

Analyzing Natural-Language Requirements: Industrial Needs and Scalable Solutions

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Introduction

- **NL requirements come in a variety of forms**
- **NL requirements won't go away**
- **Many and varying industrial needs**
- **NLP has made a huge leap forward in recent years**
- **Research leading to practical and scalable solutions**
- **Context factors, working assumptions**

Outline

- **Report on a variety of research projects**
- **Collaborations with industry**
- **Various objectives and applications**
- **Examples from automotive and satellite**
- **Lessons learned**

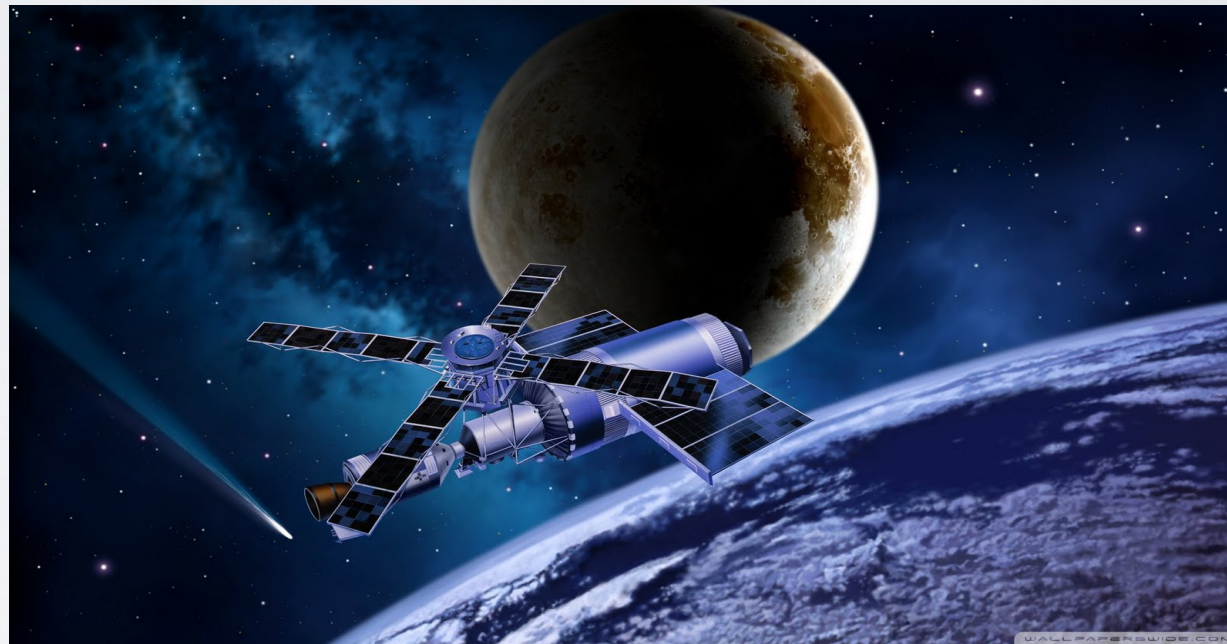
Experience

- **Compliance with requirements templates**
- **Change impact analysis**
- **Domain knowledge extraction**
- **Requirements completeness assessment**
- **Requirements-driven testing**
- **Product lines and configuration**

Checking Compliance with Templates

Representative Context

SES[▲]
your satellite company



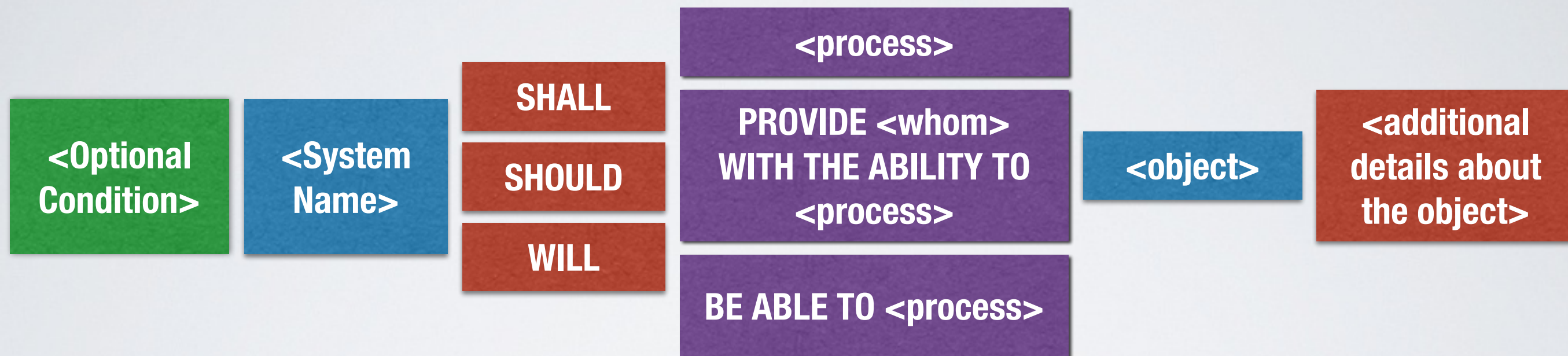
Challenges

- **Large projects (e.g., ESA)**
- **Hundreds of natural language requirements**
- **Tiers of requirements**
- **Many stakeholders**
- **Requirements capture a contract**
- **Requirements frequently change**

Compliance with Templates

- Templates and guidelines address **ambiguity and incompleteness** in NL requirements
- Large number of requirements
- People tend **not to comply** with templates and guidelines, unless they are **checked and enforced**
- **Scalable and accurate automation** is needed
- Existing tools (DODT, RQA) require **glossary or ontology**

Rupp's Template



As soon as the visual notification is presented
the SOT Operator shall launch the local S&T application as a
separate process.

Glossary?

Approach

- **Text chunking:** identifies sentence segments (chunks) without performing expensive analysis
- **NLP parsing** only when needed
- Templates: **RUPP and EARS**, expressed as BNF grammars and then pattern matching rules
- **Practical:** No reliance on glossary, ontology ...
- **Scalable:** Hundreds of requirements in a few minutes

Text Chunking

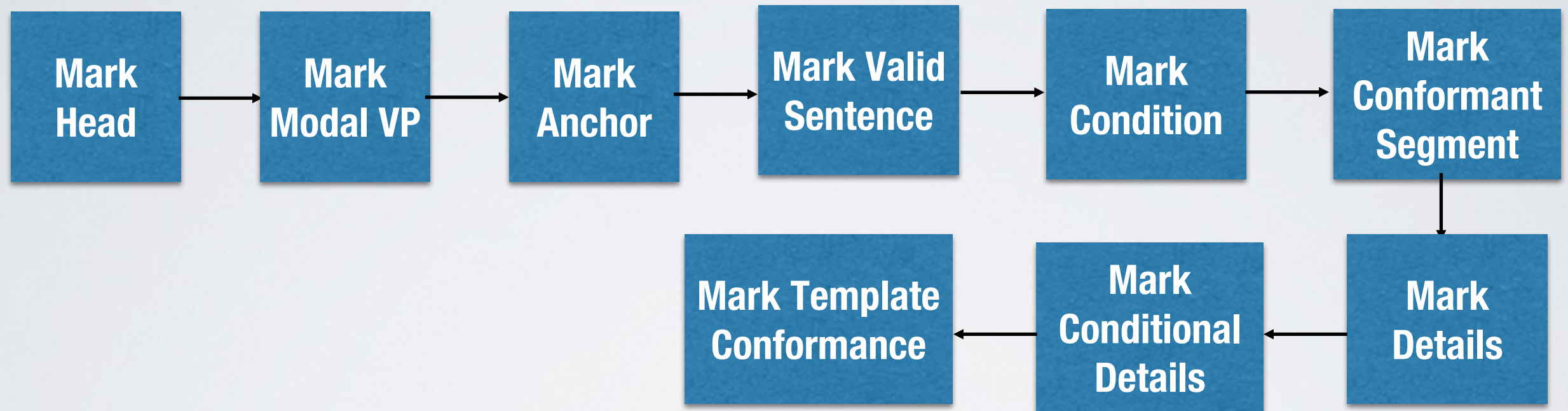
Process of decomposing a sentence into non-overlapping segments.

As soon as the visual notification is presented the SOT Operator shall launch the local S&T application as a separate process.

Noun Phrase (NP) Verb Phrase (VP) Subordinate Clause (SBAR)

Prepositional Phrase (PP) Adverbial Phrase (ADVP)

Template Conformance Checking



Valid Sentence

As soon as the visual notification is presented the SOT Operator shall launch the local S&T application as a separate process.

CONFORMANT

Evaluation



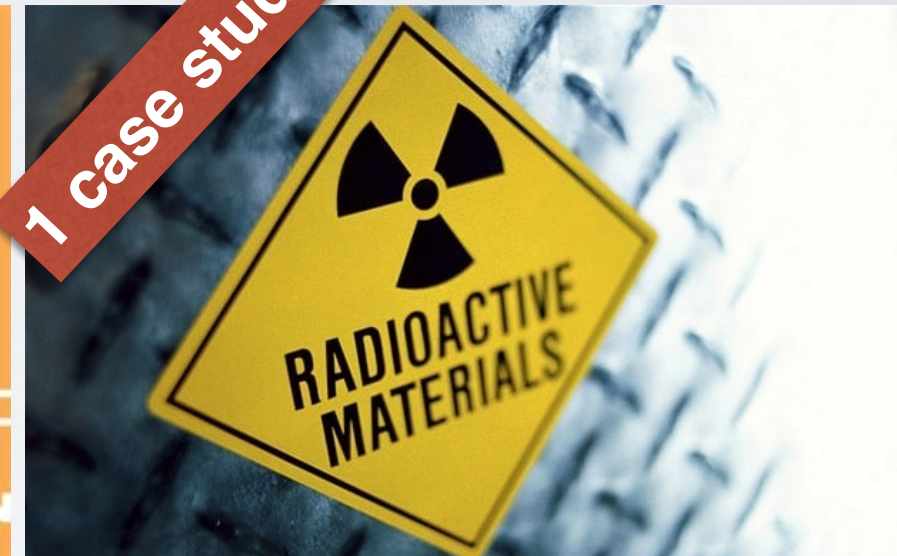
2 case studies



1 case study



1 case study



380 Requirements
380 Requirements

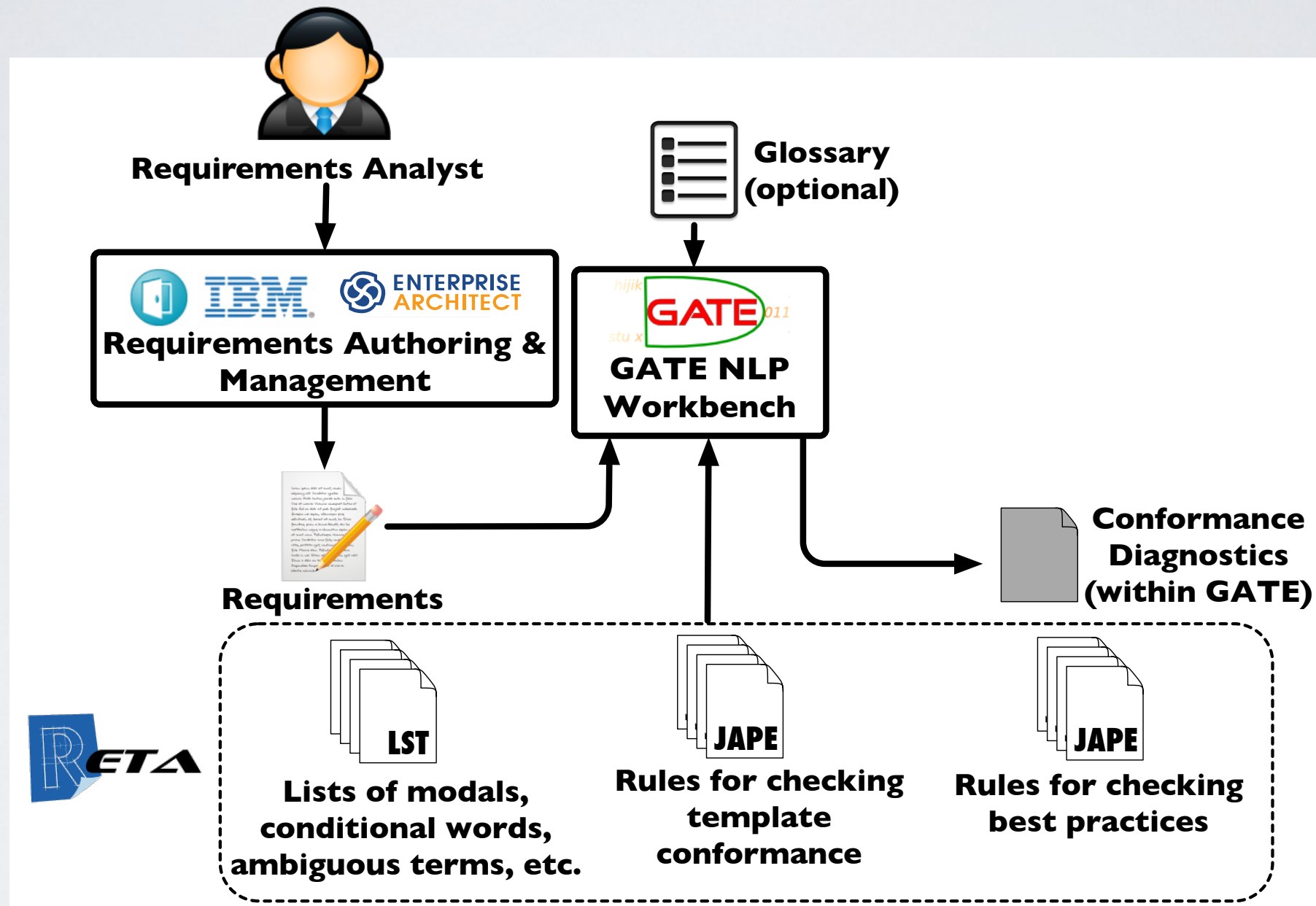
110 Requirements

890 Requirements

Results

- **Absence of glossary** has no significant impact on the accuracy of template conformance checking
- Avg. Recall - **94.3%**
- Avg. Precision - **91.6%**

Tool: RETA



<http://sites.google.com/site/retanlp/>

Change Impact Analysis

Supporting Change

- Requirements change frequently
- Changes have **side-effects** on other requirements, design decisions, test cases ...
- How do we **support such changes** in ways that scale to hundreds of requirements or more?
- **Automated impact analysis**

Inter-Requirements



**Inter-Requirements
Change Impact Analysis**

Approach

- Hundreds of requirements
- **No traceability**
- We propose an **approach** based on: (1) Natural Language Processing, (2) Phrase syntactic and semantic similarity measures
- **Results: We can accurately pinpoint which requirements should be inspected for potential changes**

Example

- **R1:** The mission operation controller shall transmit satellite status reports to the user help desk.
- **R2:** The satellite management system shall provide users with the ability to transfer maintenance and service plans to the user help desk.
- **R3:** The mission operation controller shall transmit any detected anomalies with the user help desk.

Change

- **R1:** The mission operation controller shall transmit satellite status reports to the user ~~help desk~~ **document repository**.
- **R2:** The satellite management system shall provide users with the ability to transfer maintenance and service plans to the user help desk.
- **R3:** The mission operation controller shall transmit any detected anomalies with the user help desk.

Challenge #1

Capture Changes Precisely

- R1: The mission operation controller shall transmit satellite status reports to the user ~~help desk~~ **document repository**.
- R2: The satellite management system shall provide users with the ability to transfer maintenance and service plans to the user help desk.
- R3: The mission operation controller shall transmit any detected anomalies with the user help desk.

Challenge #2

Capture Change Rationale

- R1: The mission operation controller shall transmit satellite status reports to the user help desk document repository.
- R2: The satellite management system shall provide users with the ability to transfer maintenance and service plans to the user help desk.
- R3: The mission operation controller shall transmit any detected anomalies with the user help desk.

Challenge #2

Change Rationale

- R1: The mission operation controller shall **transmit** satellite status reports to the user help desk document repository.
- R2: The satellite management system shall provide users with the ability to transfer maintenance and service plans to the user help desk.
- R3: The mission operation controller shall **transmit** any detected anomalies with the user help desk.

Possible Rationales:

- 1:** We want to globally rename “user help desk”
- 2:** Avoid communication between “mission operation controller” and “user help desk” (R3)
- 3:** We no longer want to “transmit satellite status reports” to “user help desk” but instead to “user document repository” (only R1)

Solution Characteristics

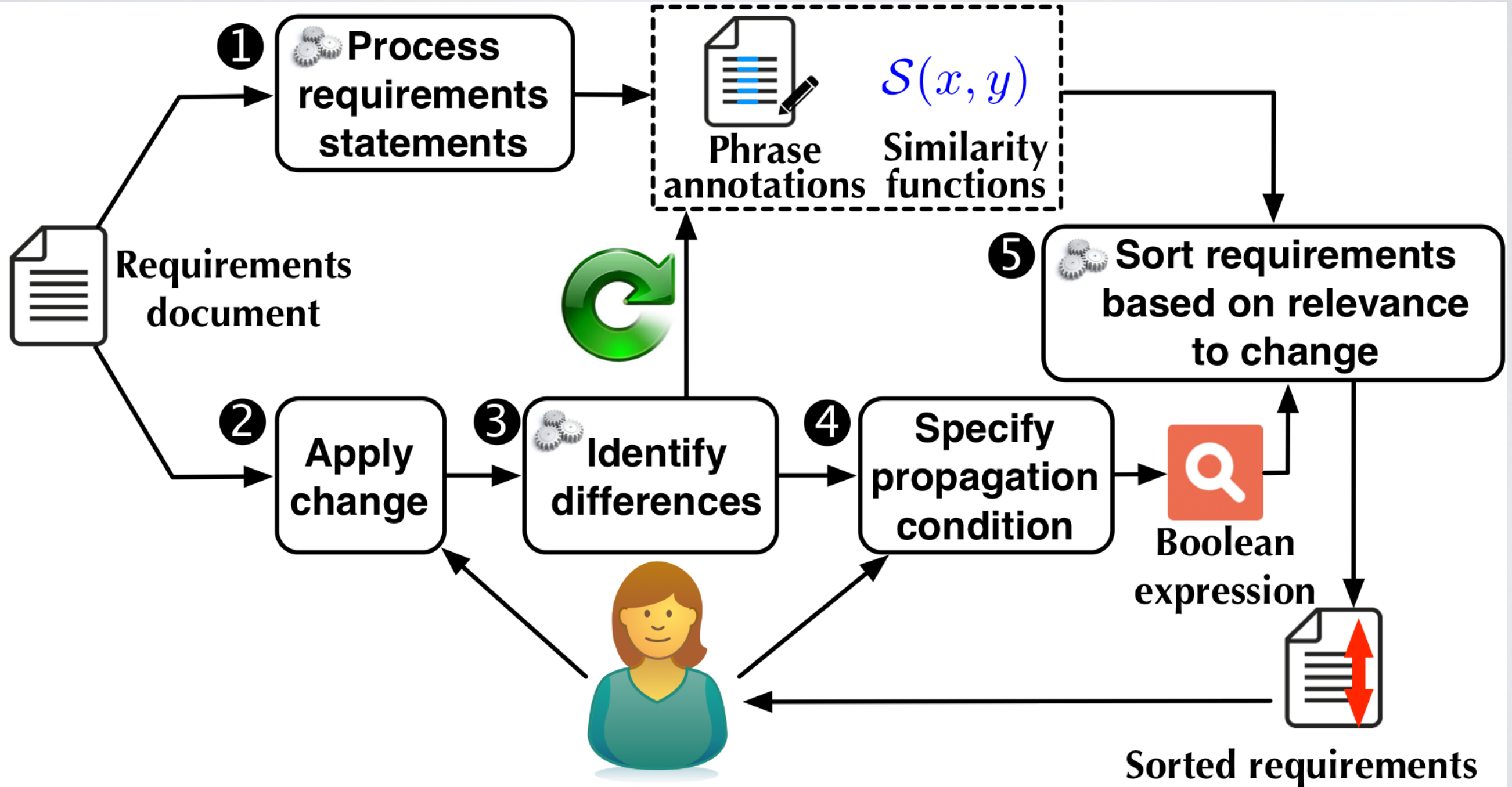
- **Account for the phrasal structure of requirements**

The mission operation controller shall transmit satellite status reports to the user ~~help desk~~ document repository.

user help desk, Deleted
user document repository, Added

- Consider **semantically-related phrases** that are not exact matches and **close syntactic variations** across requirements
- Account for **change rationale** expressed by user

