Establishing a Center of Requirements Excellence (CoRE) – the People Perspective

> ”Users have trouble expressing their needs and desires in a way that the technologist can understand. There must be someone in the middle to interpret what the user is saying and translate it to IT.”
>
> *Chief Technology Officer, quoted in Software Magazine*

Businesses often wonder why their technology projects take longer than anticipated or end in failure. It’s been statistically shown that requirements errors are at the bottom of most of these problems – either the requirements are incomplete or they aren’t expressed in a way that business can understand (and therefore know what they’re approving) or that developers can interpret correctly (and therefore build what will meet the business need).

We believe that there are four root causes of these difficulties: people, process, technology and organization. While all are critical, let’s focus first on the people issues.

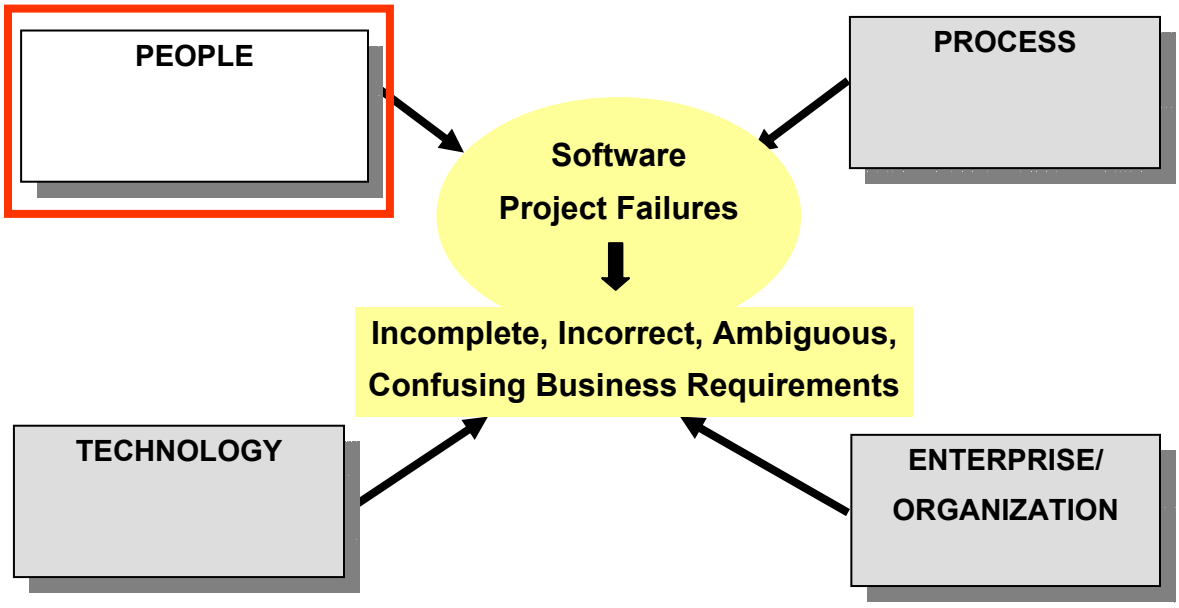

Figure 1

In many organizations, the job of documenting requirements for a technology project belongs to the business analyst or the systems analyst. We like to characterize this role as a *requirements architect* because we believe that it should function in much the same way as an architect who

works with a client needing a new building. An architect is someone who can model the solution in terms that the owner understands, but at the same time can interpret and translate the owner's needs to the builders. The blueprints an architect creates are invaluable for guiding the solution, and can be pulled out later if the owner wants to add to or change what's been built.

The same principle applies to business software applications. Unless you, the business owner, have lots of time and lots of experience, you will need a similar "someone in the middle" for your projects. The goal is to ensure that your business analysts become skilled requirements architects.

A first step is to examine who plays the "requirements architect" role in your organization, if anyone. Is this what your business analysts do (or should do)? What roles currently exist, and what skills and competencies are in place? Once you know what roles and skills are in place, you need to ask where skills *should* be placed throughout the project life cycle – what skills are most important and which are nice to have? Figure 2, below, shows a sample skills assessment that can be used, while Figure 3 is a project plan that illustrates some of the tasks that should be performed during this phase.

Business Analyst Skills Assessment	Unfamiliar With Input=1	General Understanding/ No Experience Input=2	Some Experience Requires Regular Oversight Input=3	Medium Experience Requires Occasional Oversight Input=4	Expert Can Lead/ Work Independently Input=5	Specific Details
Process						
System Development Lifecyle Methodologies						
Businss Analysis and Improvement						
Business Process Reengineering						
Requirements Analysis and Specification						
User Acceptance Testing						
Project Management						
Rational Unified Process (RUP)						
Rapid Application Development (RAD)						
Change Control Management						
Other						
Techniques						
Process Modeling						
Data Modeling						
Object Modeling						
Unified Modeling Language (UML)						
Object Oriented Analysis						
Object Oriented Design						
Agile Development						
Information Engineering						

