](#)
- [There's no space to think](#)

13 Doers vs shapers

All business analysis professionals started as doers – documenting, writing stories, taking notes, cranking through tasks. But some of the BAs I spoke to have moved past this into something fundamentally different ...

Those that had moved beyond “doing” talked about shaping direction, seeing across the organisation, influencing how work happens rather than just executing it. They might retain the title, but those that have evolved beyond those initial tasks are doing a wildly different – far more ambiguous – role.

These “shapers” – despite working in different countries, different sectors, different organisational cultures – all described remarkably similar work: reading the situation, finding where things are stuck, making progress happen regardless of the mess around them. Role boundaries, hierarchies, and convention be damned.

"There are also people who like to grumble about the fact that they're just note takers and requirement gatherers, like — yeah, you can change that situation."

"Jesus, guys, there's so much more to this. And I feel like you're just so limiting yourself – maybe by what you think the role is, or what someone told you a BA does"

"The role I thought I was going to have — is it even useful? But the role I am doing is useful. And they're different."

"I'm much more into the strategy and how things fit together — seeing across the organisation what's going on, seeing connections, mapping that out and helping people understand it."

Commentary

There's a role here. Something more than what is generally considered BA work. It's squishier, messier, and operates at a different level.

Nothing actually encourages a shift into this messier space and there's zero expectation that anyone does so.

Those who make the shift do it on their own – by taking agency, expanding their scope, and often by ignoring what they were told the role was.

Challenge issued?

See also:

- [Organisational dysfunction is a feature, not a bug](#)
- [The idea of “Proper BA is a myth”](#)
- [Detail is a trap](#)

14 Community is not a nice-to-have

Almost every business analyst described some form of professional isolation at some point.

Maybe they were the only BA on their team at some point, maybe they lacked access to feedback, maybe they were unsure if they're doing the work right. Peer support is clearly not just a nice to have – it is how business analysis professionals learn, validate, and sustain themselves. Community provides reassurance that someone else is dealing with the same things and patterns for how to approach something new.

This matters even more because the people immediately around you aren't always safe. Several BAs described deeply negative experiences with colleagues that overshadowed everything else about the role.

"Being a BA can be very solitary and isolating."

"My last project, I spent 3 months walking on eggshells until finally my manager called an intervention"

"I do like to have and create spaces for people to share. I see that as a really powerful thing."

"I like learning from other people. I don't always do what they tell me, but I do like being part of something bigger than myself"

Commentary

This was genuinely a surprise to me but came through loud and clear in every single one of my conversations ... **community really matters.**

It was how newbie BAs learnt the craft and how we survived the chaos. And it seemed to be a key factor between a role that was burning us out, and one that we were enjoying and I know this has been the case for me on many a project.

See also:

- [The idea of a "Proper BA" is a myth](#)
- [The professional bodies are not delivering](#)

"When you're in an environment that doesn't support ideas, it's difficult, it's hard"

"I need that someone that I can share with to help me with that journey, with the areas that I want to grow"

15 The professional bodies are not delivering

The business analysis professionals I spoke to had little positive to say about their professional bodies – particularly the IIBA.

The certifications were seen as useful grounding but disconnected from day-to-day reality. The language was overcomplicated, the resources felt like sales pitches, and the ongoing value after certification was hard to articulate. One BA who remains actively involved said that their motivation was about giving back to the profession, not because the IIBA itself was delivering value.

BAs are clearly hungry for community and support — and the one organisation that's supposed to provide that is failing to deliver.

"I get zero value out of the IIBA. The webinars feel like a sales pitch."

"I had a very bad experience with IIBA. The way they call things was not intuitive, didn't make sense to me. I studied and I passed, but it was a bad experience. I didn't like the language they used — I think they overcomplicated things. And the whole BABOK thing — what a brick, for God's sake"

"I'm involved in IIBA, but that's merely because I think I have that thing that I want to try and do something to give back."

Commentary

Okay so to acknowledge the context here straight away: out of all the insights in this pack, this is the one most likely to be influenced by my selection method (I've been vocal in my criticisms of the IIBA). Including it even though it feels self-congratulatory, because it really did come up again and again. The theme was too clear to ignore.

In my defence I didn't actually attempt to elicit perspectives on professional bodies – I honestly considered them irrelevant to my research.

Right up until the point I realised how important community was ...

See also:

- [Community is not a nice-to-have](#)
- [No, you're not imagining it – the role really is that misunderstood](#)
- [The idea of a "Proper BA" is a myth](#)

16 BAs are relentless self-improvers (and relentless self-doubters)

The same instinct that makes business analysis professionals good at their work – pulling things apart, questioning assumptions, spotting the 10% that isn't right – can easily turn inward.

Almost every BA I spoke to displayed a pronounced tendency toward self-analysis, and many demonstrated characteristics of low confidence, second-guessing, and a reluctance to claim expertise.

But the navel-gazing has an upside. BAs tended to be proactive with their own development — turning the analytical lens on their own gaps, identifying what they needed, and going after it. The same mindset that makes them second-guess their value also makes them relentless self-improvers.