Narcia



<https://sites.google.com/site/svvnarcia/>

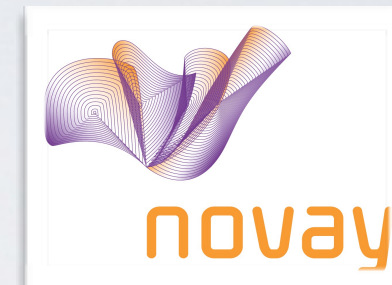
Evaluation



1 case study



**158 Requirements
9 change scenarios**

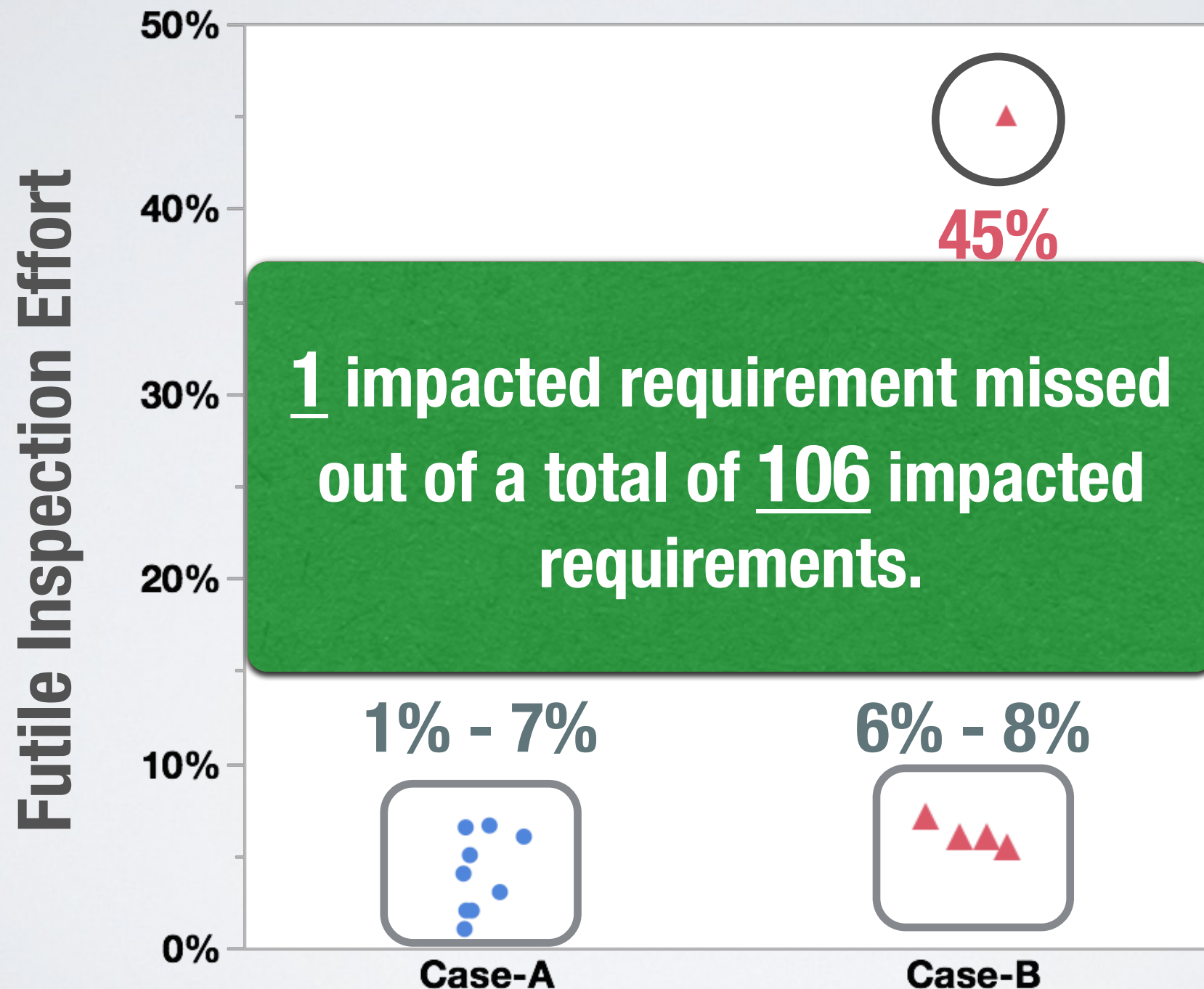


1 case study

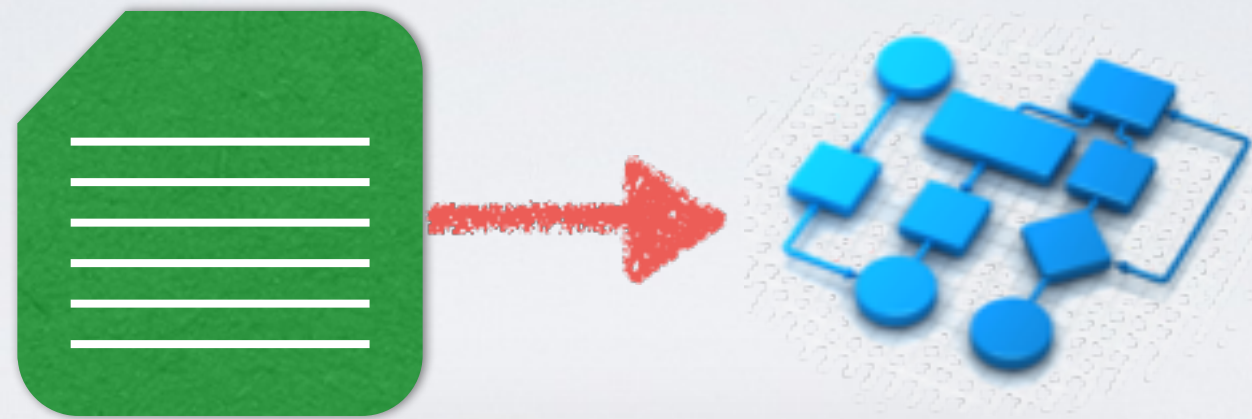


**72 Requirements
5 Change
Scenarios**

Effectiveness of Our Approach



Requirements to Design

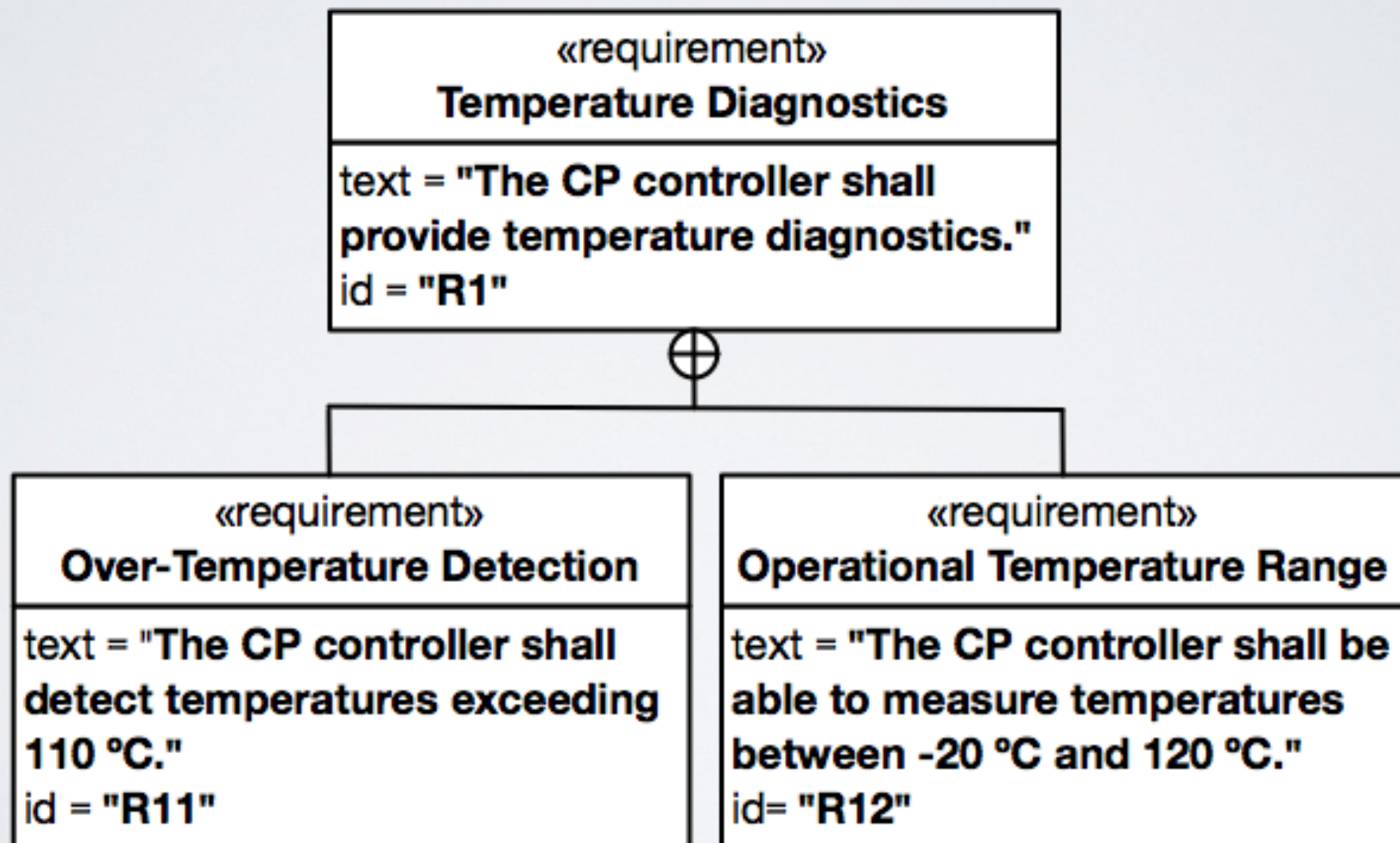


**Requirements-to-Design
Change Impact Analysis**

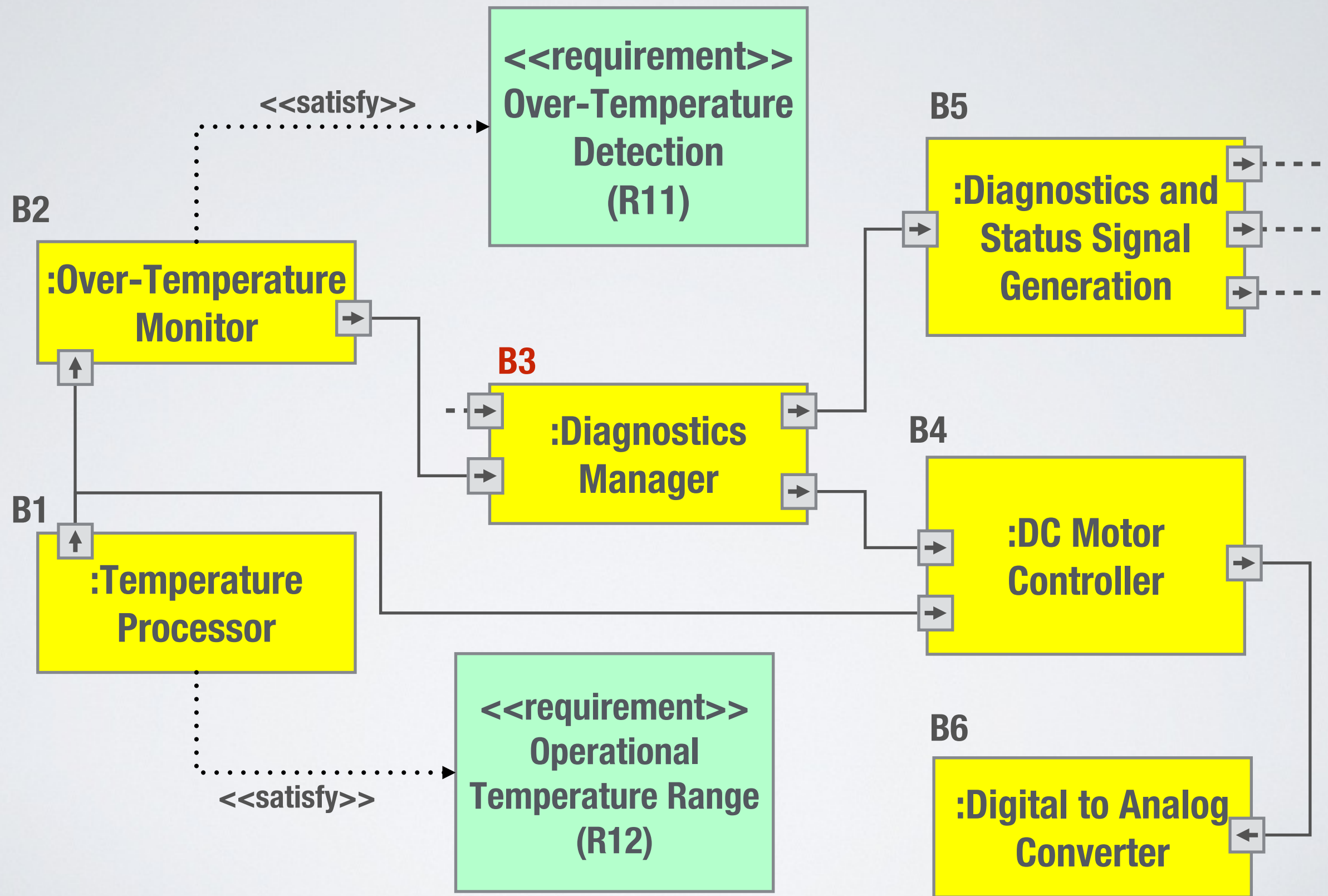
Motivations

- **Rigorous change management** required by many standards and customers in safety critical systems, and embedded systems in general in many industry sectors
- Impact of requirements changes on **design decisions**
- **Complete and precise design impact set**
- **SysML** commonly used as embedded and cyber-physical system design representation

