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WHO NEEDS TO BE PLURAL

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Quick Summary: Seek many diverse opinions in determining applicable product requirements.

Abstract:

Unwittingly, new product requirements can be heavily influenced by a small group of internal or external individuals. Gathering inputs and reviewing them in an iterative process with diverse internal and external resources is essential to avoid some narrow, undue influence. To remain grounded, it is important to consciously track both what requirements will be discarded as well as those that will be embraced.

The title of this article is not a question. Instead, it refers to the "Who" in the article "*Who is Leading the Charge*." That article puts forth the notion that customers must be the group that determines the requirements for a new product. Internal company resources are responsible for capturing those requirements, or if they develop them on their own, each requirement needs to able to relate to:

How will this requirement positively impact the customer?

This article is intended to emphasize the point that multiple customers and other external sources need to validate the need for each requirement to protect against a "one-off" requirement being included in the new product definition. This situation can even occur when a group of customers meet, perhaps in a users group meeting, and develop a consensus on an issue. The so-called "group think" phenomenon in which one outspoken advocate can sway an entire group.

As discussed in the article "*Beware of the Blender,*" it is easy to develop a requirements list that is a superset of every competitor's product as well as any single customer requirement. The goal of this approach is to appeal to every prospect in the entire market. While noble, the added requirements and, most probably, added cost and complexity, make this approach impractical. Developing plans to consciously target customer segments instead of more generic market segments is crucial in sifting through the requirements and determining what "should" be done instead of what "could" be done. It is tough to admit that a new product simply may not appeal or apply to a certain group of customers. Most of us know it to be true, but are reluctant to admit it during the planning stage.

Segmentation occurs in virtually all markets. The auto industry and the garment industry are excellent examples of companies carefully targeting narrow segments. The cellular phone industry is also following suit with large, incredibly powerful smartphones at one end of the spectrum to small, "talk and listen' only phones at the other end.

The customer requirements collection process is best divided into two overlapping and iterative processes. Initially, a wide net should be cast to collect as much input from a diverse group of external users and internal resources as possible. Next, a verification phase should be conducted to determine the best requirements combination with the most desirable customer segment. The most desirable segment may not be the largest segment. Similar to gathering and filtering requirements, equal care should be taken in defining which particular market segment is the most practical and attractive to pursue.

During the process of requirements filtering and market segment selection, it is important to consciously list what captured requirements and specific market segments will <u>not</u> be pursued. This activity helps to guard against the tendency to make small, incremental decisions that, in total, provide multiple partial, but not complete solutions.

Finally, the "who" should include meeting with individuals classified as members of the "non-users group." These individuals could be users of competitive products, users that the company thought should be users, or potential users in a projected future market. The underlying concept is simple: gather requirements from a plurality of individuals and then consciously decide what to do and what not to do.