Accompa White Paper

7 Tips for Better Requirements Management

Learn 7 practical, proven & simple tips to improve your requirements management process and build more successful products.

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We've distilled these 7-tips through our survey of more than 100 companies of all sizes (from Fortune-500 companies to growing startups).

I. Introduction

Do you and your team gather and manage requirements and feature requests for your products and/or services?

If yes, you already know that managing these requirements consumes a lot of time and resources. If you're like other companies, you also run into a lot of hassles in managing the requirements, sharing them with other teams, and ensuring that they get implemented to meet customer needs.

The 7 tips that follow can help you and your team:

1. **Save time** spent in tracking and managing requirements,
2. **Avoid project failures** caused by missed & incorrect requirements,
3. **Share requirements** with other teams in a timely and efficient fashion,
4. **Delight your customers** by consistently meeting their needs, and
5. **Impress your executives** by implementing an improved and repeatable requirements management process.

While the authors of this white paper are employed by Accompa Inc., a leading provider of cloud-based requirements management software—we've tried to be as unbiased as possible. **You don't need requirements management software to benefit from these tips**—although good requirements software can make it easier and more repeatable.

II. 7 Tips for Better Requirements Management

More than 100 companies of all sizes (from Fortune-500 companies to Startups) use our software to manage requirements. We've distilled these 7-tips through our customer surveys and customer feedback. These tips are proven, practical and can help improve your team's requirements management process.

Strive to implement as many of these 7 tips as possible—even if due to organizational constraints you may not be able to implement all of them.

It’s no surprise then that capturing 100% of these requirements is a huge challenge at most companies.

Tip #1: Capture 100% of Requirements

Sounds very basic, doesn’t it? But at most companies, ensuring that all of the requirements coming from various stakeholders are actually captured is a huge challenge. Why is this the case?

If you’re like most companies, requirements come to your team from all directions. From customers. Prospective customers. Sales. Support. Executives. Professional services. Business development. But that is not all.

They come to you in all formats. Emails. Meetings. Conference calls. Hallway chats. Instant messages. Word documents. Excel spreadsheets. Napkins. You get the idea!

It’s no surprise then that capturing 100% of these requirements is a huge challenge at most companies. Omitted requirements lead to missing functionality and cause product shortcomings.

By implementing systematic processes in your team to capture 100% of requirements—you can secure a big advantage over your competitors.

How to Achieve This:

- Create an easy to follow requirements capture process, including a standard template to capture requirements.
- Create a template using Excel or similar spreadsheet software.
- Educate everyone in your team of this process.
- Get buy-in from everyone to follow this process, 100% of the time.
- Follow up regularly with spot-checks to ensure everyone follows it.
- Tools such as Accompa’s cloud-based requirements software can help you implement this easily.

Requirements from stakeholders can be vague, ambiguous and sometimes even self-conflicting!

Tip #2: Proactively Verify Requirements

As discussed in Tip 1 above, requirements come to your team from many different stakeholders in many different formats. It is not just sufficient to capture them. You must also ensure that you verify them. What do we mean by "verify"?

Most stakeholders from whom you and your team receive requirements are not trained in writing requirements. As a result, their requirements often tend to be vague, ambiguous and sometimes even self-conflicting! They may also say that they want "Feature A"—whereas in reality what they really need is "Function B" and they think that "Feature A" is the only way to get "Function B."

Ensure that your team proactively follows up with the source of the requirements to verify their real objectives and needs. This will help your team implement the right requirements and meet the real needs of your customers—which, after all, is one of the most important roles played by your team.

How to Achieve This:

- Define an easy-to-follow process to verify requirements, and communicate the importance of doing this to your team.
- Verify immediately (within a day or two) following the receipt of the requirement—people often tend to forget the reason for and details of the requirements they asked for!
- Make it easy for the source of the requirement to provide further details and clarifications.
- Record clarifications from the source for future reference.
- Accompa's cloud-based requirements management software includes features such as discussion boards that make it easy to verify requirements and capture clarifications.

