

Documenting Business Requirements

An important aspect of any project is gathering and documenting the business requirements. This critical activity directs all future project work so considerable care and effort is required to ensure the documents are complete and comprehensive.

A business requirements document represents the direct “Call to Action”. It must include specific action items for the reader (e.g. approve, forward or revise).

When creating a requirements document it is important to remove the passions, biases and personal/professional agendas of individuals. The objective is to provide a clear, complete and concise definition of requirements which forms:

- The business agreement as defined in the Project Charter for sign-off by the Project Sponsor;
- The basis for all subsequent systems analysis, design and development work; and
- The foundation for user acceptance testing and sign-off of the completed project.

The requirements document should be written using easily understood business terminology. It should include structured tables and/or graphical models to illustrate key points such as:

- Transformational processes.
- System states and changes between them.
- Relationships between data elements.
- Process and logic flow.
- Object classes and the relationships between them.

Requirements should be written hierarchically with:

- High-level requirements providing summary information, grouping the requirements into the overall structure.
- Detailed requirements that decompose high-level requirements, clearing up ambiguity and providing specific examples.
- Written so that if the requirements are satisfied you will satisfy the users' needs.

It is important to not provide so much detail that you are constraining the design of the solution. This can occur when you start addressing the how instead of the what. If this happens you need to step back from the problem to refocus on defining the requirements.

When defining the requirements documents, the Business Analyst will normally document more requirements than may be reasonable given constraints of time and budget. As a result, the prioritization of the requirements is critical. Prioritizing requirements can be done through the use of verbs that have explicitly defined meanings such as:

- Shall or Must – Mandatory fulfillment for the project to be deemed a success.
- Will – Similar to Shall or Must, but generally refers to activity in the real world versus internal system functionality.
- Should – A clear benefit / risk association, but not mandatory.
- May – A “nice to have” item with low or no quantifiable benefit / risk association.

Templates are an important tool for the analyst. They are a quick starting point for a project, ensuring the Business Analyst doesn't have to reinvent the wheel for each new requirements document. Ideally, the template should cover the complete range of projects an organization may address as it is easier to remove a section than it is to remember to insert that section for a particular project.

The following is an example of the table of contents for a business requirements template:

- 1 Project Summary
- 2 Reference Documents
 - 2.1 Company Documents
 - 2.2 Industry Standards
- 3 Assumptions, Dependencies and Constraints
 - 3.1 Assumptions
 - 3.2 Dependencies
 - 3.3 Constraints
- 4 Top Level Functional Requirements
 - 4.1 Next Level Summary (repeat as necessary)
 - 4.1.1 Detailed Functional Requirements (repeat as necessary)
- 5 Non-Functional Requirements
 - 5.1 Security Requirements
 - 5.2 Data Conversion Requirements
 - 5.3 Performance and Response Time Requirements
 - 5.4 Platform Dependent and Installation Requirements
 - 5.5 Parallel Testing Requirements
 - 5.6 System Interface Requirements
 - 5.7 Data Archival, Backup and Recovery Requirements
 - 5.8 Forms and Reporting Requirements
 - 5.8.1 Localization Requirements
 - 5.8.2 Forms
 - 5.8.3 Reports
 - 5.9 Training and Procedures
- 6 Terms and Definitions
 - 6.1 Documentation Standard
 - 6.2 Diagrams and Models
 - 6.3 Glossary

Business analysis is as much an art as it is a science. The Business Analyst should consider the culture of the organization to determine how much detail is appropriate and specific senior management requirements for approval. By following an approved organizational template you will find that you should be able to deliver a requirements document that meets your organizational needs.

Need more information?

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