



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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When to Implement a Requirements Freeze

There are different opinions about when to implement a requirements freeze. Here are some things to keep in mind when considering a freeze.

You Cannot Freeze Business Change

First, business is always changing and the project solutions that are built must reflect this change as well. Freezing change requests is simply a technique to bring closure to the project. Remember that when you build a solution for your client, the project only represents the initial steps in the product lifecycle. Once the system goes into production, there may be follow-on phases to the project, or the solution will go into a support and enhance stage. This stage could easily end up representing ninety percent, or more, of the entire solution lifecycle. The enhancement process is the way that the application gets changed over the long-term. So, do not seek to freeze business change overall, only to freeze changes that would extend the life of the initial project. If changes are needed after the project freeze is implemented, they go on the evolution backlog, to be addressed as enhancements.

All that being said, you do not want to deliver a solution that does not meet the business needs. That would not make sense either. If you implement a requirements freeze, you must also have a process in place for getting around the freeze. What you are really doing is gaining agreement with the client sponsor to raise the threshold for scope change management. During the freeze, for instance, it may be that all change requests need to be approved by the sponsor personally. If the sponsor understands the benefit of the change request, as well as the cost and impact to the project, they may still approve the request, if it is important enough. However, even important changes may not get approved during the freeze. What may happen instead is that the change will be prioritized high as part of an enhancement request after the solution goes live.

Fixing Errors is not Affected By the Requirements Freeze

You may wonder whether system testing is the right time to implement a freeze. Remember that the freeze is on business requirements changes. Of course, if you find problems or errors in the system test, they need to be corrected. System testing is a time when you do stress testing, usability testing, documentation testing, performance testing, etc. As an example, during requirements testing you may find that you misinterpreted a requirement, which will require a change. This is not a change to the requirements, but the correcting of an interpretation error. This may be allowed. During stress testing, you may find that your hardware is not powerful enough to take the load. This may require changes to the system configuration, or a change in how the transactions are processed. Again, this may be required under the freeze.

However, hopefully your client is not adding new business requirements during system testing. When you get to system testing, in many cases you have to retest when changes



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are introduced. For instance, if a change request is allowed during system testing, you must make the change, unit test it, run integration tests, and potentially rerun all the system tests. This is very disruptive, if the change could instead wait until the enhancement process opens up after implementation. In fact, at this point in the project, you may even defer some errors that were uncovered during testing, if they do not have a major impact to the value of the solution.

Summary

The important points about a requirements freeze is that you are recognizing that continued change requests will jeopardize your ability to deliver within your budget and deadline. You gain an agreement with your sponsor to allow the team to focus on a fairly stable system for completion of the testing and implementation process. Critical change requests are still allowed, while less critical changes are deferred until the enhancement process after implementation.