The Standish CHAOS Report, which surveyed 9,236 IT projects found "Incomplete Requirements" was the second most important reason for project failures...

Tip #3: Ensure Completeness of Requirements

Did you know that The Standish CHAOS Report, which surveyed 9,236 IT projects found that "Incomplete Requirements" was the second most important reason for project failures.

Incomplete requirements lead to project delays, unmet customer needs, lost deals, and ultimately product failure. As a result, it is critical to ensure completeness of your requirements.

The following list includes examples to make your requirements more complete (these are examples, the correct set of information varies for each organization):

- Describe business needs and use cases underlying the requirement.
- Document who asked for the requirement (i.e. "Source").
    - Be as specific as possible—identify individuals, departments, or partners that requested it.
- Include functional as well as non-functional parts of the requirement.
- Capture desired date and pending deals that depend on this date.

How to Achieve This:

- Create a standard template that includes all the fields necessary to ensure completeness of requirements.
- Train your team to follow the template, and take each field into consideration while capturing the requirement.
- Communicate to stakeholders the importance of providing complete requirements.
- Accompa's web-based software can make it easy to create a standard template (including mandatory fields) to ensure the completeness of your requirements.

Prioritizing requirements benefits everyone — those who create it, and those who consume it. Plus, it ensures that your company spends its resources in the right areas.

Tip #4: Prioritize Requirements Systematically

Prioritizing requirements benefits everyone—those who create it (such as product managers, project managers, et al), as well as those who consume it (such as personnel in Design, Engineering, QA, Marketing, etc). And of course, it ensures that your company spends its resources in the right areas.

Prioritization should ideally be based on ROI (return on investment) of each requirement. There are many ways to measure the ROI—such as Net Present Value (NPV), Payback Period, Rate of Return, and Internal Rate of Return (IRR).

All of these metrics weigh how much it costs to implement a requirement against the incremental revenue/profit generated by that requirement.

In assigning priority for each requirement—in addition to financial ROI, you should also take into account other factors such as competitive differentiation, market trends, company strategy, and the needs of key customers.

We recommend that you implement a simplified ROI metric that helps prioritize requirements—for more concrete ideas, please read our ROI white paper (PDF)

How to Achieve This:

- Keep prioritization simple and systematic. For example, use a scale of:
    - High, Medium, and Low
    - P1, P2, and P3
- High/P1 could mean “Must Have”, Medium/P2 could mean “Stretch Goal”, and Low/P3 could mean “Nice to Have, but Not Essential.”
- Implement a simplified ROI metric that drives the prioritization decisions.
- Add a column for “Priority” in your template and ensure that it always gets completed.
- Accompa’s cloud-based requirements management software provides a customizable way to calculate ‘ROI Scores’—and share it across all teams.

Communicating requirements across teams in real-time can help ensure that requirements are accurate, complete and well understood...

Tip #5: Communicate Across Teams in Real-Time

Communicating requirements in a timely fashion (as close to real-time as possible) across all teams—product management, design, engineering, QA, marketing, sales, support, etc—is essential to ensure that the requirements are accurate, complete and properly understood by everyone.

This is especially important as most of the industry adopts some form of "agile" product development process—which often means requirements constantly evolve, instead of being frozen at the beginning of the projects that follow traditional development processes.

It is important to equip your team to communicate requirements on a timely basis both internally (within your organization) and externally (customers, partners, et al) depending on your organization and the type of requirement.

Implement a process that enables everyone to know the up-to-date status of a requirement easily.

How to Achieve This:

- Establish clearly defined communication process for requirements and ensure that everyone understands the process.
- Educate everyone on the importance of communicating requirements in a timely fashion.
- Make use of tools such as wikis and discussion boards—in addition to emails and meetings. These tools capture communications in a central archive.
- Accompa's cloud-based requirements management software includes centralized repository, discussion boards and email alerts that make it easy to communicate across teams in real-time.

