



Accelerating progress using a contextual breakdown

as presented by

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Achievement summary

What was delivered and what was the result?

Two years ago I joined a new employer and landed into a multi-capability working group that was defining a program of work to improve the daily life of our customer service employees. This initiative was already years in the making in a department where project and feature delivery was often IT-led and not necessarily focused on end-users and their business need.

Fast forward to early 2023 and we delivered a first version of a new application for our customer service employees that both looked and functioned much better. It strongly delivered against its business case and KPIs and the MVP version alone saw a significant reduction in time spent on successful customer contact.

However, not only did we deliver a successful product but enabled a new way of working within IT and business. Firstly, my approach to functional decomposition in creating a contextual breakdown of the program of work that focuses on the user. This enabled clarity of scope and prioritisation of incremental delivery across different departments. Secondly, the user focus leads to shifting the approach away from IT-lead delivery to co-creation for increased employee satisfaction.

Achievement details

Please explain the details of the initiative and the approach that was taken.

The reasons for doing the program will be familiar to many business analysts; pain points related to the tech stack, legacy applications with horrible front-ends, and an overload of functions and information. All leading to a one-size-fits-nobody (CRM) application that users found hard to learn. Of course then resulting in user dissatisfaction and the birth of lots of auxiliary applications to solve individual problems, triggering IT to start an initiative to combat these issues.

As the initiative had been running in a definition phase for so long, a lot of artefacts were already produced. Among them were visions from a business and architectural perspective. There was a technical direction for the program decided - 20,000 users were getting a new application. But there was no concept of where and how we start with building an application for a large number of teams and users. For me, the challenge was to determine how to create a functional decomposition, which I spent quite some time on.

I enjoy planning the BA approach, but I also like to start doing, to experiment to see what I find. The first decomposing experiment I did was creating themes, epics and

features based on the architectural vision. While keeping in mind the small library of research results, business interview results and vision. The result I got was a breakdown, but I noticed quickly that it was really hard to express functional and business value for an epic or feature. It really ended up being a story map based on technical components. But it made me shift focus to what I was missing: the business need. Who are the users and what do they need?

I started investigating a way to frame our program in a contextual way - a way that made sense to our users. I decided on a user journey approach and as an anchor, I explored using the most common reasons for customers contacting us. It was an important building block to ramp up the definition phase and progress towards delivery. It turned out to have multiple positives; allowing us to scope the incremental delivery of the application by targeting user groups instead of all users, to understand the functional and informational needs of our users by mapping the user journeys step by step, and to prioritise business value. The details of user journeys become the epics and features for delivery. This is now a reusable approach that the program continues to use when expanding to additional user groups to slowly replace the old CRM application. But it's also an approach that can be used by other teams within the same area to deliver CRM features.

The additional benefit of this approach was that we became very user-centric. To understand our users and their needs I did a lot of document analysis, but I also worked with the Design chapter to set up regular interviews and workshops with users. This meant we could prototype and co-create with users and now also the approach that many of the 20 feature squads within our department use to deliver features. This is a shift from the previous IT-lead approach.

Key achievement

Why do you think this initiative should receive the award?

The approach I used has led to a fundamental and gradual shift within our department to become more user-centric. To move towards co-creation with the business rather than delivering features for the business to adopt. I think it is a great example of the significant impact we can have as business analysts in directing change. Of how our problem-solving and analytical thinking can be important enablers for success. The contextual breakdown I used has been recognised as a key driver for the success of the program and area, both from a delivery and engagement perspective. And it also showcases one of my favourite qualities of business analysts - re-usability. The approach of call reason, user journeys and user centricity is still used within the program and is being adopted in other places within the company.