

Interaction With Stakeholders Made Easy

From Intuition to Structured Facilitation

Lauri Ann Scheinholtz^{1,2} and Ilona Wilmont³

¹ Mithun Training & Consulting, Leusden, The Netherlands,

² Laquso, Eindhoven University of Technology, Eindhoven, The Netherlands,
`la.scheinholtz@mithun.nl`,

³ Institute for Computing and Information Sciences, Radboud University Nijmegen,
Nijmegen, The Netherlands,
`i.wilmont@science.ru.nl`

1 Introduction

Communication between domain experts and requirements experts remains a problem, from knowledge elicitation to formal model review. The latter are hard to understand and require a certain, often trained, way of thinking. Yet active stakeholder participation, from user to manager, is vitally important to avoid issues such as misunderstanding, lack of consent over solutions and change resistance.

Practitioners report different experiences when dealing with stakeholders. Some of them participate really well and show interest, others would rather see them return with something they can understand. Why can some people deal with formalisations and structured knowledge elicitation so much better than others? Many practitioners also mention assessing stakeholders before they even come to a session, however they cannot describe explicitly how this assessment proceeds. 'Based on gut feeling' is the most commonly provided answer when asked.

Obviously then, a stakeholder's unique profile influences how he performs in an elicitation or review session. On the other hand, one of the authors' experiences show that the requirements engineer's way of questioning the stakeholder also significantly influences the information that will be elicited. We want to gain more insight into these phenomena, which are currently mainly guided by practitioners' intuition. A more structured description can result in more certainty about which people to include in a session, and how to facilitate the session to match the styles of the people involved.

This leads us to ask the following research questions:

- What is the influence of a stakeholder's way of reasoning, knowledge and skills, and attitude towards the project, on his performance in an elicitation or model review session?
- How do practitioners' interviewing styles influence the amount and usability of information elicited from stakeholders?

- How understandable are formal models for business stakeholders, even the ones that claim to be based on human perceptual principles?

Adapting to the stakeholders perception and way of thinking, which creates a sense of ownership over business problems among the people participating in the actual process, will lead to more efficient business processes and reduced errors and costs in system design.

Eventually we want to develop guidelines for practitioners to help them facilitate sessions and conduct interviews, which are specifically selectable based on the situation and the people involved. As a participant in our research we would like to give you as many benefits as possible. As every interviewer and organization has different interests in research results here are some of the benefits you can receive:

- Early access to research results
- Information on how you compare in method and style to other interviewers
- General strengths and weaknesses based on empirical data
- Deeper insight into communication processes within your interview and possibly your organization

2 Wanted from Industry

To tackle this problem, we would like to observe several aspects of a collaborative session: verbal and nonverbal interaction during the session and the preparation before the session. We look at motivations that lead people to perform certain behaviour, what skills they may have that will aid or inhibit them, their cognitive activities and how team performance changes as time progresses. For this, one researcher sits in on and audio or video-records the session, which will be transcribed and analysed afterwards. On top of that, we would like to assess the participants cognitive styles before the session, and conduct a short survey on experiences and comprehension of the material covered after the session.

We are looking for industry projects which concern system design, business process design or business process analysis. Specific types of sessions can be but are not limited to: requirements elicitation, brown paper sessions, model building, model validation. Facilitated or guided sessions by an analyst or other expert are welcome, as are self-facilitated sessions or sessions using some form of tooling or method.