

Wellbeing and Empathy:

Why BAs need to consider the 'human' side now more than ever

On the 21st January 2021, Christina Lovelock joined me for a LinkedIn live discussion about wellbeing and empathy. In these 'unusual' times, this seems like a topic that is more important than ever. [You can see the original broadcast here](#). If you'd rather read a transcript of our discussion you'll find that below.

Please note, this was transcribed by an automated tool with minimal editing, so we apologise for any mis-transcription or typos! -- *Adrian*



[Christina Lovelock](#)

BA leader, author & speaker



[Adrian Reed](#)

Principal consultant

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Adrian Reed: Well, hello, I'm [Adrian Reed](#). And this is the first prototype LinkedIn live broadcast talking about business analysis, business change, generally interesting topics to the business analysis, business change communities. And I'm really pleased to say that I'm joined by [Christina Lovelock](#). Now I'm sure many people watching will know Tina, as a BA, leader, a speaker, and indeed an author, author of articles in publications such as BA times, but also wrote the fantastic book, [Delivering Business Analysis: the BA Service Handbook](#), which is co authored with Debbie Paul, well worth getting your hands on if you haven't seen a copy already. And today, we are going to talk about a topic which is probably more relevant now than ever, which is around wellbeing and empathy. So why BA us need to consider the human side. Now more than ever. And Tina, [you sent me through a really interesting video](#), which had a comparison between sympathy and empathy. really intrigued as to what led you to find that video and what you took from it, because I took out from it, there's only like five minutes long, but it was all three minutes. And that was great.

Christina Lovelock: Thanks, Adrian, thanks for inviting me to speak today. I think there's a lot of interesting points to take from [that video](#), one of the things that really stuck out to me was the concept of an empathetic response never starts with the phrase "at least..." And I think we often feel that we need to provide a bright side or silver lining for people when they've told us a problem. And we want to play back to them, "well, at least this isn't happening", or "at least you're not in this situation". But that doesn't allow people to feel heard. And that really stuck with me, because I know, that's something I've done to a lot of people, whether it's in a business context or personal context, and I'm really interested in the idea of empathy, because I don't think I am naturally a very empathetic person, I realise it's a skill that you can learn just like any other skill.



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And so I think it's a bit of a cop out to say, "well, I'm just I just don't really know how other people are feeling. I'm not very empathetic", when it's something that we really need right now. And something we need to invest in

Adrian Reed: Knowing you, I'd say you're a very empathetic person. But it is interesting, too, because I mean, what strikes me as you're talking there is that there's two, perhaps two different elements to this. There's the empathetic feeling. So understanding that somebody is is feeling something or putting yourself in their shoes. But then there's the response to that. And it's quite difficult to know, or I find it quite difficult to know, how to respond to someone who is going through a tough time. And I suppose one of the reasons, when I was watching it, I was watching it on a personal level, but also thinking about as BA as we design services, processes, or whatever. And I'll put my hand up. I've been guilty of being in process workshops where there's been quite an internal focus, like, actually, there's a broader empathy piece for customers and users and and stakeholders.

Christina Lovelock: Yeah, definitely, I think we're all guilty of making assumptions. And assuming that we know what other people want, or other people are feeling. I think the good thing for us as BAs is that we are naturally quite a curious bunch. So in terms of response, when when someone tells you something that you weren't necessarily expecting, or challenges some of the assumptions that you had, we don't have to come up with a clever answer. We can just be curious, we can ask more about it and say, Well, that sounds really interesting, or that sounds really difficult. You want to tell me a bit more about that. And they might not want to tell you any more. But that kind of response rather than a very kind of defensive answer which we might which might naturally spring to our minds, I think actually cultivates the relationship a lot more.

Adrian Reed: Engagement, of course, especially as we talk about stakeholder engagement a lot. And I know there are lots of good models out there. But actually, you know, what I'm coming to realise is you're speaking there is that curiosity, that childlike curiosity about not just because we often talk about curiosity in terms of "the problem situation", but actually, you know, organisations are just collections of people and stuff. And in most cases, the stuff won't run the business, it's the people. So actually we're in an in an inherently people profession, I would say,

Christina Lovelock: We are. And we given the role of going out there and listening to people. That's what we are asked to do. And I think BAs can forget that that's their main purpose. Sometimes we can become a bit inward looking, we can start to focus very much on our development team, we can focus on our toolkit and, deploying that in the way that we want to use it. And we forget that our main purpose is asking good questions, and listening and providing a way to play all of that information. And so creating curiosity is absolutely key, in my opinion.

Adrian Reed: I know a few years ago, you did a presentation, I think at the BA conference Europe entitled "The BA wellbeing project". Tell us a bit about what that involved.



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Christina Lovelock: So it was "The BA happiness project". I was slightly nervous about that topic, and I didn't know how it was going to be received at all. And I thought I might be talking to an empty room, but it was really well received. And what I really wanted to do there is highlight some of the tools and techniques that we've got as BA that we can use on our own lives to help understand ourselves a bit better, and understand our sources of happiness and what makes us unhappy. So for example, [force field analysis](#) is a really interesting one for thinking, "Okay, what's contributing to my happiness right now, and what's working against that? What is causing me to be unhappy?", and I think breaking something down, and also visualising something really helps us think through our problems. And I think in the current situation where we're on lockdown, 3.0, or however many times we've been locked down. We do need to think about all the tools that we've got available, including our professional toolkit to think how are we going to get through this and what have we got that can help us. The idea of the happiness project was also to empathise a little bit with our stakeholders to understand how BAs react to change. We kind of swung around the place saying, "We're change agents, and we've got a really great attitude to change". We've got a good attitude to change when we're changing someone else, we don't have a good attitude to change when somebody is trying to change us. In that situation, we revert to all the standard stakeholder stereotypes of being resistant to change. So using some of our tools to help understand our own attitudes and beliefs was what I wanted to get out

