

# ***Creating A Successful Project When You Don't Know How to Define Success***

## *Creating a Successful Project When You Don't Know How to Define Success*

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## *Our Agenda*

- Every project has a fuzzy front end
- We'll answer these questions
  - What problem does this project solve?
  - What do the customers expect as part of their project?
  - How do you know when you're done?

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## Project Demands

- You get a mandate
  - “We must ship this product by June”
  - “We must have <blatz> feature
- Everyone has a different opinion of priorities
- We may not remember to discuss implicit assumptions
  - These assumptions are typically different for everyone
- Our biases create a product different from the one our customers want to buy



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## Mandates

- Demands are a surrogate for a problem definition
- What do you normally do when you get a mandate?
  - Common answers:
    - Look for the highest titled person, do that mandate
    - Perform the mandate without asking more questions

*Resist taking a mandate at face value. First, discover the business results your management wants to achieve*

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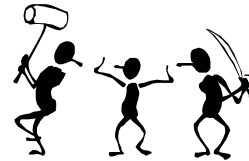
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## Different Opinions of Prioritization

- Requirements are supposed to be a way to bring the owner of the problem together with the potential solution-provider
- What happens when (well-meaning) people disagree on what the system should provide?
  - What's essential to the product's success?
  - What else would we want to do, if we could?
  - What makes this system desirable to its users?



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## Implicit Assumptions

- We're human, we make assumptions
- How do you find out what other people are thinking?
  - One way is to ask meta questions:
    - What haven't I asked you about yet?
    - What else haven't we discussed?

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## *Context Free Questions*

- What does success look like?
- Why are these results desirable?
- What is the solution worth to you?
- What problems does this system solve?
- What problems could this system create?
  
- Ask Why without asking why
  - Who, What, When, Where
  - Use How with care (avoid design decisions)
  - Asking Why might put people on the defensive

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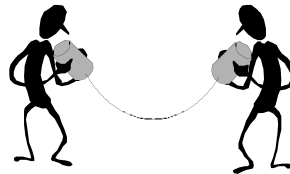
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## *Creating Open-Ended Questions*

- Use your inquisitiveness, curiosity
- Ask about the business context
- Ask about the problem this product is supposed to solve
- During the interview, avoid rapid-fire questions
  - This isn't an interrogation, this is a conversation



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## Example 1: Mandate

- You receive a mandate from your management:
  - “I want this system out by June 1. It has to do electronic signatures, and enough other stuff so our customers will want to buy this version.”
- Problems with this “requirement”:
  - 2 mandates: delivery date and one specific feature
  - 1 implicit assumption: we all know what the “other stuff” is



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## Resolving Requirements From a Mandate, Part 1

- Define the business context
  - How does this product help the company make money?
  - What does success look like?
    - How do we know when we've gotten there?
  - What is the solution worth?
    - What's the solution worth to you?
- Define the business problem
  - What problems does the business have?
- Define the users (not just the buyers, all people affected by the product)
  - Who are all the users, and who's more important?
  - How do we know?

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10

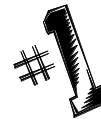
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## Resolving Requirements From a Mandate, Part 2

- Define the customers' problems
  - What do the customers need?
  - What are they willing to tradeoff to get this?
- Define the "other stuff"
  - Go back to the business problem:
    - Use a meta question, such as: "Tell me more about the results you desire"

## Example 2: Prioritization

- Sometimes, instead of a mandate, you have problems prioritizing the work to be done. How many times have you heard this conversation:
  - "Our current customers are most important."
  - "No, our new customers are most important."
- How do you define which *is* most important?



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## *Resolving Prioritization Problems*

- Define the business context
  - How does the company make money now?
  - How do we want to make money in the future?
  - What does success look like, and how do we know when we've gotten there?
- Define the business problem
  - What problems does the business have?
  - How will this system fix those problems?
- Define the users
  - Who are all the users, and who's more important?
  - Which customer set do these users belong to (current/new customers)?
  - How do we know?

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## *In Both Examples, Issues Arise*

- What problems does this system solve?
- What problems could this system create?



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## ***Interviewing Management Using Open-Ended Questions***

- Context free questions create a conversation
- If you get a brain dump of what's wrong now, you're lucky
  - That may be the most valuable information you can get
- You use this conversation to ask about the system
  - What's the business context?
  - What's the customer/problem?
  - Is this different from the user problem?
  - Do you have one customer or multiple customers?
  - Which set of users are you speaking with now, or are being represented now?
    - Some users are more favored than others
- Generate questions in advance and use a pen and a notebook to gather the information

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15

## ***Practice Context Free Questions***

- Get into groups of 3: Interviewer, Interviewee, Observer
- Take index cards from the end of your row
- Interviewer: Ask interviewee:
  - What does a successful conference look like for you?
  - Why is this desirable?
  - What is the conference worth to you?
  - What problems does your being here solve?
  - What problems could your being here create?
- You'll have 4 minutes to ask questions
- Observer: debrief to your team: What did you notice? What did you expect to see?

