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Subject: [Success with Requirements] Prioritizing Requirements to Save Time and Money; [Not] Lost in Translation; eLearning and public offering; and other Resources
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Ellen Gottesdiener, Publisher

Forward to a Colleague

Helping your business and technical teams get product requirements right so their projects start smart and deliver the right product at the right time

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Success with Requirements

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Success with Requirements

Forward to a Colleague

Welcome to our Newsletter!

Hi, egott -

Welcome to issue #10 of EBG's eNewsletter, *Success with Requirements.*

I hope all is well with you and yours. This month's eNewsletter's article addresses the topic of requirements prioritization.

Not all requirements are created equal. All teams - and product development efforts - need clear, inclusive and justifiable ways to make smart choices about the myriad of changing requirements. In this article, I explore some essential practices around prioritization that I hope you will find useful.

~ ellen

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Please contact me (ellen@ebgconsulting.com) with your suggestions and feedback on this issue.

Not Lost in Translation

I am pleased to let you know that my book *Requirements by Collaboration: Workshops for Defining Needs* has just been published in Japanese. Here's an image of the book:

Prioritizing Requirements to Save Time and Money

It seems that everywhere I go, the pressure is on teams to reduce costs and speed up delivery. One way is to adopt a practice of prioritizing product requirements and do so continually. You'll stop wasting time and energy on requirements you wont use or that dont return business value.

Let's look at essential practices for prioritizing requirements.

Who Should Prioritize?

At the start of the project, identify which stakeholders need to be involved and when. Include business or marketing owners who **understand the business benefits and penalties of implementing a given requirement**. Also involve IT architects or developers, experts in the technical costs and risks.

If you're following an iterative (e.g., agile) process, you'll revisit priorities at each iteration and in planning the next iteration. If you're following a more traditional development approach, it's best to set up milestones based on delivering requirements to a predefined level of granularity. Because requirements are continually being discovered and developed, **you need to revise priorities continually**.

What Criteria Should You Use?

Identify the factors you will use to analyze requirements priorities. **Include business customer priority, costs, risks, and architectural dependencies.** Costs include an estimate of development costs as well as the business costs of *not* delivering a requirement. These factors together help you assess the business value of your requirements at that point in time.

Next, **apply a ranking scheme to the criteria**. For example, classify each requirement as "essential," "useful," or "desirable"; "high," "medium," or "low"; MoSCoW ("must," "should," "could," or "won't"); or rank them in numerical order.

Make sure that the prioritizing stakeholders agree on what the rankings mean. Have them collaborate to arrive at clear, justifiable, and unambiguous definitions *before* ranking the requirements.

I recommend that product owners (business sponsors, product managers) pick a scheme and then take a crack at defining each level. Consult with other stakeholders - business and technical - to review and revise this draft. In the end, a **single product owner should determine the final definitions of your ranking scheme, with shared understanding by all stakeholders**.

On agile projects, requirements are estimated at a high level when they are first added to the product backlog. This gross estimate, along with the product owner's priority, generally incorporates cost, risk, and complexity. The estimate and priority is revised in finer detail during iteration planning when the product owner decides which requirements are most valuable for the iteration.

How Do You Make Decisions?

The key to effective prioritizing is to **be clear on your decision rules and decision process**. For example, a *decision rule* might be that the product owner will decide after discussion among the group, or that decisions require consensus, although rarely is consensus a good decision rule!

A *decision process* is a protocol that describes how a decision is to be proposed, who reviews it (and how), and how the group will reach closure on the decision.

For more on decision rules and decision making, see my article "Decide How to Decide: A Collaboration Pattern."

How Do You Organize Requirements?

Once you have your people, criteria, and decision making in place, you need to **organize your requirements**. Group like requirements into logical chunks of functionality. For example, event-response pairs can form feature groups, or clusters. You might organize cohesive use cases into use case maps or packages to form clusters of requirements. If you work with stories, group them into themes. Or, if your product domain is data-centric (e.g., storing, querying, and reporting information), you might cluster requirements by data groups.

