

## Business Requirements Tools - Not Always the Answer

It never ceases to amaze how frequently organizations focus on buying tools before they put the basics in place. Thinking that tools are the panacea for improving business analysis and systems development capabilities could be a costly and unrewarding experience, likened to shopping for expensive power tools before knowing what you'll be building.

The business analyst is at the forefront of most systems development or selection activity, so before you look to tools for the improvements you desire, look first to improving your business analysis basics. We all know that good requirements and analysis practices help reduce project risk and keep your project running smoothly, however when considering how to improve these skills we need to walk before we run.

Most organizations would gain significant improvement in their requirements gathering and documentation by focusing on the following simple steps before jumping into tools:

- 1) Create standard processes for requirements gathering and definition.
- 2) Develop standard templates and methods for requirements documentation.
- 3) Train Business Analysts on the process and use of the templates.

Most problems with missed or poorly defined requirements or deficiencies in applications, either developed or purchased, will not be solved with business analysis tools as generally the problems arise from incorrect requirements definition. If this is the case in your organization go back to basics and help the business analysts learn how to define requirements more effectively through structured processes, templates and training. Although this can be accomplished by using internal staff, experience shows that this almost always takes a back seat to other projects. Employing outside professional help to perform this work brings a fresh perspective on how your organization performs this very critical function. It also ensures it is done quickly so your organization can start taking advantage of the quality improvements.

Establishing standard techniques and processes will make your requirements gathering process more thorough and complete. At the same time it will provide your clients (i.e. project sponsors, business unit managers and end users) with a consistent experience, giving them a clear understanding of their role in the requirements gathering process.

Formal business analysis training and/or several years experience in standard business analyst techniques should be a starting point especially given the endless courses available. The investment in training is truly worthwhile, especially if all your business analysts are trained in the same method, as it will make them more interchangeable between projects.

Now that you have the fundamentals in place, considering tools as a means to further improve your requirements definition and systems development capabilities is a logical next step and far more likely to produce the quality and productivity benefits you are after. The easiest starting point is to solicit input from the various groups that will use the tool namely your business analysts, software architects, systems engineers and database designers.

When selecting tools consider:

- The scope of your requirements. Do you want a tool that supports business analysts as well as other application implementation processes?
- How much you are prepared to change your existing processes (many tools will radically change them). There may be benefits in making significant change; however this has to be carefully weighed against the impact (e.g. re-training, and gaining buy in).
- How you are going to measure the improvements in processes using new tools. It's rare that this is even considered, yet the reason why most organizations get business analysis tools is for improvement.
- What is the expected ROI?

Tool selection should be approached much like any other project (i.e. a business case is developed and the standard project deliverables produced). This ensures everyone understands the scope, cost, timeframe and objectives. You may find early in the process that the ROI is simply not there. Don't be alarmed. It just means there may be other areas where you can improve quality and efficiency.

### Need more information?

Please call (604)294-2292 or email [info@klr.com](mailto:info@klr.com)