



## Establishing a Business Analysis Community of Practice, Part 4

by Sam Cherubin

### Creativity and Vision

[Part 1](#) of this series describes the components a BA CoP should optimally include.

[Part 2](#) outlines the initial four steps that need to be taken to get your BA CoP up and running.

[Part 3](#) examines the ten most common reasons why BA CoPs fail.

Part 4 envisions a new way of looking at a BA CoP.

### Babies and BAs go through four stages, as they open their eyes and see

In *Stage 1*, with eyes closed, BAs are blind to their organization's *mess*: "A corporation's mess is the future implied by its and its environment's current behavior. Every system contains the seeds of its own deterioration and destruction."<sup>1</sup>

In *Stage 2*, as their eyes begin to open, BAs see in black and white: a single process step, template or isolated requirement. They notice people and projects blurring around them. They don't yet have the ability to view their company as a *system*, or perceive the customer or the product being sold.

In *Stage 3*, the mobile movement of the outside world attracts and delights them: industries, methodologies, collaborations and emerging trends. They can perceive the face of the customer in color, beyond the rattling use case or Excel cell.

They realize, in amazement, that the *customer* is not a babysitter, business area or CIO, but a real person buying a real product. They see they are in a *community* within a *System*:

"Systems theory and systems thinking suggest that the system as a whole will have properties, behaviors and characteristics that emerge from the interaction of the components of the system, and which are not predictable from an understanding of the components alone. In the context of systems theory, the term "system" is much broader than an IT system—it also includes the people involved, the interactions between them, the external forces affecting their behavior, and all other relevant elements and factors."<sup>2</sup>

In *Stage 4*, they strengthen their muscles: the analytical and creative skills used to facilitate organizational futures and protect their parent enterprise in this new economic climate. "The primary goal of an enterprise is to survive. This means that its strategy must be robust. It is only after this has been secured that one can move on to consider new business opportunities."<sup>3</sup>

BAs clearly see a community and System that they can shape, change and transform. They *look and are able to see*, the new frontier of the BA CoP.

## Organizational Blindness and its Cure

BAs operate in an organizational paradox, which can be described as the “bi-polar Enterprise.”

Companies have conflicts between what they genuinely *need to do* to attain their long term goals, and what they *actually do* in the emotional exigencies of the short-term moment:

- Wanting to focus on knowledge management, while senior employees with the most knowledge in their domain are laid off.
- Attempting to reduce costs, while losing critical in-house knowledge through outsourcing. (Which results in *increased costs*, less in-house capabilities, and a competitive disadvantage, as the laid off knowledge base goes to work for a competitor.)
- Expecting successful projects, while being unable to make the right decisions and intervene, when it's obvious that multi-million dollar projects are failing. “Of the IT projects that are initiated, from 5 to 15 percent will be abandoned before or shortly after delivery as hopelessly inadequate. Many others will arrive late and over budget or require massive reworking. Few IT projects, in other words, truly succeed.”<sup>4</sup>

Poor short-term decision-making sabotages long-term strategic goals.

This paradox and bi-polar nature of organizations is caused by senior-level decision makers who are *disconnected* from their employees, their customers and their societal environments. The world is now experiencing the results of a Dictatorship of poor decisions.

To adequately address the problems facing us, we have to tackle decision-making at its root. The solution is a decentralized, holistic, democratic Systems view: “Either all those who are directly affected by a decision, the decision’s stakeholders, or representatives they select, should be involved in making that decision.”<sup>5</sup>

Organizations have to be courageous enough to look at themselves honestly, and be open to decision-making at every level: “Agility – Every employee is able to readily contribute to the early detection of internal and external trends and respond with speed”<sup>6</sup>

In other words, a Community of Practice should be a feedback mechanism that detects and responds to internal and external trends, and participates in decision-making through the:

- *Ability to foresee technological developments*
- *Ability to take advantage of emerging market opportunities*
- *Capacity to develop new strategic options*
- *Ability to execute a strategic plan*<sup>7</sup>

This produces genuine *long-term value*, rather than the appearance of value through a manipulated balance sheet. “Communities that are aligned with a strategic purpose can make a significant contribution to creating an organization’s competitive advantage.”<sup>8</sup>

## The Light at the End of the Tunnel

IT methodology is new. Mature scientific disciplines like chemistry, biology and medicine have centuries of theory, research and practice behind them. Because IT methodology is only a few decades old, and our eyes are still half-closed, we continue to have the billion-dollar project failures that have made IT notorious.

A top-down approach which works well in a military or government setting, *does not work* when flexible thinking and creativity are required. A CoP must go beyond *reacting* to methodologies, to *identifying problems and generating solutions*. In *Cultivating Communities of Practice*, Wenger writes, “Knowledge has become the key to success.”<sup>9</sup> In addition to knowledge, *vision and creativity* are the keys to corporate success in this new Recovering world.

Vision helps us see beyond the Dictatorship of poor decisions, the tyranny of methodology and the anarchy and lawlessness of cowboy coding.

Creativity explores the unknown. “Creativity involves producing decisions that are *not* expected.”<sup>10</sup> (Poor decisions are *always* expected.) Creativity is an essential part of the learning and participation that are core activities of Communities of Practice - generating ideas; passing knowledge from person to person; engaging teams and fostering collaboration.

A recent example of a creative method which addresses and solves real business needs is Agile/Scrum. A traditional waterfall requirements process can cause dangerously long project delays, and the delivered application is often far removed from the original business intention. The Agile solution is collaborative, iterative direct work with the business customer/owner, who provides design input throughout the development process.

There’s no reason that a CoP can’t identify and creatively solve similar problems. “The real value of the community is realized through its ability to innovate – to move the practice forward.”<sup>11</sup> In this sense, the CoP functions as an organizational brain, strategically thinking about needs inside and outside of the enterprise, absorbing and assimilating information as it passes through the permeable membranes of a company’s walls.

In a world of new information, how do we harvest it, bring it back inside the system, and apply it in new ways? By being fluid, flexible and aware (essential in this economy). What if a CoP didn’t merely take tools, techniques, strategies and methods from others, but invented new tools and new ways of documenting, analyzing and modeling? As the Agile Manifesto suggests, “At regular intervals, the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behavior accordingly.”<sup>12</sup>

Since “process” can have a negative connotation, let’s call this a “*Framework for Getting Things Done*”:

- Locally solving problems, rather than waiting for problems to be solved by others.
- Reshaping an organization from the bottom up, rather than from the top down.
- Optimizing CoP structure for the specific organization in which it lives and breathes.
- Inventing a methodology tailored to specific business needs.
- Sharing creativity, vision and decision-making in a Community of Practice.

## References

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