

Solving the Requirements Problem - Once and For All

Top five issues at the root of the requirements problem



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Requirements. You know they are a major contributing factor to project failures. And given the number of software projects your organization delivers that are past deadline, over budget or fail to deliver business value, you know that requirements are a problem. Research from analyst firms confirms that organization is not alone in this situation. But no one has told you what to do about it – until now.

In an effort to get to the root of the requirements problem and provide actionable advice for solving it, Blueprint sponsored research by The Performance Institute. The research firm conducted two surveys and a myriad interview to find out:

- Why more organizations haven't been able to effectively address the requirements problem; and,
- In organizations that have made improvements, what actions have had the biggest impact?

To that end, The Performance Institute investigated commonly held but contrasting viewpoints, including:

- Are requirements addressed early enough in the lifecycle – or too early?
- Is too much time spent on requirements definition – or too little?
- Are requirements not adhered to as the project progresses – or are they too rigid to adapt to evolving needs?
- Are the wrong people charged with defining needs?

The results were enlightening. The research uncovered five main issues that lead to the “requirements problem” organizations experience today. We'll go over them briefly here. To learn more about each issue and read recommended practices to address them, download the full report.

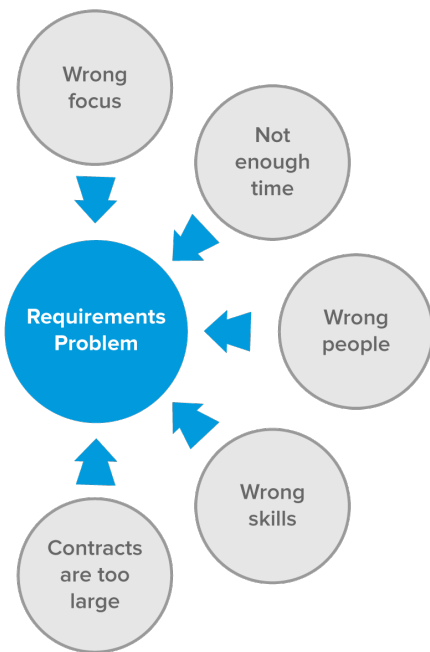
But first, some context: The survey asked respondents to comment on both their successful projects (if any) and on their challenged projects. “Challenged” projects were defined as those (a) delivered more than two months past projected delivery date; (b) 15% or more over planned budget; (c) the solution contained significant enough defects that it had to be re-worked to satisfy stakeholders.

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Issue #1: Too many projects focus on the wrong things.

Do you frequently find that software projects fail to address business needs? Are changes common during the development process? Do you discard requirements when projects are done? If you answered yes to any of these questions, chances are good that your organization focuses on the wrong things during the software development lifecycle. Through this research, it was found that “the wrong things” manifested in three key ways:

- Building the wrong thing – delivering something that doesn't meet a strategic, business need.



- Focusing on the wrong thing – working to meet budget and schedule to the exclusion of tasks more critical to success; for example, ensuring that stakeholders are on board with the project’s direction, especially if there are changes along the way.
- Valuing the wrong thing – discarding requirements at the conclusion of a project when they could be an asset for subsequent work.

Issue #2: Not enough time is spent on requirements.

As the saying goes, hindsight is 20/20. Survey respondents reported that the amount of time spent on requirements for successful projects was “about right.” Not surprisingly, respondents reported having spent too little time on requirements for challenged projects.

Issue #3: The wrong people are responsible for requirements.

Organizations can’t put just anyone on requirements definition and management, and expect positive results.

Think you’re good because your business analysts are on the task? It’s more complicated than that. Our research shows that there is a significant difference between theory and practice where the business analyst role (or functional equivalent) is used. Oftentimes, these folks are not brought into the project early enough, lack the appropriate skillset, or are not consistently used and fully committed to the project. In other organizations, solution vendors are creating requirements. This is never a good idea.

Issue #4: Business analysts don’t have the right skills.

If you have Business Analysts on staff, you’re on the right path to addressing the requirements problem. But it doesn’t end there. The title “Business Analyst” doesn’t guarantee that the holder of said title has the right skills – or enough skills – to define and manage requirements for difficult, complex projects. And having a certification in business analysis doesn’t mean that either, although it is a good indicator of experience.

Issue #5: Government contracting requests are too large to be successful.

Government organizations often struggle with another issue that can contribute to the requirements problem: the complexity of the contracting process. This can lead to significant delays between when a request is submitted and when the product or service is actually contracted. Because of this delay, the requirements information becomes Overcome By Events (OBE), and the final solution falls out of touch with the original business need.

"How can a business analyst...be expected to perform at a top level when his/her required competencies have not been clearly defined? They can't. Yet organizations worldwide are operating without defined competencies for their business analysts."

ESI International, 2006

Conclusion

Recognizing the root cause(s) of your organization's requirements problem is the first step to solving it. Chances are good one or more of the five issues exist within your organization. But if you're not sure which ones apply to your organization, that's OK. We dive deeper into each of these, and others, in the full report. We also provide recommended practices for addressing the issues head-on and eradicating the requirements problem – once and for all. Download the full report [here](#).

About Blueprint

Founded in 2004, Blueprint develops requirements definition and management (RDM) software. With its best-in-class RDM solution, Blueprint helps companies get complex software and IT project requirements right from the start. Blueprint solves many of the time-consuming, costly, and error-prone elements of defining requirements, ensuring that mission critical projects are completed on time and budget. Headquartered in Toronto, Ontario, Blueprint has global sales, operations and partner presence.

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