

Ensuring Successful Project Delivery

This article is part of an Expert Opinion series that examines practical ways to ensure IT-based projects are delivered on time, within budget and according to specification. The full series can be accessed [here](#)

The power couple

What are the leadership roles of the project manager and the business analyst?

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Both project managers and business analysts should make vital leadership contributions to successful IT-based projects.

What are their roles as leaders, how do they differ, and how should they co-operate most effectively?

Business analysts (BAs) identify business challenges and define a solution. Project managers (PMs) solve the challenges by delivering the solution.

Both roles share the leadership objective of ensuring their company derives the maximum possible benefit from its operational platforms. In essence, BAs provide the blueprints which guide PMs, as they build the right things, in the right way, for the right reasons. Unless they work in a partnership that mutually values and profits from each other's role, they will undermine their ability to achieve that shared objective.

Without the leadership support of BAs, PMs are in danger of accepting and implementing projects that do not serve prevailing business imperatives or fail to deliver projects that do meet the imperatives. Equally, without the leadership support of PMs, BAs are at risk of proposing projects that would serve prevailing business imperatives but are never implemented.

To avoid such a situation – where the right things are not done for the right reasons – it's important to emphasise the leadership roles of both functions. Skilled and experienced BAs and PMs must be empowered and encouraged to make the fullest possible leadership contributions to project success.

In combination, they are able to chart and steer a course towards the 'organisation of tomorrow', where increased competitive advantage strengthens prosperity and stability.

Chief BA and chief PM

These two titles are certainly not commonplace within the C-Suite echelon. It is perhaps then not surprising that one of the most commonly cited reasons for the repetitive failure of IT-based projects is a lack of executive commitment and visible, hands-on leadership.

The damaging problems created by this leadership vacuum within projects can be countered by raising levels of authority and ensuring 'leadership parity' between the functions of business analysis and project management. This would create an acceptance that neither is senior to the other. It would reinforce the concept of working in partnership, rather than simply paying it lip-service.

In particular, raising the functional authority of BAs would address the problems that can arise from an inflexible adherence to the core principles of project management: the so-called 'iron triangle' or 'triple constraint' that reflects the linked relationship between scope, time and cost.

The danger of this linked relationship is clearly revealed by the widely-known idea that for any project, there can be only two outcomes from the list of good, fast, and cheap. In other words, one of the three will always have to be sacrificed for the sake of the other two.

The assertion that this is a flippant and glib view of results produced by IT-based projects would certainly hold water if it weren't for the fact that the vast majority of projects do not produce the required functionality, overrun their budgets, and are not delivered on time.

It is a leadership function of BAs to avoid this cynical scenario, where the limiting permutations of the 'apologist's creed' – good, fast, cheap – will always, at the very best, produce the impaired result of win, win, lose.

To avoid this happening, it is essential that the BA function rightfully provides leadership across a fourth dimension that will assist PMs to maintain an acceptable balance within the iron triangle. Within successful projects, that unifying dimension is increasingly being referred to as quality.

BAs as custodians of quality

Assuring quality is fundamental to protecting the integrity of a project's 'vital five' – its vision, motivation, action, timeline and budget. The vital five can be defined as what needs to change (vision), why must it change (motivation), how will it change (action), when by (timeline), and for how much (budget).

In comparison to BAs, the leadership role of PMs is more widely understood. PMs handle the operational aspects of a project's implementation. They apply proven management processes to govern budgets, schedules, task allocation, team motivation, problem-solving, performance measurement and reporting.

So, what then are the leadership roles of BAs? And how do these roles contribute to project success?

BAs must first assume leadership with regard to quality as they formulate and articulate an appropriate vision and motivation. They must clearly define the 'organisation of tomorrow' for all project stakeholders and secure their support. As leaders, BAs must maintain this clarity and inspire a sustained, rationally-rooted commitment to realising it throughout the lifespan of a project. They are the voice of the business – not only articulating business needs but also guiding business stakeholders in their appreciation of their vision.

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Within the design of systems and processes, BA leadership must champion quality by advocating the doctrine that 'form follows function'. For example, BAs must ensure that before technologies are proposed as being fit-for-purpose, there must be unequivocal clarity as to their purpose.

In terms of allocating resources, it is BA leadership that should define quality for the selection and application of skills. In the context of resources, BAs must also articulate and entrench throughout the project team the full rationale for working within timelines and budgets.

When reviewing quality for existing or planned action, the BA's leadership role is to measure how action contributes to vision, motivation, timeline and budget. If positive contributions are demonstrably either non-existent or insignificant in cost-benefit terms, then cuts need to be made to resource allocations. If a resource cannot be shown to be part of the solution, then it's part of the problem...

Finally, capable BAs must lead the drive to minimise risk. Quality in relation to risk means BAs identify how to achieve quick wins that are timeline-boxed and budget-boxed. It is a BA leadership function to define these incremental achievements that combine to deliver a successful project.

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In project management, what skills do analysts need and how must they contribute to assuring project success?

Glenda Wheeler is a founding director of Tharollo Consulting. Her profound understanding of the real factors that cause repetitive failures in IT-based projects is complemented by a proven approach to ensuring consistent project success.

Established in 1997, Tharollo's expertise lies in managing R40m - R300m initiatives and is backed by a track-record of 100% success in delivering projects on time, within budget, and according to specification.

Tharollo is a North Sotho word meaning, 'solution for a problem.'

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