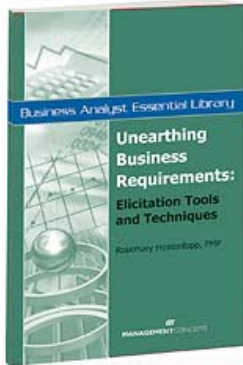


PM World Today Book Review



Book Title: *Unearthing Business requirements: Elicitation Tools and Techniques*

Authors: Rosemary Hossenlopp & Kathleen B. Hass

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Reviewer: Hussein Mzee

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Introduction to the Book

Failure to effectively elicit concise requirements and the resultant ineffective systems requirements determination has been a critical problem in the delivery and success of information systems. Project Managers and Business Researchers have identified this problem to the lack of clear communications between systems designers and end-users. Traditional interviewing methods have been the norm for many organizations, but in the last few years several facilitated group techniques have been employed and these approaches have generally outperformed the traditional interviewing methods.

These techniques, employed in initial group meetings, bring together system developers, end-users, and managers and are typically conducted with freely interacting group techniques. Unfortunately, these techniques are also prone to some of the classical relational problems and make successful outcomes critically reliant on excellent facilitation. The cost of fixing a requirements defect later in the development stage is much higher than the cost of identifying and fixing it in the early stages of development. In order to do this, the system requirements must be properly identified, analyzed and reviewed early in the development process. Rosemary Hossenlopp & Kathleen B. Hass's book *'Unearthing Business requirements: Elicitation Tools and Techniques'* tackles this vital area and details a process that primarily focuses on discovering, analyzing, documenting and managing system requirements.

Several processes and techniques have been developed to assist in requirements elicitation. In almost all projects, requirements elicitation is the process of gaining an understanding of the business problem or opportunity through interaction with the actual users and other key stakeholders. Hossenlopp and Hass go into great

details to explain how the business analyst works collaboratively with the project manager, core project team members, and other project stakeholders to create plans that customize elicitation activities to the unique needs of the project. The authors present a thorough technique that can be successfully used by business analysts. The text also examines the principles and practices for pragmatic, effective requirements elicitation and offers a detailed analysis on how to work collaboratively with project members and other core team members by analyzing the steps necessary to create customized elicitation activities for the unique needs of each project.

In a nutshell, *Unearthing Business Requirements: Elicitation Tools and Techniques* provides critical information about why and how to plan requirements definition activities and conduct elicitation sessions to capture accurate, complete, and useable business requirements. This is a practical guide that defines key business analysis terms and provides deep insight into the distinct area of business requirements determination.

Overview of Book's Structure

In projects, requirements elicitation is the precise process of gaining a deeper understanding of the business problem or opportunity through interaction with the actual users and other key stakeholders. *Unearthing Business Requirements: Elicitation Tools and Techniques* provides structured stage-by-stage information on how to plan for requirements definition activities and how to conduct elicitation sessions or workshops to capture accurate, complete, and useable business requirements.

What structurally distinguishes this book from others is that the book can be used as a practical guide and not merely a subject review, and it provides a clear insight into each distinct and intrinsic area of business requirements analysis. As the role of business analysts becomes increasingly critical in leading major change initiatives within private industry and public enterprises, Hossenlopp and Hass provide those in the profession with a practical tool and necessary techniques to operate effectively.

The book clarifies this vital role by presenting contemporary business requirements elicitation tools and practices, and explains practical applications of those practices. The various functions of the business requirements analysis process are divided into 13 chapters and within each chapter, the book presents individual activities to ensure that each area is targeted precisely and covered comprehensively with tables, models, and an implications analysis. Business analysts and project stakeholders alike will benefit from the topical focus, easy-to-understand guidance, and the practical tools included.

Highlights: What I liked!

With the continually changing business environment, the business analyst is becoming a critical project leader and business/technology consultant — helping organizations ensure they are investing in the most valuable projects, and then managing the project benefits. *Unearthing Business requirements: Elicitation Tools and Techniques* focuses on the crucial business requirements analysis role, and describes both the strategic and tactical roles of this important business task. There is a thorough analysis of different group facilitation methodologies and techniques, which reduce the impact of negative group dynamics, and help reduce the facilitator's burden of controlling relational problems during the SRLC. These approaches contribute to excellent group outcomes even with less than excellent facilitation.