"I always thought that what I did wasn't real, or wasn't good enough, or wouldn't be the same as what other people were doing out there"

"I want to occupy a space of care and wisdom and mentoring and being valuable to other people, but I don't know if that's valuable, or if I have any right to be in that space"

"In the past I have become unconsciously competent at what I do. Now I am trying to become consciously competent"

Commentary

Oh god some of the self-criticism I heard during interviews broke my heart!

I can see how this analytical mindset is what makes us good at our jobs but it is such a double-edged sword!!!

If you're one of us who defaults to negative self-talk (yes – I'm including myself here), then I want you use community to feel seen, heard, and validated!

Or for the tarot card nerds in the room, let's have a little less swords energy, and a bit more cups!

See also:

- [The idea of a "Proper BA" is a myth](#)
- [And yet ... BAs love the work](#)

17 And yet ... BAs love the work!

Business analysis professionals genuinely enjoy this work. They talked about the high of a team clicking, the satisfaction of mentoring juniors, the pleasure of making something abstract clear.

And when they described what specifically keeps them going, it was always about human impact — saving someone hours of pointless work, making a person feel safe, watching the lightbulb go on. Not the title, not the techniques, not the career path. No one was particularly precious about what their role was called — they're chasing the work and the feeling it gives them instead.

"It's a little bit cheesy, but seeing somebody light up when you've just saved them 2 hours a day from some horrendous copy and paste task, or you've coached them through getting a new bit of software and they can see the benefit — that's really quite gratifying at a human level"

"I love working on a small team. I love when everyone is clear what they're doing and good at what they're doing — it's so smooth. When that clicks, that is such a high"

"I like the BA role, it's a nice place to be"

"I'm quite happy where I am, because I feel like I'm actually making a difference"

Commentary

I heard a lot of things throughout this project. Some good. Some bad.

No one gave a shit about the title — but they all gave many many shits about the work.

Now, I know this is biased towards people who are prepared to give up their personal time to talk to me about their work — self-selection bias at its best — but the sheer joy at which people spoke about the good bits really shone through.

See also:

- [BAs are relentless self-improvers \(and relentless self-doubters\)](#)
- [The idea of a "Proper BA" is a myth](#)
- [No, you're not imagining it — the role really is that misunderstood](#)

The narrative

The current situation

1. The idea of a “Proper BA” is a myth
2. No, you’re not imagining it – the role really is that misunderstood
3. Almost no one ‘chose’ the role ... it chose them
4. The BA role has got smaller, dumber, and more specialised
5. Seniority doesn’t mean what you’d expect
6. There’s no space to think

Questions to keep you up at night

7. Omg is there actually even a role here
8. We don’t know what the fuck to do with AI yet

The human element

14. Community is not a nice-to-have
15. The professional bodies are not delivering
16. BAs are relentless self improvers (and relentless self-doubters)
17. And yet ... BAs love the work

The reframe

9. Organisational dysfunction is a feature, not a bug

What actually works

10. The techniques that matter aren’t analysis, they’re alignment
11. The real craft is conversation
12. Detail is a trap
13. Doers vs shapers

Final thoughts

I started this project because I had lost the thread of “why” I was doing, well, any of this! I ended this work feeling slightly less alone in feeling like the work I do is more nuanced and complex than the common narratives out there about our profession.

That in and of itself is valuable to me and makes the effort worth it. In practice I’m still working through what this means for me.

My main takeaway is that maverick “do-the-right-thing” energy is way more common than we think. Perhaps we are our own worst enemy? Are we victims of the system? Or are we perfectly placed to challenge it? Hmmmmmm. Either way, I’m reassured that there is work here. It might not be the work we expected, but it is work that is needed, and work that is valuable.

As one participant put it, until AI can understand all the insane things we humans do, **we’ll probably be okay.** It has certainly given me some interesting threads to follow and I hope it does the same for you.

*“Until AI can work out how to understand Susan’s horrors of accounting – that she’s been running in her dodgy spreadsheets for 20 years – **we’ll probably be okay**”*

So what’s next?

I’ve entertained doing a phase two for this research focused on talking to people working in roles that make decisions about our own such as managers, product peeps, c-level, consultants, programme folk, leads, and more ...

The idea would be to validate, extend, or challenge the insights from this phase. Would be interesting, no?

Thanks! And bye!

This work would not have been possible without the time, energy, and brains of all the participants – for me, the actual chats with business analysis professionals were the clear highlight.

And there were other besides – I shared, validated, chatted, and bounced ideas off a wide variety of others during the analysis process. I don't think I would have finished this report without y'all!

I cannot thank you all enough!

And lastly, thanks for reading the outcome of this *not-quite-as-little-as-I-thought-it-would-be* research report! I hope the insights made you think, or at least made you go “oh that's not just me!”

Ngā mihi nui,



Hannah Pearson-Coats

Jimmy

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Read more here: <https://jimmy.consulting>