THE TOP 3 MYTHS ABOUT REQUIREMENTS MANAGEMENT…

…and Real-World Advice for How to Dispel Them.

OVERVIEW

If you're OK with the status quo, you can stop reading this paper.

We're serious. If you're someone who is fine with the fact that 60-80% of all projects continue to fail, and believe it's just the nature of the beast, then save yourself the time – no hard feelings, but you're not the audience for this paper.

This paper is written for the professionals who work on the front lines of product development and project management efforts for their respective companies and have grown tired of seeing the same project failure statistics and clichéd cartoons about product requirements mishaps over and over again.

This paper is for the people who aren't happy with the status quo – and more importantly, are ready to do something about it.

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Take 10 minutes to learn more about the 3 most common myths associated with requirements management, and how to dispel them once and for all.

MYTH #1

A requirements document = requirements management.

There is no question that "writing a requirements document" is a valuable and necessary step within the requirements management process. However, requirements management is much more than that. Consequently, when companies take the approach that the requirements document is THE place for managing requirements, they can be setting themselves up for failure when complexity exists. Documents are not the best tools for managing requirements across the lifecycle of a project.

As a rule of thumb, if your project includes one or more of these characteristics, then you have too much complexity for a document-centric approach.

Project complexity checklist:

- Over 100 features or requirements within the project or product being delivered
- Dynamic customer needs that create frequent changes to requirements
- Multiple team members working virtual from a different location

The #1 point of failure in a purely document-centric approach is change management, as this all-too-familiar scenario of status emails illustrates:

> Tuesday morning, 10:30am: Status notification from the project lead.
>
> "Hello team, please review the attached updated requirements specification document (filename: Project_Wishful_Thinking_v259.doc). Requirement 1.45 changed, see page 512 in red (ignore the blue and green revision marks from last week and be sure to read the embedded comments I've retyped from my conversation with our customer).
>
> Sorry for the earlier confusion to the Testing team – you'll need to rewrite your test cases, as I attached the wrong version last week. Please make sure you are writing your test cases from this document, not the previous version. Thanks. - Barry"
>
> 10 minutes later: "Me again, Craig found an error and fixed it, see the revised attachment."
>
> 15 minutes later: "People are asking what changed, sorry I wasn't more specific – see page 45, the blue section with my comments."

2 hours later: "Team, we need to stop all work on the interface with the front-end customer system and change to interface with the back-end system. I need to figure out the impact by the end of the day (no pun intended), so if you know anything about this – let me know. Updated requirements doc is attached. Project_Wishful_Thinking_v261.doc."

4 hours later: "The steering committee met, and needs a report with all the requirements being delivered in Phase I for a meeting tomorrow with Executive Staff. Can one of the analysts compile a list, get status from the developers and get this to me ASAP. Actually, double ASAP. Thanks."

We can all laugh, but this is the classic communication and traceability nightmare that often happens when you prescribe to the myth that a requirements document is "good enough".

What happens inevitably is a series of unfortunate events:

- Inboxes get flooded.
- Changes get lost.
- Team members get frustrated.
- Assumptions get made.
- Requirements errors occur.
- Errors create expensive rework and delays.
- Projects fail.
- Customers not happy. Boss not happy. Your team really not happy.

There's a better way:

Get your team out of the document-centric process and shift to a more collaborative requirements management process that:

- Stores all the requirements and related artifacts in one central web-based repository that people trust and will actually use.
- Is easily accessible to the entire team, anytime, anywhere for real-time status updates.
- Automates the tracking of changes in requirements and assesses the impact between related requirements and the people who are working on them.
- Instantly notifies team members of just the changes of that relate to them – nothing more, nothing less – avoiding information overload and email noise.

MYTH #2

We already started the project, it's too late for RM.

We talk to teams every day who are ready to get started with RM, but want to wait for just the right time. The perfect moment when you've just launched the latest product, haven't started any new projects yet and everyone has plenty of time to focus on implementing a new business process. Right…and when is that moment exactly?

