

USoft Studio

An IT project will be more successful, cheaper, and less risky if you have first-class specifications that describe the business conduct you want to automate or facilitate, and that express what you want to deliver.

USoft Studio is USoft's solution for capturing, making available, and managing high-quality business specifications, and using them as requirements for IT projects. You will be able to write and draw specifications faster and better, and allow stakeholders to give instant feedback more easily. In Agile projects, you will be able to combine this business knowledge with user stories. Good user stories are key to facilitating timeboxed agile teamwork. But they are tailored to that task. They are not also, in themselves, an optimal format for capturing business knowledge for the longer term and other practical purposes.

USoft Studio allows you to write user stories, formulate SBVR (Semantics of Business Vocabulary and Rules) business rules, give definitions of business terms, and draw BPMN process flow diagrams all in the same tool, combining these pieces of information to great effect.

Business specifications are *still* essential

In recent years, the response to the difficulty of creating good specifications has often been to specify less, build more, and show intermediate results more often to the commissioning party – at the end of each Agile sprint, for example. This allows you to get early and frequent feedback. Feedback is just as valuable as good specifications. It can replace them to some extent.

Yet at USoft, we believe that good specifications are entirely feasible if you have a strong methodology and matching tools. These allow you to capture how an organization wants to conduct an area of their business, in a consistent and re-usable format. That solves a familiar problem: it keeps you, when new projects come along, from making the same inventories again, going over pretty much the same interviews, research and documents, only to find something that had already been sorted out but disappeared in a drawer.

Combine requirements capturing and process design to improve your projects

It's in text writing: get some training in a well-researched standard such as SBVR and write much better requirements, business rules and definitions of terms after only a few weeks. If you don't, you probably end up spending the same amount of time creating spreadsheets, e-mails, and documents that are not nearly as effective in the long run.

It's also in doodling, drawing and designing: from pictures of organisational structures to decision trees, decision tables, and process flow. Get some training in OMG's BPMN standard for process modelling and notation to improve your process flow diagrams, or use DMN and draw the structure of decisions that must be made at some point in the process, or use CMMN's case management principles and draw a good picture of how cases move through your organisation.[1]

How does USoft Studio work?

At the heart of USoft Studio is a natural-language processor that is able to analyse the grammar and syntax of your writings automatically. Definitions of terms are made available from each occurrence of the term automatically. Statements are recognized automatically as being business rules, advices, requirements, user stories, or definitions of terms (nouns but also verbs). Related statements are automatically interconnected, grouped and organised on the screen, and you can automatically navigate between them as if by clicking a hyperlink. This way, it becomes very easy to see if there is anything you missed or, conversely, if you have been writing the same thing or nearly the same thing twice.



Figure 1: Your writing is automatically structured made navigable and highly searchable, and optionally colour-coded.

USoft Studio combines natural-language processing with USoft's BPMN 2.0 process modelling tool in a single easy-to-use solution. The integration of these two components gives you automatic cross-references between the text you use in process diagrams and the text you write in business rules, definitions of terms, user stories, and requirements.

While you are busy writing and drawing, USoft Studio takes care of administrative tasks. It structures requirements and other formulations by reacting to your writing. When you define a new concept, all relevant existing information is automatically grouped and presented on the screen. Text is optionally colour-coded as a visual aid, following the characteristic SBVR red-green-blue colour scheme.

[1] Not all these diagram techniques are native to USoft Studio. The tool includes BPMN 2.0, entity-attribute-relationship diagrams, and DEMO organisation construction diagrams natively (the latter at an additional license fee). DMN's DRD diagrams are a beta feature available only after consultation. But you can refer to any type of external diagram or decision table by making external links from individual requirements or business rules.

Repository-based, Single Point of Truth

USoft Studio is a simple website on top of a powerful database. No files or documents are involved. Instead, all your content is kept in a central, structured repository. This is the best way of building a valuable network of terms, definitions, rules and other specifications.

Such a repository enables Single Point of Truth. Each specification is stored only once, even if it is presented in many different contexts and reached from many different entry points. Single Point of Truth is obviously desirable in a large specification base, but it is very hard to achieve with conventional files, spreadsheets or documents, because it is too easy for people to make copies in these formats.

Newcomers to repositories often feel that they don't own their specifications as fully as when these are contained in a local and portable document, but they quickly find that the opposite is true.

