

5 Ways to Identify a True Subject Matter Expert



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SHAW SYSTEMS WHITE PAPER

Not everyone's an expert. How many times has your organization contracted consultants who simply don't meet your expectations? Rather than bringing in-depth knowledge that enhances your project effort, you find that they don't really know the subject matter, they distract you from your tasks, and they force other project team members to support their deliverables.

Subject matter experts (SMEs) should have special, in-depth knowledge from both a business and IT perspective that when shared with others, significantly enhances performance within the organization. They should bring real-world examples, best practices, and tricks of the trade that will positively impact your business. They should be the go-to resource who helps resolve complex issues. Most importantly, they should be able to hit the ground running once they understand your unique environment and work independently to deliver project tasks.

If a resource is truly a SME, their biggest value will be found in a few key areas:

1. Improved requirements definition
2. Matching project priorities to industry best practices
3. Placing user needs at the center of the design process to impact product delivery and product strategy.

So, how does one identify a true SME? Here are a few tips:

1. SMEs have a documented history of working in the area for which they are an expert.
2. SMEs have actually done the work. They've rolled up their sleeves throughout their career. Therefore, they not only understand your challenges, but the details within those challenges. They've spec'd requirements, written test scripts, supported data validation, documented business and conversion processes, and managed critical projects.
3. SMEs understand industry best practices and can communicate those insights to help you improve your business model.

4. SMEs understand user needs. When you design a product to meet a need, you're addressing the problems, concerns, or desires of the people who will utilize it on a regular basis. SMEs know how to meld design to improve user performance.

5. SMEs lower project costs. SMEs deliver project tasks more quickly, more accurately, and more thoroughly than your typical Business Analyst. While they may bill at a higher rate, overall project costs are reduced.

In my experience, the best SMEs can do it all. They serve equally well as a project manager, a business analyst, or a QA lead supporting the business or IT. They can write test scripts, and with equal adeptness develop spec requirements. Why? They've been working in your industry getting their hands dirty their entire career. They like what they do and can't wait for the next adventure. They positively shape a product's direction as it goes through its development life cycle.

Another plus: SMEs aren't tied to any specific application. Typically, a project is better served with a high-level SME versus just an application expert. Why? It's easier to learn a new application than to learn the business.

About **SHAW RESOURCE SOLUTIONS**

Raleigh deShazo manages **SHAW RESOURCE SOLUTIONS**, Shaw Systems' consulting division. The group has successfully delivered hundreds of projects for companies across the country, including some of the nation's largest banks and finance companies.

From Project Managers to Developers to Subject Matter Experts and everything in between, **SHAW RESOURCE SOLUTIONS** has the critical resources your project needs. Proficient in your industry and systems, these consultants will address your business and technical challenges and deliver the results you expect. The group's services span the complete solution lifecycle, including project management, strategic planning, integration strategy, operational assessments, reporting, conversions, upgrades, training, systems enhancements, and more.