



Off-Spec's by Simon Kennish

Off spec's, it's that bone of contention as delivery of the outputs approach's, that dawning realisation that what you're getting isn't what you asked for – or at least, thought you asked for!

In the construction field this is called 'snagging' – though there is no legal definition of what snagging is, and it doesn't appear in most major forms of contract, so I prefer to use the contractual term of 'defective or incomplete works'. That just elevates the issue, it's not a trivial thing, it goes to the whole point of the project, to deliver an output that is both fit for purpose and to the right quality standard.

The real skill for a project or programme manager of course is getting the end user to tell you what it is they really want at the start of the project/ programme. The old saying 'the day the client tells you what they really wanted, is the day you give them what they asked for' is very true. So good PM's must spend time really teasing out what the client wants, this is an advanced skill, along with advising the client if they are unsure. Sometimes the PM assumes he knows what is required, and whilst this can be true for some technical spec's, the real high quality PM's go the extra mile to define the requirements with the client – truly probing their needs. For me the golden rules are:

Work out what you actually want to be delivered – this sounds daft, but I am continually amazed at how little thought goes into this process. For example if you want a new roof on your building, you probably want it to keep the weather out, you may or may not want it to look pleasing to the eye, you may need it to be able to withstand people walking on it etc.

Then work out what performance levels you want it to achieve and how you will be able to check its meeting those levels – for a roof this could be something as simple as it doesn't let rain water in, or has a certain thermal value, or can withstand high winds etc.

Then find a suitable method of defining these so the provider stands a fighting chance of delivering what you have asked for -whether it's a British or European Standard (though please check to see that it does cover what you want it too), I've seen the wrong ones specified before, which doesn't help when you have a claim. If you want to avoid a debate over whether it's fit for purpose or not, then spend time to spell out what fit for purpose looks like.

Of course it's then down to the service provider to deliver what has been specified, no more and no less – that is what the contract is for, laying out the service/ product and the cost for it. If they don't provide what you specified, then quite simple – don't pay them for it.



So before your next contractual ‘debate’ over snagging, just think of it as defective or incomplete works, check the contract to see what was asked for, and pause for a moment to think what a reasonable service provider would interpret that as. Of course if they have given you a rotten apple with a bite taken out and you asked for a fresh Braeburn – then you have an interesting conversation ahead. Next time you are drafting spec’s, reflect on what you really want, a few minutes spent then will save hours later.

Bio Notes - Simon Kennish FRICS, MAPM, MCMI is a Chartered Surveyor, Project and Programme Manager with a passion for delivering major projects and programmes in both the public and private sectors. www.simonkennish.com