They can still pull out the material from the repository at any time in a range of formats including XML, HTML, PDF, MS Word and MS Excel. Although USoft Studio is not a word processor, you can choose to arrange specifications in chapters and subchapters even within the tool, and then export them as an organised document.

But your material is no longer a document by nature, so you can treat it at the same time as structured data, sort it by category, status, and another 50 USoft-defined and user- defined attributes, use these subdivisions to query and filter what you are looking for, and keep track of different versions of the same material over time.

Stay in charge

With USoft Studio's features, you stay in charge. For business rules, you can determine and then track when the rule became (or will become) effective and when it ceases to be effective. For requirements, you can check whether the requirement has been approved, checked, satisfied... and by whom and when.

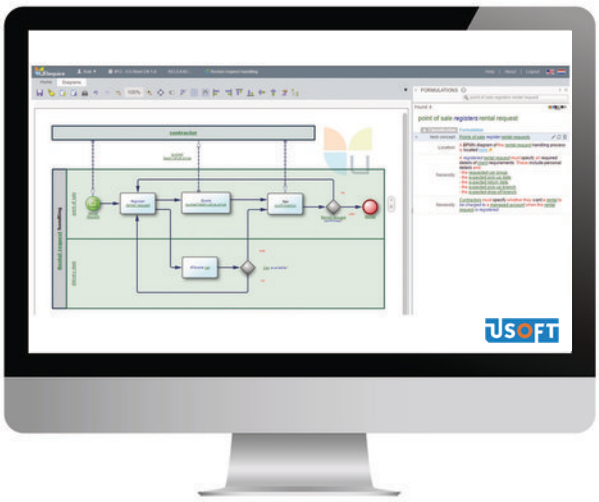


Figure 2: Automatic cross-referencing between diagrams and text.

All changes in the material are logged. You can track in several ways when each element appeared and when it was last changed, who introduced it, and who last changed it, without having to enter that information manually.

Many approaches suggest using process flow diagrams to clarify your business requirements, but it can be difficult to keep diagrams and textual specifications in sync if you have to do that manually. In USoft Studio, diagrams and text are automatically cross-referenced and navigation between them is established in both directions.

USoft Studio has simple but effective authorization features. Team members are easily divided into read-only users, authors, reviewers and owners.

USoft Studio licenses are defined in terms of number of users, not numbers of projects. You are allowed any number of copies of your own material.

You could, for example, easily move some subset to a sandbox copy, work on that in peace and away from your audience, and then merge the result back into the main repository. If you have a read-only audience, you can publish a crystallised version for them, make a copy, and start preparing the next version while your audience is using the first.

USoft Studio "get it right first time"

We believe in business rules

USoft believes in a fact-based approach where current or desired business conduct is expressed in simple, clear and convincing business rule statements. We invite you to use SBVR as an underlying philosophy – a lot of this philosophy is embodied in the tool's behaviour even if you are not aware of it. This will keep you from concentrating too much on technical details at specification time. You take a broader view and express how you want your organisation to work. Any software supporting that must follow suit.

Good SBVR business rules are practicable and directly enforceable, as opposed to policy statements and statements of intentions that are almost always too vague for development teams. They are stated in standard, natural business English (USoft Studio also supports Dutch). All stakeholders, from business owners to members of the development and test teams, are confronted with the exact same rule statements.

For those who wish to demonstrate their compliance with a regulation, or to track or analyse to what extent their (as-is or to-be) business practice is compliant with a regulation, business rules are the format of choice. USoft has developed a methodology of leveraging USoft Studio to capture point-to- point relationships between individual business rules and individual legal requirements that are navigable in both directions.

Rules Engine

USoft Studio is a stand-alone tool for requirements, user stories, business rules, and definitions of terms. It is also the specification environment for USoft's rules engine, the core component of the USoft execution platform. This engine executes rules in the same way that USoft Studio organises them: as an automatically constructed and maintained, bi-directional nodal network that is activated and navigated "from all sides" without the need for a predefined hierarchical structure.

At USoft we understand organisations desire the freedom to design their own business operations. We believe software may never pose an obstacle and should instead clear that path.

Innovation happens when you have the room to pave your own way, try new ideas and capitalise on opportunities. USoft makes this possible. With our intelligent and flexible low-code platform you can expect complete control over your data and what you want to achieve. Our technology is engineered around the power of business rules so that your organisation's context is always at the heart of everything you do.

Experience the freedom to embark on your own journey to those areas that bring differentiation and competitive advantage.

Explore new possibilities

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