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Addressing Organisational Issues in Requirements Engineering Practice: lessons from action cases

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Abstract

The requirements phase of information systems development is arguably the most organizationally dependent phase and as such it could be contended that the methods used in this phase ought to explicitly address organizational issues. However the authors would maintain that there is a weakness in many of the methods that are employed in requirements engineering in that they are not explicitly embedded within any social scientific perspective. We argue that such a perspective would enable the systems developer to address organizational contexts and to engage with users (social actors) in such a way that it may be possible to find out about their social situations and as a consequence better inform the systems development process. In this paper we present the arguments for an explicit organizational perspective in the requirements phase of information systems development. We illustrate the argument through the presentation of action case studies in which one of the authors intervened in two situations with an explicit sociological perspective and analysis methods more commonly associated with qualitative social science methods. We conclude that there is an imperative need for those involved in the requirements phase to be explicit in their assumptions about organizations and critically reflective about the methods they use if they wish to understand the domain in which they operate.

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