Brady Field

Stakeholder Elicitation Troubleshooting

**Know what they have but don't know what they want**

**Questionnaires**

This elicitation technique involves sending out a short list of questions to a lot of people and organizing the results into meaningful data. The reason one would need to involve a lot of people is because not everyone will participate, and also a lot of feedback is desired.

If stakeholders simply don’t know what they want, questionnaires can provide a starting point by getting a lot of feedback very quickly from current users. This can highlight satisfactions or dissatisfactions with the current system. These can then be used to uncover problems. Problems lead to requirements.

**Brainstorming**

The idea behind brainstorming is to get quick input from a whole group. Ideas are simply listed. They are not evaluated. This means that creative, or even crazy, ideas are accepted in this setting.

When stakeholders don’t know what they want, brainstorming can help by simply getting the ball rolling so to speak. With ideas and creativity being exercised, stakeholders can begin to get ideas of what is needed.

**Know what they want but are unable to articulate it**

**Modeling/Prototyping**

Modeling involves representing an idea graphically. Charts, graphs, prototypes, and other visual tools fall into this category. Many people are visual learners and this helps to overcome vocabulary or language barriers by communicating ideas in a different way.

When the stakeholders are unable to speak what they want, models can help transfer the idea by describing it graphically. This can also overcome language issues by describing the current system, or by describing what the stakeholders would like. This is especially useful for describing complex ideas that are difficult to verbally explain.

**Interviewing**

Interviewing is all about digging up information. This can be done either with prepared questions or with an open discussion. Either way, the interviewer needs to keep track of the information and keep the discussion on point.

In the case of helping stakeholders that don’t know how to say what they want, an interview approach can help probe with questions about what is needed. By answering questions about the issue, stakeholders will be able to better communicate their wants. Even an open discussion about the problem can yield to a description of requirements.

**Cannot agree on what they want**

**Delphi**

The Delphi technique involves managing feedback from experts while preserving anonymity of participants. A moderator is needed to gather the feedback and communicate with the participants. This is a multistep process. With every iteration of the technique, a reason is given for a particular stance on the problem. This is repeated until a consensus is reached.

When opinions or personalities are getting in the way, the Delphi technique specializes at removing personality from the equation and focuses in on the reasons behind the decisions. The whole idea here is reasoned compromise. So when stakeholders cannot agree on what they want, this method can help to resolve the differences and arrive at a good consensus; though this approach may take some time.

**Scenarios**

Scenarios involve a procedural representation of typical interactions with a system. It describes how a system would be used in a step by step format.

When stakeholders cannot agree, it may help to simply focus on the needs of the user. This could be done by making scenarios to describe how a user would normally be interacting with the system. By focusing on the user’s needs, stakeholders could prioritize what the user would find the most beneficial, and use that for common ground to build on.

**Fail to share background knowledge with you because "everybody knows it"**

**Documentation**

Using documentation to elicit requirements involves studying documentation on what is already out there for the problem domain. This could mean reading up on the current system, or reading through documentation of a competing system.

When stakeholders have implicit requirements, familiarity with the problem domain can help uncover these hidden requirements. Reading the documentation of a system or a competing system will educate one to the ins and outs involved with the whole process. This helps to uncover these “common knowledge” requirements and bring the requirements engineer to an understanding of the problem domain closer to the stakeholders.

**Ethnography**

Ethnography involves putting oneself in the field of study and observing how things work. This is a very powerful tool for research into a problem domain.

In regards to dealing with stakeholders not sharing “common knowledge” with the requirements engineer, a better understanding of the problem domain goes a long way toward uncovering hidden requirements. By immersing oneself in the problem domain, one can not only familiarize oneself with what things are done, but also why those things are done. These “common knowledge” requirements are then transferred to the requirements engineer because now he or she will better understand how things work.