

5

Killer Idea 5 Know what you are supposed to deliver before you start work on delivering it.

One of the top 10 reasons that projects fail is that people start working on the project before they really know what it is that they have to deliver. Sounds crazy, doesn't it. But it's true. I have audited loads of projects that were going bad and this was the major cause – no agreed requirements document. With no agreed requirements document in place before you start and no real control of the document during the life cycle of the project, all sorts of bad things happen. Things like scope creep, eventual chaos, slippage in schedules, overruns in terms of cost and, in most cases, a deliverable that does not meet the expectations of the client.

So what is the solution? Well, it's simple but not necessarily easy. Get an agreed requirements document in place before you start working to deliver something.

The detailed project definition document discussed in Killer Idea 4 is a good foundation for development of the requirements document, but it provides a definition at too high a level. As the Project Manager, you need to get more detail in place before you can start building the end-product.

Preparing the requirements document can be done in a number of ways. One way is to interview the client to find out exactly what is wanted, document it and go back to the client to get the client's approval. This method probably takes the longest in terms of project schedule.

Another way to define the requirement is to hold a workshop with the client. The goal of the workshop would be to deliver, at the end of the work-

shop, a documented, agreed requirements document. This method probably takes the shortest time in terms of project schedule.

A third way is to hold a visioning session. A few years ago, one of my clients asked me for a teambuilding course for 50 or so of her telephone fulfilment operators. Although she was sure that our standard teambuilding course was the thing they really needed, I wasn't happy with presenting it to her team because I didn't think it would deliver the outcome she was looking for. So I set up a visioning session. I facilitated and she and a couple of her supervisors attended.

I asked them to think ahead to after the training. How would her people be different? When she walked into their open-plan office, what would she hear? What would she feel? What would be the vibes in the room? What would she see? How would people be acting towards each other? From the answers to these questions, we formulated a vision statement that became the basis of the requirements for our training of her people. It also turned out to be the basis for testing after the training, so that we could see whether or not we had delivered the required outcome. The course we delivered turned out to be a lot different from our standard teambuilding course. Would our client have been happy with our standard course? Well, maybe. Would it have done the trick for her? I don't think so.

Look, no matter what techniques you use to define and capture the needs, make sure you prepare a requirements document, make sure you get it agreed, and use it as the basis for what you deliver. Use it as the basis for testing the finished product. You'll save yourself so much time, effort and money in the future, if you implement just this one Killer Idea.

“It's always better to know where you are going before starting a journey or you may end up some place you don't want to be.”