

OneSpring White Paper

JAM® is the New JAD

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Executive Summary

The traditional joint application development (JAD) session does not fully meet the needs of project stakeholders for software projects. There is a better way.

We're all familiar with the traditional JAD (Joint Application Development) session: A group of too many people gather in a room to discuss requirements for a project. Someone is tasked with extracting the various discussions, side conversations, whiteboard drawings, flip charts, ideas, mental images, and so on and documenting them.

All too often the outcome of the sessions is a tall stack of ambiguous requirements that was delivered weeks or even months later. Depending on the project there might be some diagrams and maybe even some wireframes or comps. Stakeholders are expected to read these documents, understand them, and approve that everything meets their needs.

The reality is that only when stakeholders see and experience the project do they understand what it is they are getting. And this typically happens during QA or user acceptance testing when it's far too late and far too expensive to make changes.

The JAD approach is mostly a left-brain exercise. That is not a bad thing of course, but when people talk about their needs, they visualize it in their mind's eye. Because everyone visualizes things differently, ambiguity and misunderstanding are introduced. It is long understood in education that people learn more effectively when both the left and right brain are engaged.

But what if you could engage both halves of the brain and move that moment of understanding to the beginning of the process? A Joint Application Modeling® Session, or JAM Session®, uses visualization to bring clarity at the start of the project. Visualization is a unique and rapidly spreading discipline for defining complex applications through interactive visual mock-ups.

At OneSpring®, we use visualization during a JAM Session to elicit and capture requirements in real time. Stakeholders not only see but experience their requirements right before their eyes by creating an interactive visual model - at the start of the project. We believe that you cannot truly understand your project by reading documentation.

There are four essential ingredients to a JAM Session:

- Small Group Collaboration
- Rapid Iterative Design
- Visualization
- Flow

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Small Group Collaboration

While your project may have many groups of stakeholders, it is not effective to have them all in a room at the same time. We try to limit participants to a maximum of 8. This is in addition to our own team: The Producer, who facilitates the experience; the Visualization Analyst who elicits and documents requirements; and the Visualization Designer who crafts the experience.

Rapid Iterative Design

The iterative cycle allows us to rapidly visualize the "big picture", gain stakeholder consensus, and then drill-down to specific features. We use observation to gain valuable knowledge and context on the business, customer, and technologies for the project. Design activities that crystallize these insights to form a model of the experience. Socialization and measurement of the experience model are used to provide continuous improvement and validation. This all happens in real time over the course of two to three days.

Visualization

From initial sketches to detailed information design, visualization incorporates the use of dynamic imagery and interaction to effectively communicate requirements. Visualization not only enhances a "shared understanding" but is critical in helping stakeholders organize their thoughts and work through problems to collectively build a solution. It engages the right-brain. However, visualization by itself is not enough. To engage the left-brain, documentation is paired with visualization so that the requirements written by the Visualization Analyst reflect the wishes, wants, and needs of the stakeholders. It aligns (traces) directly to visualized pages of the future system. The documentation coincides with a rich interactive vision of the future system, and eliminates ambiguity of elicited requirements. Both the visualization and documentation is captured in real-time and displayed in front of users via dual screens.

Flow

This is where the magic happens! In our seven years of using visualization we have become masters in generating Flow. In the sports world, this might be called "being in the zone". Generating Flow depends on both the environment in which the JAM Session takes place and the mental investment made by the stakeholders. In our sessions:

- Goals are clear
- Feedback is immediate
- Opportunity & capacity are balanced
- Concentration deepens
- The present is what matters
- Control is no problem
- Sense of time is altered
- Egos do not interfere with group process

The results we achieve with our clients are simply amazing:

- The requirements cycle is reduced by at least 35%
- Requirements defects are reduced by at least 80%

And because we employ a user-centered design approach to everything we do, the user experience and innovation of the project are significantly improved.

Case Study | JAM® is the New JAD

Case Study - March of Dimes

The organization is headquartered in White Plains, New York and operates 250 local and regional offices. The mission of the March of Dimes (MOD) seeks to improve the health of babies by preventing birth defects, premature birth, and infant mortality.

As with most not-for-profit organizations, one of the biggest challenges is the management of fundraising and the events associated with raising funds. In order to manage a multitude of data facets these organizations rely on complex systems that often lack solid user-centered design principles and rarely fit the needs of all users. As a result, users rely on multiple applications with disparate data across geographic locations or make do with one system that only meets the needs a few select user personas.

We worked with MOD to structure an agile definition and development lifecycle for the redesign of MOD's most comprehensive internal application, which consisted of several hundred pages across varying workflows. The application needed to:

- support 9 separate user personas (both internal employees and volunteers)
- allow the management of Campaigns (i.e. March for Babies or Bikers for Babies)
- provide reporting capabilities

To accommodate the agile nature of the development cycle and to capture upfront user feedback, we established a project style of working in 1 – 2 week cycles. The cycles included a 2 - 3 day JAM Session followed remote user testing. After analysis of the feedback, the team made instant iterations on the visualization so that developers could start coding the following week.

Using this process, MOD went from concept to production in less than 8 months. The project team used a centralized data store accessed through a web application by both the users and the technology team while supporting a more usable system. The new fundraising and events management application dramatically improves user experience and provides innovations not found in off the shelf products.

Conclusion

JAM Sessions are a powerful way to elicit and capture project requirements regardless of the development methodology. We have used this technique across a wide spectrum of projects from simple web site redesigns to mobile applications to multi-year mainframe modernization efforts. It engages the analytical thinking of the left brain and the creative thinking of the right brain. The key to visualization is having the right people and process. The tools are important, but without the process and the people of a JAM Session, you are not getting the full value. At OneSpring®, we've pioneered the industry's first requirements methodology, the Stream Process™. The JAM Session is a major component and with visualization enables our clients to experience their project months or even years before it will be built.

About OneSpring

OneSpring is the first Requirements Agency and works to empower and inspire you to create the very best and most successful software that changes lives. They do this by leveraging visualization to better capture, connect, and deliver application requirements. The OneSpring Stream Process™ with its JAM Session® is the first and only methodology to bring project requirements to life. For more information, visit www.onespring.net.