



Recommendations

- Use combinations of methods
- Include collaborative sessions
- Consider the quality of the information obtained
- Clarify goals and methods



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Requirements Elicitation

by Larysa Szalapaj

The process of gathering requirements for a possible software application may require the project team to be able to wield a variety of different techniques. In some instances stakeholders may be unaware of their needs and unable to articulate them. It is necessary to be able to deploy a range of methods to bring those requirements to the surface.

Each interaction between the project team and a stakeholder is an opportunity to better understand their needs. It also takes time. Consider carefully the information they provide: does it raise further questions? Is it contradictory? Use follow up questions to re-clarify requirements.

1. Documentation Review: Business plans, manuals, training guides, change request lists, user reports, product literature, and post-implementation reviews – are all sources of information about current applications and processes and can be a starting point for obtaining requirements.

2. Interviewing: Meetings with key stakeholders are helpful to find out what the application must do and how it must interact with users and other systems.

3. Surveys: Questions on diverse subjects can be used to gather information from large numbers of stakeholders. This may be done anonymously. Working practices, issues and risks, interactions with other stakeholders can be included.

4. Workshops and Focus Groups: Multiple stakeholders may participate in facilitated

meetings to generate, distil and prioritise ideas. Stakeholders are encouraged to come up with creative approaches to problems.

5. Shadowing: Observing end users perform their work then asking questions about it may help the project team to gain an understanding of typical activities and patterns. Participating in work tasks may also help provide greater understanding of what is needed.

6. Prototyping: Prototypes capture the look and feel of an application – they may be generated from drawings or images or from partially completed software. The organisation of such fragments and images into particular flows can provide valid requirements documentation and help stakeholders provide early feedback.

7. Use cases: Use cases explain in story format how a system achieves a user's goal – they describe behaviour of systems in a way that both technical and non-technical people can relate to.

Group meetings are good for circumventing potential disagreements between stakeholder groups, but they do have to be managed to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to be heard.

Apply the right elicitation techniques for your situation, the level of detail required and the type of stakeholder.

Take the time to clarify the goals and methods of the project, including those requirements which pertain the process itself.