

## The Requirements Networking Group: A review of the past year's articles

by Rob Beckmann

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The Requirements Networking Group (RQNG) is celebrating its fourth birthday. In that time it has grown to be an important forum for the requirements engineering practice and a valuable resource for its members. I am excited about what the future holds in store for RQNG.

As we enter our fifth year of operation I'd like to take the opportunity to revisit the past year's articles. (I promised myself I would not let another three years go by until the next retrospective! <sup>1</sup>) Our article contributors have provided us with some great content and it's definitely worth a second (or third) look.

In this year's retrospective I have divided the articles into five major themes, the first of which is:

### *Ideas that Challenge Us*

In our day-to-day effort to get it right we can sometimes lose sight that there might be a different approach which might prove beneficial. We need to turn things on their head a bit and think about it a little differently. These articles address ask us to do just that – consider our approaches and attitudes in a little different light.

In Chris Gurney's "[The Big Freakin' Requirements Document Must Die. Here's Why.](#)" Chris asks us to consider the value and rationale for producing the typical requirements tome and if there isn't a better way to share, collaborate and achieve consensus. The response to this article was fantastic and obviously resonated within the RQNG community – the comments provide valuable insights and perspectives on the problem raised by the article. Not to be outdone Mickey Hadick responded with an article on "[Sharing Requirements for Fun and Profit](#)". In this article Mickey shares some solutions to the problems raised in Chris' article.

The articles "[Are Systems Engineers Complete Losers When it Comes to Communication](#)" by Chris Rupp and "[Closing the Gap Between Business and IT](#)" by Ivar Jacobson and Kurt Bittner talk about the persistent issues that IT folk and non-IT folk have communicating, and suggest changes in attitudes and approaches that will serve everyone better.

Another perennial concern is our ability to ensure we are getting to the true business need as opposed to simply documenting system features. In his articles "The Requirements of the Problem parts [1](#) and [2](#)", David McGinness asks us to think about the requirements of the business problem vs. the requirements of the solution, and how IT organizations can better partner with the organizations they serve to align to the true business needs. Robin F. Goldsmith expands on this idea and borrows from the sales profession with his article "[Get the REAL Value Proposition Right](#)" which explains how developing a value proposition and truly understanding your customer will help you sell your ideas and projects. In his

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<sup>1</sup> See "[The Requirements Networking Group at Three Years: A Retrospective](#)".

article [“The Next Big Step in Business Analysis: Performing Technology-Agnostic Business Solution Design”](#) Neal McWhorter explains why the requirements-based approach to understanding business needs is flawed and how organizations will develop a business-level engineering capability and the evolution of the business analyst role to address business design.

Michael Roy challenges us to re-consider the traditional linkage of project failure to a failure in requirements and how we should approach improving our requirements practices in his article [“Requirements Excellence for the Right Reasons”](#). Barbara Davis explains why fostering an innovative environment is an important contributor to the quality of requirements in [“The Role of Management in Quality Requirements”](#). And Chad Swierczek explains why a coach is an important and distinct role that can make the difference for your project team in [“Why Teams Accomplish More with a Great Coach ... and Why You Should Really be Using One”](#).

### *Great Tips and Techniques*

Since the Requirements Networking Group is a site devoted to the improvement of the requirements engineering practice it would be very surprising if there weren't some content that offered great ideas to make our jobs a bit easier and improve on the end result.

In his article [“Visually Mapping Requirements: An uncommon approach that just might make your job easier”](#), Hobie Swan introduces mind mapping – a technique to quickly and visually capture requirements. Jan Kusiak explains how to plan and execute an effective interview in [“How to Interview Your Boss”](#).

In [“Using a Requirements Composition Table to Assess Test Coverage”](#) Yuri Chernak describes how a Requirements Composition Table can assist testers in ensuring the completeness of their test coverage when requirements are incomplete.

[“A simple approach to business modeling”](#) by Francois Coetzee is an excellent primer on business modeling using UML and a use-case centric approach as is Derek Brown's [“The How To of Essential Modelling”](#).

In her article [“Use Case Survey \(2009\): Towards Adopting Enterprise Standards for Use Cases”](#) Moira Forbes does an excellent job of describing the history of use cases and their various conventions for practitioners to make informed decisions about employing the best practices in their organizations.

[“A Primer on Developing User Stories”](#) by Nick Naumovich is an excellent description of user stories and their usage on an agile project.

Steven Gara explains how Six Sigma techniques can add to the business analyst's tool kit when engaged in enterprise analysis, and solution assessment and validation in his article [“The Integration of Six Sigma with Business Analysis sub-disciplines to achieve desired results”](#).

In his article [“Modifications to COTS”](#), Bill Flowers explains the pit falls and how to be successful when implementing commercial-off-the-shelf software in your organization.

Barbara Davis provides an overview of the CCRSP (Comprehensive & Robust Requirements Specification Process) requirements methodology which stresses team collaboration and communication in her article [“The Seinfeld Approach to Requirements”](#).

In the [“Foundations for Defect-Free Requirements”](#) Elizabeth Stoops explains the ambiguity that often accompanies qualitative requirements, the business requirements that describe the boundaries of the system and what it must do, and how to address these ambiguities.

In [“Connect the Dots: 5 Tips on Traceability to Skillfully Control Change and Improve Quality”](#) John Simpson and Eric Winquist provide five practical tips on mastering traceability – an essential requirements management skill.

