Read Me

Example Use Cases – Relationship Management

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Purpose

This document provides an overview of the contents of this download package.

Background

"Use cases" are my preferred method for documenting what Karl E. Wiegers would label as "user requirements" for a software development project.

A "use case" is a text-based description of the interactions between a user and the proposed system during the user's performance of a supported system task. Typically, each major task supported by a system is represented by a single defined use case.

I myself find that the classical "list of things the system must do approach" makes it too hard to distinguish "business requirements", from "software requirements", "functional requirements" from "non-functional requirements", etc. It also is often difficult to place requirements listed in the traditional approach within the context most appropriate for client review and comment. I have found that employment of "use case" techniques makes these important distinctions between different "types" of requirements easier, and also provides a very natural context for user review and comment.

Development of "test cases" – use case descriptions for which all the user's selection criteria are "filled in" to describe an actual description of the application of the use case (for a specific, realistic example provided by a user) can provide a good quality check on whether a use case description is accurate and complete.

I have also found that a good set of use case descriptions is a valuable aid during final system implementation. A single use case often can be reasonably implemented by a single user interface, or a tightly related small series of user interfaces.

Because I often make direct use of use cases during application form development, etc. I tend to provide types of details that others might not include – details like an indication of when a selection mechanism like a list of code values or a free-text field will be provided to the user. In general, use cases are intended to describe details of system/user interaction without specifying mechanisms that may be dependent on the choice of implementation platform. The reader should probably keep in mind that my detailed specifications of these details flirt with the boundary of what may be inappropriate levels of detail in a use case description.

Contents

The contents of this zip file contain a set of materials used to develop a set of use case descriptions for an actual project.

"Candidate Use Cases" spreadsheet

An Excel workbook I frequently use for listing all potential use cases during early development. I have also found it easy and often desirable to characterize the frequency of use and time-clustering of tasks represented by candidate use cases. This information often will influence decisions about

development sequencing, and also may provide important clues to the types of functions and interface requirements that are important for a use case in later development. (A heavily used use case may be better constructed with interface features that emphasize efficiency for well-trained users. An infrequently used use case may be better constructed to emphasize ease of understanding for occasional users.)

Use Case Descriptions

A number of individual “use case descriptions” for the proposed system are provided. In several cases, a number of separate candidate use cases have been consolidated into single use cases that perform all the tasks indicated in the original candidate use cases. In addition, four use cases have been excluded from this example because they were still “rough drafts” that did not seem appropriate for inclusion in this package.