

Creating Precise Definitions Early

1/2-day Workshop

Say what you mean



Abstract

- Understand the need for precise definitions of problematic terminology
- Understand when and how to use each of the nine specification patterns
- Learn which terms to define and alternative methods to develop the definitions
- Review rich definitions and identify missing information
- Practice writing precise definitions for your words

The Problem

Natural language is widely used in systems development to specify plans, specifications, and descriptions. Natural language is familiar, but inherently ambiguous and difficult to use effectively. Critical information is missing, incomplete, wrong, and unclear and these problems can be difficult to detect.

While communication problems may arise from poor reading and listening habits, some can be traced to misunderstandings about the meaning and implications of the words themselves. Familiar terms such as “effectively”, “identify”, “small” and “invalid” will be made precise by an implementation.

If the meaning is not made precise before system implementation, developers will define – often incorrectly – the meaning. The issue is not if precision, but when it first appears and who can validate it.

The Solution

This workshop shows you how to create rich definitions of potentially problematic terminology. You learn to capture precise context-sensitive meaning with definitional patterns including: (1) entity profiles, (2) derived values, (3) task profiles, (4) action contracts, (5) derived actions, (6) derived conditions, and (7) quality profiles.

In addition, you learn to review definitions and identify defective information. Using your own documents, you practice specifying and checking definitions.

Audience

All stakeholders in system development and modification including project managers and leads, customers and users, subject matter experts, analysts and testers, system designers and programmers technical writers and trainers, and quality assurance personnel.

Outline

Human communication

- Understanding and misunderstanding
- What's wrong with natural language?
- What so hard about precision and context?
- Searching for the devil

Grammar review

- Nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, etc.
- Plain English
- Plain and rich definitions

Defining things

- Entity profiles, attributes, and relationships
- Derived values
- Derived conditions for adjectives

Defining actions

- Task profiles, action contracts, and derived tasks
- Structure of a task profile and derived task
- Structure of an action contract
- Specifying results and rules

Defining qualities

- Quality profiles
- Structure of quality profiles
- Determining measures for quality characteristics

Conclusions

- Usage strategies
- Tool support
- Measuring impact
- Review experiences

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