Requirements Diagram



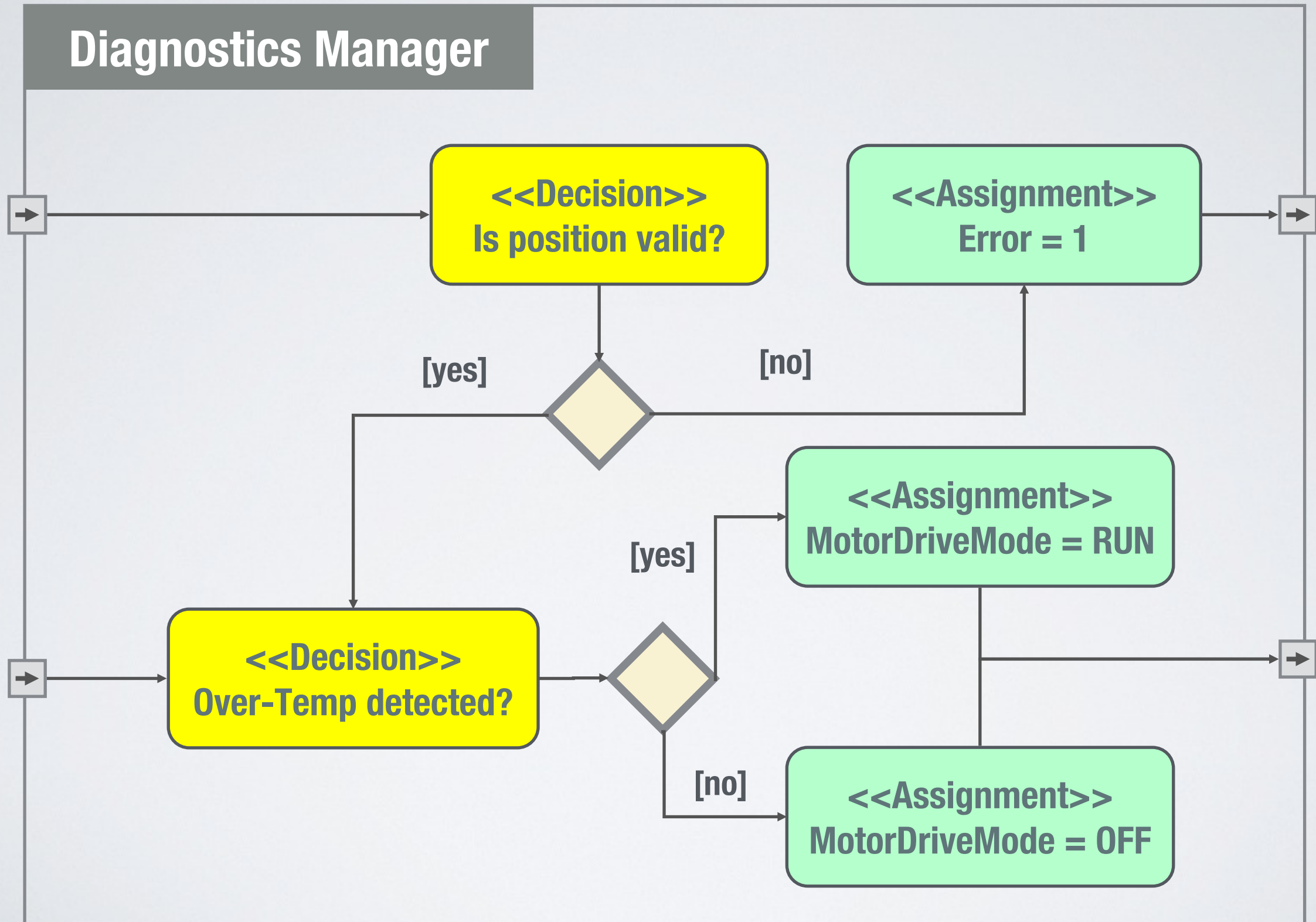
Structural Diagram



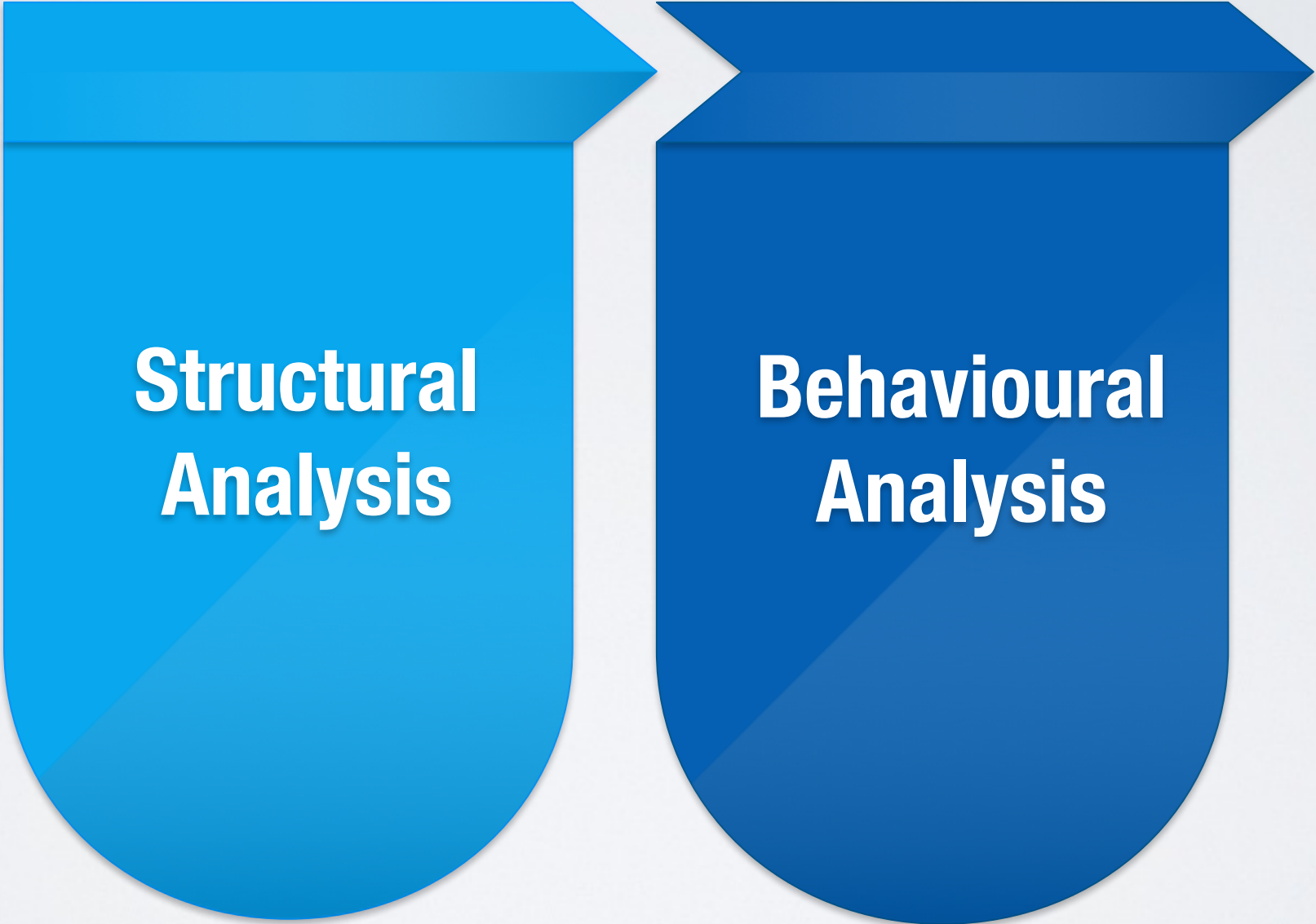
Behavioural Diagram

B3

Diagnostics Manager



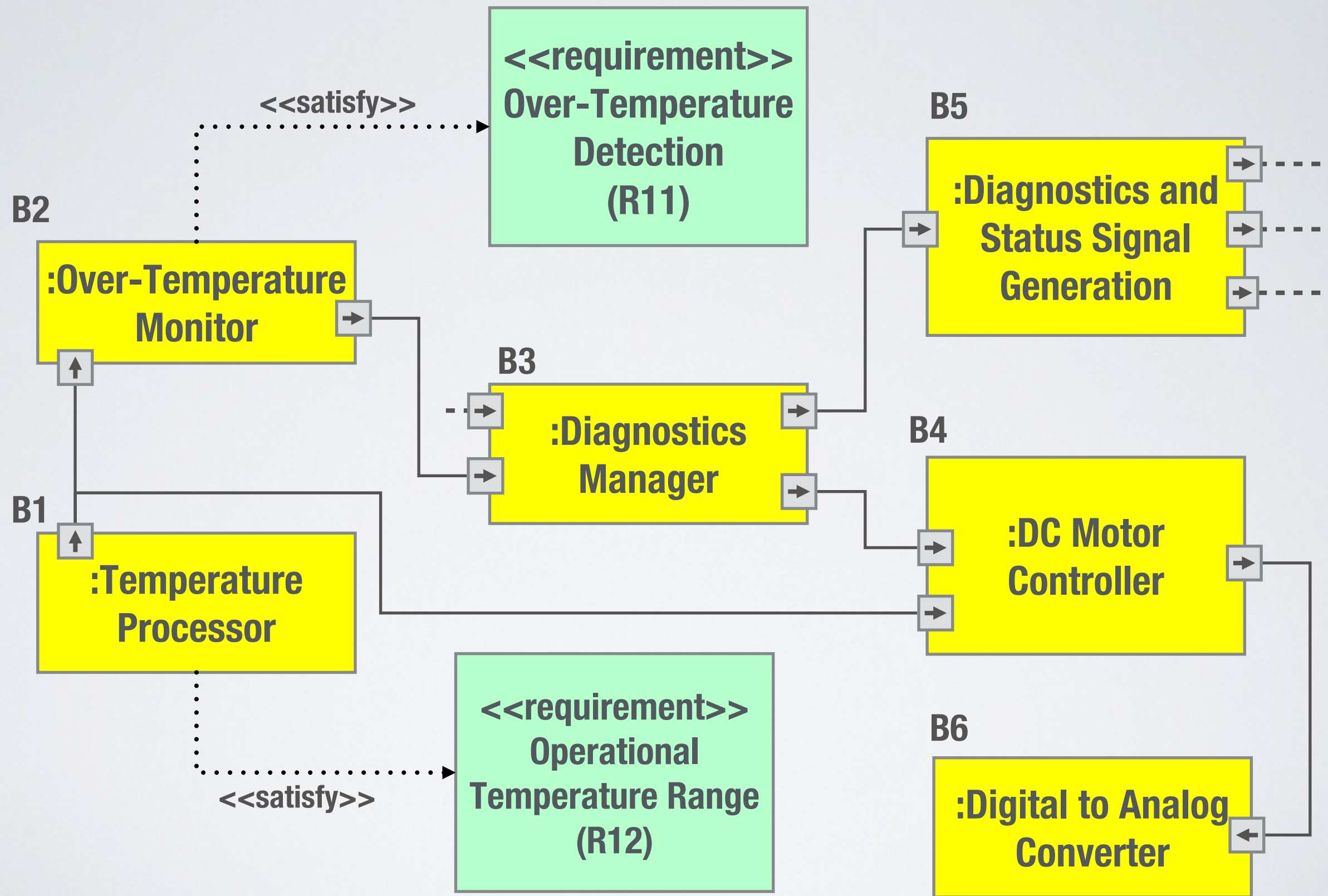
Compute Impacted Elements



**Structural
Analysis**

**Behavioural
Analysis**

Structural Diagram

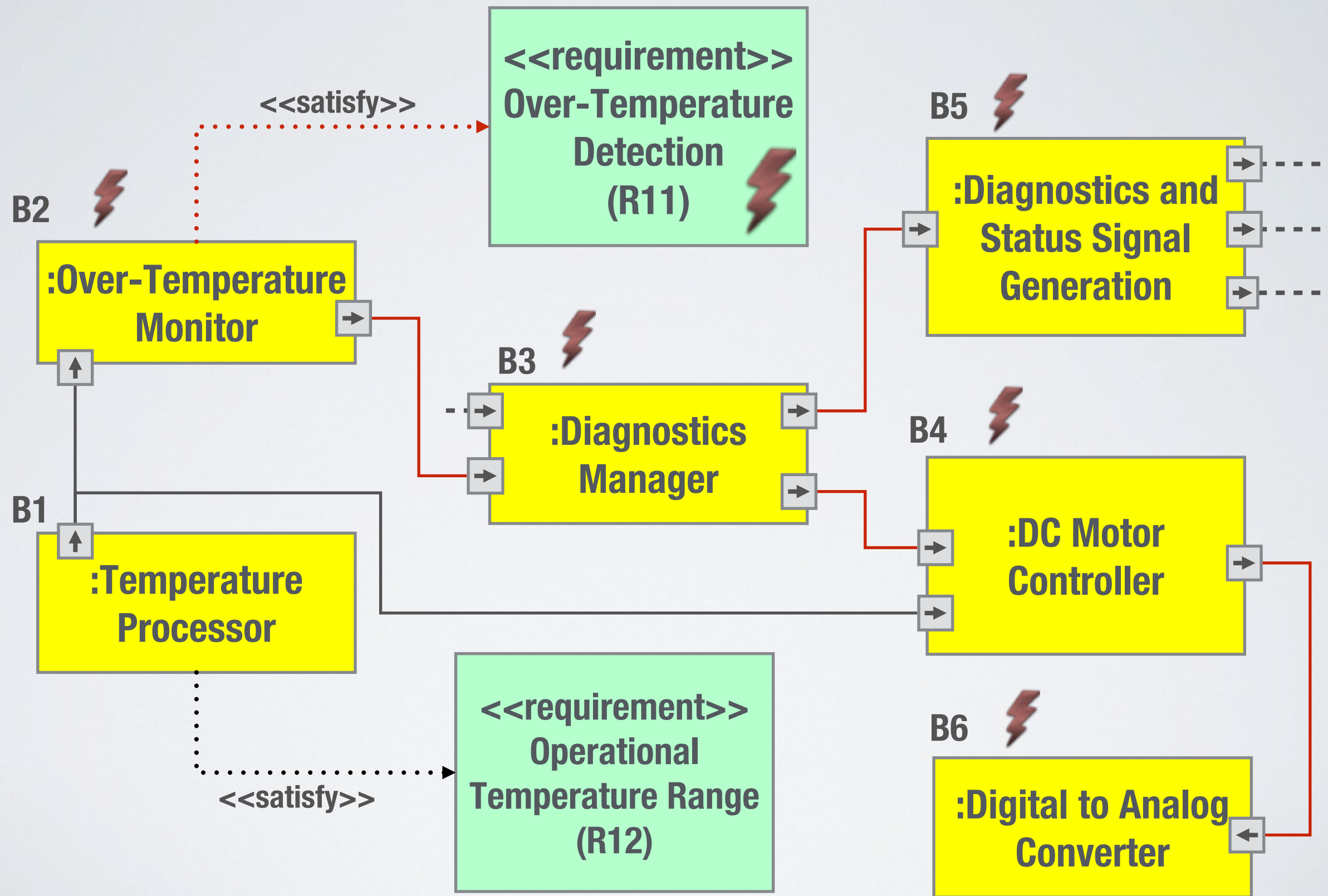


Structural Diagram

<<requirement>>

**Change to R11: Change over temperature detection level to 147 C
from 110 C.**

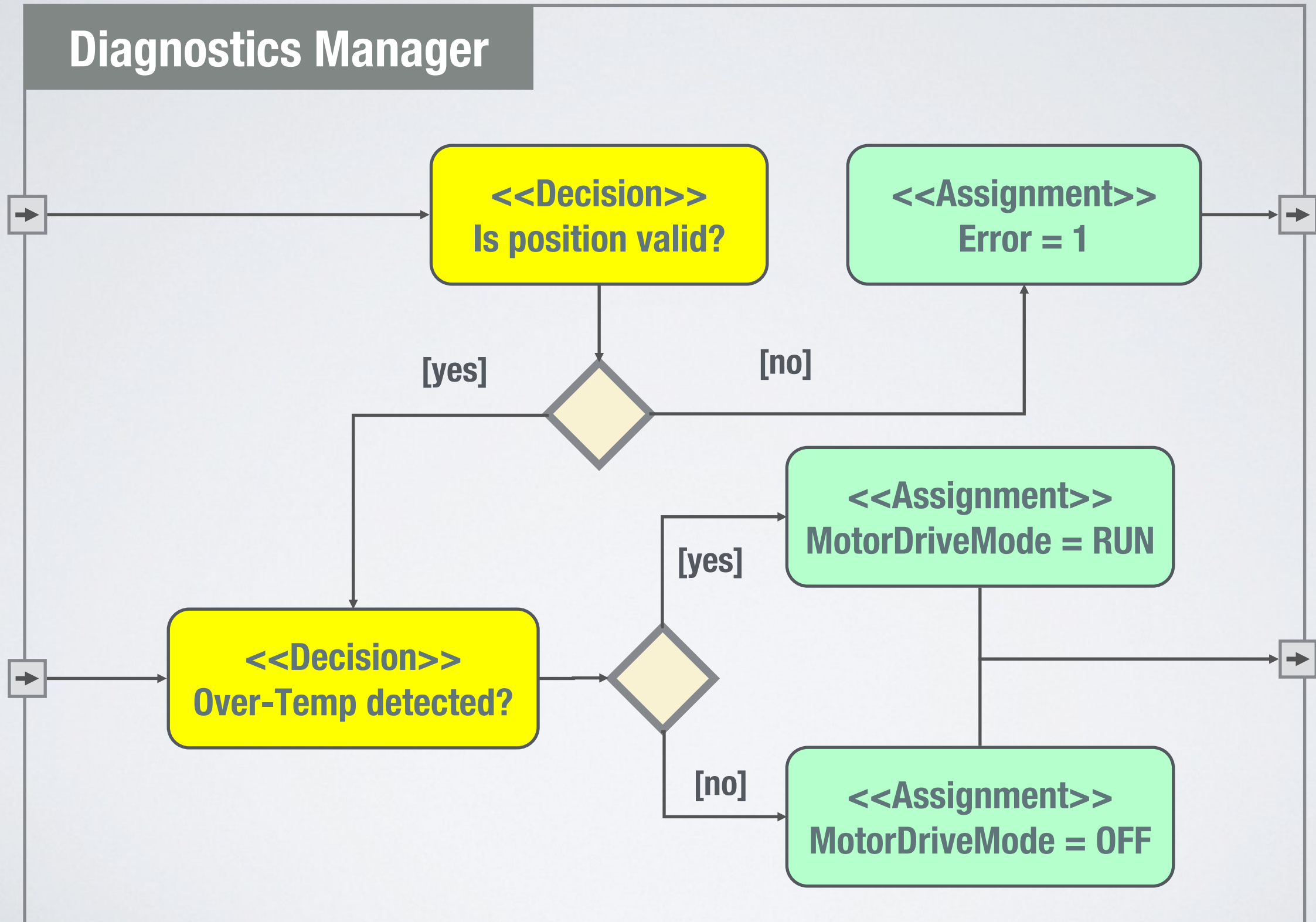
Structural Diagram



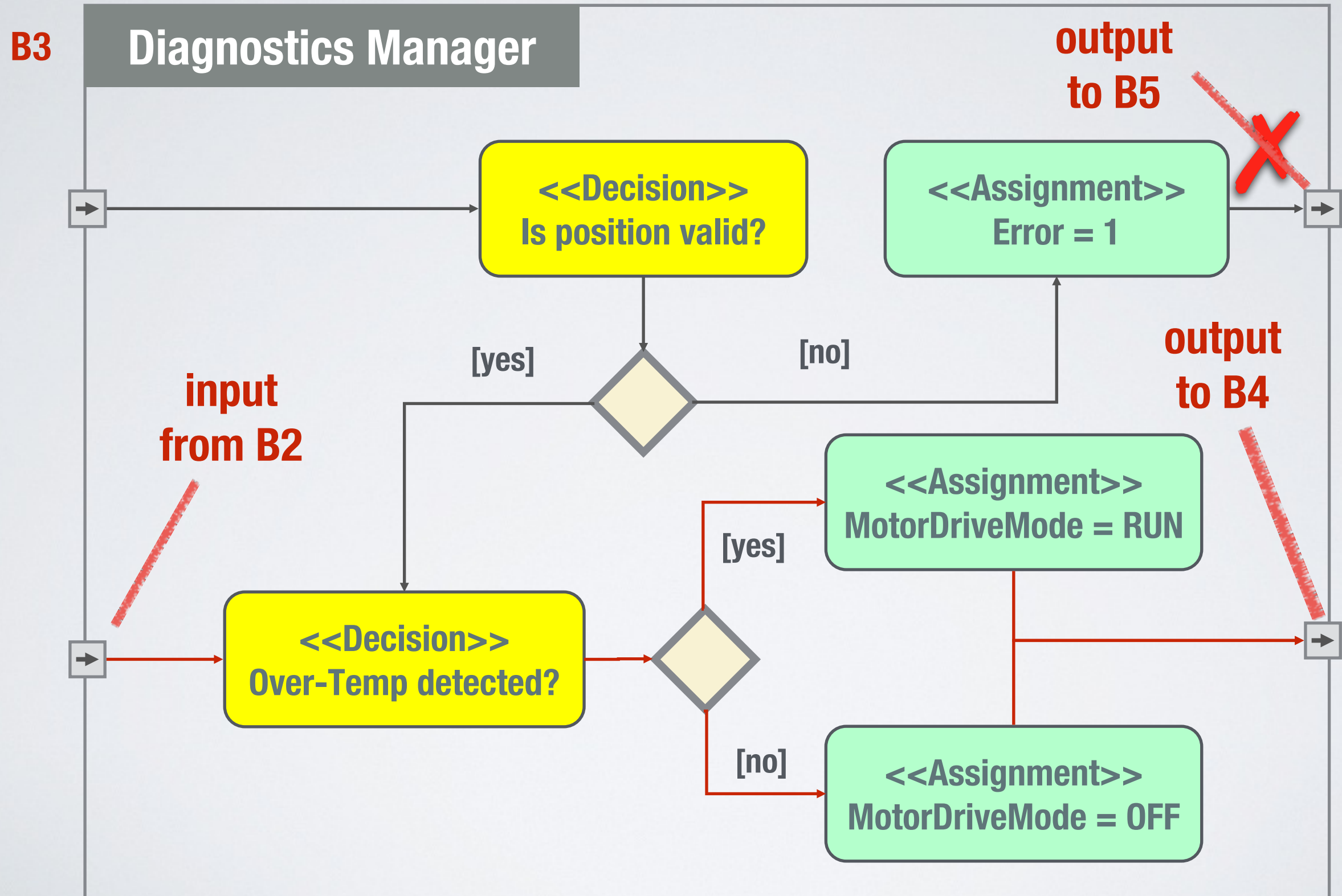
Behavioural Diagram

B3

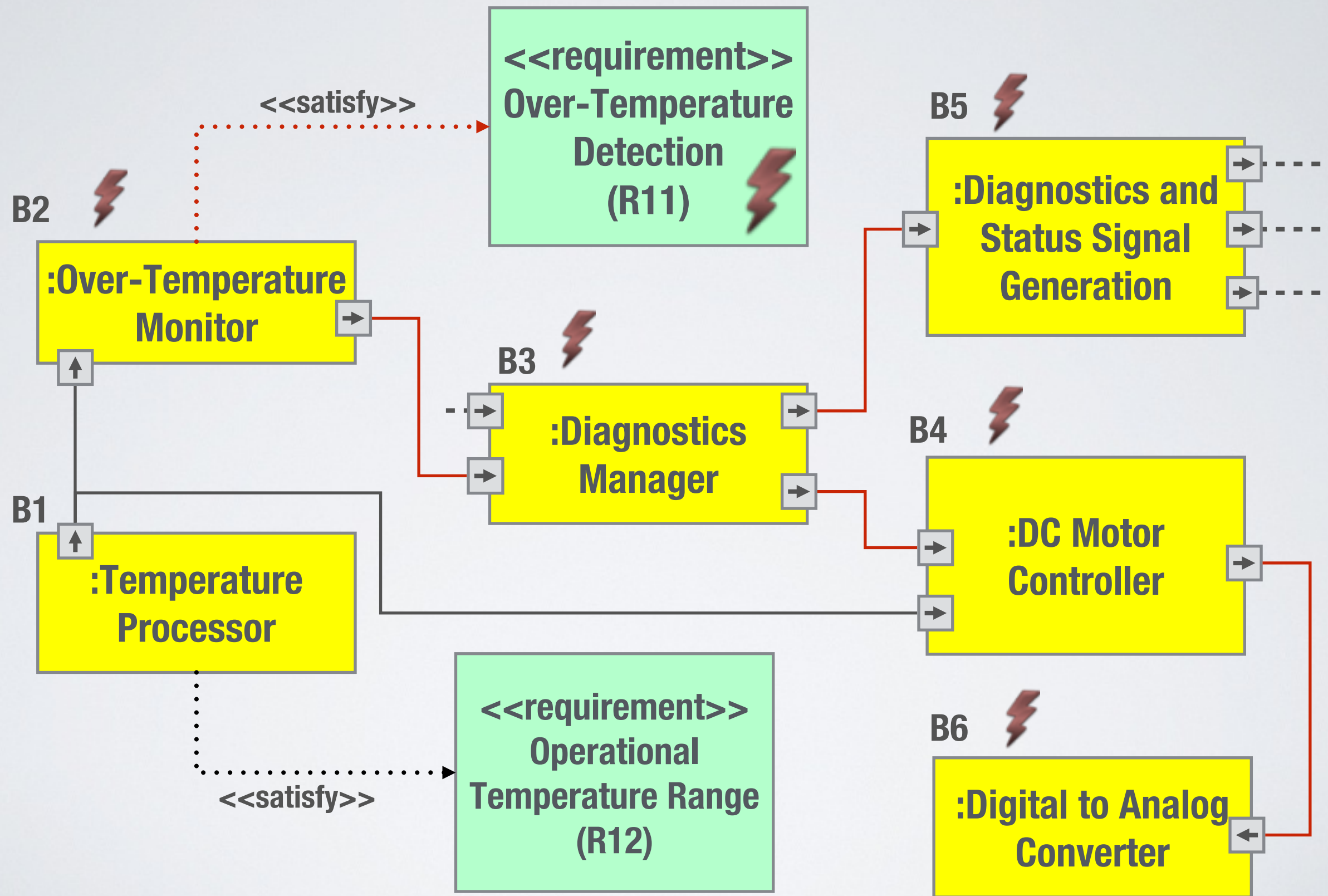
Diagnostics Manager



Behavioural Diagram



Structural Diagram



Rank Elements

**Change to R11: Change
over temperature detection
level to 147 C from 110 C.**

B2, B3, B4, B6

**Natural
Language
Processing
Analysis**

**B2
B6
B3
B4**

**Ranked
according to
likelihood of
impact**

Change Statements

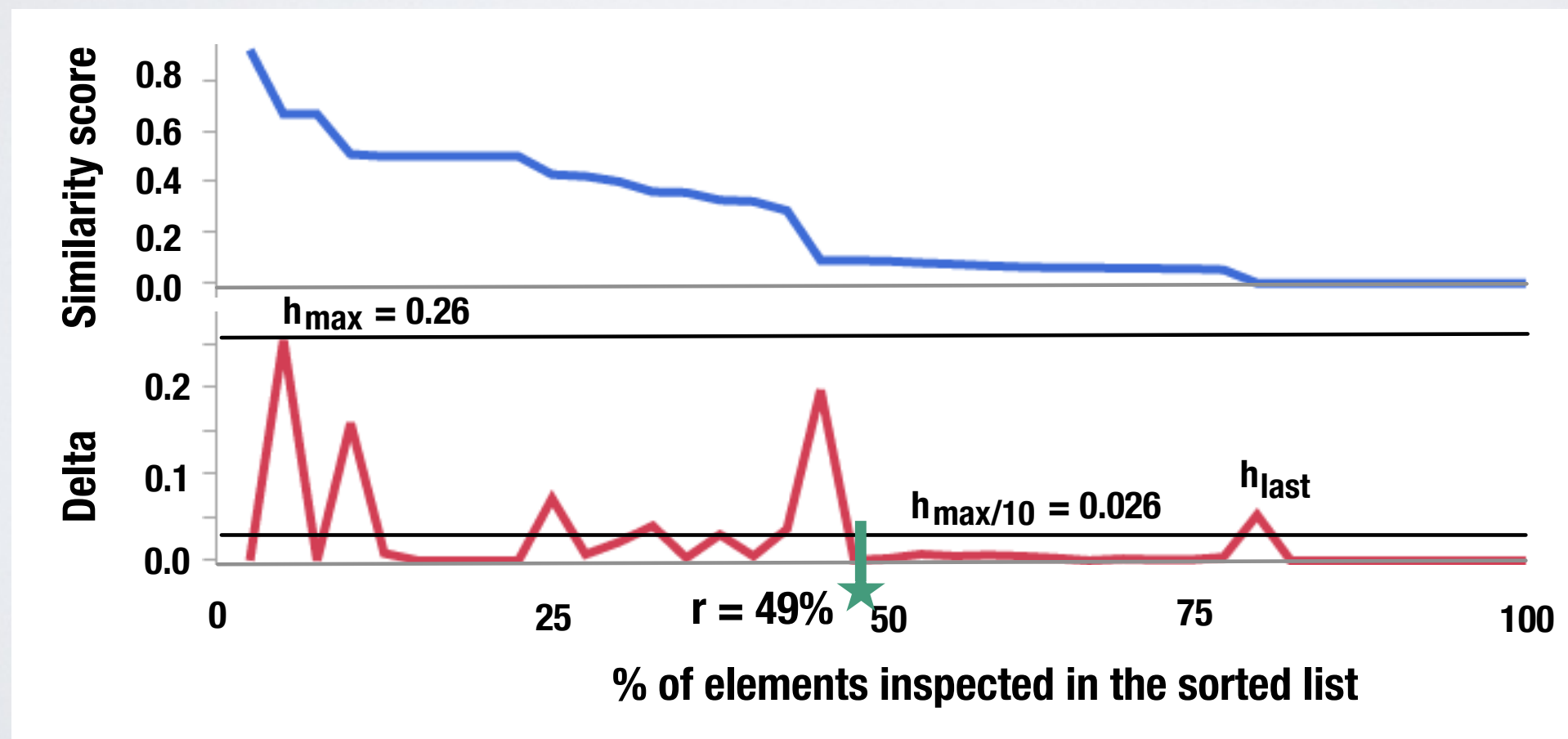
- **Informal inputs** from systems engineers regarding impact of changes
- **Example:** “Temperature lookup tables and voltage converters need to be adjusted”

Natural Language Processing

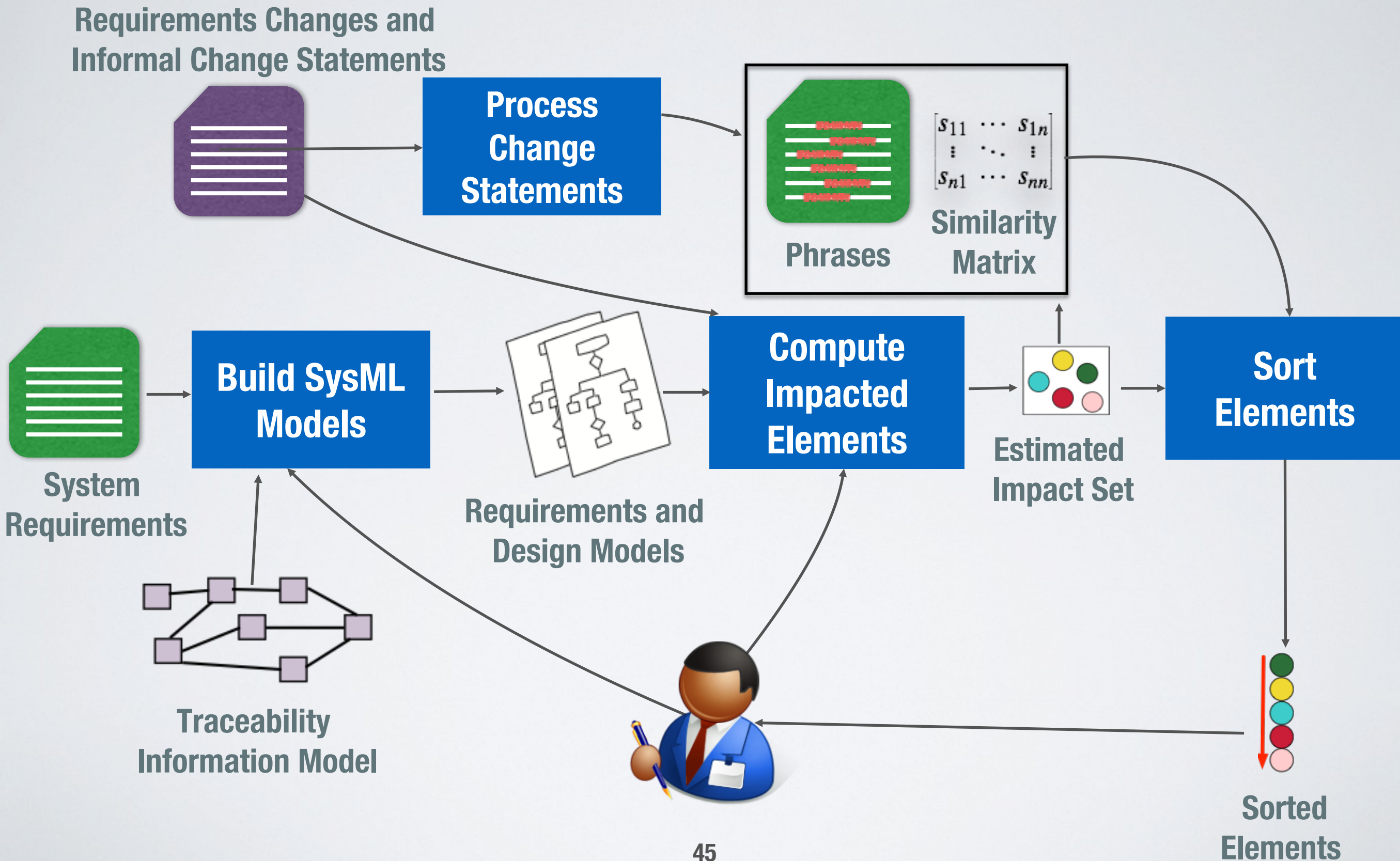
- Computing **similarity scores** for model elements by applying NLP techniques to measure similarity (syntactic and semantic) **between model elements labels and change statements.**
- **Sorting** the design elements obtained after structural and behavioral analysis based on the similarity scores
- Engineers inspect the **sorted lists** to identify impacted elements

