

Making the Business More Accountable for Requirements: How One Company Met the Challenge

THE CLIENT

A leading provider of property management services, managing thousands of properties, including commercial, residential, retail, sports and special event complexes, hotels, hospitals and medical centers. The company prides itself on the use of the latest technologies to provide its customers with value-added programs to enhance the performance of their properties.

THE RESULTS

- Clarification of roles and accountabilities
- Identification of gaps in current system
- Discovery of new areas of ROI
- Improved requirements best practices for future projects

THE BUSINESS NEED: Determine the Road to Completion

This client was planning the rollout of a new portal to support its customers in the day-to-day operations and performance improvement of their properties. While some business and functional requirements for the portal were documented, the requirements process was extending beyond what seemed rational to the stakeholders. A clear understanding of the current state of the project and a well-defined roadmap for completion was needed.

The application was built and rolled out to a group of customers. However, it was quickly realized that there were additional opportunities to improve customer support. The decision was made to engage outside expertise to redefine the business intent for the project and identify any associated gaps in the system. After attending a public Getting PredictableSM workshop, the client's CIO approached Geneca for help in bringing the portal project over the finish line. Using its requirements best practices, Geneca was engaged with the following goals:

- Clarify project roles and accountabilities
- Create a common language that defines requirements and quantifies need and effort
- Create an agreed-upon definition of success using common metrics between the business and IT
- Provide a clear understanding of the current state of the project and any associated gaps
- Provide a "road map" for an end state of the portal

THE REQUIREMENTS CHALLENGE

Often the single hardest part of building a software system is deciding precisely what the business needs. In the case of this client, there was a lack of understanding of common business processes across its 2,500 managed facilities. As a result, some of the business requirements for the project were ambiguous. Additionally, there was not enough accountability from the business to make sure its requirements were understood and met.

Furthermore, the project had been outsourced to an offshore vendor, adding to the requirements challenges. For example, there were too few upfront requirements sessions with the business and a lack of clarity over project roles and responsibilities. There was also not enough visibility into technical decisions being made by the vendor. As a result, the client became increasingly concerned as to exactly what it was getting from its offshore vendor. Gaps between what was actually being developed and the business expectation had to be identified before more time and money were spent.

THE GETTING PREDICTABLESM SOLUTION

Geneca worked with the client team in a five-week engagement which included Getting PredictableSM facilitated group sessions and follow-on work sessions. The Geneca team consisted of an architect, facilitator/business process lead, analyst/scribe and project sponsor. Participants from the client included the CIO, manager of accounting, senior vice president of operations, controller/senior vice president and a property manager.

CLIENT FEEDBACK

“[The sessions] felt a little unnatural for me because we really let the business drive the requirements. It was eye-opening, though, as I saw the business folks take more accountability for what they do. I think the Getting PredictableSM process will continue to highlight the need for the business to own the process and be clear about its responsibilities.”

– CIO

In Five Weeks, Geneca Helped its Client:

- Articulate business and IT roles and accountabilities
- Get alignment on business requirements and end state
- Develop common metrics between the business and IT
- Identify gaps between current project and agreed-to end state

The following steps were taken to begin collaboration between and within stakeholder groups:

- **Facilitated Business Process Analysis (BPA) and Business Process Scenarios (BPS)** helped the client team define its project charter, common vision and scope. In addition to understanding high-level objectives, the workflows and scenarios that captured the “intent” of the system were identified.
- Using **Low Fidelity Prototyping**, paper prototypes were developed of the business scenarios defined for the portal. Prototypes are built by the business team providing the requirements. Once this step was complete, the business was able to answer that all-important question: “Is this really what I am going to get?”
- **Gap Analysis** provided a concise, objective assessment of the current state of the project in terms of functionality and business process and a comparison to the project’s newly defined end state.

During the Getting PredictableSM sessions, the client’s IT team learned to focus on the business need first and then dig deeper to define functionality — rather than only focusing on the technical aspects. Getting PredictableSM also provided a means by which the business took more ownership of the requirements process, eliminating guesswork on the part of IT. Everyone agreed: In order to get the requirements right, they would have to be involved in ways they might not have been before.

THE REWARDS: The Value of the Upfront Requirements Effort

By the end of the engagement, project stakeholders had a clearer vision of the viable end state for the portal project. Roles and accountabilities were more clearly defined. Gaps in business process and technical functionality were identified. Further, areas of ROI with the development platform for the application were uncovered, enabling the team to use the product to its full advantage.

IT continues to learn more about the business perspective and is breaking the project into manageable pieces that focus on the delivery of business value. The business stakeholders are now taking more accountability for their role in the project.

Exposure to Getting PredictableSM has increased this client’s awareness of why requirements definition must be part of the discussion between business and IT on project success criteria before development begins. This understanding will change the way this client approaches requirements definition for future projects.

ABOUT GETTING PREDICTABLESM

Getting PredictableSM, Geneca’s unique approach to aligning business and IT, is a proven, repeatable methodology that eliminates the pre-production mistakes that hinder so many software projects. Companies using Getting PredictableSM achieve clarity and accountability throughout the development lifecycle. As a result, they deliver business value faster, at a much lower total cost of ownership.



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