

# 3Kites Consulting

## Requirements gathering and the faster horse

A few recent conversations have reminded me that the concept of requirements gathering can often be misunderstood, and indeed that requirements gathering done in the wrong way can be very unhelpful.

After more than 14 years of consulting, much of which has involved capturing and understanding requirements in order to arrive at appropriate solutions, there are some important things I take for granted about the process:

- **You have to understand the context and the jobs your consultees do.** At 3Kites we work almost exclusively with professional services organisations, largely with lawyers (both in private practice and in-house), but also with accountants, surveyors and other professionals. The challenges and pressures in those environments are different from those in, say, manufacturing and system requirements need to be interpreted in that light.
- **You have to be able to interpret what the consultee is telling you.** This is the classic “faster horse” concept. Someone who tells you they want a faster horse may be saying that because they have no idea that something more sophisticated may be possible. So the real requirement may be to get from A to B more quickly, or to pull a cart from A to B more quickly. And then there’s the follow up question about whether it has to be a cart and what’s likely to be in the cart. Is a van or an articulated lorry going to be a better solution than a faster horse? Sometimes consultees are very specific about what they want: “I want a yellow button, top left of the screen, that takes me to X”. The real requirement is quick access to X – it is very unlikely that the location of the button or its colour are critical, – or indeed whether it needs to be a button at all. You might also need to understand why access to X is needed in the first place and whether in fact, providing X – or even Y, which is greater than X - in a different way might be equally good, or even better.
- **Not all requirements can or should be met.** Requirements gathering is not about taking people to a sweetie shop and asking them to pick everything they like. That is a sure and unhealthy way to indigestion. A particular individual may be passionate about how they think things should be done, or about the potential of a novel way to approach a task, but they may be a lone voice and others might find their approach completely unhelpful. There’s a judgement call to be made, based on a wide a consultation exercise as is feasible (so that it reflects a firmwide view and not just personal whims), to get to a set of requirements which will deliver the best overall benefit to the business without being indigestible.

This is why requirements gathering is about much more than asking questions (even if you encapsulate the right questions in the first place) and writing down the answers.

**Melanie Farquharson, 3Kites Consulting, June 2021**

If you’d like to know more about how 3Kites can assist your firm, then please contact [Danielle.Leacock@3Kites.com](mailto:Danielle.Leacock@3Kites.com)