Identifying a Subset to Inspect

- Pick the last significant peak in delta similarity between two successive elements



Approach

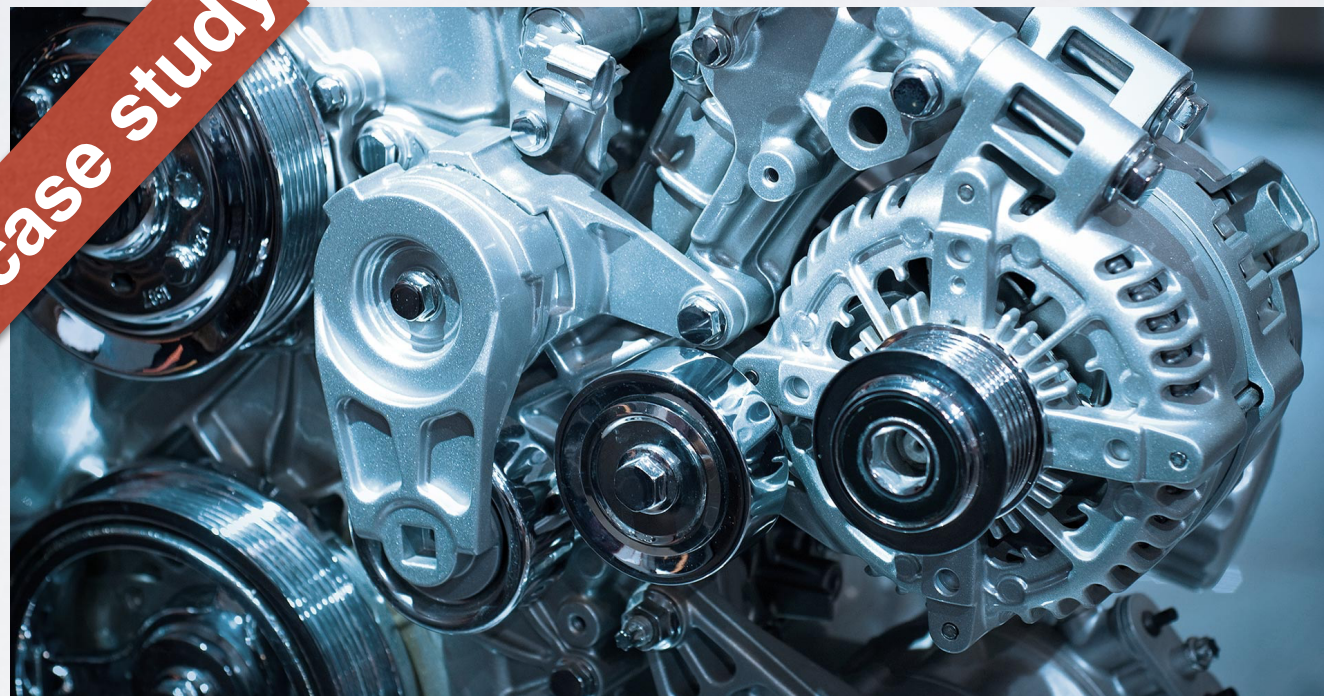


Evaluation

DELPHI

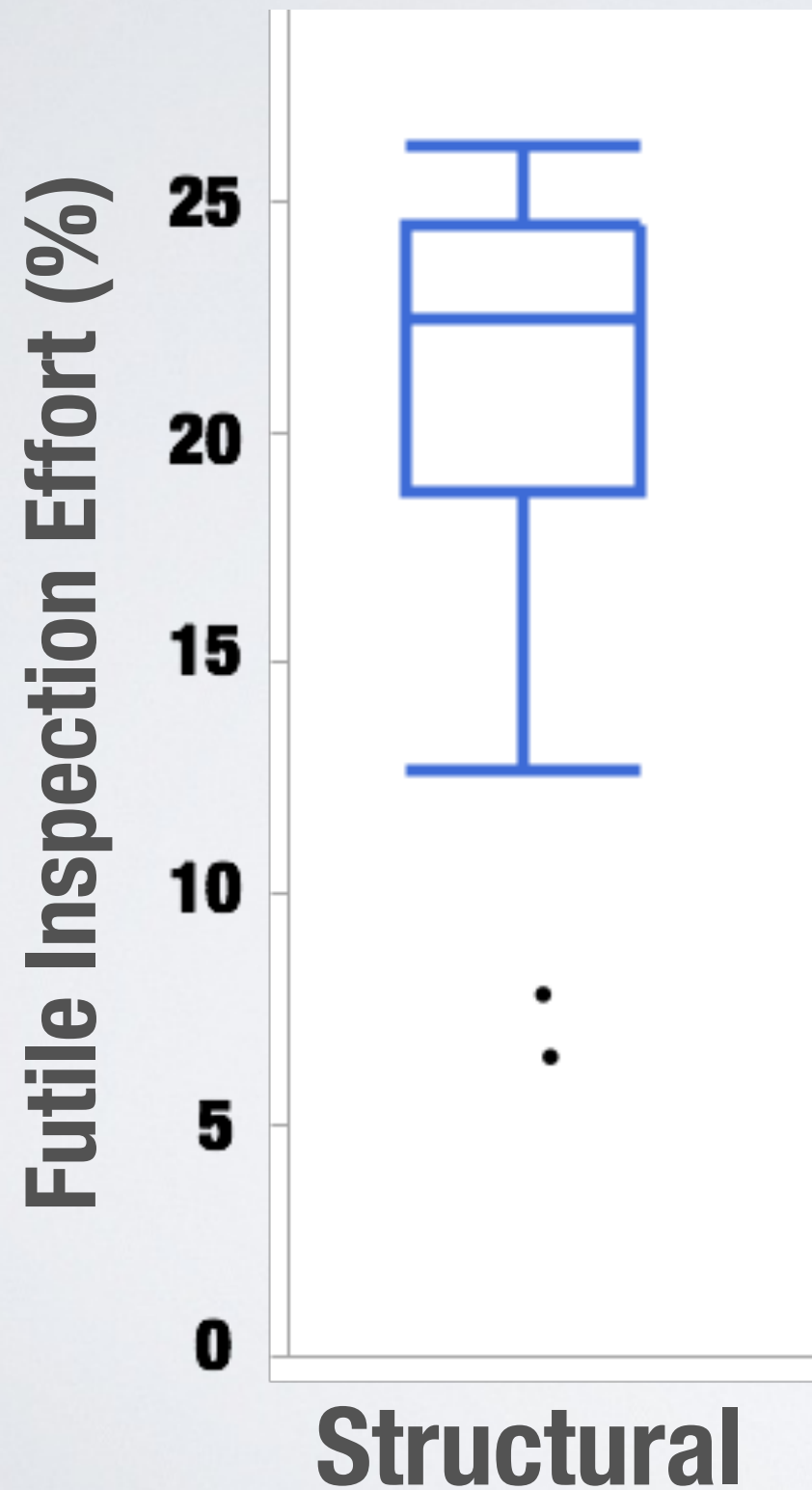
Innovation for the Real World

1 case study

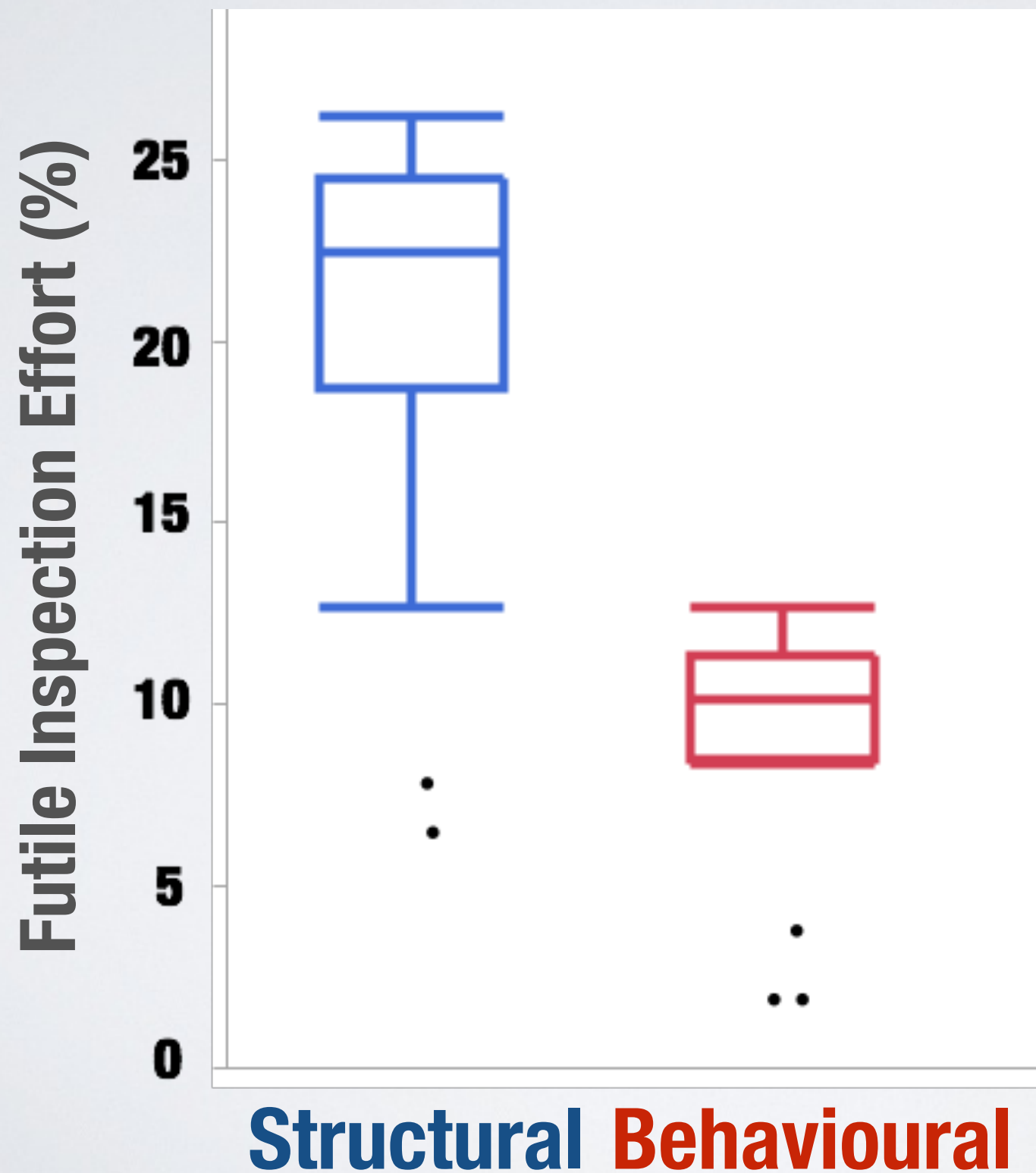


370 elements
16 change scenarios

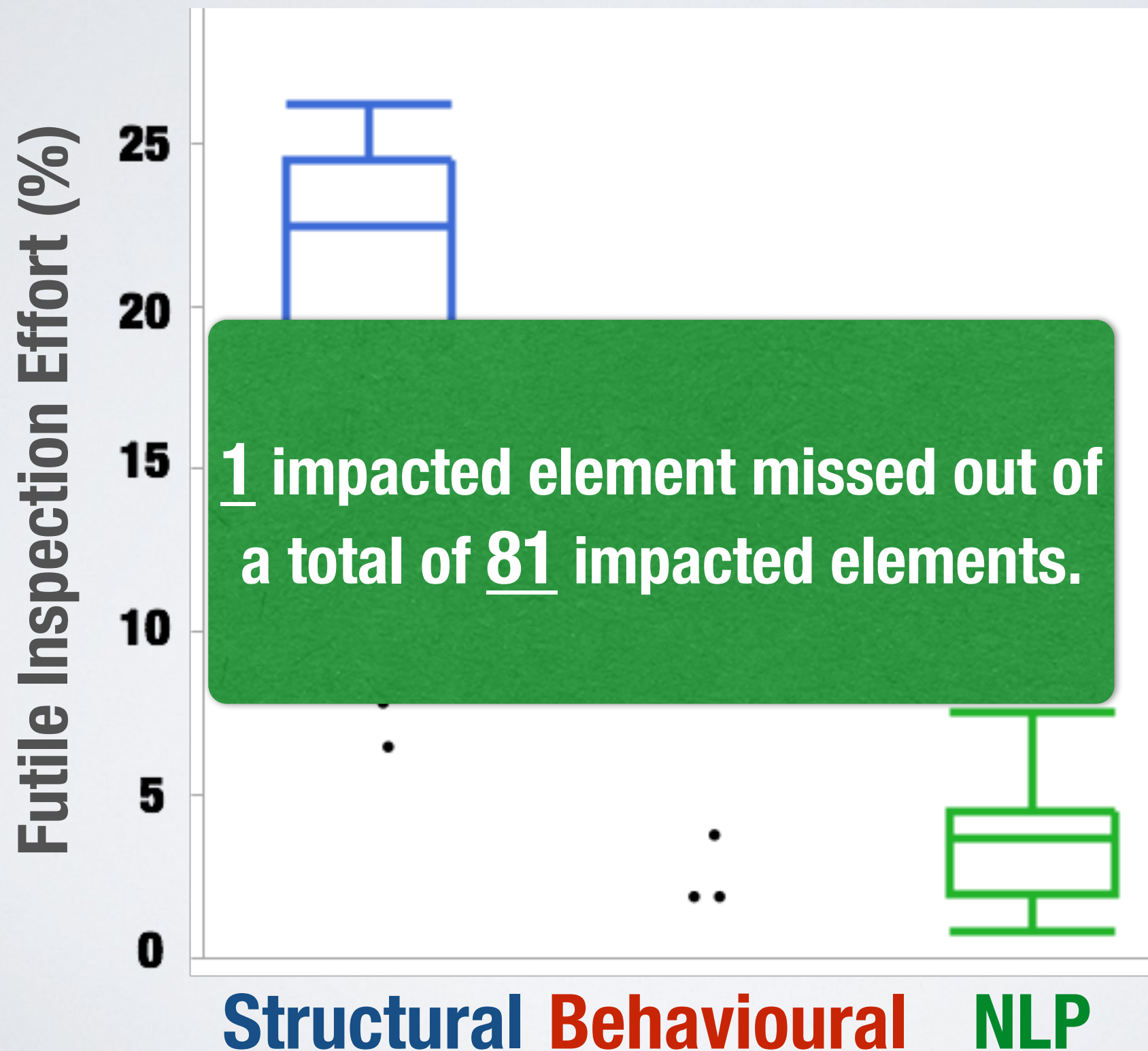
Effectiveness of Our Approach



Effectiveness of Our Approach



Effectiveness of Our Approach



Extracting Domain Knowledge

Domain Knowledge

- All requirements depend, more or less explicitly, on domain knowledge
- **Domain-specific concepts and terminology**
- In practice: **Not always consistent** among all stakeholders
- Software engineers often have a **superficial understanding of the application domain** they target
- Capturing domain knowledge: **Glossary, domain model**

Glossary Extraction and Clustering

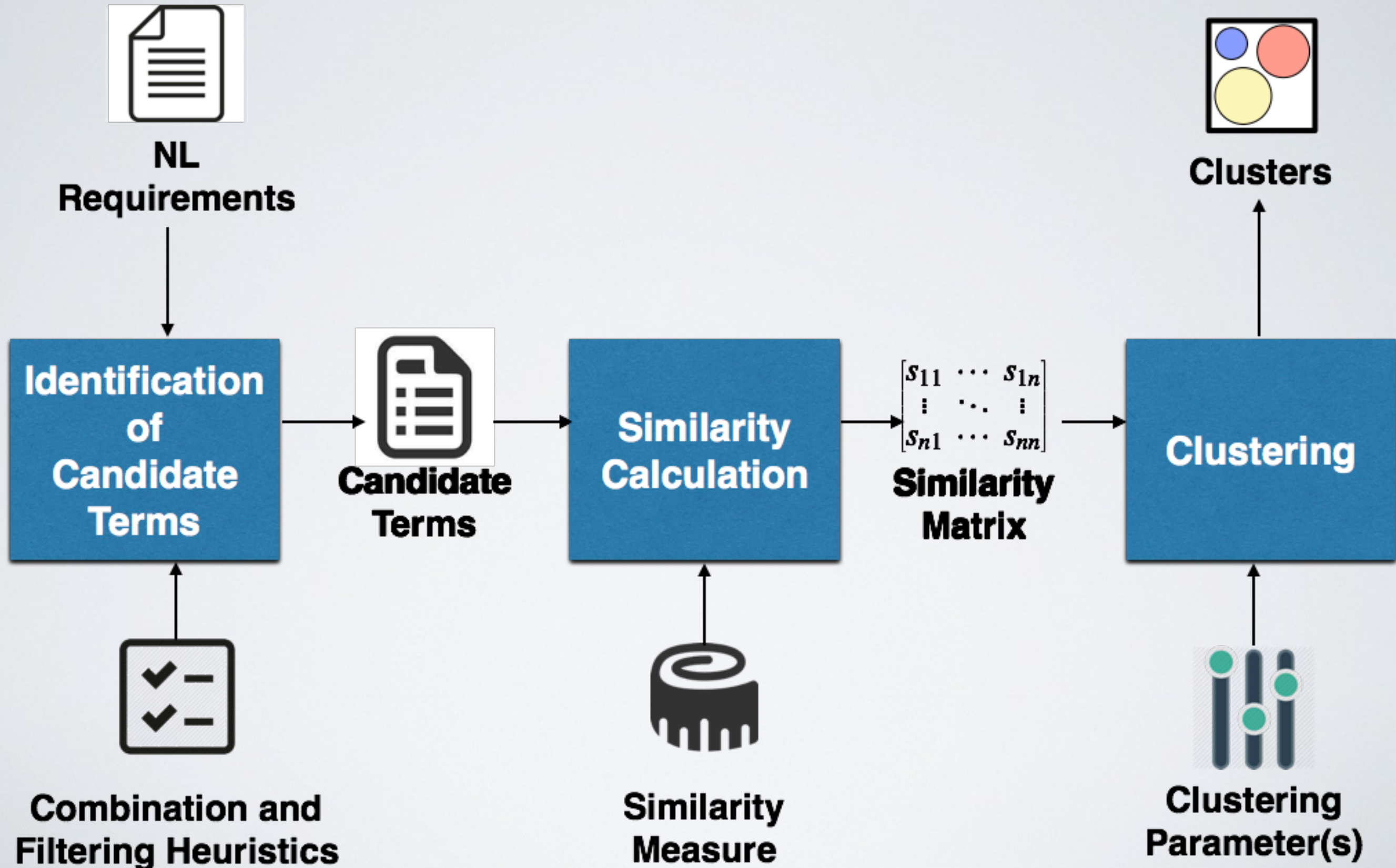
Terminology

- Usually multiple stakeholders, organizations ...
- **Inconsistent terminology**
 - **Multiple terms for same concepts**
 - element / component / object
 - **Multiple representations of same keywords**
 - status of Ground Station Interface component
 - Ground Station Interface component's status
 - Interface component status

Requirements Glossary

- Glossaries help **mitigate ambiguities**
 - consistent terminology
 - improves communication among stakeholders
- Glossaries are, **in practice, rarely (fully) defined before requirements are written**

Approach



Identification of
Candidate Terms

Similarity Calculation

Clustering

**R1 - STS shall supply GSI monitoring information
(GSI input parameters and GSI output parameters) to the STS
subcontractor.**

0.85

**R2 - When GSI component's status changes, STS shall update the
progress of development activities.**

- STS
- STS Subcontractor

- development activity
- progress of development activity

- GSI
- GSI input parameter
- GSI output parameter

- GSI component
- GSI component's status
- GSI monitoring information

Evaluation of Glossary Terms



2 case studies



380 Requirements
138 Requirements



1 case study



110 Requirements

Results

Our Approach

$\Delta\text{Recall} > 20\%$

VS

JATE

TOPIA

TextRank

TermoStat

TermRaider

No clustering

Results

Precision ~

JATE

TOPIA

TextRank

TermoStat

TermRaider

Our Approach



Clustering Evaluation



2 case studies



1 case study



20 clusters
each case study

27 clusters

• Interview Survey

How useful is our approach?

