

## REQUIREMENTS FOR BUSINESS REQUIREMENTS

A single well-written business requirement will save vast amounts of work and improve your bottom line immediately. A poorly-written requirement will not only fail to accomplish its purpose, it can also create immediate damage to your operation. That is because the business requirement is an essential written business communication. So, you can see that the title of this entry is neither redundant nor oxymoronic; "Requirements for Business Requirements" is a recursive idea that allows us to dig a little deeper in successive stages.

This is getting pretty technical, but bear with me while I try to get through the next part quickly. The next few concepts are essential, but they can also be controversial.

- Here is the first business requirement requirement: Each business requirement must be written as a complete statement. Just as in any other written communication, incomplete sentences and fragments create ambiguity, confusion and misunderstanding. If your statement is unclear, others may misunderstand it during implementation. That, in turn, will create more deliberation or rework. That costs you.
- Each requirement must contain the word "must" or another similar term such as "needed," "required" or "specified." This makes the intent clear to all readers that this is not just a guideline or recommendation.
- Each requirement must be a simple and clear statement. If you have a compound sentence then it may disguise multiple requirements. Clarity is essential to dispel ambiguity.
- Each requirement must be actionable and testable. You can ask yourself these questions: How do I approach the task of implementing this requirement? How do I know when the requirement has been met? If you can answer these questions with confidence, then you have in hand a well-written business requirement.
- Finally, a requirement statement must present the actual need, the actual deed to be implemented, and not describe only the requirement in general terms.

Business requirements are not exactly specifications, but they are close. They "specify" an understanding of your business model in terms that can be communicated clearly to other members of your team. A better analogy may be a statement from statutory law. If you want to see an example of good requirements, read a few paragraphs of your state's published family law code.

These business requirement requirements are controversial. There are several reasons, but they all boil down to time and money. The principal objection is that creating and publishing well-written requirements becomes too daunting a task when there are thousands of requirements to list. Careful decisions must be made up front with respect to requirements which reference other requirements, to requirements which are subordinate to or included within others, or to requirements which may even duplicate others.

There is a substantial niche industry marketing requirements tracking databases, systems and servers. But these are not short cuts, and must be evaluated judiciously. It is good to remember that a thoughtful application of the requirement definition process yields direct bottom-line competitive and economic advantages. That will be the subject of my next blog post.

