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A Good User Story

PART 1: BUSINESS VALUE VS. SOLUTIONS

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One of the most important activities we do with our clients is gather business requirements and document them in the form of user stories. Writing quality user stories is an art form that must be perfected over time. Throughout my next few posts, I will touch on three key aspects for producing a good user story: (1) focus on business value vs. solutions, (2) decompose user stories into the smallest possible vertical slices, and (3) use clear language to eliminate the potential for misinterpretation.

The traditional user story format (As a... I want to... So that...) helps the team to focus on what business value will be delivered by completing the story. We try to avoid naming solutions within a user story unless there is a specific business requirement to do so. Naming a solution in a user story locks the delivery team into providing that specific solution, even though there may be several different approaches that would deliver the same value. Alternatively, focusing on a specific solution may not

provide the desired business value. Empower your delivery teams to identify the proper solution.

As an example, let's say there is a business group that needs their data to be transferred between two applications. A user story for delivering that capability should focus on the business need; what data should be transferred, how often it should occur, how long should it take, etc., as opposed to naming the mechanism for transferring said data.

Focusing on the business value gives us the opportunity to present multiple approaches, along with pros and cons of each option. Offering these options to the customer ultimately allows them to decide which approach fits best.

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