- I find this cluster helpful for **identifying the related terms** for a glossary term.
 - **89.6% (strongly agreed / agreed)**
- As the result of seeing this cluster, I can **define a glossary term more precisely** than I originally had in mind.
 - **88% (strongly agreed / agreed)**
- I find this cluster helpful for **identifying the variations (synonyms)** of a glossary term.
 - **61% (strongly agreed / agreed)**
 - **28% (not relevant)**

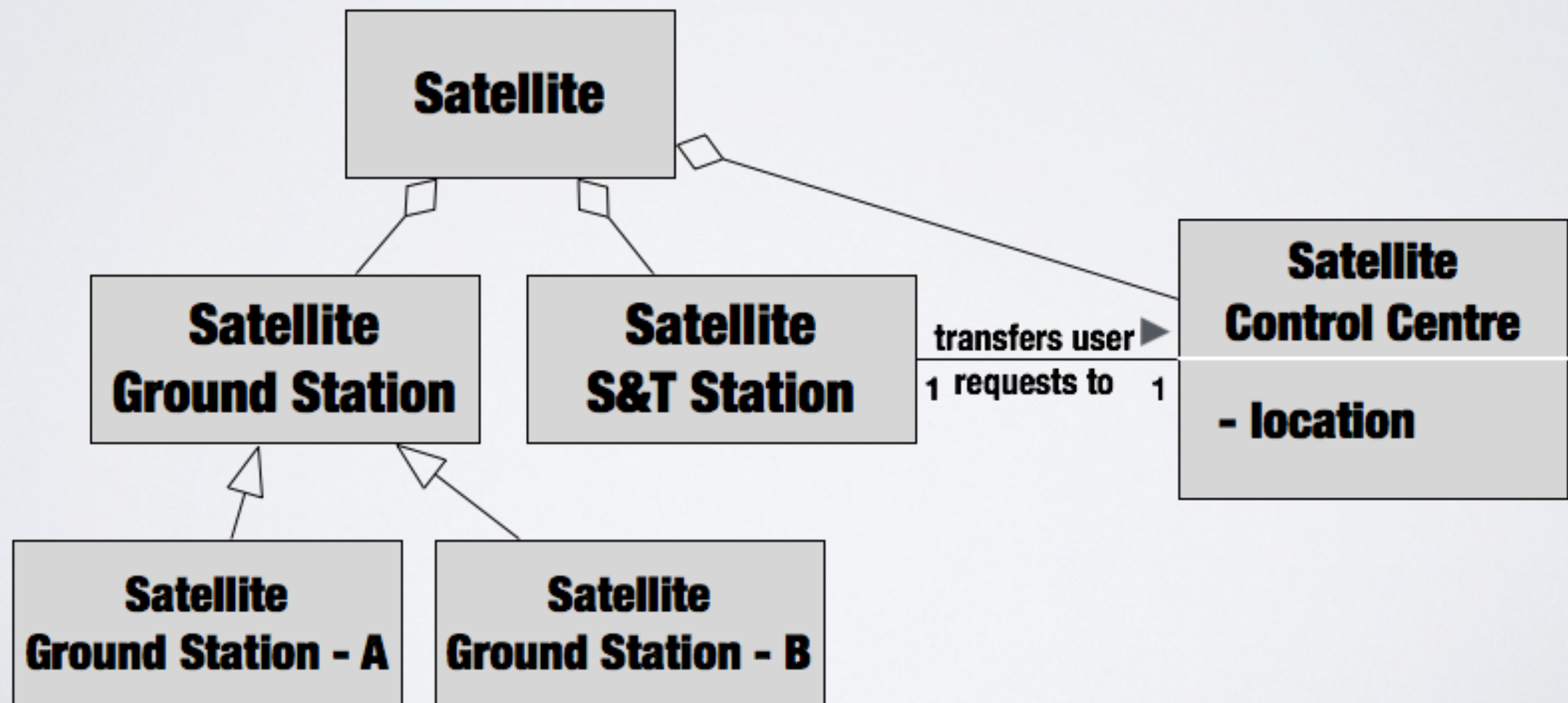
Domain Model Extraction

Motivation

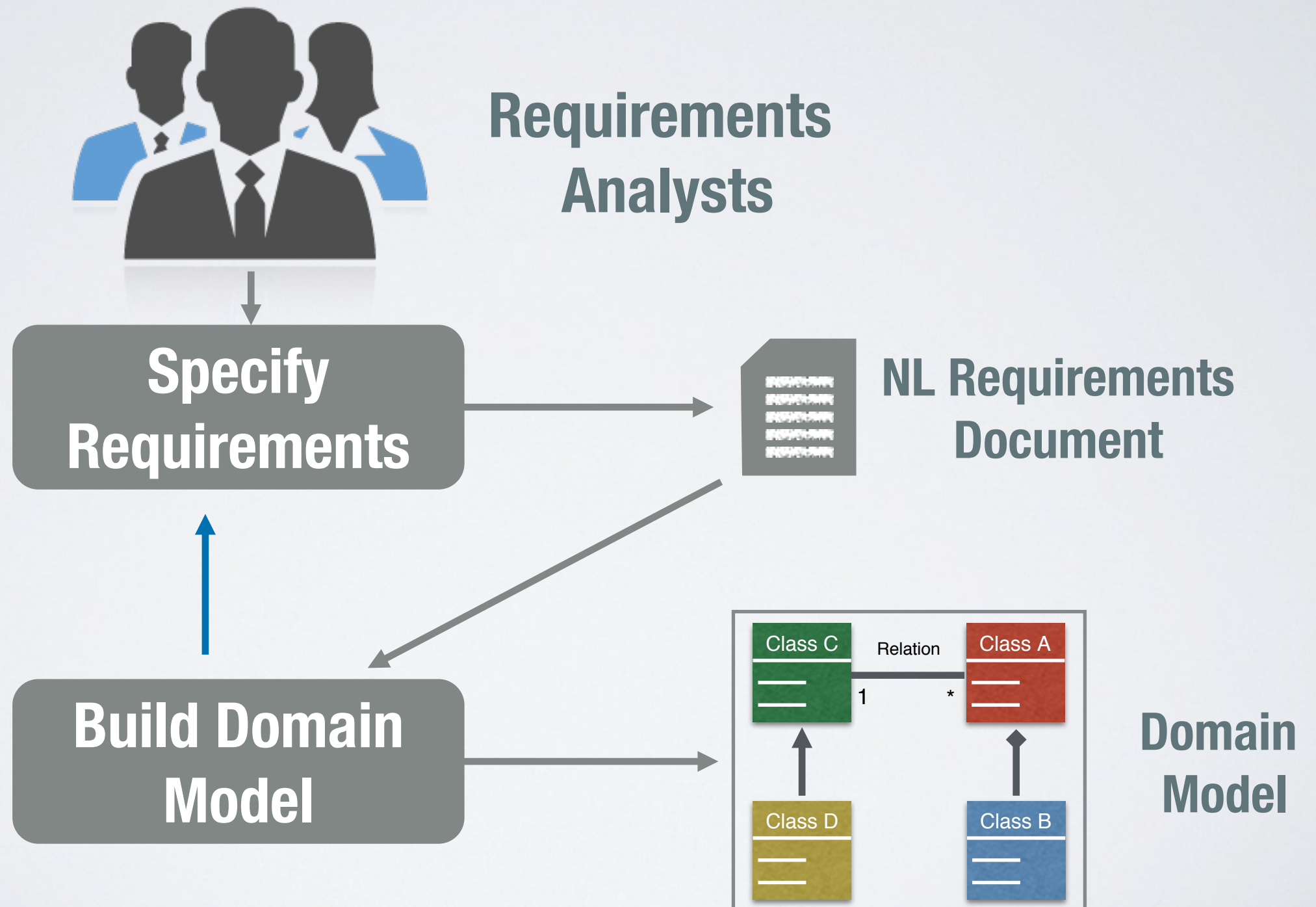
- Representation of important **domain concepts and their relations**
 - **Facilitate communication** between stakeholders from different backgrounds
 - Help identify **inconsistencies** in terminology, etc.
 - Helps assess **completeness** of requirements
- In practice, domain models **are not preceding the elicitation and writing of requirements**

Domain Models

A domain model is a representation of conceptual entities or real-world objects in a domain of interest.



Context



Problem Definition

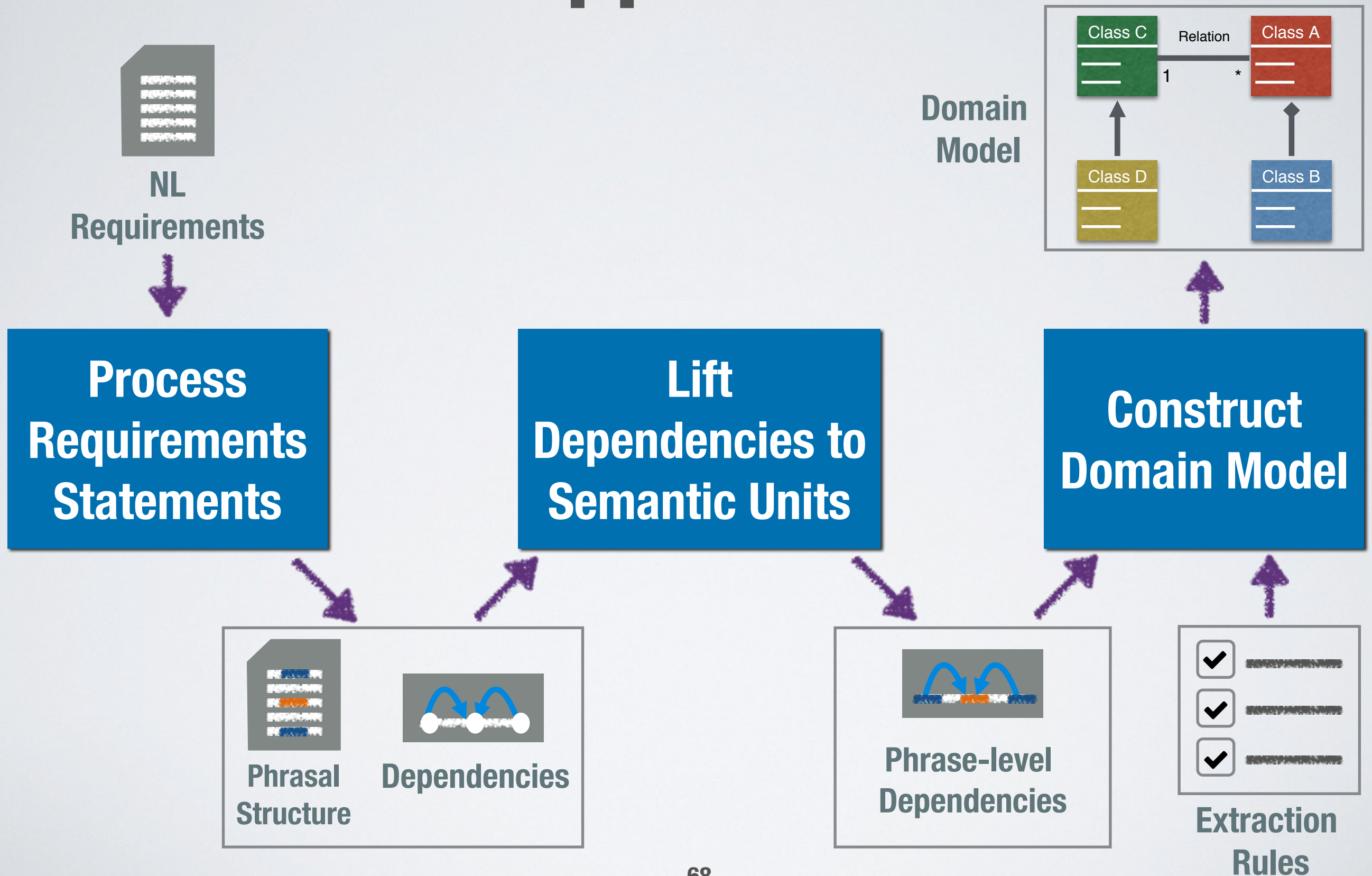


- Manually building domain models is **laborious**
- **Automated support is required** for building domain models

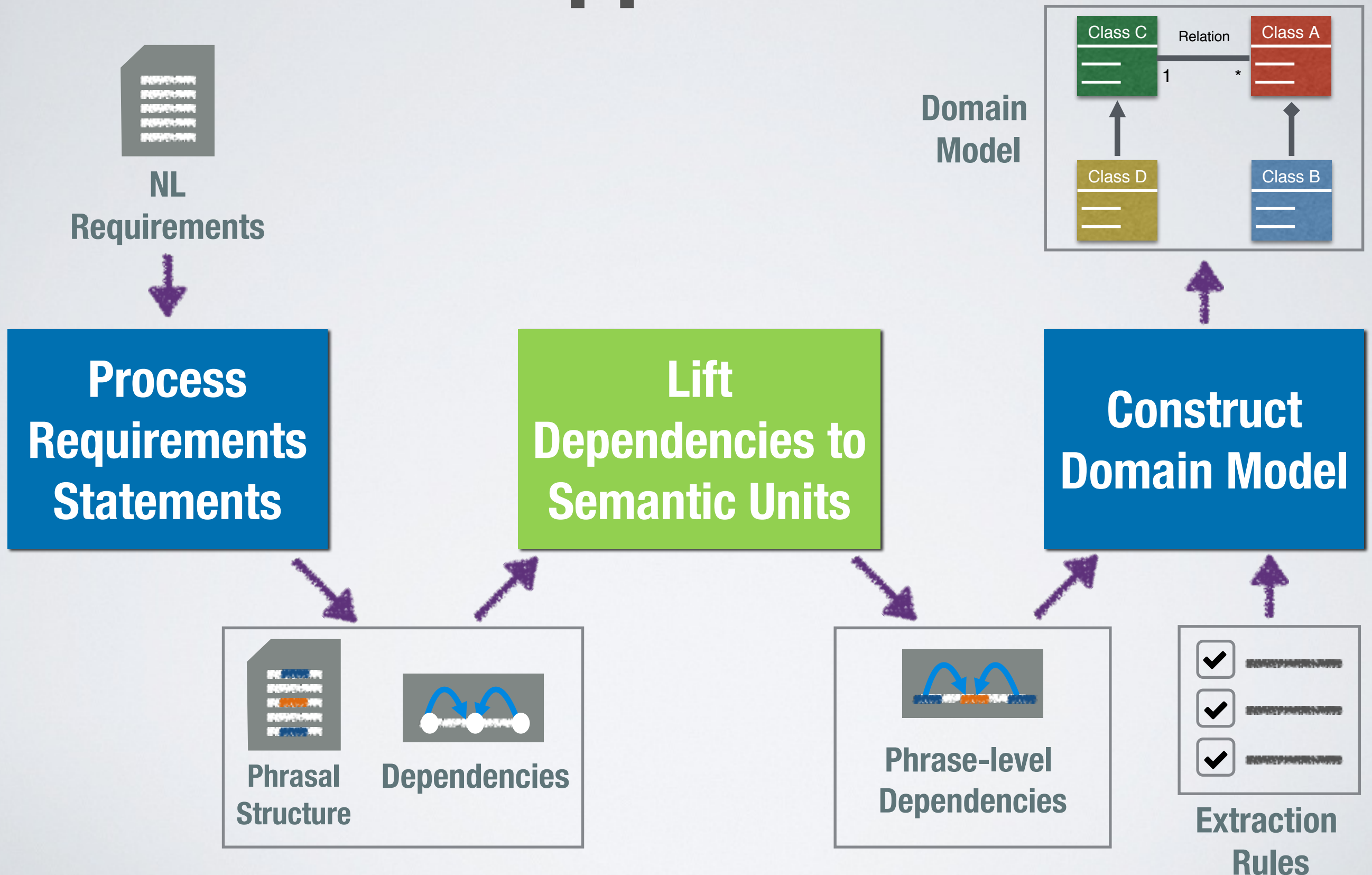
State of the Art

- **Multiple approaches exist** for extracting domain models or similar variants from requirements using **extraction rules**
 - Majority assume **specific structure**, e.g., restricted NL
 - Extraction of **direct relations only** but not indirect ones
 - **Limited empirical results** on industrial requirements

