

Project Requirements Indigestion



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Gathering a grocery list of requirements guarantees scope creep and projects that produce little business value. Decomposing the Scope to develop requirements avoids both problems.

Building a Strategic Requirements ala Carte Menu

We can use one of two approaches for developing requirements. There's the "grocery list" where we faithfully record a long list of ingredients the users give us, with no one having a clear idea about whether we are making Chicken McNuggets® or Cordon Bleu. With the grocery list approach, we can't assess new requirements against any criteria, so the grocery list grows and grows. Then as we near the end of the project and have a bunch of half-baked dishes, we try to blend them into something of business value. But we usually wind up serving some inedible slop that gives everyone indigestion and those executive belches can be career threatening for a PM.

The alternative is the strategic menu approach where we identify in precise measured terms the overall business result from the project. Next we decompose that business result into the major achievements that lead to the result (measured business value, not deliverables). With this AdPM™ method we can gauge what should and should not be included in the project. Let's see what happens with each approach.



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The WC2010 Project: Invitation to Failure

The PM sat in one of the lushly padded conference room chairs, joining more than 15 managers from the user division for the emergency project meeting. The senior VP bounded in and said, "OK, this is priority #1. The water cooler is just not working for us and causing big problems in customer service. I want this fixed by the end of next quarter. I want results soon not a lot of paper work and meetings! We're shooting for world class employee satisfaction and customer service!"

The senior VP headed for the door and then turned with a clenched fist and said, "You have my full support."

In the ensuing silence you said, "Let's talk about the UID first, then we'll tackle the WAN."



"Speak English," one of the users said with an exasperated sigh.

"Sorry," the PM answered, "I meant the User Interface Devices, UID, and the Water Accessibility Network, the WAN."

"Do you mean the cups and the water dispenser?"

The PM nodded and in 20 minutes had a long list of requirements, including; 32 ounce cups for those taking sponge baths, 4 ounce cups for those seeking a quick gargle, biodegradable cups so we don't kill the rain forest, cups with ergonomic handles for frequent users who have repetitive motion complaints, designer cups for the trendy. They discussed a new GUI interface to prevent certain slob users from putting their mouths over the spout. Three users wanted flavored water and then the discussion turned to the hardware. The PM heard how throughput was insufficient, waiting times too long. The suggested solution; running WAN (water accessibility network) lines to every workstation to improve accessibility.

The PM sensed that the requirements were growing out of control. Just then the Senior VP wandered into the session and asked, "Why hasn't work started? Remember, you folks have a due date!"

You asked, "Could you give us a bit more direction on exactly what..."

The Senior VP snapped back, "These people can give you the details of what we need. The mission is world-class employee satisfaction and customer service. Now, let's get started!"

No Strategic Structure means we're Short Order Cooks

What's the forecast for this project? The project will drown in a downpour of new and changing requirements because the PM never built an achievement network that defined the end business achievements the executive desired. The PM is unable to filter out requirements that may be nice and even valuable but which do not contribute to the end business results the project must achieve. Nor can the PM do much to keep even truly wasteful or stupid requirements out of the plan. In fairness, it's hard for either the users or the PM to know what should be included in the requirements because no one knows what we're really trying to achieve much less the precise components that will lead to that result. So, we include everything and develop requirements suitable for a coronation ball when we only need to serve a snack.

When we get to prototypes or testing, the PM hears "this won't work for us" and "it has to be changed." When the PM tries to stem the flood and limit the overruns on cost and duration, conflict results. The PM has no authority to tell users what they don't need. When that's tried, the users complain to their executives that, "we're not getting what we need to run to our business." None of the characters in these soap operas has any basis actually defining what should be included in the project. The PM argues for additional budget and duration in exchange for the "new" requirements but the executives and users counter with accusations that these were or should have been in the plan. These late changes are dozens or even hundreds of times more

costly than if we made them during the initial requirements process. It's no surprise that a majority of projects in many organizations finish late, over budget and even need to be repeated because little, if anything, of business value is achieved.

The Strategic Menu

We start with a long and difficult process of working with executives to define, in measured business terms, success for the project. This Measure of Success (MOS™) gives us an unambiguous and objectively measured end result for the project. Then we craft a High-level Achievement Network (HLA), which are smaller achievements, in the user areas, which will lead to this MOS. These, in turn, are subdivided into measured business results at the functional or business event level. It is at this level that we detail our technical requirements. Thus, each technical requirement is wrapped, like a stuffed pastry, with business achievements the user must deliver using it.

A strategic menu is in the user's language of business and functional achievements in their business, not ours. We get away from the user mentality of "build it and then we'll figure out how to use it." Instead, the plan is built on achievements the user management must deliver with tools we develop with, and for, them. Changes or new requirements must contribute to a measured result in the network and that's how we exercise scope control. Like any menu, executive decision-makers can make choices on trade-offs by modifying any element in the network to reduce duration, cost or both. (See 4-Corners Trade-offs)

Don't Start Tell the Map is Finished

The difficult part in building our High-level Achievement network (HLA™) is the pressure to start work, which usually means fulfilling the requirements, not talking or meeting with the executives. Often, to keep users happy and to avoid conflict, we start on some of the requirements and hope that the promises to plan later aren't just strudel. There will be intense debate and conflict about business purposes, what to exclude and the measurement of business results. But isn't it better to have productive conflict early rather than after we have invested 100s or 1,000's of hours and dollars on a meal that has then gagging? It is a fantasy to believe we can do the project and then let the user figure out how to use it to improve their business performance with it. With a High-Level Achievement network (HLA™), the user is committing themselves and us to business results they will achieve before we start work.

Strategic Menu for WC-2010

Going back to the water cooler project, we should have started with the difficult process of getting the Senior VP's time and eventual commitment to a project Measure of Success (MOS™). We gently probe the performance pressures the executives are feeling by asking the Senior VP how success will be measured. We may find that the end business result the executive wants is less employee time spent at the water cooler. We ask how much time is spent now and how much reduction is

the goal. It may be a long process until we secure executive agreement that success is "Less than 200 person hours/day spent at the water cooler." We'd then work with the executives and users to define the courses in the meal, the HLA™ network that will lead to this end result. It might look something like this when we were done:

Less than 200 person hours/day spent at the water cooler

- Reduce trips from 10 to 3 per day per employee
- Cups hold 16 ounces
- Water stays below 41 degrees for three hours
- Cup insulation/lid reduce warming to 3 degrees per hour
- 90% of employees use lids
- 80% of employees use ice
- Avg. time at cooler less than 2 minutes
- Deliver 30 ounces/minute at 35 degrees
- "Let it run time" less than 12 seconds to reach 35 degrees
- Travel time to cooler less than 3 minutes
- New Sales water cooler installed and meets specs #22-45
- New Shipping water cooler installed and meets specs #22-45
- Less than 60 seconds of "visiting/chatting" at water cooler
- 90 % of employees attend "Gossip is bad" training session
- 80% of employees score 75% or higher on test of "Gossip is bad" concepts

Building this achievement network takes time, tact and persuasion. But when we're done, we can develop requirements that are clearly linked to measured business results. We also have a plan that clearly delineates the achievements that must be delivered by the user and by technology.

Summary

Our [Achievement-driven Project Management \(AdPM™\)](#) approach gives us benefits in scope control, user partnership, and clear assignments to all members of the project team. It also gives executives the ability to control projects at a strategic level and make decisions based on data, not guesses. Take a look at our training courses, project books and our project library for more information on these techniques