An area where a lot of teams can improve their requirements management process is:
Tracing dependencies between requirements.

Tip #6: Trace Dependencies

One area where a lot of teams can improve their requirements management process is in tracing dependencies between requirements. What do we mean by "tracing dependencies"?

Consider the following example.

> For the next release of your product, "Requirement B" and "Requirement C" depend on "Requirement A" being implemented. Your original requirements document included all 3 requirements. However, when the project is nearing completion, development recommends that "A" be omitted to meet the dates. You check with your Sales Manager who requested "A" to make sure this is acceptable and she agrees. You drop "A" and release the product—however, this also means "B" and "C" are not met. Important deals are lost due to "B" and "C" not being met—your Sales Manager is livid.

At many companies, a variation of the above scenario plays out all too often. How can your team avoid this?

By documenting dependencies between requirements (i.e. "tracing dependencies"). This will enable your team to do simple impact analysis like:

If "A" is omitted from the release, how are other requirements impacted?

How to Achieve This:

- Create a template that includes "Dependencies" field and ensure that it is completed carefully.
- When writing requirements documents, clearly map out key dependencies.
- When deciding to omit a requirement from a project during the middle of the project, make sure to perform a dependency analysis.
- Tracing dependencies between requirements is one area where requirements management software such as Accompa can make your life much easier.

Being able to change requirements allows an organization to be more nimble and flexible to meet everchanging market conditions and customer needs...

Tip #7: Track All Changes to a Requirement

In the early days of the software and IT industry, most projects followed a "waterfall" development process that froze requirements at the outset of a project.

As we enter into the Internet age, most projects are following some form of "agile" product development process in place of the "traditional" processes. A key advantage of these agile processes is that they accommodate evolving requirements—i.e. requirements change throughout a project.

Being able to change requirements allows an organization to be more nimble and flexible to meet ever-changing market conditions and customer needs. But it also brings a new challenge to requirements management process—that of "How do I track changes to a requirement during a project?"

Tracking changes to each requirement and who made those changes allows your team to understand how a requirement evolved, perform root cause analysis, and alleviate personnel issues in a project team related to these changes.

How to Achieve This:

- Of the 7 tips in this white paper, this one is probably the hardest to implement without a requirements management software. That said, tools such as wikis can enable you to track changes and audit them in a much better way than spreadsheet or word processor software.
- Accompa's cloud-based requirements management software automatically tracks all changes including what changed, the date of change, and the person who made the change. You can easily audit the change history as well as rollback at any time.

Even implementing just 1 out of the 7 tips can help you save time and increase the productivity of your team.

III. Summary

The 7 tips listed above are proven, practical tips—implemented by companies of all sizes (from Fortune-500 enterprises to growing startups) who use our cloud-based requirements management software.

You can implement these 7 tips without any requirements management software - although software such as Accompa can make it much easier. Start implementing these tips today. **Even implementing just 1 out of the 7 tips can help** you save time and increase the productivity of your team—and help you avoid project failures and meet customer needs on a more consistent basis.

P.S. If you'd like to implement these 7 tips in a systematic and repeatable fashion, we invite you to request a FREE trial or a personalized demo—you can find out whether your team too can benefit from Accompa as teams at more than 100 companies of all sizes (from Fortune-500 companies to growing start-ups) already have.

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About Accompa

Product Management, Business Analysts, and related teams at more than 100 companies of all sizes (from Fortune-500s to startups) use Accompa to gather, track, and manage requirements while saving time & increasing productivity. Accompa is 100% cloud-based and is easy to deploy and use. Now you can achieve powerful real-time collaboration across your internal teams, as well as with your customers. Get started — see links below...

Our mission: *To help you build more successful products more efficiently* by enabling you to continuously improve every part of your requirements management process.

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