CONSULTING
EDUCATION
EXCEPTIONAL QUALITY, LASTING VALUE

Managing Ambiguity

A Key Business Analyst Competency

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Agenda

THE PROBLEM

Ambiguous Requirements

HEURISTICS TO UNCOVER AMBIGUITY

1. Search Subjective Terms
2. Memorization Technique
3. Mary Had A Little Lamb Technique
4. Ambiguity Poll Technique

EXERCISE

Get Requirement through Quality Gateway

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What Do You See?

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambiguous_image)

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The Problem

Ambiguous requirements lead to confusion, wasted effort and rework.

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Quality Gateway

Only Requirements that are Fit For Use May Pass Through

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HEURISTICS

Uncover Ambiguity Before Gateway

1. Search Subjective Terms
2. Memorization Technique
3. Mary Had A Little Lamb Technique
4. Ambiguity Poll Technique

(Exploring Requirements: Quality Before Design, Don C. Gause & Gerald Weinberg)

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Search Subjective Terms

Apply A Simple Checklist

- ❑ User-friendly
- ❑ Easy
- ❑ Simple
- ❑ Rapid
- ❑ Efficient
- ❑ Support
- ❑ Several
- ❑ State-of-the-art
- ❑ Superior
- ❑ Acceptable
- ❑ Robust

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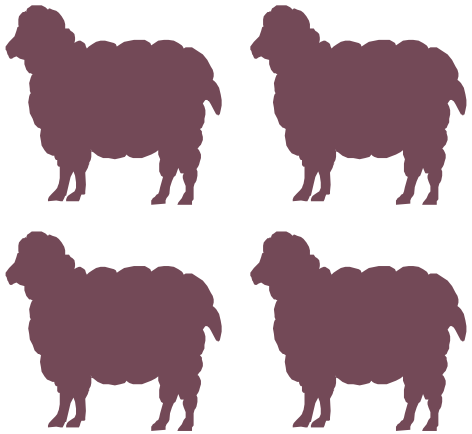
Mary Had A Little Lamb



Read the statement in question:

- Aloud several times,
- Each time emphasizing a different word or words
- Until as many interpretations as possible are discovered.

• **Mary** had a little lamb.

It was Mary's lamb, not Tom's, Dick's or Harry's.

• Mary **had** a little lamb.

She no longer has the lamb.

• Mary had **a** little lamb.

She had only one lamb, not several.

• Mary had a **little** lamb.

It really was surprisingly small

• Mary had a little **lamb**.

She didn't have a dog, cat, cow or goat.

• **Mary had** a little lamb.

John still has his little lamb.

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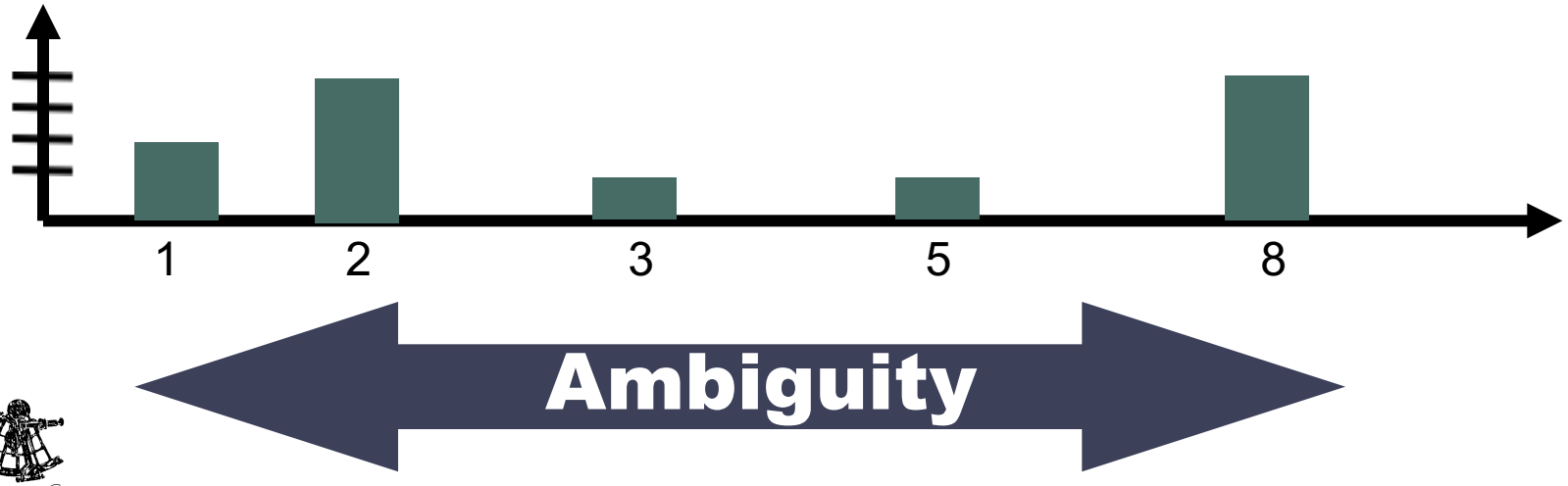
Ambiguity Poll
aka Planning Poker®

