COLLECTIVE WISDOM

CHAPTER 8
EXCERPT

The Requirements List

The requirements list is usually long, with dozens of individual requirements. Organize it in logical categories. This is one scheme we like to use.

- **Vendor requirements.** What kind of company do you want to do business with? Don't waste time working with a fledgling startup if you don't have the stomach for it. Often, but not always, you may have to step away from the more established vendors if you want bleeding-edge functionality. Include financial viability, customer references, and the business model (hosted or licensed) in this category.

- **Architecture and adherence to standards.** The tool must fit into the overall IT picture. For instance, it may have to run on Linux, or on an Oracle database. You may have specific requirements for what kind of development environment is required for customizing the tool.

  Separate from the platform requirements there are the performance, scalability, availability, recoverability, security, and compliance areas to worry about.

  The IT team must participate in defining the requirements to get this category right.

- **Business functionality.** This is the largest category of requirements and we've discussed literally hundreds of them in preceding chapters. Because of the size of this category, we like to subdivide it further, for instance as follows. Each subcategory is illustrated by some of the requirements that belong in it.

  - **Authoring**: Can templates be defined? Is there a spellchecker? What's the metadata?

  - **Publishing**: Does the tool support a workflow? Can there be multiple workflows? Does publishing require a separate, manual step?

  - **Maintenance**: Does the metadata include publication date? Can solutions be linked to cases to measure usage?

  - **Retrieval and search**: Is NLP supported? Are results returned in popularity order?

  - **Customer portal**: Can the tool support a tree-based search? Does the system support subscriptions to individual solutions or to categories?

  - **Personalization**: Can the tool present different experiences based on business rules? How does the tool handle language preferences?

- **Collaboration**: Does the tool support customer forums? Does it provide help for support staffers trying to locate a technical expert?
- **Analytics**: Can the tool identify knowledge gaps (this is a very tough requirement!)? Are standard reports provided as a basis for customization?
- **Integrations**: Can the tool be integrated with the support-tracking system so that support staffers can search seamlessly from a case summary to the knowledge base?

- **System maintenance and implementation.** You must be able to implement and maintain within your timeframe and resource constraints. If you have a firm deployment date, state it.

  Also, define the level of responsiveness you need from the vendor's tech support department. Any kind of maintainability requirement can be put there, including maintenance release frequency, for instance.

- **Budget**. Based on the ROI analysis, set a target price from the start for both the tool purchase and the implementation (and, if you're smart, the ongoing maintenance). Don't live beyond your means, and don't waste time evaluating tools you simply cannot afford. Prices can be quite elastic in the high end, however, and we will see how to negotiate deals to make apparently unaffordable tools affordable later in the chapter.

What is appropriate to include on a requirements list? Stay away from vague terms you may find on vendors' marketing brochure such as "the system should scale well." Instead, state how many users the system should support and what kind of response time they should expect. Whether you elect to perform a stress test as part of the evaluation process or to simply rely on references is your choice, but you should have a good idea of what you are testing against.

At the same time, don't get bogged down into details. The requirements list is a shopping list, not the detailed specifications document that will be created at the start of the implementation phase. In particular, do not include a description of what field should go in the upper left-hand side corner of the screen at this point. It's way too early.

To help you, we included a generic requirements list in the appendix. The template is meant to stimulate your thinking about your customized list: do not use it as is!

COLLECTIVE WISDOM

CHAPTER 9
EXCERPT

Consider a group that has just rolled out new knowledge management practices. All of the support staffers are encouraged to create content when appropriate, and all are expected to reuse knowledge if it's available. It's still fairly early in the life of the new knowledge base, so there still remain many knowledge gaps.

The manager, Sara, is concerned. For the group overall, the average participation rate—that is, the average number of times cases are closed by being linked to new or reused solutions—is only a little over 50%. The numbers have been climbing, but slowly. She suspects there are some slackers and some superstars, and she intends to make examples of each.

Sara calls up a report, and she finds just what she was expecting. Clearly, Sam and Raj haven't gotten the message. Sara calls each of them into her office for a little "quality time." They admit they haven't really gotten with the program yet.

