

Ambiguity: The means to no end ...



I have been in the business of formalizing and executing activities that achieve the basis and details of agreements for decades and the one thing that I have found is that:

If you are ambiguous in defining the agreement between you and your customer, you are sure to have controversy, which leads to strife and an unhealthy experience.

An example (though simplistic) would be where the requirements definition (which is in fact an agreement) states that a consulting company **will produce all reports necessary for a given role or set of roles**. This (as you all would agree) leaves open the possibility of not only every report that is necessary and **achievable**, but it also leaves open the possibility of reports that are necessary and **not achievable**.

In this instance the relationship becomes a continuous battle of “is the report REALLY necessary” and no one survives the strife that ensues.

By adding a little more detail to this requirement or “agreement” that states that the consulting company will produce all reports necessary for a given role or set of reports that are necessary **and achievable per the use of Report Facility XYZ** and given the work effort **does not exceed** the budgeted resources, then a portion of the wide range of reports are removed in “the agreement”.

In this instance the relationship becomes a continuous battle between each report, the role(s) requiring it, and the resources that were previously allotted. The battle now shifts to one between the various roles in the customer’s organization(s) and (in the end), few survive the strife that ensues.

However, if the requirements detail **ALL** of the reports that are **expected** to be required in sufficient detail as to establish agreement **between** the various roles and the consulting company, **while also** enabling the consulting company to formalize their **best estimate** as to the work effort required, then the only issues that can arise are based on (1) a missing report that was unforeseen as necessary or (2) the report requires more effort than was expected.

In this instance the agreement becomes a form of TEAM effort. If a new report is required, then both the customer and the consulting company bring their best efforts to the table. Is the report required? What are the details of that report? Is it achievable? What is the work effort required to produce the report? Can the required level of budget be obtained? ALL participants are joined together to address the change(s) in the agreement.

If it's not achievable or if budget can't be obtained – then it drops off “the list” and everyone continues in an unambiguous flow of project execution.

This is but one example of the dozens of possible instances where unambiguousness is a “success facilitator” when combining the needs of a customer and the role of a consulting company.

You probably have war stories enough to fill a book (or two).

Check out an example of specificity as a means of resolving ambiguity in this brief video clip from the movie [Phenomenon](#). Bob gets it, but not after a few rounds of refinement.

Strive to be unambiguous. It makes the project TEAM flow smoother, and it might even give you a weekend or two that can be restful and enable you to spend time with family and friends instead of the alternative.