

Debating Use Cases and Requirements (8/21/2002)

RM14: Use Case Panel--Discussion Among Use Case Gurus

Doug Rosenberg wouldn't have a 20-page use case. Ian Spence would. But, as Ellen Gottesdiener reminded the panel, it's not all about size.

Welcome to the Use Case Panel: Discussion Among Use Case Gurus. And what a panel it was. On hand for the Wednesday RUC 2002 event were Ivar Jacobson and Ian Spence from Rational Software, Ellen Gottesdiener from [EBG Consulting, Inc.](#), Doug Rosenberg from [ICONIX Software](#), Elemer Magaziner from Project Linguistics, Intl., and Steve Adolph, from [WSA Consulting, Inc.](#) If any of the lightning flashing around Orlando today were to have stuck this room, there'd be no one left to write articles about use cases.

The panel responded to questions submitted earlier in the week via the [Rational public site](#) and the Rational Developer Network. And, as you would expect, there was some agreement, a few disagreements, and an occasional debate, all of it ably moderated by Kurt Bittner from Rational.

The first question: How do business requirements and use cases interact? And the audience knew it was in for an interesting 90-minutes Magaziner's said, "It is a hard question to answer because I don't know what the word "requirement" means." He then went on to state, "I think of business rules as requirements and use cases as a good way of seeing those in context."

Gottesdiener took the view that you shouldn't put business rules in your use case; you should separate them for more flexibility.

The question then arose of what types of requirements were being discussed, with Magaziner saying, "If you don't know what all the different types of requirements are, you don't know if you've gotten them wrong."

Jacobson added, "To talk about requirements you also need to talk about the depth of requirements."

This acted as a natural lead into that most-asked of use case questions: "How deep do you need to go to specify requirements?"

Rosenburg answered, "If you have a complicated 20-page use case, you have to hide the information, so you can only see it at the top level. There's got to be a way to drill down into layers to see the detail, but it can't all be at the top."

Spence concurred that use cases need to tell a story and do it fully enough that

the story is clearly conveyed to the right stakeholders. He said, "If you're using use cases to drive testing, you'll need to put the information the testers are going to need into those use cases."

Adolph offered the opinion that, as a general rule of thumb, if a use case has more than nine steps, it should be redone and made more simple. He made the analogy of the use case being the hub of a wheel from which additional information radiated out, like spokes.

Gottesdiener made the point that how much detail depended greatly on the goal of the iteration you were in. She suggested a "doneness test" that basically determines what end users need for the use case to be "done enough."

Another way of looking at that "doneness test," pointed out Magaziner, was to view it as risk mitigation. Ask yourself, "What's the risk that something can be misinterpreted?"

Rosenberg's viewpoint was to think of use cases as if you were "writing the user manual, and then writing the code, but I have no purpose for a 20-page use case." His advice: split up large use cases to enable the analysis and design of smaller features and functions.

Adolph seemed to agree with Rosenberg, commenting that if he saw a 20-page use case, he'd assume it was actually multiple use cases masquerading as one.

After a few minutes of wrangling, Gottesdiener (the lone woman on the panel) wryly asked, "guys, are we all talking about size right now?" This drew a huge laugh, not only from the audience but also from her fellow gurus.

It's not about size, was her viewpoint. "It's not the length, it's the complexity of the story."

All this took place in only the first 45-minutes of a 90-minute session.

For more on use cases, see the article by Rational Developer Network's own requirements analyst, Susan August, "[Ending Requirements Chaos](#)," based on a proposal she submitted for a RUC 2002 session.

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