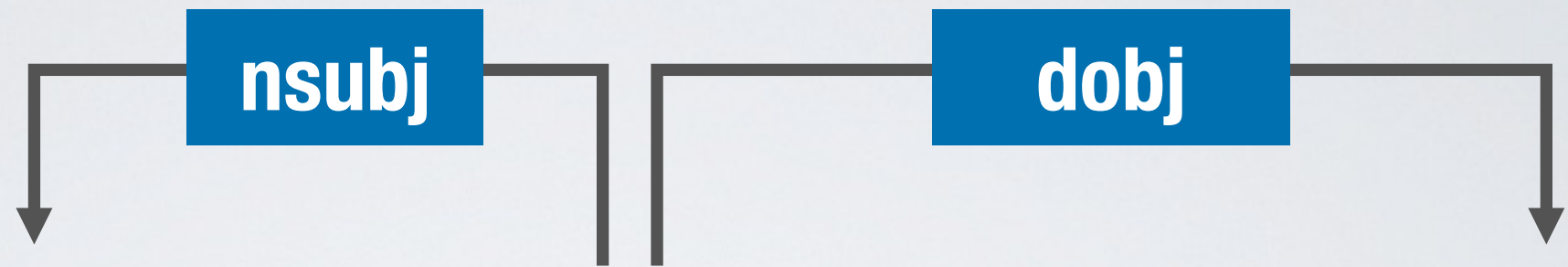
Approach



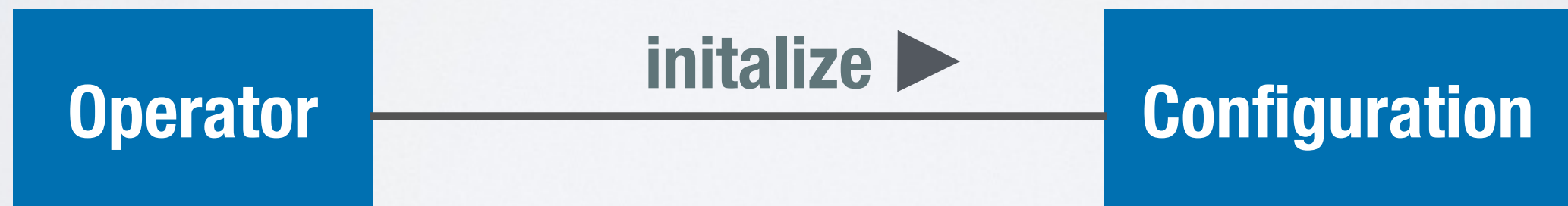
Approach



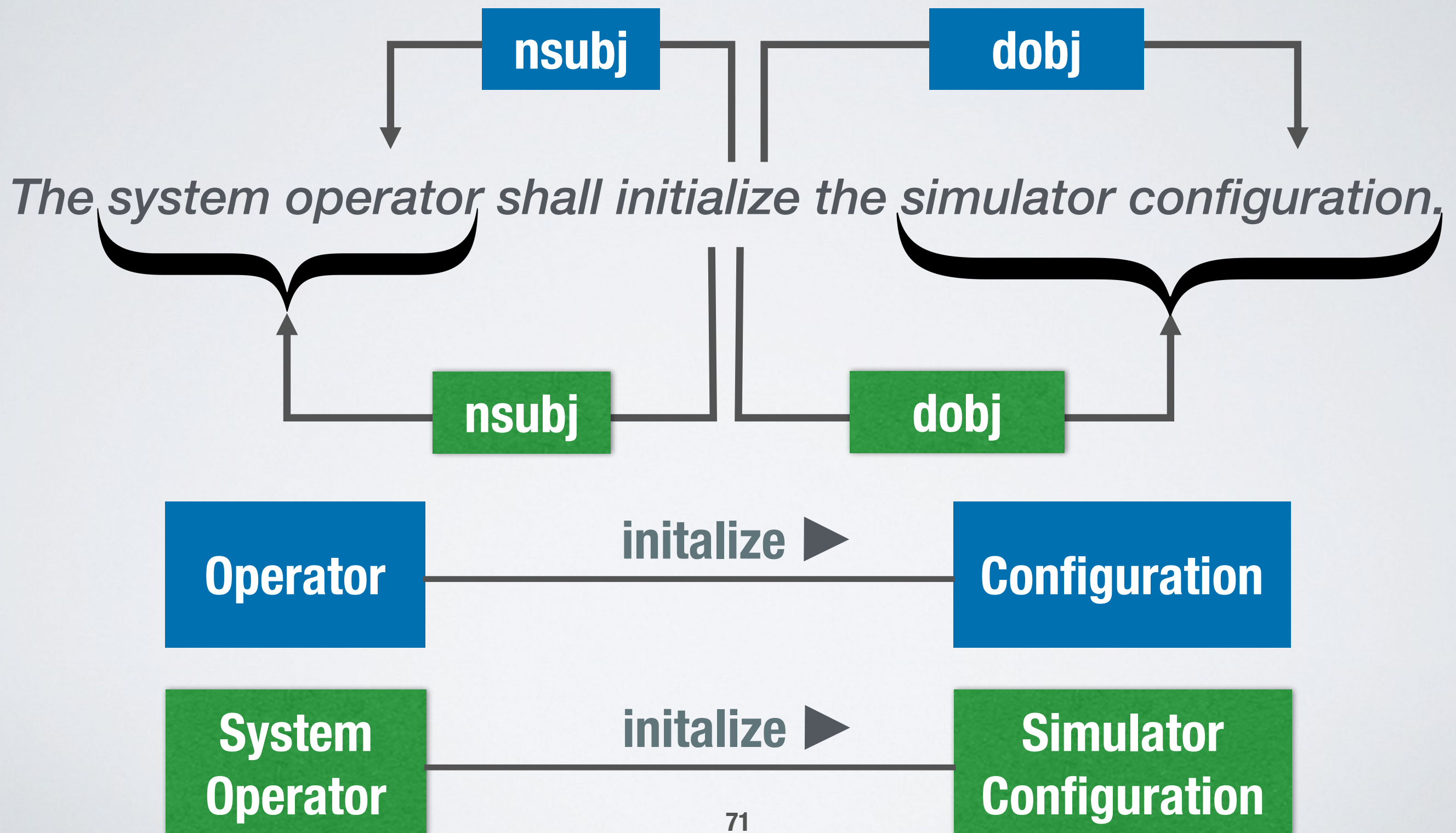
Grammatical Dependencies



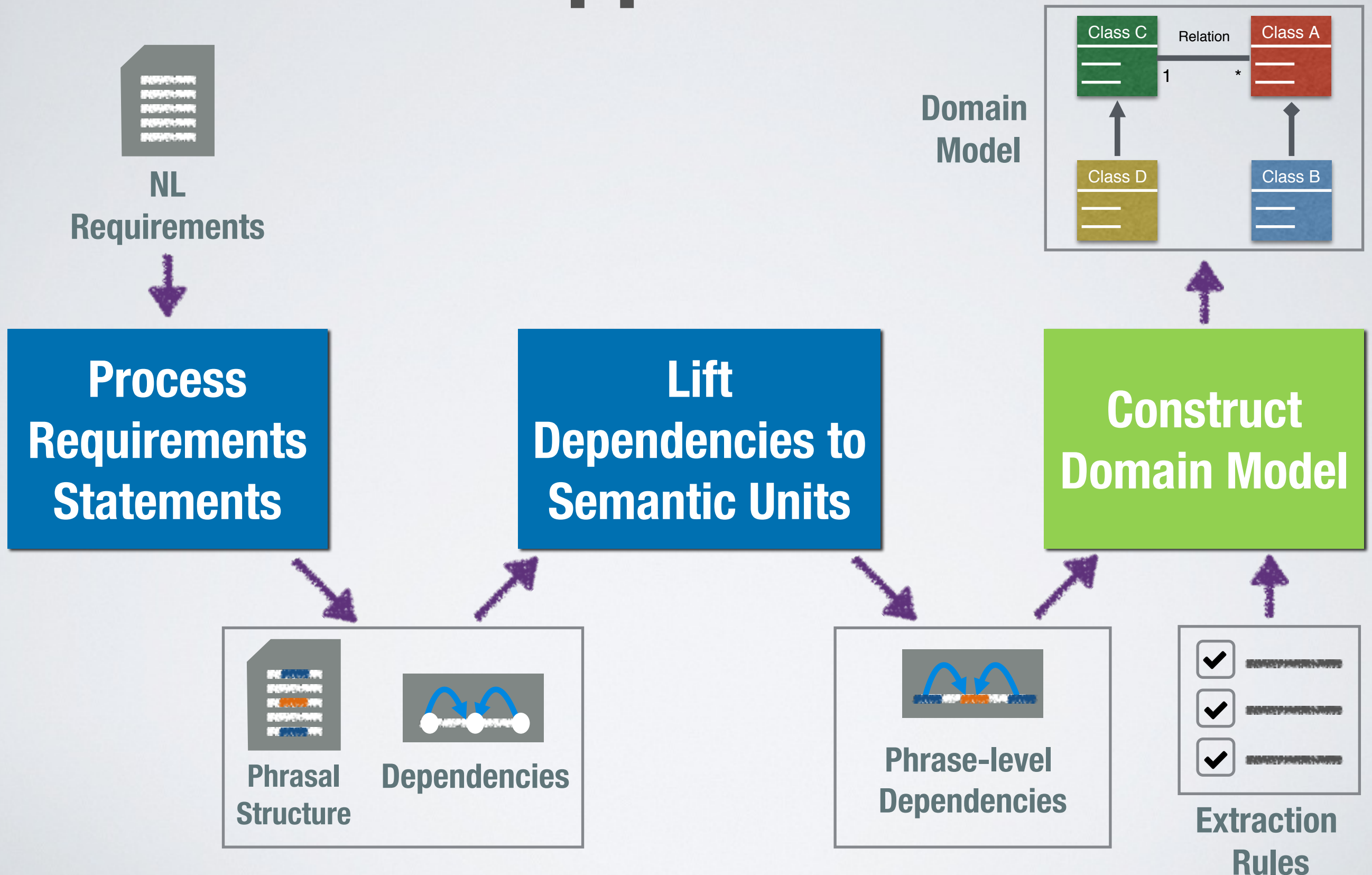
The system operator shall initialize the simulator configuration.



Lift Dependencies to Semantic Units

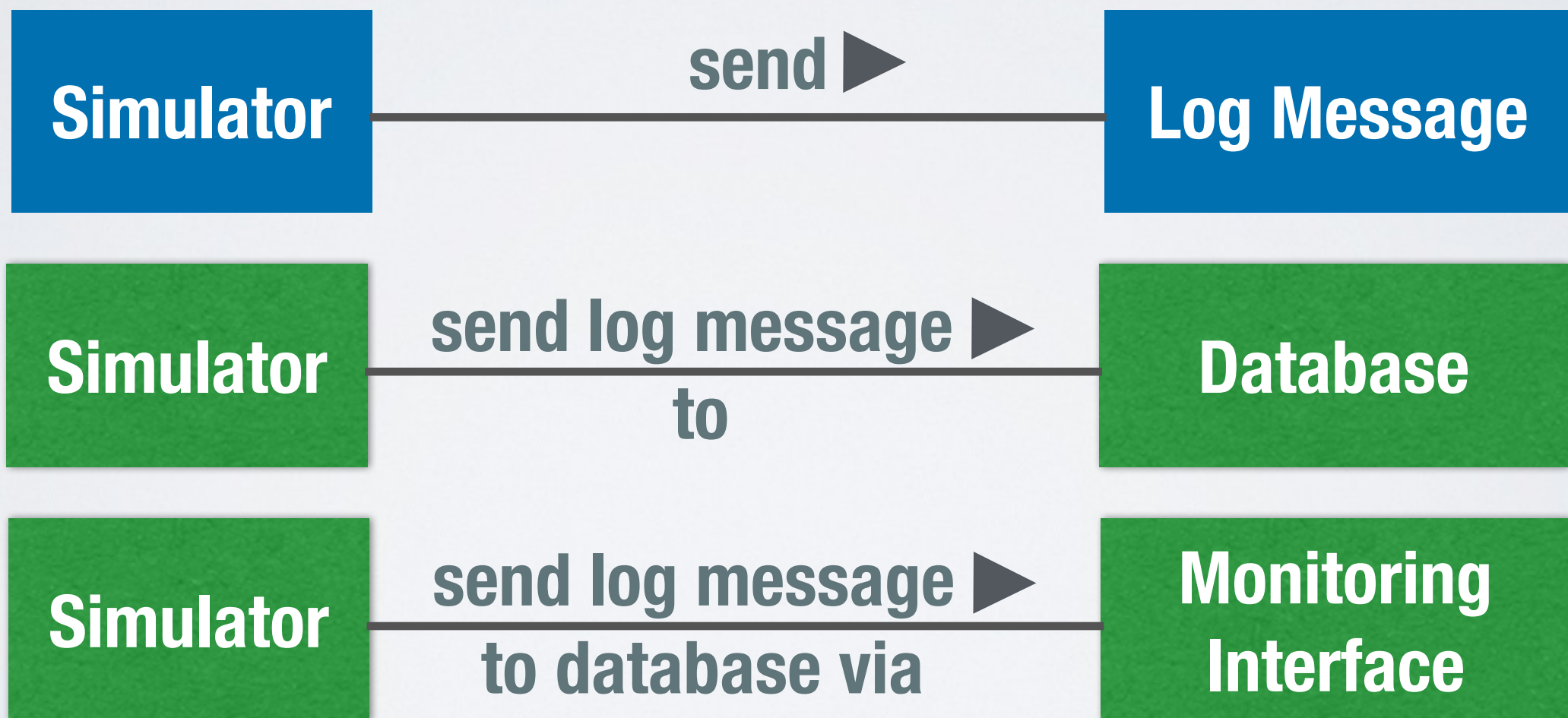


Approach



Link Paths

The simulator shall send log messages to the database via the monitoring interface.



How useful is our approach?

SES[▲]
your satellite company

1 case study



**50 Requirements
213 Relations**

- **Interview survey** with experts
- **Correctness and Relevance** of each relation
- **Missing relations** in each requirement

Results

Correctness- 90% (avg.)

Relevance- 36% (avg.)

Missed Relations- 8%

Requirements-Driven Testing

Traceability

- In many domains, various types of traceability are required
- For example, in automotive (ISO 26262), traceability between requirements and system tests: **requirements-driven testing**
- **Many requirements, many tests, therefore many traces ...**
- Automation is required

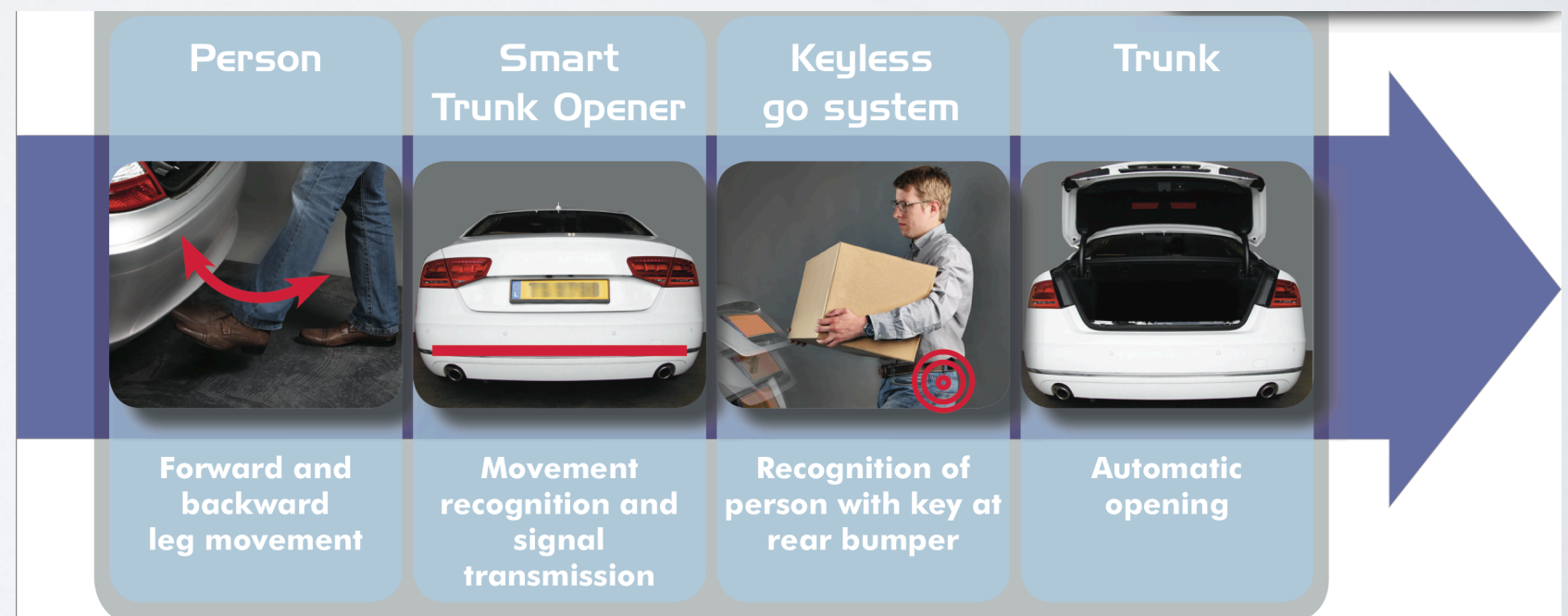
Context

IEE develops real-time embedded systems:

- Automotive **safety sensing systems**
- Automotive **comfort & convenience systems**, e.g., Smart Trunk Opener



International Electronics
& Engineering (IEE)



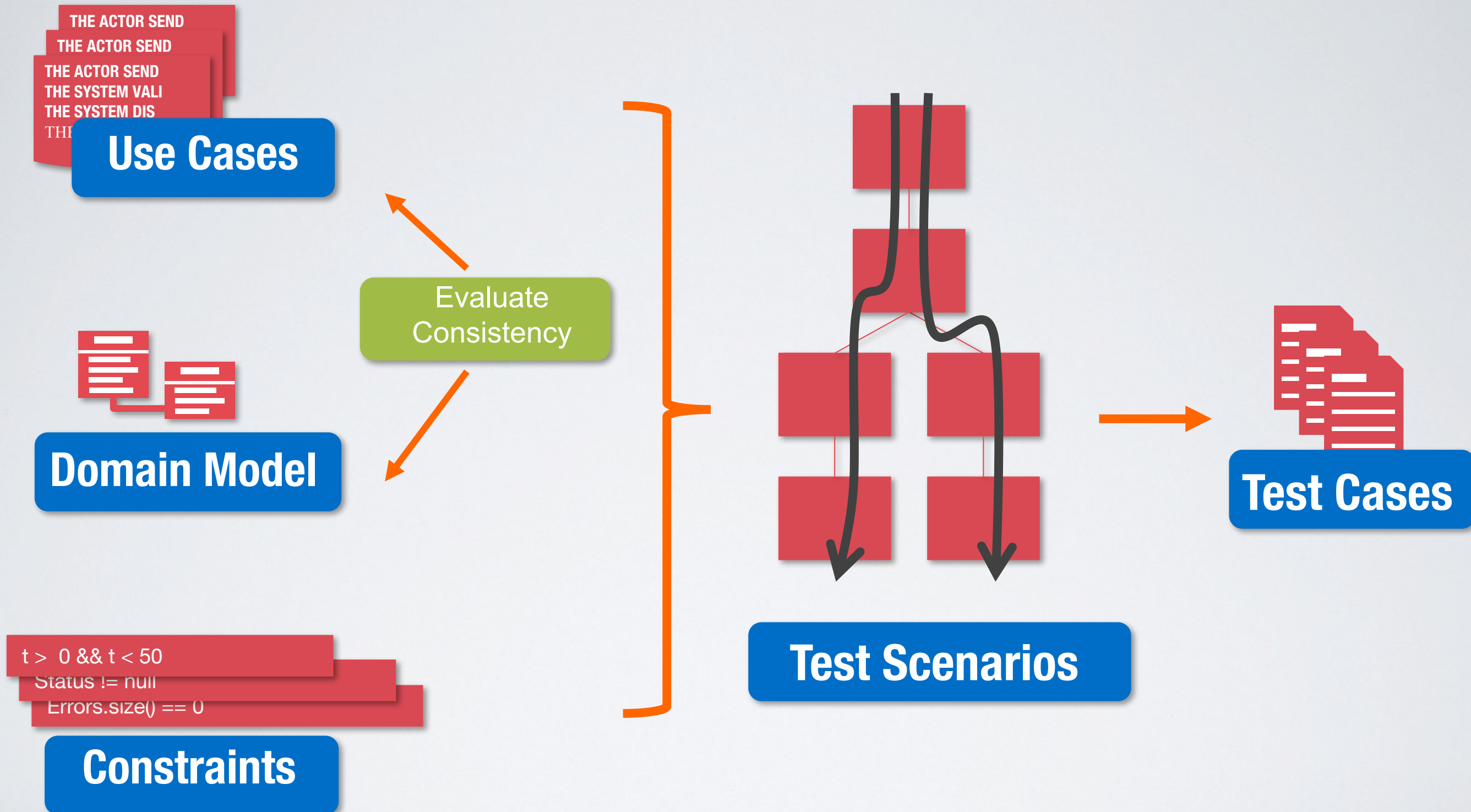
Objectives

- Support **generation test cases from requirements**
- Capture and **create traceability information** between test cases and requirements
 - Requirements are captured through **use cases**
 - Use cases are used to **communicate** with customers and the system test team
 - Complete and precise behavioral models are not an option: **too difficult and expensive** (Model-based testing)

Strategy

- **Analyzable** use case specifications
- Automatically extract test model from the use case specifications (**Natural Language Processing**)
- **Minimize modeling**, domain modeling only
- **No behavioral modeling**

UMTG



Restricted Use Case Modeling: RUCM

- RUCM is based on a (1) **template**, (2) **restriction rules**, and (3) specific **keywords** constraining the use of natural language in use case specifications
- RUCM **reduces ambiguity** and **facilitates automated analysis of use cases**
- **Conformance** is supported by a tool based on NLP

RUCM

[Yue et al. TOSEM'13]

Use Case Name: Identify Occupancy Status

Actors: AirbagControlUnit

Precondition: The system has been initialized

...

Basic Flow

1. The seat **SENDS** occupancy status **TO** the system.

Postcondition: The occupant class for airbag control has been sent.

2. **INCLUDE USE CASE** Classify occupancy status.

3. The system **VALIDATES THAT** the occupant class for airbag control is valid.

4. The system **SENDS** the occupant class for airbag control **TO** AirbagControlUnit.

Specific Alternative Flow

RFS 3

Postcondition: The previous occupant class for airbag control has been sent.

1. **IF** the occupant class for airbag control is not valid **THEN**

2. The system **SENDS** the previous occupant class for airbag control **TO**

1

Elicit Use Cases

2

Model the Domain

3

Evaluate Consistency

5

Specify Constraints

4

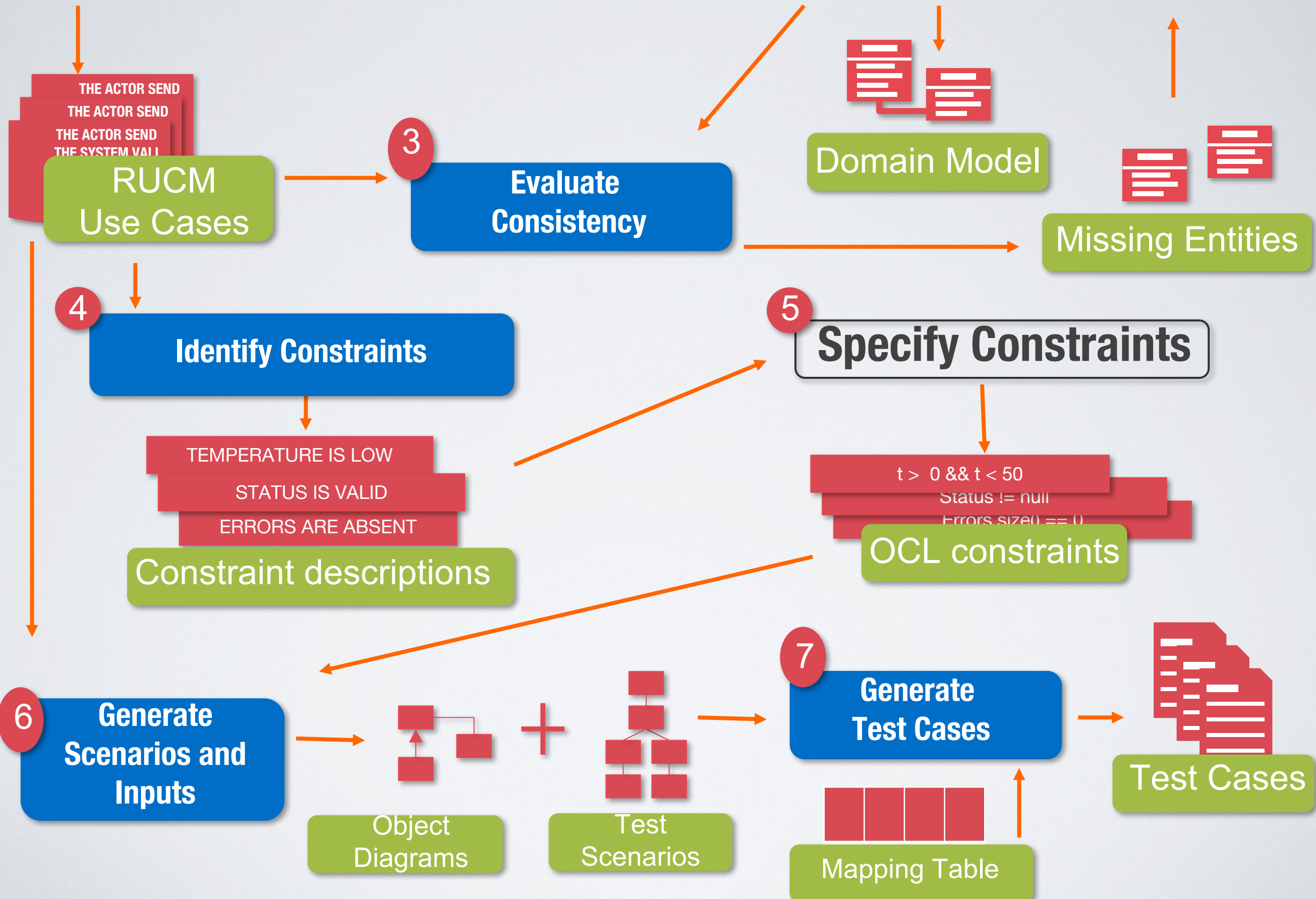
Identify Constraints

7

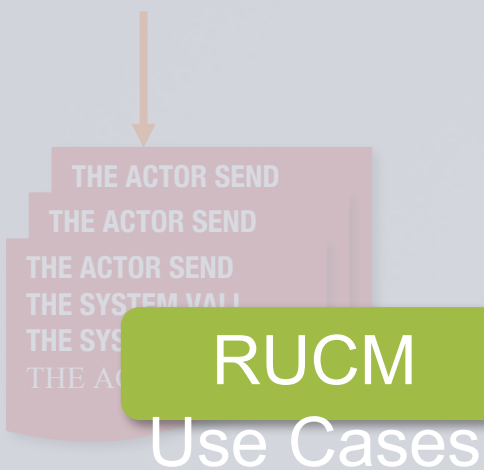
Generate Test Cases

6

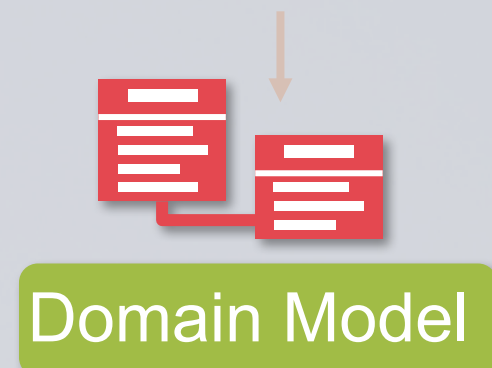
Generate Scenarios and Inputs



1 Elicit Use Cases

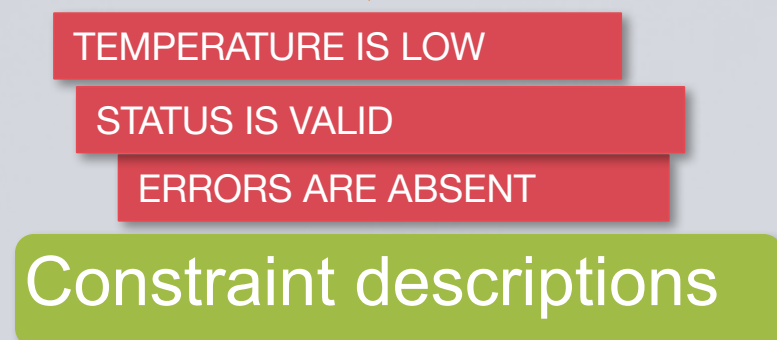


2 Model the Domain

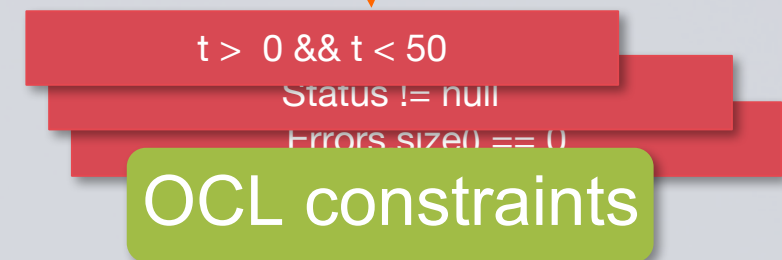


3 Evaluate Consistency

4 Identify Constraints



5 Specify Constraints



6 Generate Scenarios and Inputs

Based on Natural Language Processing

Basic Flow

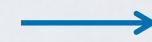
1. The seat **SENDS** occupancy status **TO** the system.