Be sure to **include nonfunctional requirements**: external interfaces (e.g., feeds to and from other systems or subsystems) and quality attributes (e.g., performance, reliability, and response time). Try to limit the total number of clusters to 30 or fewer.

Also **be sure your clusters reflect interdependencies**. Can one or more requirements be implemented independently? Must you implement some requirements together? If there are dependencies but the requirements don't have to be implemented together, keep them separate but identify them as interdependent.

Dependency analysis will alert you to architectural dependencies. These dependencies, along with knowing the business value of the requirements, is essential for successfully planning incremental releases. Remember that interdependencies are often based on data and the state of key business data, so include a high-level description of dependencies in your initial analysis modeling efforts.

Apply the Practices

These practices set the stage for prioritizing: defining who will prioritize, determining critieria and ranking of those critieria, delineating an explicit decision making process, and organizing your requirements and their interdependencies. Now you are ready to apply your criteria to the requirements at any given point in time to make good choices.

Systematically deciding who, when, and how to prioritize your requirements not only makes good business sense but also establishes a healthy team culture. Try it - your team will find it useful for making smart choices, saving time and money, and delivering business value.

~ ellen

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References:

For a short explanation of eight prioritization techniques, see "At a Glance".

eLearning, Blended Classroom, and Public Offerings

Take self-paced eLearning, or optionally combine it with our expert instructor-led training for our unique "blended classroom" offering. Discount information for you, a subscriber to *Success with Requirements*, is provided below.

1. Self-paced eLearning: ***Roadmap to Success: Foundation for Requirements Development and Management.***

This content rich and engaging training includes:

- Long-term access (45 days) to the "*Roadmap to Success: Foundation for Requirements Development and Management*" curriculum
- A copy of the industry's "go to" book on requirements: *The*

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Click here to learn more or register. Subscribers to *Success with Requirements* receive special pricing. Use **DISCOUNT CODE: RFRTS05.**

2. Blended Classroom: ***Roadmap to Success: Comprehensive***. We are offering this unique, blended training publicly in two locations:

- March 26-27, 2008: Indianapolis, Indiana
- April 16-17, 2008: Orlando, Florida

This unique blended learning experience includes all the items listed above (***Roadmap to Success: Foundation for Requirements Development and Management)*** ***PLUS***:

- Two days of instructor-led training in "*Analysis Modeling*"
- Course guide for "*Analysis Modeling*"
- Mini-poster of the Requirements Roadmap
- Continental breakfast, lunch, snacks for the two-day instructor-led training event
- Completion certificate

Click here to learn more or register. Subscribers to *Success with Requirements* receive a 10% discount. Use **DISCOUNT CODE: RCRTS05**.

Upcoming Events

1. Ellen Gottesdiener will both be delivering a full-day tutorial and a presentation at the Better Software: Agile Development Practices (Orlando, December 3-6). As a presenter, I can share with you a way to save up to an additional $200 off your registration fees - use promo code SPAD during the registration process.

2. Our next public offering of our new blended classroom (self-paced combined with instructor-led) offering, Roadmap to Success: Comprehensive Foundation and Analysis Modeling will be held in these locations and on these dates: Indianapolis (March 26-27, 2008) and Orlando (April 16-17). See more info above on reader discounts. Register early to reserve your spot, class size is limited!

Resources of Interest

Each month we'll provide a few resources we think are worthwhile. The resources below all relate to the topic of this month's *eNewsletter* article: prioritization. We welcome your comments and suggestions for future issues!!

- You can read an introduction to the Kano Model, a technique for prioritizing needs, published in the *Center for Quality of Management Journal*.

- Mike Cohn provides a short and sweet example of the Kano Model in his StickyMinds article located here.

- Read Al Davis' "Notes on *The Art of Requirements Triage*." (If you or your organization has access to IEEE archives online, the source article is located here).

- Visit the home of "Win-Win," Barry Boehm's (and his research students) site on negotiating stakeholder requirements, including the Win-Win negotiation tool they developed to support the "win-win" model.

- You can read a summary of wisdom from contributors to IAFs Group Facilitation Usenet on dot voting here.

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