



## Business Rule Solutions

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*This month's column takes a fun look at the reality of today's business governance practices as seen through the eyes of a bright newcomer to the work world, my older son. Here is the story of his introduction to business rules, or, rather, to the challenges of running an effective business when business rules are unmanaged. Any resemblance to your own organization is ... probably not just coincidental.*

## My Son, Business Rule Analyst Governance and Compliance Through Young Eyes

### Premise and Conclusion

My older son, a recent college graduate and now into law school, started his first day of work as an intern for a professional sports team. He called me at the end of the day, puzzled. "I asked them what my responsibilities were," he related, "and they said, 'We need you to know what we are supposed to be doing.'" After a long pause he went on, "I wanted to ask them why they didn't already know what they were supposed to be doing, but I didn't think that would be such a great idea my very first day there."

Let's see if at some level this sounds familiar to you. It turns out his area of responsibility had to do with ensuring operational compliance with corporate sponsorship agreements. You would think these agreements would be relatively simple, but, of course, there's no such thing as a truly simple business. The sponsorships are quite expensive, and they outline a complex configuration of promotional and other benefits, some automatable and some not, all usually tailored specifically for the individual sponsor. They are loaded with decision criteria and computation formulae (read "business rules") to govern the sponsorship relationship. And owing to the dynamic nature of the sponsors' marketing needs, the contracts are amended frequently, both formally and informally (via hand-shake).

To continue the story of my son's first day, they gave him a stack of contracts and amendments, operational schedules, and invoices. and told him to see if they all matched. Of course, they didn't. Not by a long shot.

By the end of the first week, he had become fairly fluent in the organization's governance problems. (Ah, young minds!) The contracts and schedules were all produced by different people at different times. Some of the schedules were hand-done and some automated. But even the ones that were automated often didn't match the contracts. The invoices were automated, but in many cases they too bore little resemblance to the contracts. The IT people were not much help. "They seem to speak a different language," my son reported naively. Bottom line: A number of the sponsors were becoming quite annoyed – not a good thing for a mediocre team in a mid-sized market.

But there was more. The sales reps were, shall we say, quite creative in what they offered the sponsors. Their terminology, which often found its way into the contracts, was highly

idiosyncratic. Yet they were talking about the same shared resources (e.g., banner boards in the stadium) that had to be coordinated real-time across many sponsors. They seemed oblivious to some of the company's rules – even though some, quite literally, were dictated by physics (e.g., a banner board can only say one thing at a time; there is only so much time during a game, etc.)

By the way, my son went to one of the team's games his first week at work. The team lost. Attendance was poor. Sponsors were unhappy. "I think it's going to be a long three months," he said.

After a moment of reflection, he added, "You know what really worries me is that I am going to figure all this out, then walk right out the door with all that knowledge. They'll be right back where they started. Doesn't seem to me like a very good way to run a business."

Welcome, my son, to the story of business rule mismanagement in the 2000s!