

Who's on First, What's on Second, but Where is the Why?

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Industry Article

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Who's on First, What's on Second, but Where is the Why?

In projects, the bread and butter areas for Business Analysts typically focus on eliciting business requirements and identifying (and resolving) related issues. Business Analysts familiar with the Business Analysis Body of Knowledge (BABOK) know the value of clear, concise, complete and unambiguous business requirements and work diligently to properly capture the details. There are a myriad of suitable templates and tools to assist in capturing business requirements and documenting related issues. However, BAs sometimes get caught up on the emphasis of the "Who", "What", "When" and "Where". When the process advances into Solution Design and Functional Requirements, the emphasis then shifts to the "How". What tends to be overlooked or under emphasized is the "Why".

If you don't capture the "Why" it won't necessarily diminish the value of what was documented for the other 5 elements, although it is still critical for other reasons. "Why" should clearly document the thinking going on by the business owners and users at the time the business requirements and issues were documented. In other words, it should answer a number of very important questions such as:

1. Why are the business requirements needed (i.e. what is the driver)?
2. Why are they needed in the desired implementation timeframe?
3. Why would there be a problem if any of the business requirements were deferred or not implemented at all?
4. Why were certain business requirements considered "out of scope" for this project?

For related issues it is equally important to capture the "Whys". For example:

1. Why is the issue an issue? What is the implication to the business owners and users?
2. Why would there be a business impact or risk if an issue is not resolved at all or not in a timely manner?
3. If an issue is subsequently deemed not to be an issue it's equally important to explain "Why" it's no longer perceived as an issue.
4. Why do the affected business owners and users feel the manner in which an issue was resolved is appropriate?

If the proper time and effort is not applied to adequately document the "Whys" they may come back to haunt the business owners and users. As time goes on the affected parties begin to forget the "Whys" when subsequent questions are asked regarding things such as:

1. Why was a business requirement implemented in the manner or timeframe it was?
2. Why was it considered acceptable that a business requirement be deferred or not acted upon at all?
3. Why did we decide an issue wasn't an issue because the current evidence seems to indicate otherwise?
4. Why did we decide the approach to resolving an issue was acceptable?

Forgetting the "Whys" could have serious negative implications on future development efforts because business owners and users may be unaware of the landmines previously sown and no one left a map for them to follow.

One way to avoid missing the "Whys" is to consider the principles set forth in the Business Analysis Body of Knowledge (BABOK) for Enterprise Analysis. Consideration is given to the following taken from Version 2.0 of the BABOK:

1. Analyze the business situation in order to fully understand business problems and opportunities.
2. Assess the business situation in order to fully understand the change needed to meet business needs and achieve strategic goals.
3. Determine the most feasible business solution approach.
4. Define the solution scope and develop the business case for the proposed solution.
6. Define and document business requirements (including the business need, required capabilities, solution scope, and business case).

As a final thought, the BABOK goes into more detail on these points and the first topic is "Define Business Need". Guess what the first noted thing is... "Identify and define why a change to organizational systems or capabilities is required."

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