DOMAIN ENTITY



INPUT STEP

2. **INCLUDE USE CASE** Classify occupancy status.



INCLUDE STEP

3. The system **VALIDATES THAT**



CONDITIONAL STEP

the occupant class for airbag control is valid and

CONSTRAINT

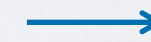
the occupant class for seat belt reminder is valid.

CONSTRAINT

4. The system **SENDS** the occupant class for airbag control **TO**

AirbagControlUnit.

DOMAIN ENTITY

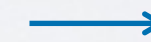


OUTPUT STEP

5. The system **SENDS** the occupant class for seat belt reminder **TO**

SeatBeltControlUnit.

DOMAIN ENTITY



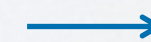
OUTPUT STEP

6. The System Waits for next execution cycle.



INTERNAL STEP

Postcondition: The occupant class for airbag control and the occupant class for seat belt reminder have been sent.



POSTCONDITION

“no error has been detected”

OCCL Constraint

```
Error.allInstances()  
->forAll( i | i.isDetected = false)
```

“the occupant class for airbag control was derived.”

OCCL Constraint

```
BodySenseSystem.allInstances() → forAll( b |  
  b.OccupantClassForAirbag = Child  
  OR b.OccupantClassForAirbag = Adult )
```

UseCaseStart

Input

Include

Condition

Condition

Output

Exit

DomainEntity

OccupancyStatus

OCCL Constraint

...

Condition

Exit

Output

Exit

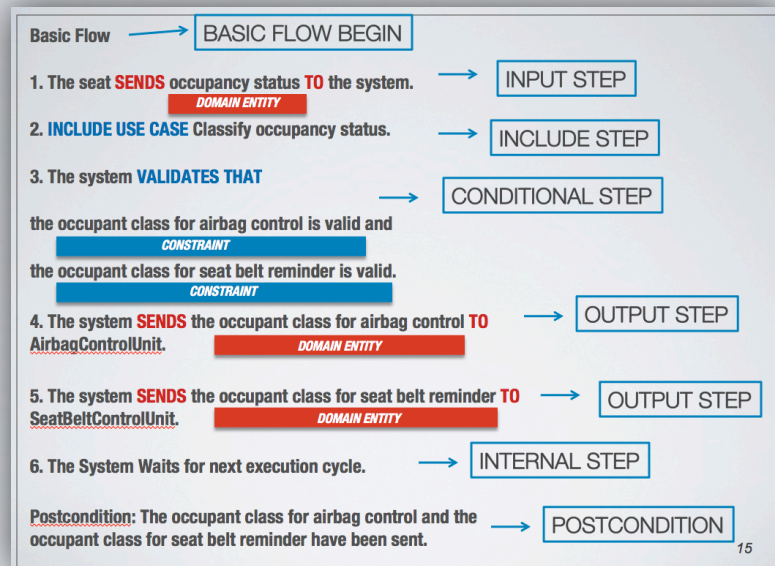
DomainEntity

...

DomainEntity

...

Evaluate Model Consistency



Airbag Control ✓

Classification Filter ?

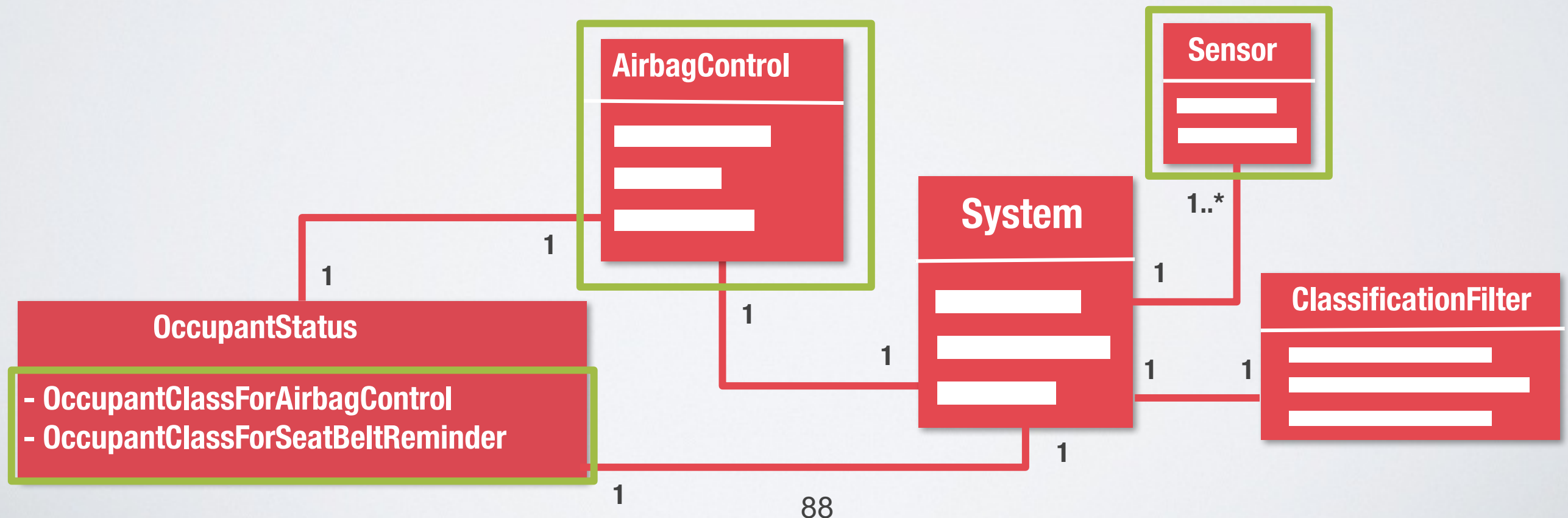
Sensor ✓

Occupant Class for Airbag Control ✓

Occupant Class for Seat Belt Reminder ✓

Tagged Use Case

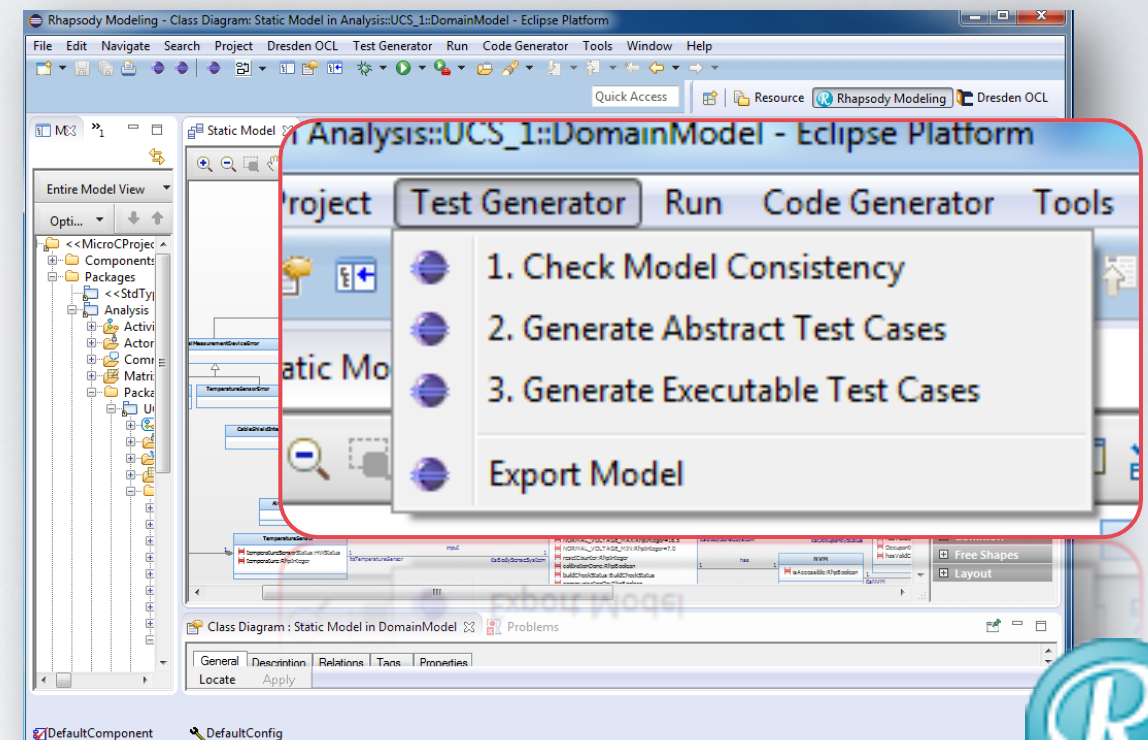
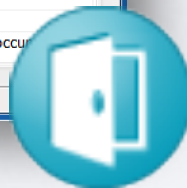
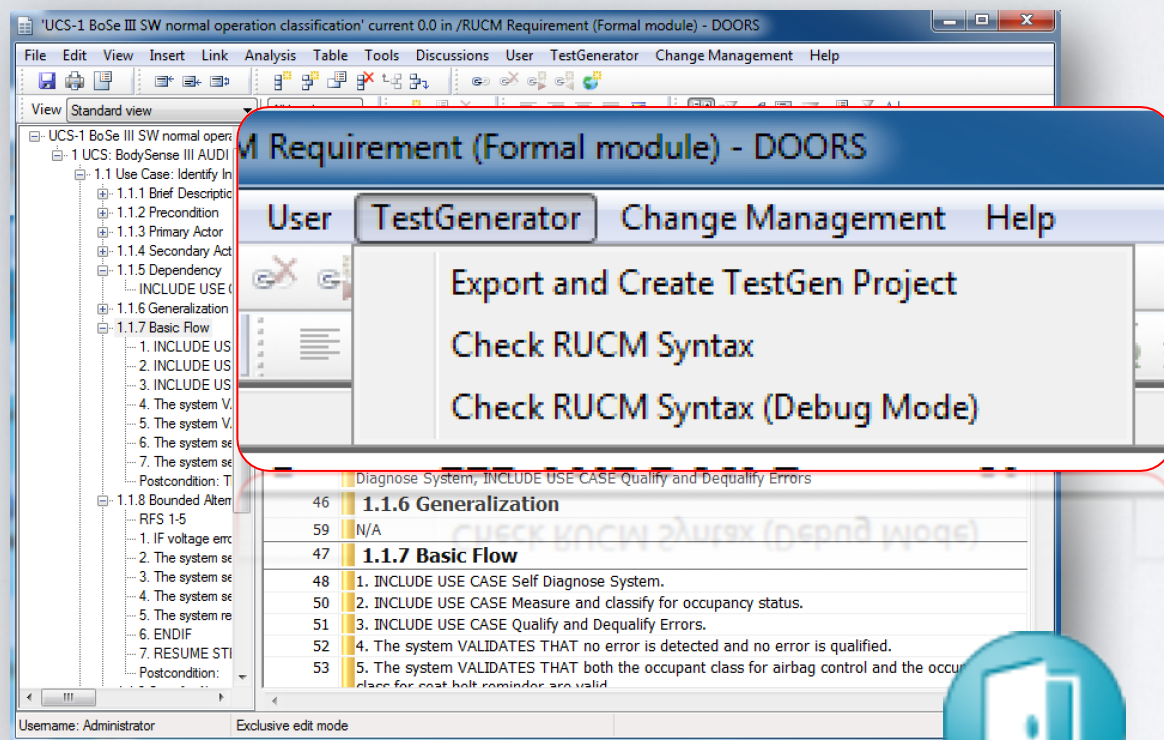
Domain Entities





TG

Toolset integrated with IBM DOORS and Rhapsody



<https://sites.google.com/site/umtgTestGen/>

Case Study

- **BodySense, embedded system for detecting occupancy status in a car**



- **Evaluation:**
 - **Cost of additional modelling**
 - **Effectiveness in terms of covered scenarios compared to current practice at IEE**
 - **Keep in mind changes and repeated testing**

Costs of Additional Modeling

Use Case	Steps	Use Case Flows	OCL Constraints
UC1	50	8	9
UC2	44	13	7
UC3	35	8	8
UC4	59	11	12
UC5	30	8	5
UC6	25	6	12

**5 to 10 minutes to write each constraints
=> A maximum of 10 hours in total**

Generating OCL Constraints

- **May be a challenge in practice**
- **NLP: Semantic Role Labeling**
- **Determine the role of words in a sentence (e.g., affected actor)**
- **Match words with corresponding concepts in the domain model**
- **Generate an OCL formula**

Semantic Role Labeling (SRL)

“no error has been detected”

A1



verb

Error.allInstances()->forAll(i | i.isDetected = false)

A1

verb

A0: actor that performs
an activity

A1: actor that is affected by the
activity described in a sentence

“The system detects temperature errors”

A0

verb

A1



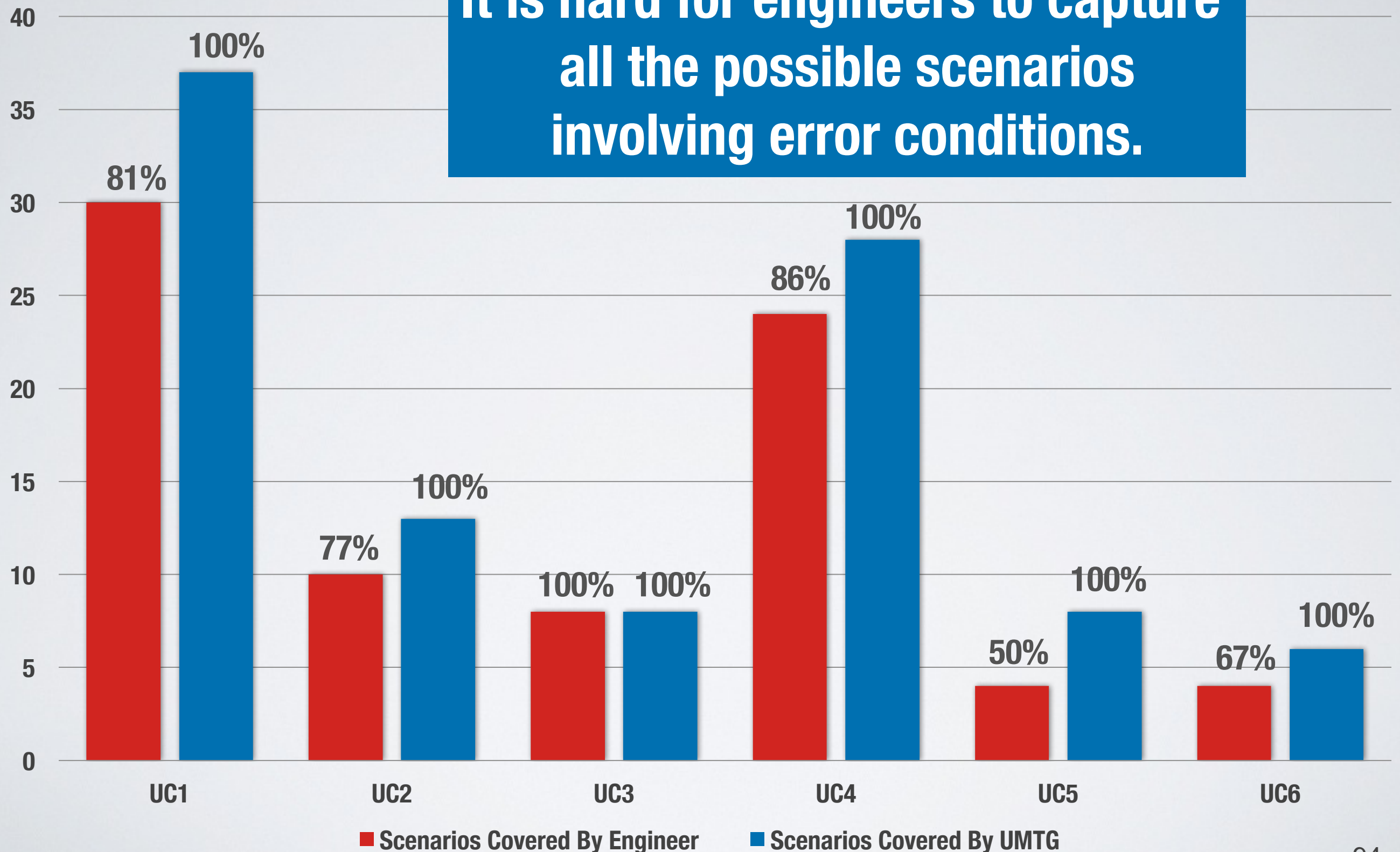
TemperatureError.allInstances()->forAll(i | i.isDetected = true)

A1

verb

Effectiveness: scenarios covered

It is hard for engineers to capture all the possible scenarios involving error conditions.



Supporting Product Lines and Requirements Configuration in Use-Case Driven Development

Configuring Requirements

- Many software systems are part of product families targeting **varying needs among multiple customers**
- Requirements typically need to be tailored or configured for each customer
- Because of interdependencies among such decisions, this is often error-prone and complex
- **How do we support this with natural language requirements?**

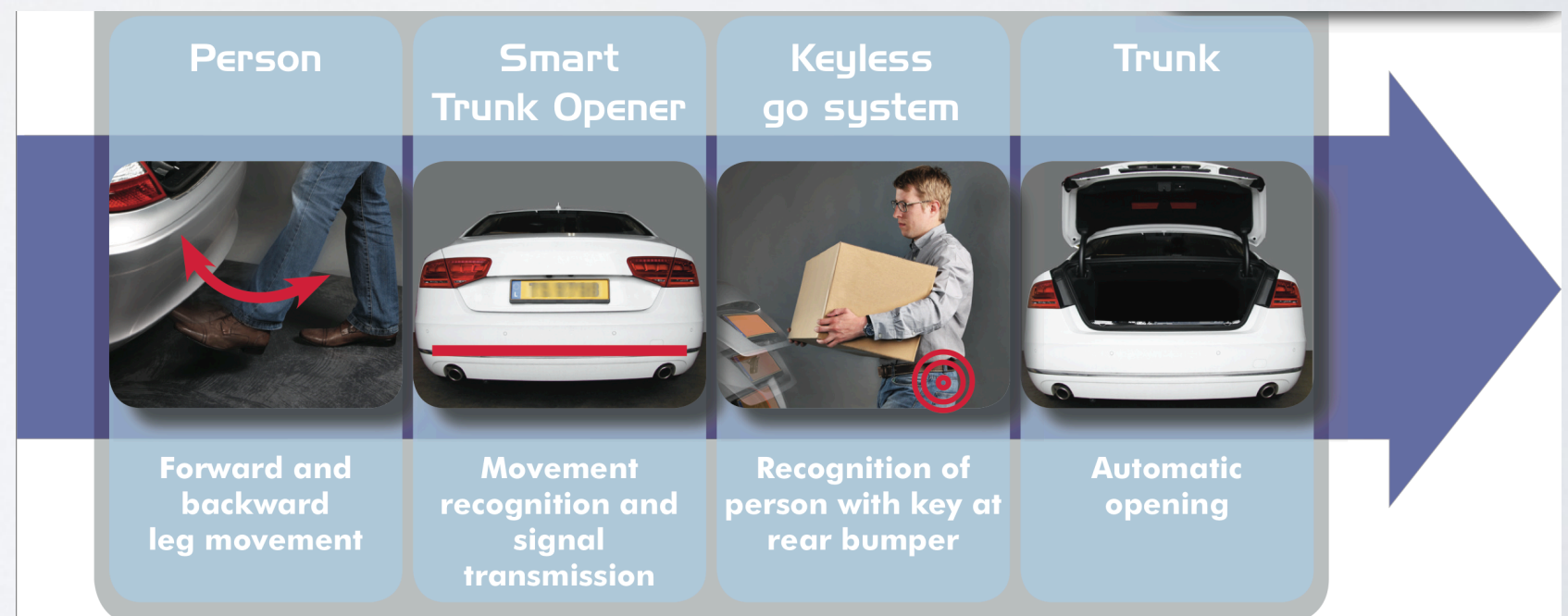
Context

IEE develops real-time embedded systems:

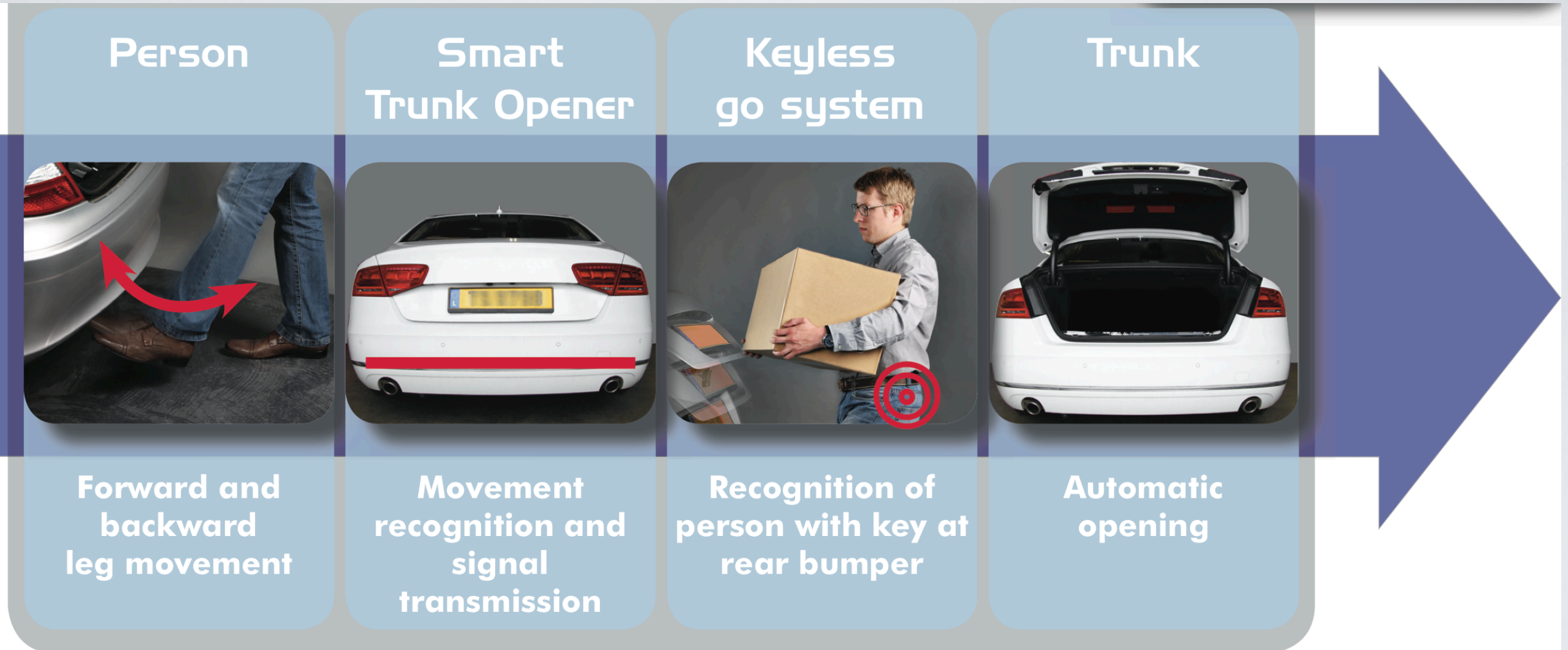
- Automotive **safety sensing systems**
- Automotive **comfort & convenience systems**, e.g., Smart Trunk Opener