When it comes to requirements management in the IT community, the formal approaches analyzed in the book have been tried and have worked tremendously well when applied to IT scenarios. The authors perform an excellent task of laying out their analysis in a way that explains why a formal elicitation approach may or may not work well with business IT systems. Most business analysts complain about how users are inept at giving requirements but many in IT fail to understand that business users and IT are two different cultures trying to speak with each other. Not only are the cultures different, but so are the languages.

Most BA's hold workshops to elicit requirements and use cases are the most common means, however, business users are not familiar with these use case terminologies. They can't specify their requirements in a structured way the use case expects them to. It will help them tremendously if they are told beforehand what is expected from them, and in what format. This book does exactly that. It can be used as a standard facilitation guide or its analysis can be molded into a mock exercise to provide a working example of how Business requirements are mined and what Tools and Techniques can be employed to elicit these requirements.

Shortfalls: What was Missing!

BAs get so many requirement changes because of the tendency to lump all requirements into one bucket. There are multiple types of requirements, and this book sometimes tends to combine them together. There are strategic and policy level requirements, and when we mix all these together, we are more often than not going to dilute requirement changes because users empowered to specify these different requirements are different. Operational users should not speak on behalf of policy makers, and vice versa, and we should create structures and mechanisms in our requirement discourses to discourage and eliminate this problem. I sincerely

wish there was more attention paid to this in the book because this eventually ends up impacting BAs, the users, and projects alike.

I would have liked to see different processes to identify operational requirements and strategic requirements, because their life-cycles are managed separately.

Who might benefit from the Book

What I benefited most from this book was gaining a complete understanding of the tangible process of eliciting requirements from a Project perspective. All cadres of readers from CEOs to Project and Business Analysts and Planners would find this book engaging and find that it offers, at the very least, a detailed and practical guide for gathering business requirements.

For those keen to understand the role of Business Analysts in the Project Management Execution process, how to review pre-project business analysis information, resolve requirement conflicts, setup elicitation workshops and discovery sessions, and how to tailor requirements elicitation surveys, this book definitely provides that. Readers will take away from this book a tangible process of eliciting productive feedback even from the most negative project stakeholder or user.

Conclusion

With the continually changing business environment, the business analyst is becoming a critical project leader and business/technology consultant by helping organizations ensure the project requirements are accurately documented, and then managing the project requirements. *Unearthing Business Requirements: Elicitation Tools and Techniques* provides critical information on how to plan requirements definition activities and conduct elicitation sessions to capture accurate, complete, and useable business requirements.

The heart of the business analyst's role is to drive various constituencies through processes to achieve consensus on the intricate needs and requirements of the business. Successfully facilitating meetings, whether one-on-one interviews or a larger presentation, is essential to business analysis. *Unearthing Business Requirements: Elicitation Tools and Techniques* provides a powerful tool that the business analyst can use to negotiate through the myriad of meetings, informal work sessions, and formal workshops that are necessary to develop business requirements. This book helps to facilitate the role of the business analyst as the business and technology strategist who provides the executive leadership team with the critical information, process, tools, and capabilities to make the best decisions.

Unearthing Business requirements: Elicitation Tools and Techniques aptly describes this process in detail and in a language that resonates across corporate classes. The

authors provide a comprehensive approach to Business requirements elicitation - one that addresses not only the Business Analyst perspective, but one that also factors in, the project, cultural and organizational dimensions. I recommend this book for anyone interested in requirements or enterprise analysis or rapid application development (RAD) architecture and those keen to analyze the best practices in the field of Requirements Specifications. What Rosemary Hossenlopp & Kathleen B. Hass provided in this book is a guide by which the organizations can benchmark their requirements expectations and both qualify and quantify business requirements elicitation in an enterprise context.

About the Reviewer:



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Hussein Mzee holds a BA in Economics and an MA Degree from Kokusai Daigaku (IUJ) Japan. He graduated in December 2007 with an Executive MBA in Project Management from the University of Texas at Dallas. Hussein has wide consulting experience with major IT and telecommunication companies both in Japan and the US including Lehman Brothers, IBM-Japan, Fuji Xerox, Fujitsu-AMD, Hitachi, and DHL. He is currently employed by Perot Systems and is based in the company's global headquarters in Plano, Texas. He can be contacted at Hussein.Mzee@ps.net.