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16

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## You've Moved From Mandate to Problem

- Congratulations!
- Now, it's time to define your project tradeoffs
- Not only does the product have requirements, the *project* has requirements
  - I don't buy the traditional 3-legged stool: cost, schedule, quality. It's more involved than that...

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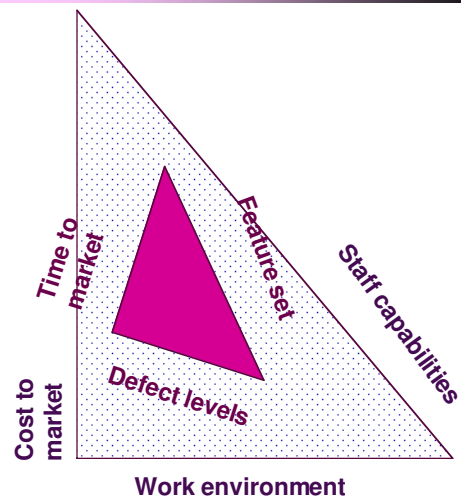
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17

## Possible Project Requirements

- Every project has requirements and constraints
- What do your customers care about the most?
  - Time to market
  - Feature set
  - Defect levels
- Internal Perspectives or Constraints: Your customers don't care about these. You do.
  - Cost to market
  - People and their capabilities
  - Work environment



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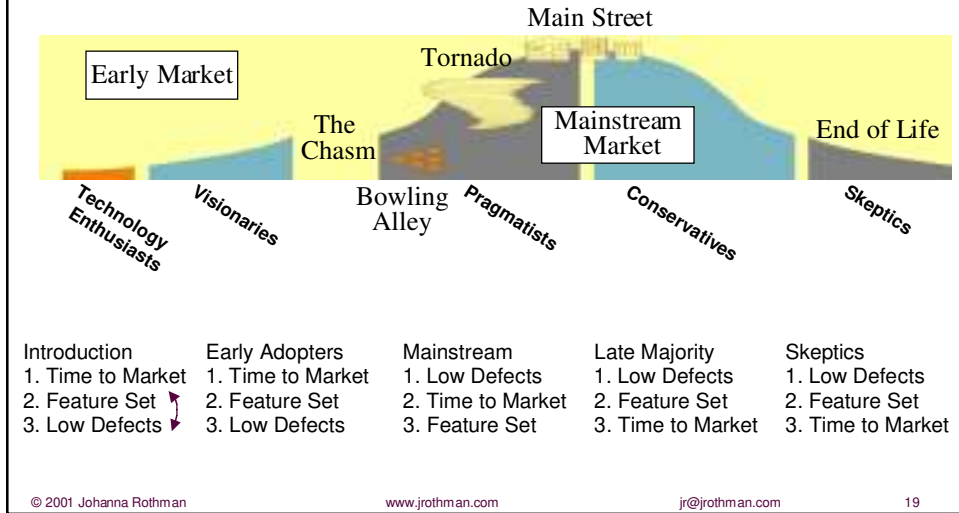
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18

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## All Projects Have Different Customer Pressures and Tradeoffs



## Customers Have Expectations

- Not all your customers will share the same expectations and pressures
- Your job is to choose a lifecycle that helps you plan a reasonable project that still meets enough of their expectations



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## Activity

- Take a few seconds to think...
- Consider the screw-in halogen light bulb
- Where is that lightbulb in its lifetime?
- Why do you think so?

## Release Criteria

- Help define what “done” means
- What’s critical to the success of the project?
- Make release criteria reasonable
  - Discover assumptions and fears
  - Allow you to resolve those assumptions and fears before you release the product
- Agreed to by entire project team and SMART
  - Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Trackable
- If you define release criteria well, you will surface assumptions and fears



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## Release Criteria Help Illuminate Testing and Product Goals

- Must we meet this requirement by the requested release date?
- What is the effect on our customers if we do not meet this requirement by the release date?
- Do we need to test this part completely? What are the consequences if we do, if don't?

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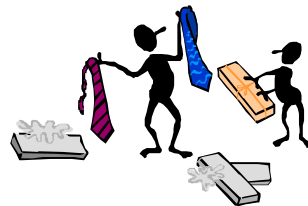
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## Define Release Criteria

- As a PM, I draft release criteria, and get buy-in from the entire project team
- I then present the release criteria to senior management, to make sure we're on the same wavelength
- If not, where's the disconnect?
  - I misunderstood what someone told me
  - No consensus among senior management
  - Things have changed...



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## *Possible Release Criteria*

- Specific functionality frozen, tested, with no critical defects
- Specific date
- Specific performance or reliability scenario tested and passed
- Other corporate groups have their deliverables complete
- Documentation tested

## *Activity*

- Take two cards
- At the top of each card, write down:
  - Release criteria did not work. Why?
  - Release criteria did work. Why?
- You'll have 2 minutes
- Debrief

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## Summary

- It can be hard to get started on a project
- Context-free questions are a powerful tool in eliciting and defining the project's problem statements
- Once you know what problem you're trying to solve, you can define the project's requirements
- Use release criteria to define in advance when you're done



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27

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28