The reality is that too often that time never comes because your work environment is just too busy. So, you risk never reaping any of the benefits that a collaborative requirements management system can provide.

Even with your current project underway, there are some tangible advantages to implementing a requirements management solution now versus later:

- Get everyone on the same page and gain immediate productivity improvements and less confusion about which specification to use.
- Spot redundancy because team members are able to see what each other is working on – this can lead to significant cost savings from eliminating duplicated efforts.
- Reduce frustration and time lost searching for the latest changes – it's well documented that many people stop looking after just a few minutes and make assumptions instead, which leads to errors and expensive rework.
- Rein in any "scope creep" because you'll be able to baseline your requirements and start tracking changes and impact on the project budget, timeline and deliverables.
- Capture future requirements and ideas in the same central repository which will make the planning process for the next version of the product that much easier.

MYTH #3

A requirements tool = requirements management.

Wait a minute – a requirements management tool provider suggesting that RM isn't just about picking their tool and everything will be right in the world - are they crazy?

No, not crazy, just honest. The reality is that a successful requirements management solution requires more than just technology – it's a key ingredient, but there's more to the recipe for success. Requirements management also requires:

- Commitment to a process – it doesn't matter which process you choose, whether Waterfall, Iterative, Agile, Scrum, Crystal Clear, etc. – select one and stick to it for that project so the entire team is in sync. Now, this doesn't mean you have to be married to that process forever. Many traditional RM tools lock you into a single process. Today's more progressive tools are process-agnostic, so you have the flexibility to adapt and the tool adjusts to you, instead of you adjusting to the tool's process.
- Accountability by all team members to the management of the requirements and related artifacts. RM isn't just the responsibility of the Business Analyst or the Project Manager – when the entire team is plugged into the tool, collaboration increases and errors decrease.
- Discipline within the team to capture every idea, requirement, artifact and change request no matter how big or small within the centralized repository, so there's visibility to all elements related to the project. The tool will only be as good as the information you feed it.

BONUS MYTH #4

4 out of 5 dentists agree: requirements management is lame.

What do dentists have to do with requirements management? Read on and you'll see where we're going with this.

People have characterized requirements management as boring, lame, painful, a necessary evil – take your pick. Our favorite analogy is that requirements management is like flossing – everyone knows they should do it, but very few actually do because it's far from something to get excited about. We don't blame you for having this previous point of view. In fact, based on our own experience with the traditional, antiquated tools and their processes, we'd historically describe RM the same way. It's precisely why projects don't succeed and the #1 reason points back to requirements management issues.

We believe it's time for a fresh approach to requirements management, if not for the success of your projects and your company's benefit, at least for your own personal well being.

Let's take the flossing analogy even further. Did you know you can add a year or more to your life if you floss every day? (You never know what you'll learn in a whitepaper).   It's true.

Now, more relevant to RM, imagine how many years you could add to your life and to the overall quality of your work experience if you eliminated the stress and frustration resulting from requirements management issues? Well, we actually did the math, and we estimate you could add five years to your life. Now, that's something to think about tonight – you know, when you're flossing.

Note: No dentists were harmed in the development of this whitepaper.

Thanks for reading. We hope you enjoyed it and find the information valuable within your company. Let us know what you think.   We welcome your feedback.

WELCOME TO JAMA. PEOPLE AGAINST PROJECT FAILURE.

This free guide was written by Jama Software, a team of seasoned project management and product development professionals who believe in taking a collaborative approach to requirements management. We are dedicated to building professional-grade, web-based applications that help companies ensure their projects and new products will be successful – delivered on time, on budget and meet customer needs.

The result is a product called Jama Contour. To learn more about Contour and to help shape the future direction of requirements management, join us in the Jama Backstage, an online collaborative forum of professionals who care about improving the success of their projects and product innovation efforts.

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