

# Requirements Elicitation - interviews

## Eliciting requirements through interviews

Eliciting requirements through interviews is one of the more common and, usually, the most effective method of elicitation. One downside to this technique is that, sometimes, stakeholders may not be sure exactly what it is that they require. For this reason, interviewing should not be the sole technique used to elicit requirements. The observation technique is an excellent, complementary technique to interviewing.

An interview may be carried out with an individual person or with a group of people and can be either formal or informal. Interviews can be structured or unstructured but those that follow a structured process will generally be most successful in gathering requirements from stakeholders. Structured interviews require the business analyst to develop a pre-defined list of questions that will be asked at the interview. An unstructured interview is when the business analyst meets with the stakeholder(s) and discuss topics of interest in an open-ended way.

The key components of an interview are planning and scheduling, preparing, opening, conducting, closing and following up.

### **Planning and scheduling**

Planning and scheduling considers the order in which the interviews are carried out. The accepted method is a top-down approach where management would be interviewed before their employees. When scheduling time for interviews explain why the interviewee's assistance is required and clearly state the time, place and purpose of the interview.

### **Preparing**

Interview preparation includes carrying out background domain research. It is important that the business analyst is conversant with the key ideas and techniques within the interviewee's domain. Use this research to gain an understanding of the scope, objectives and setting.

If the structured interview technique is being used, develop the questions that will be asked. Be aware of the need to ask open-ended questions that elicit a dialog and cannot be answered with a Yes or No. Use closed-ended questions where appropriate to elicit a single response such as Yes or No or a specific number or value. Do not exclude questions if you think you know what the answer is – ask the question regardless to ensure you have the correct understanding. Organise the questions that will be asked into a logical order or an order of priority. The goal is to follow a logical order rather than jumping around when asking questions. This will enable the interview to flow from general to specific, from familiar to unfamiliar, from high priority to low priority, from high-level to detailed.

If the unstructured interview technique develop a list of topics to cover in the interview. These topics can be used to guide the interview and ensure the important components are covered off.



## **Opening**

The business analyst states the purpose of the interview, addresses any initial concerns from those being interviewed and explains that notes will be taken throughout the interview and that these will be shared with those being interviewed after they have been compiled.

It is important that the interviewees are put at ease. Ensure that the interviewees know that they are not being judged in any way.

## **Conducting**

Use the questions or topics developed to guide the interview but do not use them as a script. It is important that the conversation can flow naturally and not be constrained by the questions – but ensure the discussion tracks well to the interview objective. During the course of the interview the business analyst may need to ask questions in a different order than originally planned or in a different way. It may be useful for the business analyst to ask “Why?” to get to the root cause of business problems.

The business analyst must practice active listening to reassure those being interviewed that their input is appreciated and understood. Acceptance cues are important for drawing requirements from the interviewee. These include a welcoming posture, appropriate eye contact and polite manners. The business analyst should restate comments made in their own words to check their interpretation and indicate their continued interest.

## **Closing**

When closing the interview, it is important that the business analyst asks the interviewee for any areas which may have been overlooked in the discussion.

The business analyst should summarise the interview and thank the interviewee for their time.

## **Following up**

Once the interview is complete the business analyst documents it to preserve the data gathered. The notes from the interview should be sent to the interviewee for their review. The purpose of this review is to ensure the interview has been documented correctly.