White Paper

Linking Process, Procedures and Business Requirements to Successful Customer Outcomes

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Craig is known throughout the business world as "The Process Ninja" – he is a passionate advocate of business process management.

His talent for making things simple has resulted in a proven track record of saving organizations millions of dollars whilst simultaneously improving the customer experience.

Named as one of the top process bloggers in the world by both the Process Excellence Network and Processpedia, Craig's work has been featured on the BNet, Telstra, Flyingsolo, BPM Leader, PEX Network, iDatix and Orbus Websites as well as in the Herald-Sun Newspaper.

Contact Craig to discuss how he can improve your organization.

This white paper provides a means for the identification of requirements that meet business and customers' true needs by establishing a reusable approach that ensures traceability between process, procedures, requirements and successful customer outcomes. It is intended to be used as a practical guide for Business / Process Analysts and Project Managers to improve business processes rapidly.

In summary this white paper details:

- The common mistakes in gathering business requirements
- The importance of focussing on needs, not wants
- A nine step approach that links process, procedures and business requirements to successful customer outcomes.

Business Requirements Gathering – Common Mistakes

"Go out to the business and gather their requirements!"
How many times do we hear this said?

It's an unfortunate result of process understanding immaturity that many businesses today are locked into old ways of getting things done. One of the most common examples of this is in the shotgun approach to understanding and implementing business requirements. What generally happens is that business analysts are sent off to gather requirements and end up with a list of what the business thinks they want.

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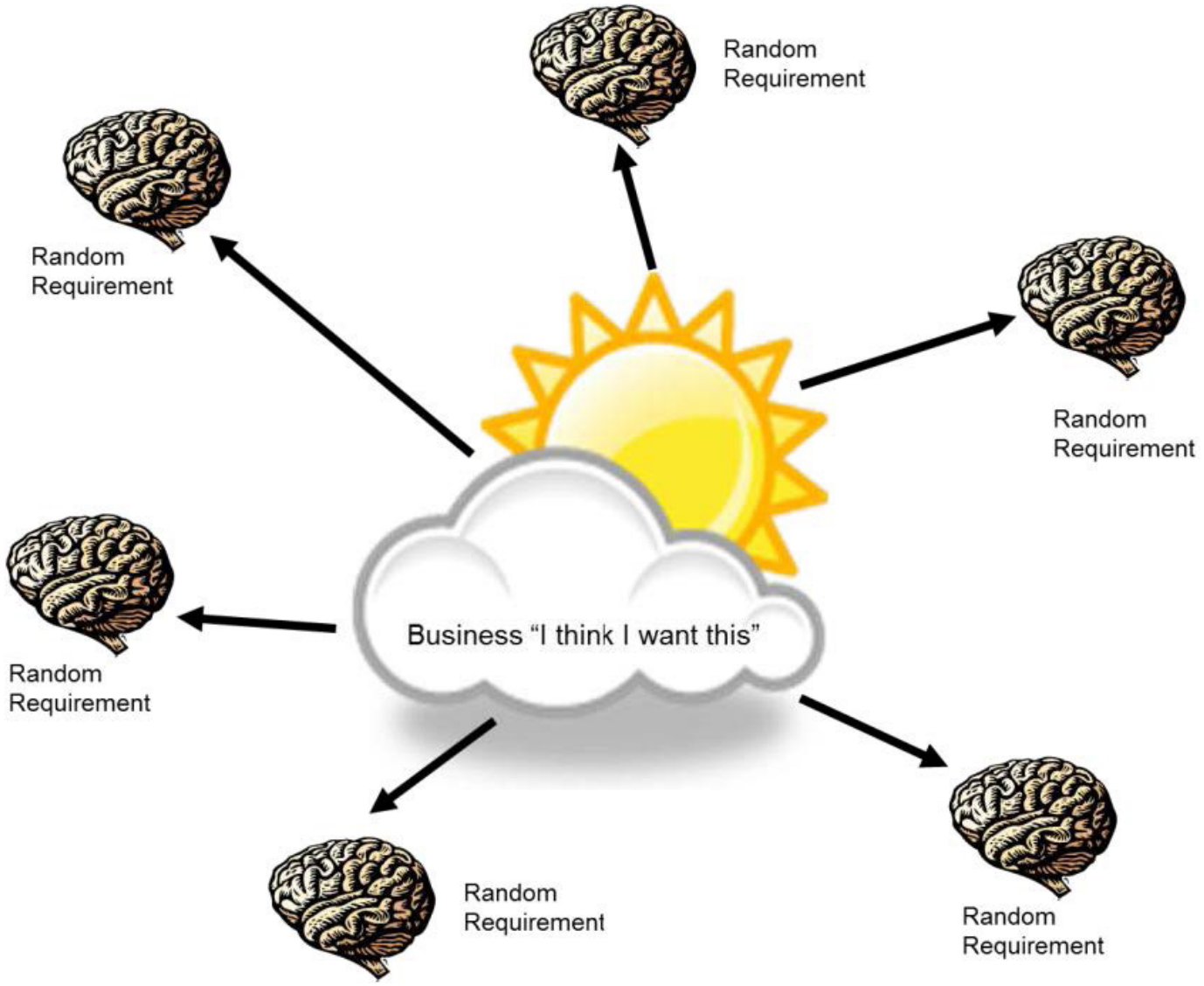

Figure 1

Typically, this results in a giant, rambling document written in a pseudo business / IT speak that the business say they can't read and the IT staff say isn't detailed enough for them to build from. So the Business Analyst goes away and creates a functional specification document which the IT guys love, but which has morphed so far from what the business have asked for, they have a heart attack when they see the final product.