Figure 2: Sample Skills Assessment

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		Task Name
1		**Assess current project work**
2		Determine status of current projects (nature, backlog)
3		Determine participants in new projects
4		Determine how projects requests are reviewed, approved and initiated and build Process Flow Map
5		Determine company goals and objectives
6		**Assess current state/usage of SDLC methodology**
7		Review current SDLC methodology
8		Build Process Flow Map of SDLC methodology with BA role swim lane highlighted
9		**Assess current state of BAs within organization**
10		Determine current job titles
11		Determine current role of BAs in organization
12		Gather and review current job descriptions
13		Determine where BAs are situated within the organization
14		Develop conceptual BA Assignment Relationship Diagram
15		Determine number of BAs by area
16		Interview representative sample of BAs
17		Present interview results to team and integrate feedback
18		**Assess recruitment practices**
19		Determine means of recruitment
20		Gather job postings
21		**Assess current competencies of BAs**
22		Review BA competency assessment matrix and revise - specific to organization
23		Assign values to skills
24		Administer BA competency assessment to BAs
25		Review and compile results of competency assessment

Figure 3: Project Plan

In order for your business analysts/requirements architects to be successful, a thoroughly documented process should also be in place. That way everyone knows how they should participate, when they should participate, who they need to work with, and what deliverables they are responsible for. Understanding and documenting the process also means that you can build a list of the education that will be required to bring your staff from their current skill levels to the competencies you need, and to develop a training plan. The education you provide will focus in various areas: process knowledge, modeling techniques, "people" skills such as interviewing, and tool usage are some examples.

Another important question is where your "requirements architects" should be housed organizationally. Business analysts typically report to a business area. But there can be advantages in developing a "Center of Requirements Excellence" for your business analysts. A CoRE can allow staff to be allocated to projects more efficiently and helps develop an enterprise-wide view of business needs and goals.

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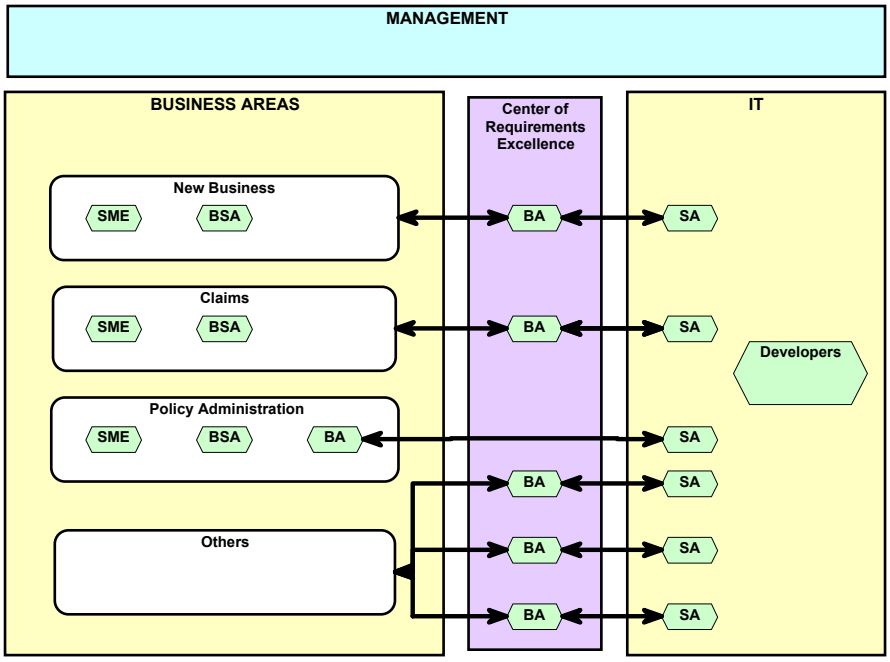

Figure 4: Organization Options

Discovering, documenting and maintaining good requirements is the most crucial activity of the entire development life cycle. Spending the time and the effort to build a business analyst competency means a better solution in the long run. Your goal is to develop people who can be the "someone in the middle" and can speak the language of the many project roles involved.

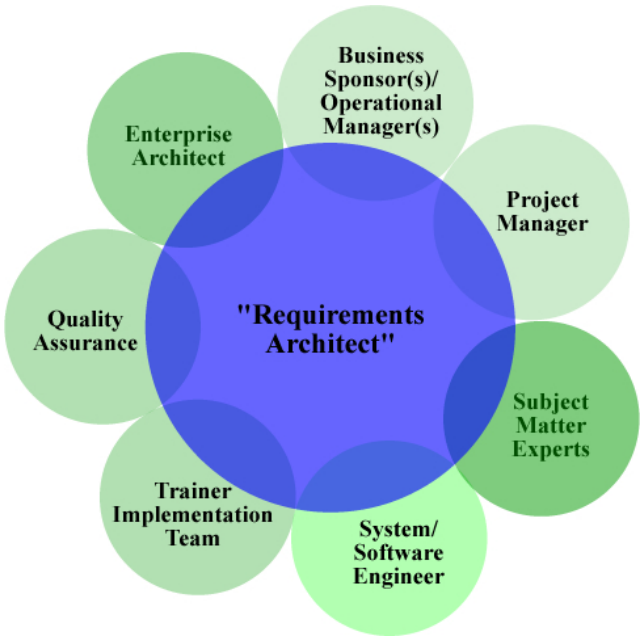

Figure 5: BA/Requirements Architects "In the Middle"

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