

# COMMON ANALYSTS' MISTAKES IN REQUIREMENTS ELICITATION INTERVIEWS

# Mistakes classifications

1. Question formulation
2. Question omission
3. Order in the interview
4. Communication skills
5. Analyst behaviour
6. Interaction with the interviewee
7. Planning

# QUESTION FORMULATION



# Asking vague questions

- Open ended questions are ok
  - *Let the interviewee speak*
- Vague or ambiguous questions are **NOT** ok
  - *If the interviewee does not understand your question, it is not a good sign*
  - *Interviewees may try to answer even when they do not understand, and you do NOT control the dialogue anymore*
- Examples:
  - “Can you indicate the major constraints of the project?”
  - “Do you want some specific features on the website?”
  - “What are your expectations?”

# Asking technical questions



- Many stakeholders do not know computer science terminology and concepts
- Do not use technical jargon or concepts
- Examples:
  - “Are we *allowing push notifications*?”
  - “What *cryptographic solution* do we want to use?”
  - “What *mean time to repair* do you expect?”
  - “What’s the *current business process*?”

# Asking irrelevant questions



- All the questions need to be relevant for the development of the system
- Out-of-scope questions make you lose time
- Example: your customer wants you to develop an app for allowing his/her customers to book appointment for his/her dentist shop and you ask
  - “*How does the inventory work in your shop?*”
  - “*Since you allow walk-in, how do you handle them in the shop?*”

# Asking the interviewee for solutions



- You need to collect your stakeholders' needs and learn their perspective and domain
- Questions related to the solution are outside the problem realm and
  - *Can be confusing for the interviewee*
- Examples:
  - *“How do you want the system to manage reservations?”*
  - *“How should I fix the problem of customers reserving a spot at the same time?”*

# Asking long and overly complex questions



- Questions should be concise
- Very long questions can be overwhelming
- Examples:
  - *Are you considering to include in the system also the option of reserving periodic appointments, meaning for example booking the same kind of appointment every other Tuesday for a few months, to allow people to avoid to log in multiple times and so save time?*

# Incorrect question formulation



- A question is formulated correctly if it asks only one concept at the time
- Examples:
  - *“Could you tell me more about the kind of interface and how would you like to distribute this kind of application, which platform?”*

# QUESTION OMISSION

# Not asking for additional stakeholders



- Your interviewee knows only part of the information
- You need to understand which information the interviewee does not know, and ask who could answer your additional questions
- Safety question: *“If this interview was a group meeting to discuss the project, who, besides us, do you think should participate to the meeting?”*

# Not asking probing questions



- There is no shame in not understanding!
- Ask probing questions when you suspect that you misunderstood something
- Ask probing questions even when you're sure you have understood
- Always rephrase: use your terms, do not use the same terms used by the customer



# Not asking about the existing system or business process

- To really understand what the customer wants, you need to understand the **system-as-is**
- There may be already computer systems in place, or social (human-based) systems, that you may need to replace, or integrate
- Although you should not use the term “business process”, you should understand the current sequence of activities

# Not asking questions about feature prioritization



- There are features that are more important than others
- You should understand which are the most important ones
- If the interviewee is not able to formulate the most important features, provide suggestions based on your understanding

# Not asking information about the problem domain



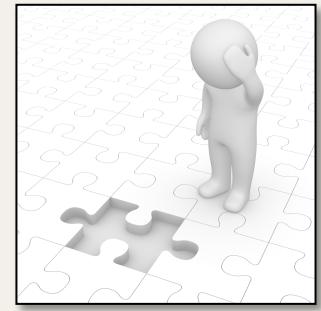
- You can document on the domain beforehand, but each domain has peculiarities that only domain experts know
- Whenever you hear a domain-specific term, ask what the interviewee intends with that term

# Goals and success criteria not identified



- You have to understand the motivation behind the development of the system (the goals)
- You have to understand when the customer will consider that the system deployment is successful
- Do not explicitly ask for goals and success criteria
- Propose goals and success criteria and ask for confirmation after you have understood a bit of the process and domain

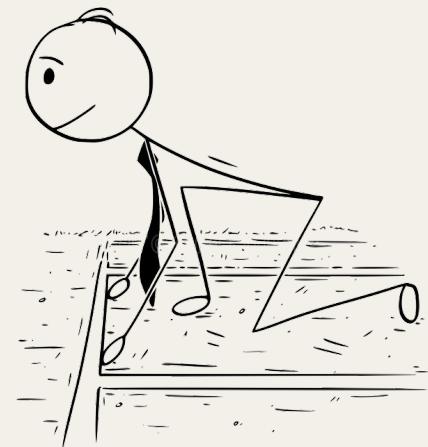
# Not asking all the relevant questions



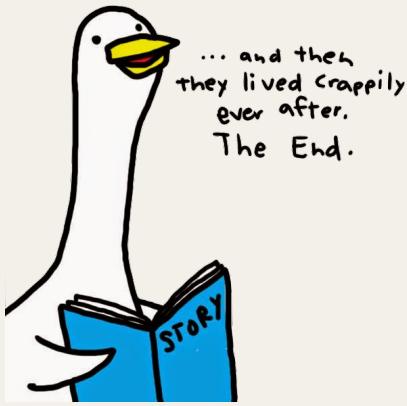
- If you do not cover all the relevant topic, you will have an incomplete vision of the problem
- You should prepare and know which topics you need to cover
  - *Make sure to cover them!*