1. Create a metric (Size or Story Points)
   Requires solid understanding problem to estimate
2. Give requirement to informed individuals
   Ask them to independently estimate value of metric
3. Bring the individuals together
   Compare and discuss the tabulated results



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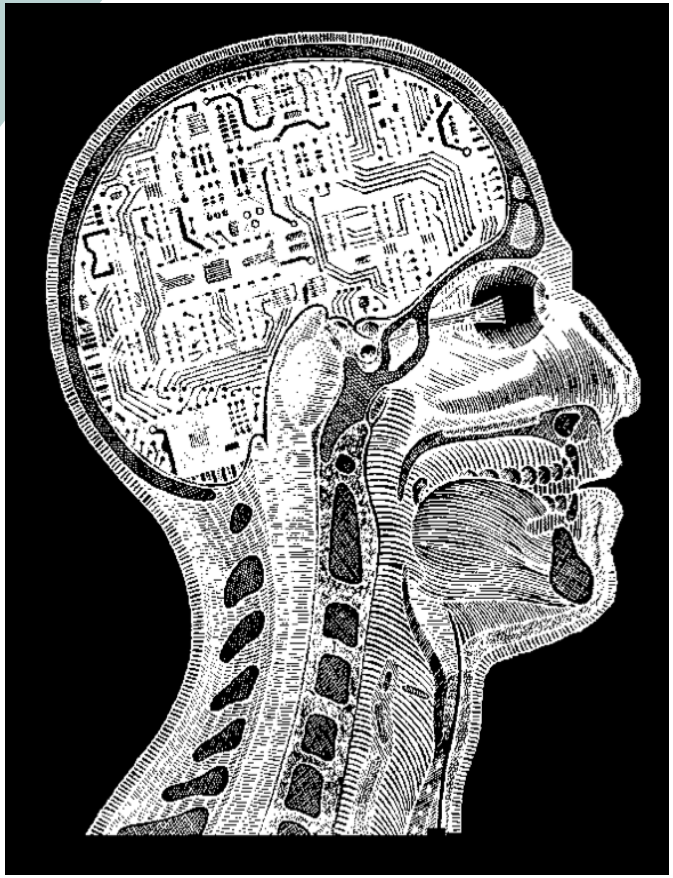
Memorization



1. Present problem statement
   - Briefly
   - Various individuals
2. Recall the problem statement
   - Precisely from memory
3. Parts not remembered
   - Rich source of ambiguity

Exercise

Detect Ambiguity Using Heuristics

“The product shall provide status messages at regular intervals not less than every 60 seconds.”

Ambiguous?

- ❑ Search Subjective Terms
- ❑ Mary Had A Little Lamb
- ❑ Ambiguity Poll
- ❑ Memorization

Try Rewriting it!

(Software Requirements, Karl Weigers and Joy Beatty)

Better?

The Background Task Manager (BTM) shall display status messages in a designated area of the user interface.

1.1 The messages shall be updated every 60 plus or minus 10 seconds after background task processing begins and shall remain visible continuously.

1.2. If background task processing is progressing normally, the BTM shall display the percentage of the background task processing that has been completed.

1.3. The BTM shall display a “done” message when the background task is completed.

1.4. The BTM shall display an error message if the background task has stalled.

(Software Requirements, Karl Weigers and Joy Beatty)

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Let's chat!

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