MoSCoW Method
~ By Duncan Haughey

When managing a project, it is important to develop a clear understanding of the customers’ requirements and their priority. Many projects start with the barest headline list of requirements, only to find later the customers’ needs have not been fully understood.

Once there is a clear set of requirements, it is important to rank them. This ranking helps everyone (customer, project manager, designer, developers) understand the most important requirements, in what order to develop them, and what not to deliver if there is pressure on resources.

So what is the best method for creating a prioritised list of requirements?

The MoSCoW method can help. MoSCoW stands for must, should, could and would:
- M - Must have this requirement to meet the business needs
- S - Should have this requirement if possible, but project success does not rely on it
- C - Could have this requirement if it does not affect anything else on the project
- W - Would like to have this requirement later, but delivery won't be this time

The O's in MoSCoW are added to make the acronym pronounceable and are often in lowercase to show they don't stand for anything.

MoSCoW as a prioritisation method is used to decide which requirements to complete first, which must come later and which to exclude.

Unlike a numbering system for setting priorities, the words mean something and make it easier to discuss what’s important. The must requirements need to provide a coherent solution, and alone lead to project success.

The must requirements are non-negotiable. Failure to deliver even one of them will likely mean the project has failed.

The project team should aim to deliver as many of the should requirements as possible. Could and would requirements are nice to have and do not affect the overall success of the project. Could requirements are the first to go if the project timeline or budget comes under pressure.
It is essential to have a clear set of prioritised and agreed requirements with the customer, alongside the overall objective, quality criteria, timescale and budget if you are going to deliver a successful project. The recommended method for setting priorities is MoSCoW.

MoSCoW was developed by Dai Clegg of Oracle UK in 1994 and has been made popular by exponents of the Dynamic Systems Development Method (DSDM).