

Avoiding conflict between the PM and BA, Part I

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Industry Brief

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At a recent conference I sat next to a project manager who observed, “My organization hired a new consulting company to do business analysis work. They’ve completely taken over. Now they do a lot of the work that I used to do, such as meeting with the sponsor to uncover the business problems, determining what we’re going to do on the project...I can’t believe it! I feel like I’m being treated like a second-class citizen!”

While this complaint pointed out some organizational issues, it also got me thinking about the role of the PM and the BA in the early stages of a project. The two bodies of knowledge, the *BABOK® Guide 2.0* and *PMBOK® Guide - Fourth Edition* each allude to work being done at the beginning of the project, so it is not surprising that conflict between these two roles can arise.

It’s easy for me to say that spelling out roles and responsibilities helps avoid this conflict. Using a responsibility assignment matrix, such as a RACI, is helpful, but it may not be enough. Looking back it seems to me that as both a BA and a PM, I never spent a lot of time dwelling on this issue. When I was a BA I didn’t have a project manager, so in a sense I was able to avoid conflict. When I became a PM, I was extremely fortunate to work with strong BAs who took initiative to define their own roles. Below I have listed what worked for us and why. Next month I’ll delve more into the pitfalls and some examples of less successful projects.

We worked on a project which had both business and technical complexity. We were introducing many new business processes as well as new technology. The project affected many business units within the organization, and the risk was high. Below are a few of the factors that I believe contributed to a smooth relationship between the BA and me (PM), and ultimately to a very successful project:

- We each worked with our strengths. As PM mine was focusing on delivering the product (new software) when we had promised it, within the approved budget, and with frequent communication with the sponsor. As a BA hers was an incredible ability to understand the real business need—why the project was being undertaken, what was happening currently, and what we needed to recommend to the sponsor, which was different from what the sponsor had requested. Without her, I would have accepted the solution originally requested by the sponsor, a solution which would not have solved their business problem.
- We kept the good of the organization in front of us at all times. There simply was no grab for territory, because it wasn’t about us. It was about delivering a product that worked--on time and within budget. One of the team members observed that she felt like we were giving birth. The good news was, though, that we didn’t have to suffer through teenage years!

- I was focused on the date and budget, so my natural tendency was to want to do the project quickly rather than correctly. Fortunately I had the good sense to listen to the BA and slow down when I needed to, which was usually at her insistence. Was this easy for me? Not at all! Am I glad I did? You betcha!
- I completely trusted the BA. But the whole topic trust is the topic for different blog on another day.

About Watermark Learning

Watermark Learning helps improve project success with outstanding project management and business analysis training and mentoring. We foster results through our unique blend of industry best practices, a practical approach, and an engaging delivery. We convey retainable real-world skills, to motivate and enhance staff performance, adding up to enduring results.

With our academic partner, Auburn University, Watermark Learning provides Masters Certificate Programs to help organizations be more productive, and assist individuals in their professional growth. Watermark is a PMI Global Registered Education Provider, and an IIBA Endorsed Education Provider.

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