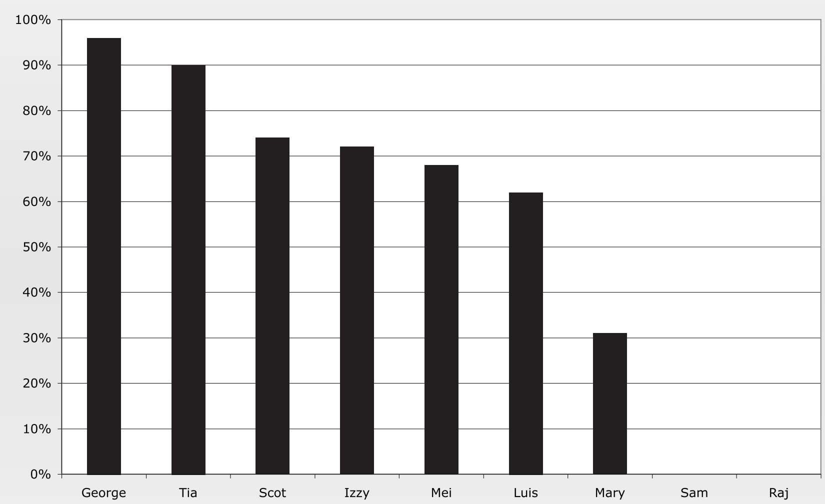

Figure 9-1: *Team participation rate.*

Raj's situation is simple. He was out the day that training on the new processes took place, and is eager to get started. Sara arranges a make-up session with one of the trainers.

Sam's situation is trickier. He has been around forever, and feels that, if the answer is known, he already knows it. Sara points out that it's just possible that new answers will come up that Sam doesn't know. But more to the point, even when he knows the answer, it helps the organization's consistency if he uses the standard answer; it helps their tracking what solutions are useful and root cause analytics when he links solutions to his cases; and, it helps when he casts his practiced eye on the solutions and fixes or flags those that need correcting. Sam agrees to give it a try. Sara feels like she's had a little breakthrough, because she knows all the other staffers look to see what Sam does.

Now comes the fun part—what reward and recognition to give the superstars. She looks at Tia and George's participation rates, which clearly are more like what she was expecting. But she has a nagging feeling about the two of them: before getting out the recognition certificates, she decides to investigate further. She pulls up charts that show a number of the activities and outcomes she's monitoring together.

Here's Tia's chart for the first six months of the program. Before reading Sara's analysis, take a minute to think what it means—is Tia really a superstar?

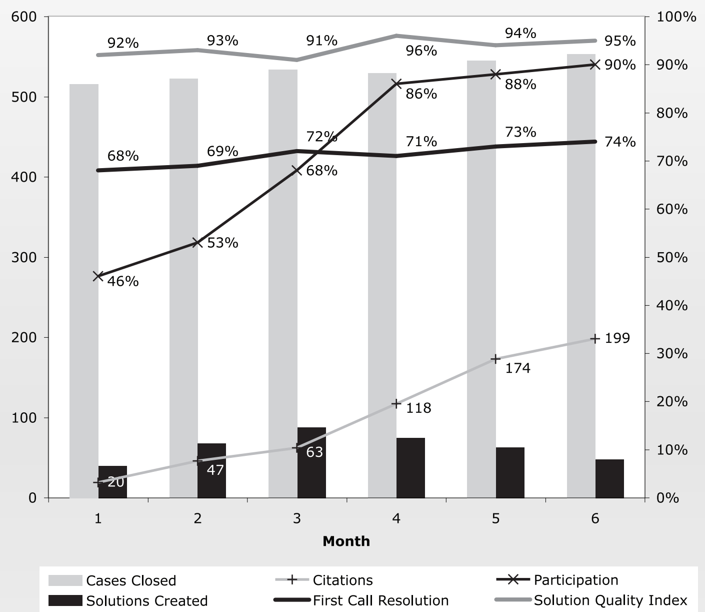

Figure 9-2: *Tia's first six months.*

Participation has increased quickly and steadily. Tia is creating fewer solutions than she once did, which puzzled Sara for a moment, until she realized that Tia's filled in most of the knowledge gaps in her area of specialty. Her knowledge is also getting reused by others, as the "up and to the right" shape of the citations line indicates. ("Citations" is how often Tia's solutions are linked to cases by other staffers.)

In conjunction with this healthy-looking menu of activities, Tia's outcomes look good, too. First call resolution rate is heading up and is within the organization's goal. Along with that, she's closing more cases.

