



The Decision Model and Notation standard, known as “DMN,” provides a clear, standardized, and executable way to model decisions driven by business rules. But what, exactly, is a business rule?

A business rule is a specific, actionable, and testable directive that is under the control of a business and serves to guide or constrain business operations. This customer discount rule is an example of a business rule. This employee policy is also a business rule. This order processing directive also meets the criteria of a business rule.

However, admonishing employees to “be nice” to customers is not a business rule. It’s neither specific nor testable.

Likewise, an aspirational mission statement may be important, but it’s not a business rule. It’s vague. It fails to prescribe a direct activity. There is no measurable benchmark. Furthermore, becoming a global leader is only partially under the control of the business.

Finally, while general advice might be true, it doesn’t represent a business rule.

When a process is based on specific, actionable, testable, and controllable business rules, a business rule task based on DMN can be incorporated in Business Process Model and Notation (or “BPMN”) process models.

For example, consider this order processing model.

- The process is instantiated when a customer places an order.
- The company checks the customer’s purchase history and retrieves the total value of the customer’s purchases over the last 12 months.
- That data is then used to determine the discount to be applied to the purchase price of the new order using a business rule task in accordance with DMN.
- The Decision Requirements Diagram (known as the “DRD”) says that the purchase discount depends on the cumulative value of the purchases by the customer over the preceding 12 months.
- The decision table spells out the precise relationship between the customer’s cumulative purchases and the discount to be applied.
- Once the discount is determined according to the business rules, it can be applied to the purchase price, and the process instance can be completed.

To recap, the DMN standard provides a clear and executable way to represent and execute business rules. A business rule is a specific, actionable, and testable directive that is under the control of a business and serves to guide or constrain business operations. Business rule tasks can clarify and enhance BPMN process models.