Musings of a business analyst: Could a robot take my job?

This could be one of the most relevant questions of our time, given the rise of automation, driverless cars, drones and smart technology. When viewed from the perspective of a business analyst (BA), there are two contrasting viewpoints.

Jurie Schoeman, client engagement and strategy executive, BSG.

Jurie Schoeman, BSG client engagement and strategy executive, believes if you view the BA role as defining models, processes and documents in the context of very linear, structured and predictable business change – then yes, it is well suited to automation. However, if you view the role as an empathetic, creative, critical-thinking problem solver – bridging the gap between IT and business teams to drive business change – then that fits squarely into the set of roles that cannot be automated easily or at all.

Driving change

He believes a BA should play a key role in adding value to business operations, influencing and advancing business change. "As executives require more meaningful and useful information to make informed decisions, so BAs have gone from answering the 'what' to answering the 'why'. In the past, a BA typically followed methodologies focused on analysis and documentation, summarising what was relayed to them. The role of the BA has evolved and must incorporate design, commercial and engineering thinking – while ensuring the customer experience is always top-of-mind."

The impact of the modern consumer must also be factored in when seeking to understand how the role of the BA has changed. If organisations want to remain relevant and successful, they must be able to react quickly by understanding their customers and anticipating their needs, meeting their expectations and addressing their problems. Coupled with this is the desire to ensure value is being delivered to the end-customer. This requires organisations to have flexible systems and BAs to be willing to adapt to these changing requirements, while designing for change.

Schoeman references a 2015 Forrester Research report highlighting the impact of changing technology on a BA and the significant change in skillsets required. "The adoption of Agile methodologies and Lean concepts are further impacting the skills a BA requires. Ideally, BA roles need to be adapting to new software delivery methods and process changes. To remain relevant a BA needs to understand the impact of change and new methodologies on their organisation, to enable them to guide the transformation of their role and practices."

Part of this new thinking requires BAs to enable their organisations to embrace the "innovation by design" approach to find desirable solutions that benefit the end user. By understanding how to match what a person needs with what is technologically feasible, BAs can guide their organisations towards customer value and market opportunities.

If BAs don't want to be replaced by machines, Schoeman strongly urges them to evolve their roles by driving innovative and creative solutions.

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