

DOCUMENTING THE ANALYSIS

The Business Analyst requires four key stores. The first two are final repositories of project information. These are the two key outputs from the business analysis activity, and are a critical part of the overall project documentation¹:

1. The Business Requirements Specification, and
2. The Benefits Realisation Plan.

The focus of this paper is on the other two, which are working stores:

3. Questions to be asked of stakeholders, and
4. The Project Objectives: that is, the list of problems and opportunities to be addressed by the project.

QUESTIONS FOR THE STAKEHOLDERS:

Right from the beginning of the analysis there will be questions of fact, understanding, interpretation to be asked of the many and various stakeholders. Some will be simple to ask, and equally simple to answer. Others may be more complex, may require some time to resolve, or may require re-phrasing as new data and understanding becomes available.

The easy temptation is for the Analyst to memorise them or to note them in personal papers to seek clarification at the next interview. These practices expose the project to a significant risk, namely the risk that the Analyst will either forget the question, or become unavailable to the project, and thus take the list of questions with them.

A preferable work practice is to list all such questions in a publicly accessible repository. This insulates the project against the key person risk described above, and as well provides traceability.

¹ These two documents are each the subject of a separate discussion paper.

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A basic format for the list of Questions is as follows:

Questions for the stakeholders

For each question, the following is required:

- A unique identifier
- A clear statement of the question
- The stakeholder(s) to whom the question is to be addressed
- Status (new, in action, closed)
- Analyst responsible for follow-up (for teams)
- *Reference*

Using a unique identifier eliminates situations where the wording of the question changes, and thus it is unclear whether there is one question, or more than one. Note that the unique identifiers should remain unique: do not reuse them, as this will destroy traceability, and will re-introduce uncertainty.

Once the question is resolved, the information received in response to the question will be stored in a different document.

- If it is a question of fact about the current business processes, then the fact will be documented in the current system models attached to the Business Requirements Specification.
- If the answer identifies a business problem or opportunity to be addressed, then this will go in the Objectives Inventory (discussed below).
- If the answer relates to Benefits Realisation, it will be stored in the Benefits Realisation Plan.

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- Any other responses are likely to be project-related, such as implementation concerns, project risks² or issues³. These are the responsibility of the Project Manager to resolve, and should be forwarded to that person for documentation and resolution.

THE PROJECT OBJECTIVES:

Project Objectives start as the list of problems and opportunities that are to be addressed. These are business risks that exist in the current business process⁴ They will be identified in many ways:

- They will emerge from the first moments of the project.
- They will be reported by a wide range of stakeholders.
- Legal, compliance and audit staff may identify some.
- Strategic or corporate planning bodies will be aware of future directions and models to be supported.
- Steering Committee meetings and members will provide some.
- Some will be inherent in the anomalies and inefficiencies in the current arrangements.
- Risk Management standards provide a structured approach to identifying business risks, and can broaden the range of Objectives beyond those likely to be identified by specific groups of stakeholders.

² A risk event is defined in the PM-BOK as an "occurrence that may affect the *project* for better or for worse" (my italics) . That is to say, business risk is clearly distinguished from project risk. Business Risk is a business problem or opportunity, and the project is in effect the Risk Mitigation Strategy. Project Risk, on the other hand, is about the possibility of something going wrong for the project, so that the project fails to meet its critical success factors.

³ There are lots of different uses of these two words. A useful distinction is to think of them as follows:

- A Risk is something that could go wrong in the future, and requires a Risk Mitigation Strategy to reduce the likelihood and/or consequences of it occurring.
- An Issue is something that is going wrong right now, and requires a Risk Containment Strategy to minimise damage.

⁴ For projects based in Australia and New Zealand, the current Standard for Risk Management is 4360:2004. The key distinction between the previous version (dated 1999) and the current standard is that there is now a clear understanding that missed opportunities are business risks as much as traditional risks. That is, something not going right is as much a business risk as something going wrong.

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To further complicate the situation, different stakeholders will have different perspectives on the same business problem or opportunity. This means that the wording of the objective is likely to change as further understanding grows. Again, using a unique identifier eliminates ambiguity in this situation.

When documenting the objectives, care must be taken to clearly separate the business problem or opportunity from the many other things that it may be wrapped up with. Accordingly, these following matters will be documented, but separately from the statement of the business problem or opportunity:

- emotional concerns raised by stakeholders
- implementation considerations and tasks
- possible solutions
- potential constraints

A problem or opportunity may be identified, but be determined to be out of scope of the project, In this case it should be referred for resolution to the Project Office, corporate Project Approval and Review Board, or the relevant business manager, via the Project Manager.

Typically, there will be dozens to hundreds of objectives to be addressed, and many more on larger projects. Ranking or prioritising them can only be done when the benefit stream to be derived on resolution is understood. However, the Analyst may find it of short-term assistance to classify them:

- Early in the analysis, by the most relevant datastore or process (if any).
- Later in the analysis they could be classified by the project Phase planned to deliver the Objective.

It is crucial to document the Project Objectives in a structured manner, and immediately they are identified. They are the basis for planning the benefits, as well as having significance in determining progress and assessing project success. They are necessary in order to select amongst possible implementations (whether off-the-shelf, bent or bought, begged, borrowed, or...). If any are forgotten, mislaid or just lost, the project will fail to deliver the expectations of at least one stakeholder.

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The basic elements of the Project Objectives are as follows:

Project Objectives: Problems & Opportunities.

For each objective:

- A unique identifier
- A description, covering all aspects of the objective as seen by different stakeholders
- Notes on implementation considerations, possible solutions, potential constraints, and emotional concerns
- Project Phase proposed for delivery of the objective
- Optionally, classification by the datastore or process to which it most closely relates