

Book Review: **Requirements By Collaboration – Workshops for Defining Needs**

by Ellen Gottesdiener, Addison-Wesley, 2002, ISBN: 0-201-78606-0. Reviewed By Dr. Lawrence D. Pohlmann, Strategics Consulting, pohlmann@incose.org

“Requirements by Collaboration explains how to plan and hold workshops to meet two essential needs: efficiently defining user requirements while building positive, productive, working relationships.”

I view this book as a requirements workshop handbook that is highly useful to workshop sponsors, facilitators, and participants. It is practical, well written, and comprehensive. It would be a good addition to the bookshelf of any systems engineer involved with requirements definition, derivation, and documentation.

The Author. **Ellen Gottesdiener** is the Principal of EBG Consulting, Inc., a company that emphasizes use of collaborative techniques to elicit business models and rules and user requirements. She is a Certified Professional Facilitator.

The Target Audience is “Anyone who participates in initiating, eliciting, analyzing, verifying, validating or approving requirements for software will find this book useful.” While the discussion context is software, I think the book should have and will have broader appeal.

The Focus is on requirement workshops. Throughout her book, Gottesdiener seeks to openly share her many heuristics, tips, checklists, lessons learned, and best practices about conducting successful requirements workshops. “A *requirements workshop* is a structured meeting in which a carefully selected group of stakeholders and content experts work together to define, create, refine, and reach closure on *deliverables* (such as models and documents) that represent user requirements.” She offers a wealth of very practical and prescriptive guidance on all aspects of planning, conducting, and following up on requirements-related workshops. For example, she clearly defines various types of workshops and the kinds of activities and outcomes suitable to each.

Structure. The book has 12 chapters grouped into three parts.

Part One, Overview of Requirements Workshops, includes three chap-

ters that introduce basic concepts, terminology and ingredients for success.

Part Two, Requirements Workshops Framework, includes six chapters that address techniques for every aspect of planning and conducting workshops. For example, Chapter 7 is devoted to describing potential workshop products.

Part Three, Requirements Workshop Design Strategies, includes the final three chapters. Characteristics and potential benefits of several alternative workshop strategies and sequences are discussed; four case studies which used different strategies are reviewed; and guidance is provided on how to sell management on the efficacy of the requirements workshop process.

Supporting elements include an appendix on collaboration patterns (discussed briefly below), a reasonably detailed glossary, a bibliography, and an index. References are relatively recent, mostly from 1995 through 2001.

Collaboration Patterns. An insightful and unique contribution of the book is its explicit articulation of eight “collaboration patterns.” Each pattern is defined in terms of context, problem, solution, consequences, exit criteria, and uses for the pattern. Gottesdiener has named these patterns:

1. Decide how to decide
2. Divide, conquer, correct, collect
3. Expand then contract
4. Is there a norm in the room?
5. Multi-model
6. Self-reflect
7. The sieve
8. Wall of wonder

Presentation Style. Gottesdiener’s book is user friendly. Chapters are logically organized; lots of subheaders give the chapters structure, there is frequent use of meaningful graphics, tables, and checklists. Each Part Two chapter ends with a number of specific tips, a set of useful questions or a checklist, and a list of helpfully annotated additional information sources. She employs a competent and friendly coaching and mentoring style.

A variation of the familiar plan-do-check-act “wagon wheel” graphic is used to anchor the many activities discussed

in Part Two, Requirements Workshop Framework. Key heuristics are highlighted with a “key ingredient” icon.

Pointers are included when additional information is available on the author’s web site.

Availability. This 368 page book lists for \$44.99 at Amazon and other sources. Quantity discounts are available from the publisher.

For Additional Information, see:

- www.ebgconsulting.com – the author’s site – which contains numerous downloadable resources related to the book, and links to a downloadable chapter 6 from the Rational Edge site
- www.aw.com/cseng/ – the publisher’s site which includes a downloadable pdf of chapter 7
- www.amazon.com – which lists the detailed table of contents, portrays all of chapter 3 as sample pages, and includes several other complimentary customer reviews of the book
- easyweb.easynet.co.uk/~iany/ – Ian Alexander’s site which includes reviews of this book and numerous others. [As an aside, I view this as a must see site for people involved with requirements development!]

It is very noteworthy that all eight of the customer reviews currently on Amazon rate this book at 5 stars! I have never seen this before – although the book by Hooks and Farry as well as the one by Young both come very close. [Both of these requirements-related books have been previously reviewed for INSIGHT.]

In Closing. This is a practical and useful book. It can benefit anyone involved with defining requirements – especially in group settings. Its extensive prescriptive guidance will make it a potent reference in many contexts for years to come.

I agree very strongly the primary premise of the book: requirements derivation is by nature a group activity, an activity that both mandates and benefits from creative and disciplined use of techniques for effective and efficient collaboration.. I expect to refer to this book repeatedly in support of my own consulting efforts.

“The payoffs for using requirements workshops can be dramatic.”