



## Business Rule Solutions

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## Know What Your Business Rules Are About: Decision Rules vs. Behavioral Rules

*Unlike decision rules, behavioral rules do not pertain directly to determining the best or most appropriate answer (outcome) among alternatives. Instead, they are about guiding or shaping on-going business activity – i.e., behavior. Also, behavioral rules usually need to be applied at multiple points of determination for the very same matter, not just once.*

*These differences between behavioral rules and decision rules are pronounced. Three simple but typical examples in Column illustrate. Avoid force-fitting a decision-oriented approach to every business rule problem in business processes. It simply doesn't work!*

An operational business decision focuses on determining the best or most appropriate answer to an operational business question.

For a particular matter (situation or case) the question generally needs to be answered only once at some particular point in time. Consequently, the relevant decision rules are likely to be evaluated only at a *single* point of determination.

Example:

Consider the operational business decision *What should be charged for shipping an order?* For any particular order all decision rules relevant to the decision might be evaluated only when that order is taken.

Behavioral rules in contrast:

- Do not pertain directly to determining the best or most appropriate answer (outcome) among alternatives. Instead, they are about guiding or shaping on-going business activity – i.e., behavior.
- Usually need to be applied at *multiple* points of determination for the very same matter. Their purpose is to prevent undesirable situations that could occur at any of *various* (multiple) points in time.

These differences from decision rules are pronounced. Three simple (but typical) examples illustrate.

### Example 1.

Behavioral Rule: *A customer that has ordered a product must have an assigned agent.*

This business rule:

- Is *not* about selecting the most appropriate agent for a customer – i.e., *not* about the decision, *Who is the most appropriate agent for a customer?*.
- Does *not* apply only at a single point of determination – e.g., when an order is taken.

Instead, the business rule is meant to be enforced continuously – for example even if the agent assigned to a customer retires or leaves the company.

### Example 2.

Behavioral Rule: *A work group posted to a union site must include a union liaison.*

This business rule:

- Is *not* about selecting the most appropriate work group to post to a site – i.e., *not* about the decision, *What work group should be posted to a union site?*.
- Does *not* apply only at a single point of determination – e.g., when a posting occurs.

Instead, the business rule is meant to be enforced continuously – for example, if the current union liaison drops out of a work group, or if a non-union site to which a work group is posted subsequently becomes union.

### Example 3.

Behavioral Rule: *A student with a failing grade must not be an active member of a sports team.*

This business rule:

- Is *not* about selecting the most appropriate sports team for a student – i.e., *not* about the decision, *Which sport team is best for a student?*.
- Does *not* apply only at a single point of determination – e.g., when a student joins a team.

Instead, the business rule is meant to be enforced continuously – for example, if a student who is already active on some sports team should let his or her grades fall.

## The Bottom Line

Business rules like the three in these examples generally fit no particular pattern. For that reason they cannot be effectively managed in a decision table along with other parallel rules.

Instead, they need to be expressed as individual business rule statements following appropriate conventions (e.g., *RuleSpeak*<sup>1</sup>). Your organization has hundreds or thousands of such business rules.

Decision rules and behavioral rules are fundamentally different.

- Decision rules simply produce answers; behavioral rules indicate what you must or must not do. (Behavioral rules always carry the sense of *obligation* or *prohibition*.)

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<sup>1</sup> *Tabulation of Lists in RuleSpeak®: A Primer*, by Ronald G. Ross, 2013 – (free) on <http://www.brsolutions.com/IPSpeakPrimers>

- Decision rules can usually be applied at a single point of determination; behavioral rules usually apply at multiple points of determination.

These differences are stark.<sup>2</sup> Many approaches gloss over them, or ignore them completely, causing great harm. Avoid force-fitting a decision-oriented approach to every business rule problem in business processes. *It simply doesn't work!*

The text of this Column was extracted from *Decision Analysis – A Primer: How to Use DecisionSpeak™ and Question Charts (Q-Charts™)*, by Ronald G. Ross, 2013, available (free) on <http://www.brsolutions.com/IPSpeakPrimers>

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<sup>2</sup> For additional discussion refer to: <http://goo.gl/bVzfl>