And, as you might suspect from the rest of this, her solution quality index is outstanding. The SQI target is 85/100, and Tia is running in the mid 90s. Clearly, her solutions are unique and meet the other criteria set out by the content standard.

Yes, as Sara suspected, Tia's a superstar.

Here's the same chart for George, our other candidate for recognition. Again, before reading on, please draw your own conclusions. Should George take his place in the limelight next to Tia? If not, what's gone wrong?

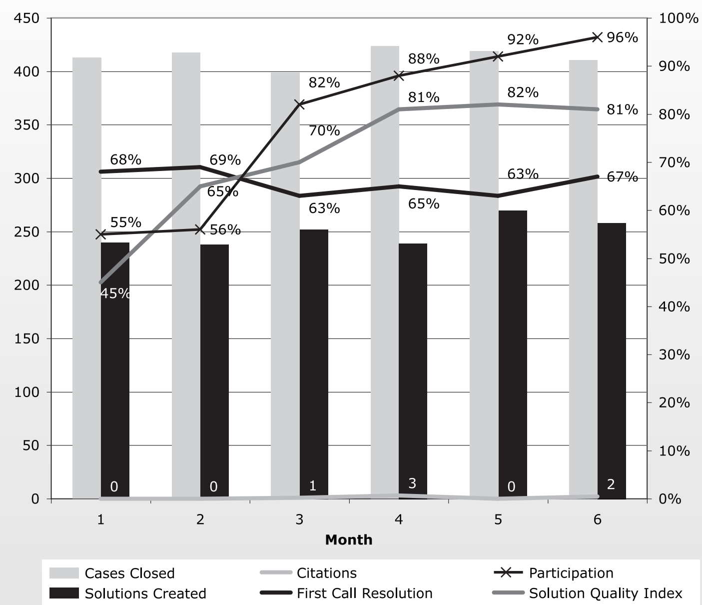

Figure 9-3: *George's first six months.*

Hmm. Sara shakes her head. This chart looks rather different from Tia's.

The first thing that stands out is the solutions created. It's a high percentage of cases closed, which indicates that the vast majority of cases get new solutions, rather than reused solutions. But George's specialty area isn't that different from Tia's; his cases can't be that unique.

The other thing that strikes Sara is the citations. George is creating a huge volume of content, but others don't seem to be using it.

These facts help explain the lack of change in his business outcomes: cases handled and average handle time haven't really moved. Since he's not reusing content—he's creating it most of the time—he's not able to save any time.

George's solution quality index is below the acceptable range.

Sara tries to think through what's going on. George has been heard bragging about how much knowledge he's creating; he must have missed part of the point of the initial training that quality matters at least as much as quantity. Maybe he thinks he'll get rewarded for a high creation rate and participation rate. (He almost was, Sara thinks, wincing at the thought of the second certificate next to her printer.)

But why isn't he reusing knowledge? It must have something to do with what he does when he first opens a case. Maybe he's not searching much at all. If he isn't searching, and he's just creating content, he's likely polluting the knowledge base with duplicates—that would go far to explain his poor SQI. Sara looks at the detailed scores behind the SQI:

Support Analyst	Solution Quality Index	Solutions Reviewed	Not in Customer Words	No Fix in Finished Solution	Fix Not Usable	Too Thin	Duplicate	Content in Wrong Section	Broken hyperlink
Mary	93%	16		2			1		
Tia	95%	14				1			1
Scot	89%	17			2		2		
Mei	78%	18	4			2			
Sam	99%	17					1		
Luis	96%	16		1					1
Raj	90%	23	1				4		
George	**68%**	**18**				**5**	**6**	**2**	
Izzy	86%	20				1		2	2
Total			5	3	2	9	14	4	4

Figure 9-4: *SQI score breakdown.*

Sure enough, lots of duplicates. She schedules time with George to help him understand the importance of searching early and often, before he adds any more duplicates into the knowledge base.

One recognition certificate will be enough for today's meeting.

Key Metrics for Self-Service

The Elusive ROI Measure

If we had an answer to the question we're most often asked—is there a simple, accurate formula to determine the ROI of a self-service solution?—we'd be lying on a beach somewhere being served drinks with umbrellas in them. Needless to say, we aren't, and there isn't such a magic formula.

Don't despair. While an exact calculation isn't possible, a set of metrics can work together to provide good insights and strong evidence of ROI. We present these here.