FACT or FICTION?

PERCEIVED PROJECT REQUIREMENTS: perceptions

Every project is a solution to a problem, an answer to a question or response to an opportunity. Stakeholders, especially high interest Stakeholders, might think they know the problem, question, or opportunity; and the required solution, answer, or response right from the beginning; maybe even before the project is initiated. When we talk about Stakeholder Requirements it is important to discern between real requirements and perceived requirements. As the Project Manager it will be necessary to work through Stakeholder perceptions. This should be done before trying to write a Project Scope Statement.

Moving from Stakeholder perceptions to a Project Scope Statement can be a challenging experience. There are 4 problems with perceptions:

* They exist in our minds, where other people cannot see them
* Not everyone sees the situation the same way
* People change their minds
* More often we know what we want, before knowing what we need.

Too often in a project the wrong problem gets solved because we as Project Managers don’t understand the real issues, and we have not fully understood the Stakeholders. Also, sometimes even the Stakeholders do not understand the real issues. By delving into the Stakeholders’ perceived requirements and working with the Stakeholders to move together toward real requirements, we can improve the likelihood of success in our project, because we will come closer to solving the real problems.

How then can we move from perceived requirements toward real requirements while attaining Stakeholder acceptance? Here are some tips and tools:

* Determine who originated the project and obtain their requirements
* Search out other Key Stakeholders and determine their requirements
* Consider information gathering through a Brainstorming Session or a Questionnaire to gather as many perceived requirements as possible (This is just gathering information, not evaluating it, yet)
* Use cause and Effect Analysis (Fishbone chart) to determine root causes or real requirements
* Send a memo to all the Stakeholders who provided the perceived requirements, listing the identified perceived requirements, so far, and asking for feedback.