# ORDER IN THE INTERVIEW

# Incorrect start of the interview



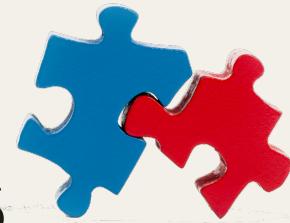
- Never start the interview by asking direct questions about the system to be developed
- Start the interview by building rapport and then trying to understand the domain, the current system and the process



# Incorrect end of the interview

Perform a structured summary of what you have understood

- It works as a verbal contract
- It allows the interviewee to clarify misunderstandings
- It allows the interviewee to have a structured vision of shared knowledge



# Incorrect order of questions

- Do not be illogical in the order you cover topics
- Examples:
  - *Asking details before talking about the big picture*
  - *Ask usual polite questions (how are you? ...) after you ask question on the product*
- Do not go back and forth among topics
  - *Sometime it might be necessary, but it should not be an habit!*

# Question repetition



- Repeating questions may show that you did not listen to the customer
- You can repeat questions only to clarify, but you should **rephrase** the question and declare that you wish to clarify

# COMMUNICATION SKILLS

# Usage of unnatural dialogue style



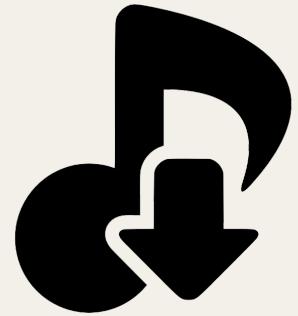
- Interrogatory-like questions are unnatural
- Let the customer create scenarios:
  - *“Please, let me visualise the first page of your application, and tell me step-by-step how should I interact with the application to ...”*
  - *Let the customer act as teacher, not as a student in an exam*

# Language-related issues



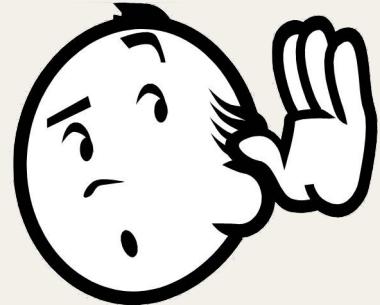
- Non native speaker interviewers
  - *Try to use it in a correct and clear way*
  - *Minimize the mistakes*
  - *Make sure your pronunciation is understandable*
- Native speaker
  - *Try to avoid grammar mistakes (even if commonly accepted)*
  - *Choose the correct lexicon*

# Speaking in a low and unclear tone



- The interviewee should hear you
- The interviewee should hear that you really want to know the information that you are asking
- Low and unclear tone is irritating

# Poor listening skills



- Listen to the interviewee and react to his/her words
- Interviews are conversations
  - *Do not use a predefined agenda ignoring your interviewee*
- Good listening skills can help you to prevent other mistakes

# ANALYST BEHAVIOUR



# Confidence

- Lack of confidence
  - *Do not underestimate yourself*
  - *Do not let the interviewee think that you are not valuable and you will do a poor job*
- Overconfidence and arrogance
  - *Do not behave like you have all the answers*
  - *Remember that you work for the project stakeholders*
  - *Do not forget that collecting requirements is difficult!*

# Passive attitude



- Do not let the interview dominate you
  - *Be an active participant*
  - *Lead it*
- By properly leading the interview, you create a better atmosphere that will improve the interviewee's engagement

# Unprofessional behaviour



- Even if you have created a relationship with your stakeholders, a requirements elicitation interview is a work task
  - *Never cross the line*
- Being professional is a necessary condition to be focused and get the most from the interview

# **INTERACTION WITH THE INTERVIEWEE**

# Not creating rapport with the interviewee



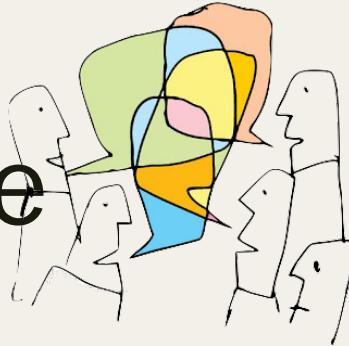
- Always start the interview with small talk
- Understand how the interviewee is feeling
- Show that you are a nice person
  - *if you are not, just try to be professional*

# Trying to influence the interviewee



- If the interviewee states something, do not try to change their mind or influence them in a subtle manner
  
- Example:
  - *I: The app is developed only for my private use*
  - *A: Would you like to have a personal account to log in?  
(The analyst does not clarify that this increases the cost)*
  - *I: It is not a big deal to me, but yes, it would be nice to have it*

# Interrupting the interviewee



- Let the interviewee speak
- Let the interviewee finish their argument
- If you really need to interrupt the interviewee for time reasons, apologize in advance



**PLANNING**

# Not managing time in a proper way



- Do not be too fast! The interview should look like you have all the time in the world, because you planned for it
- Do not be too slow! Do not spend too much time discussing aspects that are not so relevant

# Lack of preparation on the domain



- Search information in internet about the domain(s) that you will be dealing with
- You cannot know everything in advance, but it is good to have an idea of the vocabulary that the customer is going to use

# Lack of interview planning



- Prepare core questions before the interview
- Expect to add other questions during the interview, depending on the dialogue flow
- Rehearse the interview with the mirror or with your colleagues
- Remember that you do not have many chances to talk with certain stakeholders

# Long pauses during the interview



- A dialogue needs to be lively
- There is no problem if there is a pause, it may help the interviewee think
- There is a problem if there are very long pauses in which you do not know what to say