

The Case for Outsourcing Requirements Facilitation

By: Bonnie Walker

Understanding and gathering requirements is a discipline and a process that is rooted in high performance communications and good analysis. With communication at the heart of the requirements effort it is important to appreciate the role of the senior requirements facilitator.

Creating a focused environment and a good stakeholder meeting requires guidance from the executive sponsor and input from the project manager, but a successful project kick off ultimately depends on the skill and expertise of the lead requirements facilitator. Not enough has been said about the value of a professional requirements facilitator. With a unique skill set and vantage point, this is a powerful resource for driving out complete requirements and building consensus.

A requirements professional brings expertise, practice and experience to a project. People often make the mistake and assume that a requirements facilitator needs to be an expert in the specific industry they are working in. This is not the case at all. A requirements facilitator relies on a consistent process and solid questioning techniques to elicit the content from the subject matter experts. It is not the facilitator's job to be a content expert but to be the requirements expert. A good facilitator will ask a lot of questions and continually repeat information back. This appears to the participant that they really know the business, when in reality the facilitator is an active and expert listener, who often learns as he goes.

Professional requirements facilitators have a disciplined process they follow. They are precise and specific in elicitation. A professional requirements facilitator knows the clues and triggers to watch for and they pay attention to the actual words used. They distinguish between nouns and verbs and understand that this has impact in the world of systems development. They also know when something is missing and as external consultants they can ask hard questions. They don't run the same risk of political backlash that an internal

resource would. Professional requirements facilitators are not afraid to push back on the participants to get the clarity they need and they know how to defuse a hostile or volatile situation. Political agendas can make the job of gathering and documenting requirements next to impossible in some organizations. This and speed are the chief reasons why organizations today choose to outsource requirements facilitation.

The efficiency that a professional requirements facilitator brings to his work is the other reason for outsourcing. It is very difficult to reach this level of expertise in a typical enterprise organization. In most companies there are many people responsible for delivering requirements and on average they can allocate less than 20% of their time to actual elicitation, which makes it obvious why they don't have the same level of focus or ability. A professional requirements facilitator does requirements all day, everyday. They spend their careers in the analysis phase of systems development projects around the world. They eat, sleep and drink requirements. And while being the requirements facilitator at the front of the room is not the only job in gathering and documenting good requirements, it may well be the most important one delivering the most impact.

The senior requirements facilitator is not easily produced and many organizations are finding this out the hard way. The truth is; this person is 1 in 10,000. Those that have what it takes today are in high demand and those that show promise, know their future is bright. Hire a professional senior requirements facilitator today and experience the difference!

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