

Lecture 3 Involving Clients

Client Communication

When meeting client

- What do you say?
- Where do you start?

This lesson:

- good questions to ask
 - questions to avoid
 - what to keep in mind when interacting with your client.
- » to confidently converse with your client and elicit requirements effectively

First meeting

The Goal: take an idea from their head and turn it into a software product

An important thing to keep in mind:

- you are there to explore options with them.
 - You are not there to simply gather their ideas.
- » Client interaction should be interactive.

Restaurant & software development

Waiter?

- This isn't like a restaurant where you are the waiter or waitress.
- You are not just taking the order and delivering them what they asked.

Chef?

- It's more like inviting them back into the kitchen, introducing them to the chef, and letting them look at the ingredients.
 - Then you, the chef, and the client talk about all the delicious dishes you could make.
- » As a team, with the ingredients you have, you invent a new innovative meal that is perfect for the client.

How & After the first requirements elicitation

Prototypes & requirements

- Once you have mock-ups and prototypes to show your client, it's much easier for them to say what they like, what they want, and what they hate.
- To get requirements right, and thus the right product, you're going to have to visit requirements elicitation frequently.

You'll be revisiting the requirements often

» make sure that you are numbering your requirements with some unique identifier. This will make them easy to reference throughout development for everyone involved.

Also, requirements do not have to specifically come from the client.

Ways to elicit additional requirements

There are many ways to elicit additional requirements.

Interview end-users

For example, you can interview end-users to see

- how they work,
- what they want,
- and what they like.

Conduct feasibility studies

You can conduct a feasibility study with a focus group.

Watch end-users using the product

You can observe end-users to see how they use the product.

Consult user manuals for similar products

If the end-users had used a previous product, you can consult the products user manual to see what they're used to.

establish a glossary for the product » ease client interactions

- This glossary presents information specific to the product.
- Once a term is inducted into the glossary it should be used by everyone.
 - » increases clarity because there will not be different terms for the same thing.

Quiz

Kyle is a new software product manager...

He has his first ever client meeting of his career. He shakes his client hand, and introduces himself and his development team.

- He asks his client about the goal of the product and gets some insightful answers.
- He then asks the client what they would like to see in the product.
- The client starts listing features that she wants to see, Kyle records the answers.
- After the meeting Kyle meets with his development team to turn the list of requested features into a backlog of requirements.
- He emails the backlog to the client and asks her to prioritize the requirements.
- Once the development team receives the prioritized backlog, they get started with development.

Quiz

- Two weeks later, Kyle and the development team meet the client to show her a prototype.
- The prototype was exactly what the client had asked for, but it was pretty difficult to use.
- The development team wasn't very satisfied with their work.

What did Kyle do that resulted in this situation?

- A. Asked the client about the goal of the product.
- B. Based the requirements solely on what the client suggested.
- C. Had the client prioritize the requirements.
- D. Provided the client with a prototype after two weeks.

Quiz

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Interacting with client

Find a correct balance with your client

- You do not want to come across as too passive.
- You do not want to come across too aggressive either.
- You are not a waiter or waitress taking an order.
- You want to suggest new ideas and perspectives.

Avoid telling the customer what they want, interrogating them for details and decisions.

» Find a balance where you are assertive and helpful.

Ask good questions

A good way to find this balance is to ask good questions.

- Ask good open ended questions.
- Stay focused on the goal and purpose of the product.
- try to stay as independent of technology as possible.

Constantly ask your client “Why?”

- Why do they want it that way?
- Why do they need the product?
- Why would anyone use it?

[video] TED Talk by Simon Sinek about the power of the question “Why?”

Questions to avoid

other questions that you should avoid, other than yes or no questions.

- what do you want?
- what are your requirements?

These questions are a little too open-ended.

» They will result in random, poorly structured, but important thoughts.

In software development

As a software product manager, you want to act **in the opposite way** of a trial lawyer.

- Try to structure the conversation **to allow more organized thoughts**.
- This will make it easier to transform ideas into requirements.

Explore alternatives

- Make sure that you are not steering clients to a prematurely conceived solution.
- You want to explore alternatives.

If the client prematurely agrees to a solution without exploring other ideas, they may end up less satisfied with the end result.

Customer is not always right

The client may try steering towards a certain solution.

"The customer is always right in retail"

v.s. Sometimes the client is wrong in software development.

How the client can be wrong

- Sometimes the client doesn't know what is possible
- they might suggest ideas that would make the product harder to learn by their end users.

It's important that you respect the point and understand the rationale behind their thinking.

» Again, ask "Why?".

The right approach

- Try to suggest possible alternatives
- politely highlight why their approach may not work.
- At the end of the day, the client makes key requirements-level decisions.

If you leave requirements totally up to the development team,
» it allows them to build whatever they want and not what the client needs.

Quiz - context

You and your development team are creating an online shopping website for a company that sells pet supplies online.

The client is very specific about what they want.

- She wants a green background with red text.
- She wants pictures of animals that are animated to look like they are dancing,
- and she wants all products displayed on the front page, sorted by price from high to low.

Your development team is a little uneasy about this design.

They tried to convince her to let go of these features.

- One developer explains that it's hard to read red text on a green background.
- And that people who are color blind won't be able to read it at all.
- Her favorite colors are red and green, so she was hesitant to change her mind.

But eventually she agreed to green background with blue text. Not ideal, but better.

- The development team then tried to convince her of sorting prices from high to low.
- They decided the dancing animals were harmless and the least of their worries.
- They explained to the client that the user should be able to sort by animal type or product types like food, toys etcetera.

Quiz

- They explained it would make the website much easier for users and less crowded on the main page.
- She refuses to change the sorting system.

What should be the next approach for the development team in this situation?

- A. Create the website with all her requests and deliver the product she wants.
- B. Provide experimental data to show her that sales can be increased with a better sorting system.
- C. Make the animal dance moves inappropriate, just to spite her.
- D. Create a website that is visually appealing and has a great sorting feature.

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Quiz - explanation

The team needs to have courage in this situation.

- Their next approach should be to do an experiment
- or find some data that backs the position of the development team.
- You can use this to create a data driven decision.

Again, you need to think of the why of the product is needed.

- If the why is to increase sales or to satisfy customers, then the product should reflect that.
- A reasonable client will be swayed with the right data and economic argument.
- However, if your client is completely unreasonable
- and no approach is working to change their mind,
 - » then it may be best to deliver the product they want.