A B L ™ - Architected Business Language

The Architected Business Language A B L ™ was developed to address the eight key elements to successful business understanding and communication. These eight elements provide the underpinning of the three "sets" of communications that exist in an enterprise or organization – (1) Business people communicating with business people, (2) Technology people communicating with technology people, and finally (3) Business people communicating with technology people, and technology people communicating with business people. The overarching objective of A B L is to provide a communication mechanism that allows business expression of a problem or opportunity, that could potentially be transformed by technologists into mechanized or manual solutions. In understanding these objectives, the underlying design philosophy is to "keep it simple" – avoid unnecessary complexity.

The eight essential elements to successful business communication are:

• The Five Minute Rule

• A Structure

• The 7±2 Rule

• Clarity in Expression

• Consistency in Expression

• A Medium that is easily graspable

• Expressive Relevancy - Concise

• Timeliness

The eight elements:

(1) The Five Minute Rule

In the internet driven, multitasking, interrupt driven world we live in, we have learned that imposing extensive new requirements of any kind on our business partners, subject matter experts, and customers just does not work – and frankly, correctly so. Teaching our business partners a modeling language or symbology with dozens of constraints, elements, arrows, "crow's feet", and accompanied by a 400 page manual will not cut it! A good question directed toward ourselves as architects or technologists, is why should we impose

"anything" on our customers – after all, they are customers (partners?), not "users"! The Five Minute rule recognizes that we must, and we can communicate with only five minutes of explanation or learning, on something that may be new to our business partner. A B L was designed with this in mind – human consumable and understandable with five minutes or less of introduction, and yet robust enough for transformation and translation by technologists. A B L has three essential design elements – (1) a consistent naming convention, (2) a graphical notation, and (3) a template-assisted definition for each artifact necessary to understand and communicate.

(2) Structure

How the interactions between business personnel and technologists are structured will determine the clarity of the understanding that results. Structure comes from the three essential design elements discussed previously – naming convention, graphical notation, and template-assisted definition, and the ability of humans to absorb and understand anything of complexity – the 7±2 Rule – discussed next. The structure should allow for both summarization and granularity – depending on the audience in the dialogue.

Furthermore, structure comes from a defined "frame of reference" – a framework. A B L is based on The Enterprise Framework ™. The Enterprise Framework provides a set of collectively exhaustive and mutually exclusive artifacts that can be used to describe business representations to business people, and transformations from these business representations to technology personnel. Without a "clean" Framework, technologists and business personnel tend to keep coming up with "new" representations, because they are looking for the "one" representation to serve all needs. We suggest that this search is fruitless. If you have had the pleasure, privilege, or frustration of building a house, as an example, you know that to represent something as simple as a house (as in comparison, describing or representing a business strategy or business) takes multiple drawings. Elegant structures based one the Framework are simple to understand.

(3) The 7±2 (seven plus or minus two) Rule

We as humans have a finite capacity to hold information in our short-term memory – we are not computers! Our brains retain information in "clusters" or "groups". Numerous studies have determined that these clusters or groups are best understood if they are "limited" to seven plus or minus two items within a group or cluster.

This extremely important fact requires us to "represent" our thoughts to business people within these constraints to allow maximum understanding.

Human communication requires this structure in long documents, graphical representations, or general communications. So, for the most impactful communications and understanding, the structure would "cascade" to whatever level of depth is required:

- 7±2 sections (or elements in an overall diagram)

- 7±2 sub-sections in each section, etc. (or elements detailing each higher-level element)

If you end up with a dozen sub-sections in a section, either consolidate two or three sub-sections in to one, or create a new section to maintain this structure.

(4) Clarity

Clarity is simply being on point. A B L has no elements that are not fully traceable from the business descriptors to potential end solutions. Providing a confused message to your business or technology personnel only confuses them and your message will be ignored, or worse, misinterpreted.

If you are communicating about a marketing event – stay on point. First describe the marketing event. Then describe the relations of this marketing event to others that may be an influencer on this event. Given the right frame of reference, this is all that is required to sufficiently describe the marketing event from a business perspective. Three additional, more technology focused descriptors are needed to fully describe a solution (not the focus of this article), and these are focused on a technologist understanding: a technology neutral description which transforms the business understanding into "technology neutral" representation; a technology specific representation; and a solution specific understanding.

It is better and clearer to create separate representations for separate stakeholders.

(5) Consistency

Nothing upsets people more than inconsistency of your representations.

A B L defines a consistent vocabulary that is clear and unambiguous by defining each term used, providing extensive examples, templates, and with The Enterprise Framework, a mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive set of artifacts that are each human consumable. As an example, endless and fruitless discussions whether something is a strategy, or an objective, or a tactic, or a performance indicator, or etc. are removed by fully defining each artifact and its relationships. Without a frame of reference, one person's strategy is another person's objective. Definition of terms is just not enough.

(6) Medium

The message and the medium are both important. Specialized "tooling" and/or software actually get in the way of business personnel understanding the message. Frankly, why should business people learn a special tool to understand themselves?! The sequence of events should not be "find a tool or software, and then fit the problem to the tool", but *to start with a frame of reference* that this complete, and deliver an architected understanding in a medium that takes less than five minutes to understand. Too often, technologists confuse their need for or use of a tool or software, with presenting understanding to business personnel. Additionally,

if the only tool you have in your tool bag is a hammer, everything starts to look like a nail. That is why someone invented a toolbox.

The medium that should be used for human understanding of a business opportunity or issue is one that provides the greatest likelihood of comprehension, the greatest accuracy, the least possible ambiguity, at the lowest cost, shortest learning curve, and shortest time to delivery. There is little value from a business perspective other than these criteria.

(7) Relevancy

Without a frame of reference – a Framework that is complete and clean – the inventive juices of technologists will continue to look for or "invent" *the* one representation that will solve all needs. Realization is occurring that there are six fundamental and exhaustive set of understandings that describe simple or complex opportunities or issues. Years of history have proven this to be the case. With the five minute rule and the 7±2 rule, to date, these six "abstractions" can describe anything in an enterprise. We know that some may see this is quite a bold statement, and some reading this paper will, of course, be skeptical, but four decades of practice, with the main objective of the practice addressing business understandings and opportunities, have proven this to be the case. These six abstractions, very briefly (very briefly, and without detailed elaboration in this paper), are Strategies and Goals, Processes and Activities, Materials and Things, Roles and Responsibilities, Locations and Geography, and Events and Triggers. As a further example, our practice has found that the key element for increasing an organization's agility, is the understanding and representation of Events and Triggers. Suggesting that an organization's agility can be significantly enhanced by "handcrafting software solutions smaller and faster", does not make much sense as an organization's strategy for growth and competitiveness.

(8) Timeliness

Psychologists call remembering the first few items presented as a "Primacy Effect", and remembering of the last few items presented as a "Recency Effect". A B L design, with the other accompanying characteristics described in this paper, provides the underpinnings to timely communications. Business personnel (along with all of us!) differ to the degree of how dominant each effect is on their understanding of an opportunity or issue.

Additionally, each time interactions between business and technology personnel occur, anchoring on the previous status and understanding, and providing a continuous and traceable path to the most timely information *is imperative*. Continuing to remember the limits that "humans" have to remember context and content with all of the "information" that is thrown at them on a daily basis, providing current and timely information, within the context of previous interactions, will maintain and grow understanding, trust, and partnerships.

In summary, the Architected Business Language (A B L) provides a unique, quick, simplified, relevant, and precise language to facilitate business and technology communications. Only the essentials, without needless complexity.