In their sixth article describing the Volere requirements techniques, Suzanne and James Robertson’s article on [“Atomic Requirements: where the Rubber hits the road”](#) describe atomic requirements and their attributes vis-à-vis the various stakeholders in the requirement.

#### *Business Analysis and Project Management*

Although “project management” may not necessarily be in your job description, business analysts are often asked to lead smaller projects and do collaborate with their project manager in defining functional scope, helping to identify priorities and risks, etc.

Identifying, planning for, and managing on-going project risk can be one of the more challenging aspects of project management. Some of the most common project risks and how they can be mitigated are described in [“How Agile Practices Reduce Requirements Risk”](#) by Ellen Gottesdiener. Cynthia West presents the [“Four Common Reasons Why Projects Fail”](#) and the solutions that can mitigate these project risks. In [“Quantum Mechanics, Buddhism and Projects”](#) Rolf Goetz espouses on why people have trouble grasping the holy trinity of time, scope and budget, and why an overly enthusiastic identification of project risks may present a project risk in itself in [“Heaps of Risks \(Why Managing Many Risks is Risky\)”](#).

In her article [“The Agile Business Analyst: Eyes for Waste”](#), Ellen Gottesdiener leverages agile and lean approaches to reducing project waste. Ellen goes on to describe incorporating Agile requirements modeling into collaborative planning workshops in her article [“Agile Requirements by Collaboration: Making Smart Choice About What and When to Build”](#).

In his article [“Requirements: The Key to Choosing a Best Fit Project Management Life Cycle”](#), Robert K. Wysocki describes how the Requirements Management Life Cycle (RMLC) integrates within a Project Management Life Cycle (PMLC) and how understanding that integration can improve the likelihood of delivering successful projects.

Jason Westland describes the [“10 Reasons Why Project Tracking is an Essential Practice for a Manager”](#) - a useful guide to why it is an integral part of the business and essential for project success.

In "[Project Failure: Is Technology the Answer?](#)" Curt Finch and April Boland inform us that although technology can be a useful aid it is really the project management processes supported by the technology that must be understood.

In her article "[If change is so great, why is it so hard? \(Part 2\)](#)" Gail A. Severini continues from where she left off in [Part 1](#) (highlighted in last year's retrospective) and examines several challenges to implementing change and how to overcome them.

### *The Business Analysis Profession*

As you are probably aware the business analysis profession can be hard to describe consistently, thus the emergence of such organizations as the IIBA (International Institute of Business Analysis) to define the role and the competencies.

Renee Saint-Louis describes how to increase the job satisfaction of employees in an analyst centre of excellence in her articles on "Engaging Employees: An Analyst Center of Excellence Strategy", parts [1](#) and [2](#).

In an update to their original 2003 paper, Derrick Brown and Jan Kusiak describe the basic skills a business analyst should possess in "[What is a Business Analyst?](#)"

David Heidt describes the organizational change issues and the training that business analysts receive can often conflict and how this can be mitigated in "[Fortifying the link between skill building and the BAs day-to-day job responsibilities](#)".

In her article "[Testing the Easy Way](#)", Chris Rupp explains the importance of good requirements and how certification from the International Requirements Engineering Board (IREB) can ensure a high standard.

Barbara Davis describes the "[5 Critical Requirements Steps that get Missed: What Business Analysts Are Not Doing](#)" and how you can assess that the BA's in your organization are up to the task.

In his article "[Beyond Programming](#)", Nilesh A. Raje describes the key functions that a business analyst must be adept at to be successful.

Vinod Rajan addresses the business analyst's interaction skills with the development team when the inevitable change requests starting to emerge in his article "[5+n CR related FAQs from the development team, faced by the BA](#)".

Bill Flowers describes business intelligence concepts and the business analyst role in ferreting out requirements along with recommended reading material in his article "[Business Intelligence \(BI\) - An Analytical Opportunity](#)".

### *What's Emerging?*

The requirements engineering field is subject to change and new ideas. These articles discuss what's emerging now and coming down the pipe.

Ronald G. Ross gives his thoughts on business rules and where the industry is headed in "[What's the Latest on Business Rules and Decisioning?](#)" In "What Business Analysts Need to Know About the Decision Model", parts [1](#) and [2](#), Barbara von Halle and Larry Goldberg provide an overview of the decision model based on their book "*The Decision Model: A Business Logic Framework Linking Business and Technology*".

In "[The Four Waves of Process Management](#)", Paul King describes total quality management and business process reengineering as the first two waves of process management, and how process excellence (the third wave) and process-based competition (the fourth wave) are creating a new age of process management.

Mitch Bishop describes how application rationalization is gaining steam and how you can position your organization to modernize itself and eliminate overlap in his article "[A Rotten Economy Has a Silver Lining](#)".

In their article "[Eliminate the Top 3 Productivity Killers and Build Great Products in Half the Time](#)", John Simpson and Eric Winquist describe how productivity is hindered by information silos and the loss of intellectual capital, and how the trend in social networking can be leveraged to facilitate collaboration and sharing on your projects.

I hope you enjoy reading some of these articles as much as I enjoyed revisiting them for this article. I believe the Requirements Networking Group is successful only because of the many contributions of its members, of which the articles only represent a small fraction. There are many comments, blogs and forums that our members contribute every day, as well as whitepapers and podcasts, that add value to RQNG and make it a useful resource for our members.

### **About the Author**

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<sup>2</sup> Certified Business Analysis Professional is a trademark owned by International Institute of Business Analysis.

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For your convenience I have appended a bibliography of the RQNG articles that were mentioned in this article, ordered by author's name.

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