"That's not what we wanted!" they say.
"But that's what you told us!" say the BA's and IT guys.

Separating Wants from Needs

Finding out what the business needs is very different to asking them what they want, but it's critically important from a process point of view. As Henry Ford once famously quipped *"If I'd asked them what they wanted, they would have said a faster horse"* – focussing the requirements on the outcome sought by the process is the starting point for an alignment that creates traceability from the outcome through to the requirements and the implemented solutions.

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Putting Process First

The mistake that many Business Analysts make is not starting with understanding the current process and the outcomes that are sought by the process. Requirements are often “gathered” in a haphazard fashion with little structure - this results in a “wish list” that doesn’t focus on what the business and, most importantly, the customer needs. To get this right we must...

Figure 2

The Method

TIP: Stand in your customers’ shoes and look at your business from the outside-in. The process does not start and stop within your walls. The customer experience IS the process.

1. Define the Process Scope

The first step towards delivery is to establish what the scope of the process is from the customer’s perspective i.e. where does the process start and stop. Don’t take the business’s word for it - their interpretation of what a process is may be radically different to yours. Document the process at a high level and confirm this with the business.

2. Define the Successful Customer Outcome(s)

It’s critically important to define what it is that the customer really needs as everything in the process must be aligned with those needs. Think about what process the customer thinks they are involved with (it may be different to the actual process). Think about what their expectations are (both good and bad). Summarize what they really need in a one line successful customer outcome statement.

3. Define the Current Process

Once the process scope and successful customer outcomes have been agreed, proceed to document the process at a task level. This is best done in a workshop with the staff that perform work as part of the process. Ask each staff member to write down every task they perform in the process on sticky notes then merge them together on the biggest sheet of brown paper you can find!

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TIP: Don't drown in procedural level detail. Focus on what tasks are performed rather than how they are performed.

Don't just consider "sunny day" processes where everything goes right - consider everything that can go wrong. Look at the paths from every business rule in your process. Consider all process permutations and trigger points of the process.

Once you have agreement on the current state process, ask the staff to annotate each task with how long it takes to complete. Note: this should be task time, rather than elapsed time.

TIP: Ideally, have at least a couple of days break between the current state analysis and the improvement workshop. This allows the participants time to generate ideas about potential improvements.

TIP: Whilst you may have your own great ideas about how to improve the process, the trick to running a great process improvement workshop is to help the staff to come up with the ideas themselves. *Facilitate, don't dictate!*

4. Improve the Process

Once you have agreed which tasks are performed in the current process, it's time to get creative. Start by splitting your participants into teams then ask each team to write down 20 potential improvements to the process. This is a great way to get new ideas flowing. Ask each team to present their ideas so that the ideas are shared with all participants.

Next, work through the process seeking to eliminate each task one at a time. If you can't eliminate the task, focus on improving the task in some way (always remembering to focus on the successful customer outcomes required). Cross off each task eliminated as you progress through the process.

TIP: Why quantify the improvement? There's nothing that gets management more excited than a cost saving – and it also helps to build a business case so that decision makers can spend money to improve the process. Sometimes it's necessary to speculate to accumulate process savings.

5. Quantify The Improvement

At the end of the improvement exercise you will have details of both the current state and potential future state process. The improvement can then be quantified by comparing the current state process cost (process time x staff cost x volume) versus the future state process cost. The difference will be the saving you can deliver to the business.

Note: not all improvements will be related to cost savings – improvements to the customer experience are just as important, if not more so.

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6. Link Process Tasks to Procedural Steps

For each task in the process, create procedural steps - how each process step is done rather than what is done. This can be done very simply in a spread sheet or if you want to create sophisticated procedures linked to the process you can do it in a modeling tool, such as Orbus iServer. What's more, you can then split it into a procedural document for your staff to use for training and day-to-day operational procedures.

7. Link Procedural Detail to Business Requirements

The procedural detail helps to create a granular level of detail that greatly benefits the creation of specific requirements. It forces the analyst to think of all possible permutations and options - it forces them to think in the context of the real world, not a jargon-laden business requirements document.

8. Link Business Requirements to Test Scenarios

Use procedural detail and business requirements together to develop test scenarios and use cases - IT can then use these for their unit testing prior to them being re-used for user testing.

9. Build it. Iteratively.

Presuming that there is an IT solution involved (and let's face it, there usually is), it's best to adopt an iterative (agile) approach where there are short development cycles with high business involvement. This helps to ensure that the business stakeholders are kept in the loop with no nasty surprises upon delivery.

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Conclusion

This method ensures that customer needs are met, staff are actively involved in changing the process and the benefits of the improvement are quantified. In nine steps, a Business or Process Analyst can create complete traceability from the customer outcome to the delivery, at the same time providing improved service to the customer and cost savings to the business. But to achieve these goals we must always remember to ***Start With the End in Mind***.

To find out more about how to align processes with the customer experience please visit www.theprocessninja.com

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