Adrian Reed: interesting, actually, when we are change professionals, but rarely do we apply those techniques to ourselves. That's a really interesting observation. I mean, from a lockdown perspective, definitely, I don't think there will be a single person anywhere that hasn't had ups and downs with a lockdown. And and you're right, actually looking into our toolkit and saying, "well, actually, you know, all the tools we have are about managing change. It doesn't really matter if that's organisational change or personal change", Springboarding from that you can use the tools for career planning too. You know, there's a lot of things you can use, because fundamentally, I suppose what the toolkits about is taking current state, working out what the future desired state isn't working out the path between them. Interesting. Did you manage to get to a situation where your team were more adaptable to the kind of change that was thrown at them?

Christina Lovelock: I think that we're able to use the fact that we are change professionals, and reflect on that and think about our toolkit when an unexpected changes thrown our way. So for example, organisational restructures: we're able to talk about that even when it affects us in a slightly more abstract way. And talk about what why are we feeling that way. We've used techniques like the six thinking hats, for example, to try on different ways of looking at a problem that's affecting us as a team, which is quite interesting and an interesting way to use our toolkit on our own challenges and problems.



Adrian Reed: Yeah. Six thinking hats. It is a great technique. If you read de Bono's original work was about having multiple people and doing it in "parallel thinking", However, I even find it sometimes useful individually. You can say, "okay, well, am I being a bit 'black hat'? " I I don't know if most BAs are, like me, but I find that sometimes I tend to think about everything that could possibly go wrong about something. In fact wasn't that one of the [bad BA behaviours you spoke and wrote about?](#)

Christina Lovelock: Yeah, absolutely, we do tend to be a bit pessimistic, a little rain cloud following around our heads when we're walking around. And yet, the black hat one is really interesting, because it also allows us to confront stakeholders with the attitude that they are typically bringing, or whether we are that person, or whether it's somebody that's working with us, it allows us to say, look, we've all got a natural perspective and a natural way of looking at things. But there are multiple perspectives. And let's try and open it up a little bit. I once had a bit of a tricky stakeholder who was a natural black hat. They said that they felt that other people had an expectation on them to bring that doom and gloom. To bring in those kind of warnings and flag issues: that was the role that they played for the group. They actually found it quite liberating to be able to try on some of those different hats with the six thinking hats and not have to play the role that they usually play, which I thought was really interesting.

Adrian Reed: Yeah. Interesting question. How have you tended to run these sessions? I mean, I'm guessing you probably don't do it with physical hats? Do you use a prop at the time you're doing it?

Christina Lovelock: The most recent time I used it was when we're still face to face with my team. We had different coloured Sharpies and different flip charts in different areas of the board, so the colour matched the colour of the hat, I've never used it with physical hats. I think that would be a step too far for me.

Adrian Reed: I've got a whole set of laminated descriptions of the hats. I like stationery. So unsurprisingly, I have a laminator and I laminate things. I find it useful to like put the like the legend in the middle of the table. Then you can have a different coloured card representing the hat.

Adrian Reed: So, wrapping up: if you were thinking about as BAs supporting each other—and that could be people in our team, or people in the wider community—and supporting our colleagues, what what sorts of things should we be doing?

Christina Lovelock: Well, another message that I took from the video that we both watched, and I think that you're going to be able to post the link to it afterwards, the idea of showing a little bit of vulnerability, showing how you're feeling.



And I certainly had weeks where I've said to my team, I'm just not feeling it this week, and just allowing them to see that we all have ups and downs. Sometimes showing a little bit of yourself to invite that trust and allow other people to really share how they're feeling with you is really important. I think as BAs we are natural facilitators. And I think we've already got a little bit of permission to ask questions around that area to be operating more in the space of interpersonal skills, what I refer to as core skills, and some of the other roles that we work with. So I think there's already a little bit of an in for us to be that person who asked those types of questions.

Adrian Reed: Yeah. And again, that comes back to *curiosity*, asking those sorts of questions, and Looking out for each other looking for those signals that someone might be might be struggling. Do you have any tips, if we do notice a colleague struggling, or a fellow or a stakeholder. What sort of—and this comes back full circle to your opening statement—what would a good empathetic response be?

Christina Lovelock: I think, just allowing people to see what you've noticed. "So I noticed that you weren't contributing as you normally would in that meeting, or I noticed that you had your camera off Is everything okay?" And just kind of get inviting a response. People can say, No, I'm fine, and kind of shut it down, and that's fine, too. That person obviously doesn't want to take up that invitation. But just making time to let people know that you're thinking of them and even if you've noticed something, perhaps something different in their behaviour can actually really help build that relationship as well. I think,

Adrian Reed: Yeah. Build the relationship and also help the person out and really inject that that sort of empathy. You know, the more we talk about the more I'm concluding that the two work hand in hand. You almost can't have wellbeing without empathy, like yin and yang type of thing. Well, Tina, thank you so much for having this, this chat. Always a pleasure to talk to you. So and for everyone that's tuned in, THANK YOU for tuning into what was essentially "episode zero" of this format. I'm not entirely sure how it's going to evolve. But do keep keep an eye on the LinkedIn feed. And, you know, we'll bring in more more interesting BA related broadcasts So, so thanks again, Tina. And see you again soon

Christina Lovelock: Thanks Adrian. Bye

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