International Electronics
& Engineering (IEE)



Smart Trunk Opener (STO)

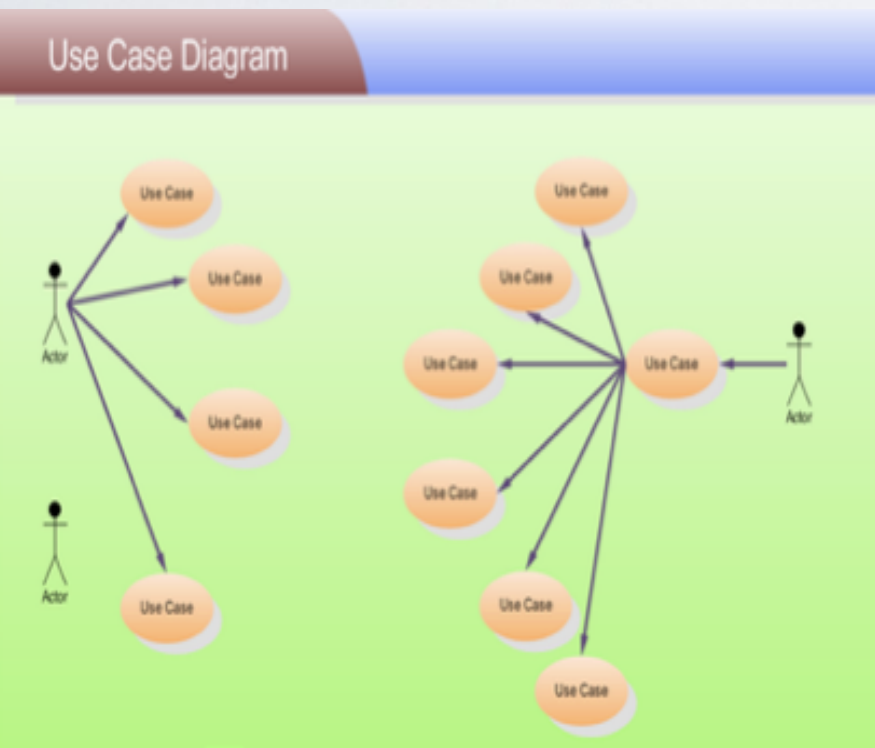


STO Provides **automatic** and **hands-free access** to a vehicle's trunk (based on a **keyless entry system**)

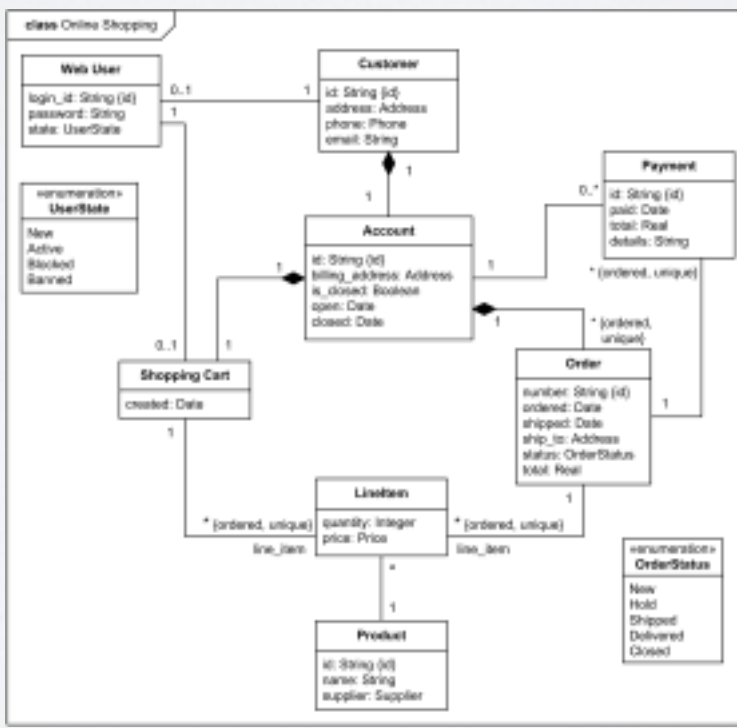
IEE Requirements Engineering

Use Case-Driven Development

Use Case Diagram



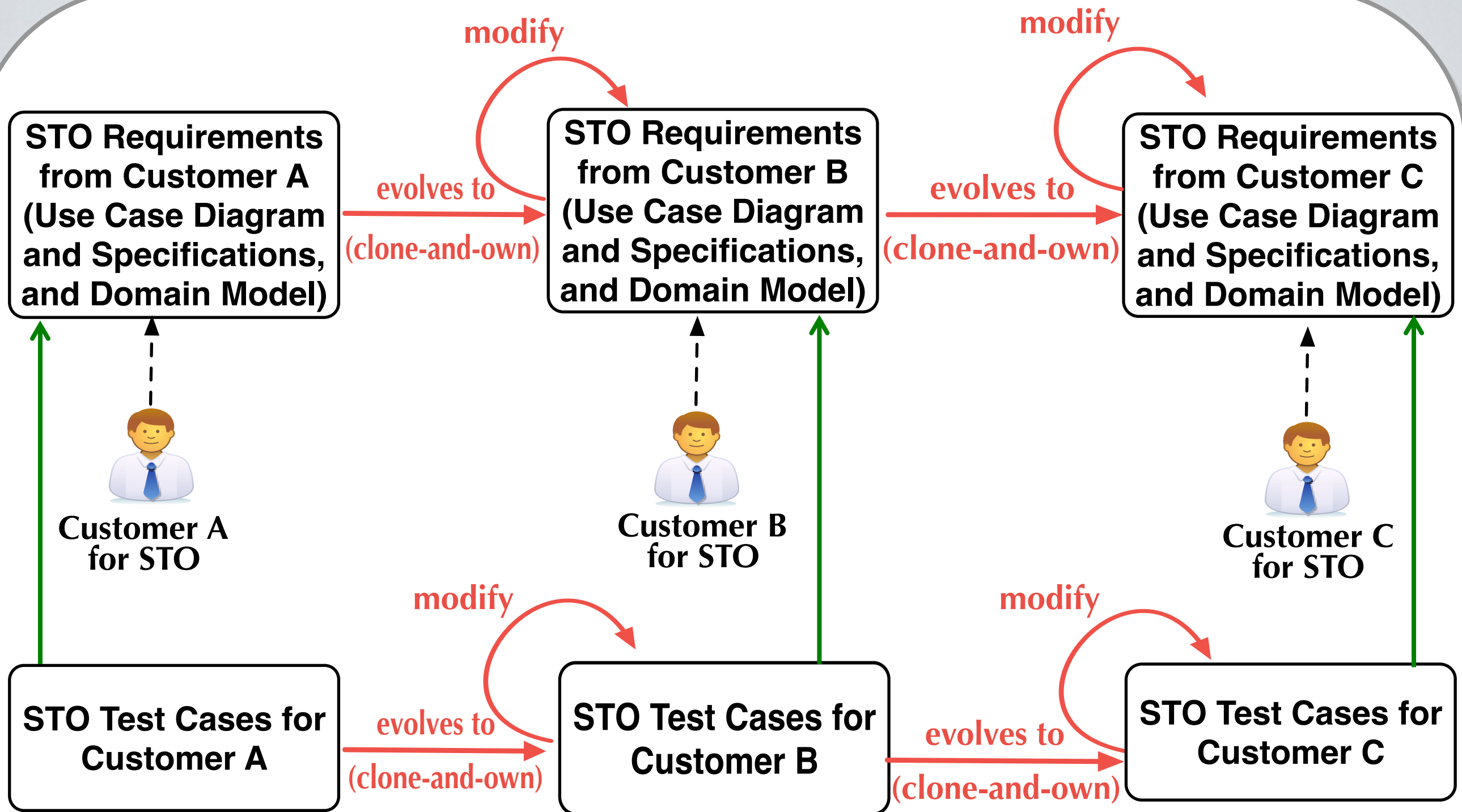
Domain Model



Use Case Specifications

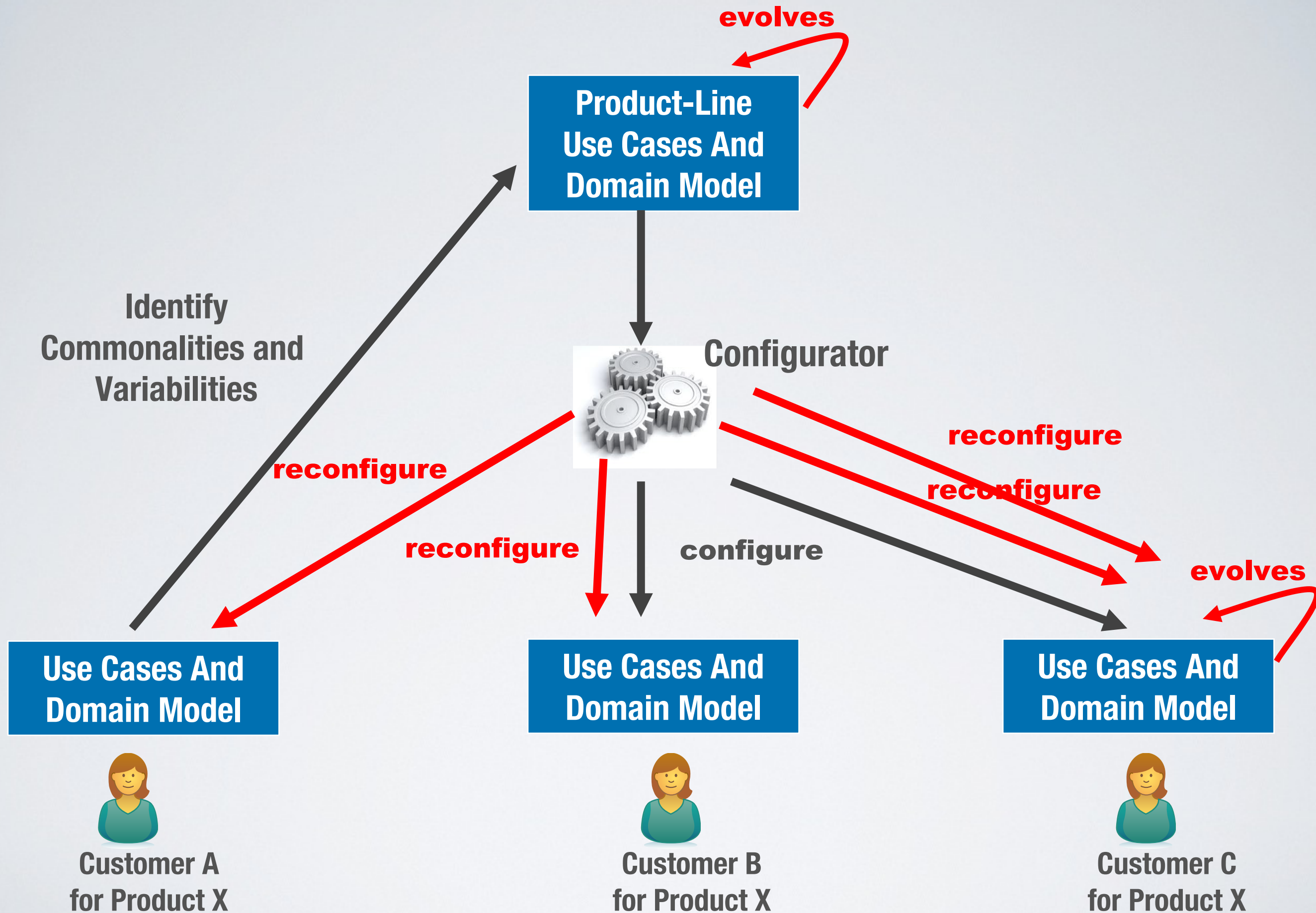
Use Case ID:	3
Use Case Name:	Deposit check
Actors:	Customer
Description:	Deposit cash without using ATM card by using E-Card system.
Preconditions:	1- The Customer has an activated E-Bank username and password. 2- The agreement should be signed by the customer. 3- The check must be valid.
Postconditions:	1- Customer account balance is increased by the amount of the deposit check.
Normal Flow:	1- Open the application. 2- The application shows welcome screen. 3- Log in to the application. 4- Choose the account. 5- Choose the transaction then deposit check service. 6- Enter the amount of money of the check and submit it. 7- Receiving the barcode. 8- Scan the barcode. 9- Insert the check into the ATM machine. 10- Receive notification. 11- Log out of the application.
Alternative Flows:	7a. if the customer didn't receive the barcode : 4- Customer will click on the get barcode bottom. 5- Bank sends a new barcode. 6- Use case resumes on step 8 of normal flow. 9a. if the ATM didn't accept the check: 3- Reenter the check into the ATM. 4- Use case resumes on step 9 of normal flow.
Exceptions:	8a. In step 8 of the normal flow, if the customer cannot scan the barcode 4- Transaction is disapproved 5- Customer rescan the barcode correctly 6- Use Case resumes on step 9 of normal flow.

Dealing with Multiple Customers

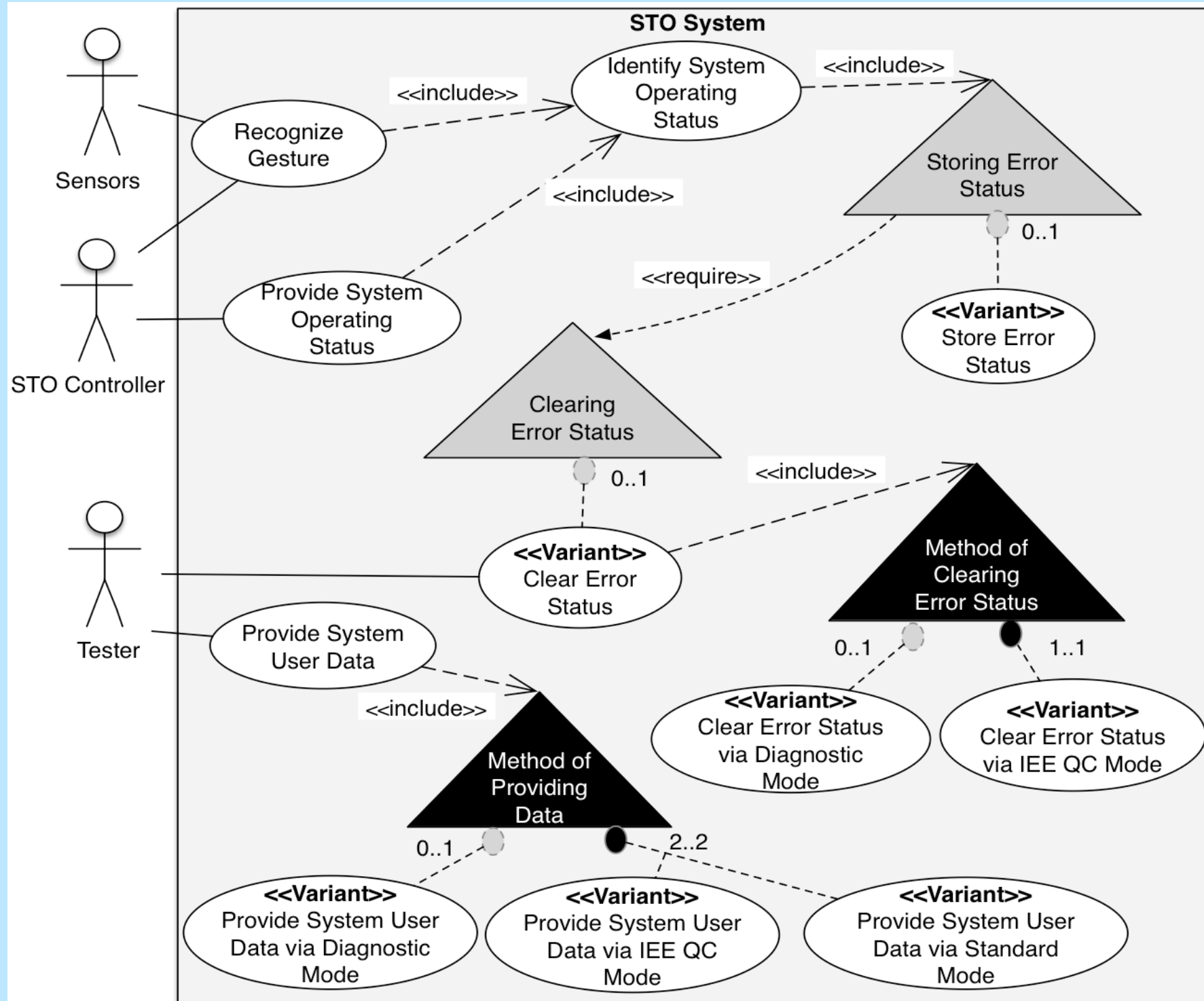


Product Line Approach

- **A Product Line approach tailored to practice and with minimal overhead (adoption)**
- **Restricted and analyzable use case specifications (RUCM)**
- **No feature modeling!**
- **Variability modeling** in use case diagrams and specifications
- **Automated configuration** guidance for configuring requirements with each customer
- **Automated generation** of product-specific use case models based on decisions



Product Line Use Case Diagram for STO (Partial)



Example Variability Extension

- Keyword: **INCLUDE VARIATION POINT: ...**
- Inclusion of variation points in **basic** or **alternative flows** of use cases:

Use Case: Identify System Operating Status
Basic Flow
1. The system VALIDATES THAT the watchdog reset is valid.
2. The system VALIDATES THAT the RAM is valid.
3. The system VALIDATES THAT the sensors are valid.
4. The system VALIDATES THAT there is no error detected.
Specific Alternative Flow
RFS 4
1. INCLUDE VARIATION POINT: Storing Error Status.
2. ABORT.

Results

- Tool Support (PUMConf): <https://sites.google.com/site/pumconf/>
- **NLP is a key instrument**
- Positive feedback from engineers, both about the modeling approach and configuration tool
- They confirmed they benefited from:
 - **Understanding the commonalities** and differences across product requirements
 - **Automated guidance** in a configuration that is often complex, i.e., many (interdependent) decisions

Discussion

RE Applications

- Requirements to support a **shared understanding** among many stakeholders in large projects, e.g., software engineers and domain experts
- Requirements as **contract** with customers
- Requirements to **support compliance** with standards, e.g., traceability to tests
- Requirements to **support quality assurance**, e.g., system testing
- Requirements to **support change control**
- Requirements to support **product-line configuration**

Forms of Requirements

- **Natural language** statements, complying or not with templates
- **Use case stories**, following various templates
- **Use case specifications**, possibly structured and restricted
- **Mixing models and NL**, e.g., class and activity diagrams

The best form of requirements depends on context, but in most cases significant information is captured in natural language

Contextual Factors

- **No “right” way to express requirements**
- **Domain complexity and criticality**
- **Regulatory compliance, e.g., standards**
- **Project size, team distribution, and number of stakeholders**
- **Background of stakeholders and communication challenges**
- **Presence of product lines with multiple customers**
- **Importance of early contractual agreement**
- **Frequency and consequences of changes in requirements**

Automation is required to justify the cost of rigorous requirements engineering

In most cases, we don't have practical and scalable automation solutions

Conclusions

- **NLP technology now provides many opportunities for automation**
- **But more attention to NL requirements analysis is needed in research**
- **Many applications, diversity of contexts and types of requirements**
- **Account for practicality and scalability**
- **More (reported) industrial experiences, as working assumptions play a key role**

Acknowledgements

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Analyzing Natural-Language Requirements: Industrial Needs and Scalable Solutions

UU/SIKS Symposium on Natural Language in Requirements Engineering, 30 November 2017

Lionel Briand
Interdisciplinary Centre for ICT Security, Reliability, and Trust (SnT)
University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg

Natural Language Requirements

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- **[MODELS 2016]** C. Arora et al., Extracting Domain Models from Natural-Language Requirements: Approach and Industrial Evaluation
- **[RE 2015]** C. Arora et al., Change Impact Analysis for Natural Language Requirements: An NLP Approach
- **[TSE 2015]** C. Arora et al., Automated Checking of Conformance to Requirements Templates using Natural Language Processing

Requirements-Driven Testing

- **[ISSTA 2015]** C. Wang et al., Automatic Generation of System Test Cases from Use Case Specifications
- **[ICST 2017]** C. Wang et al., System Testing of Timing Requirements based on Use Cases and Timed Automata
- **[Submitted]** C. Wang et al., Automated Generation of Constraints from Use Case Specifications to Support System Testing

Product Families and Configuration

- **[MODELS 2015]** I. Hajri et al., Applying Product Line Use Case Modeling in an Industrial Automotive Embedded System: Lessons Learned and a Refined Approach
- **[SoSYM 2016]** I. Hajri et al., A Requirements Configuration Approach and Tool for Use Case-Driven Development

Impact Analysis

- **[FSE 2016]** S. Nejati et al., Automated Change Impact Analysis between SysML Models of Requirements and Design
- **[RE 2015]** C. Arora et al., Change Impact Analysis for Natural Language Requirements: An NLP Approach