

# Benefits and Challenges of Ambiguity

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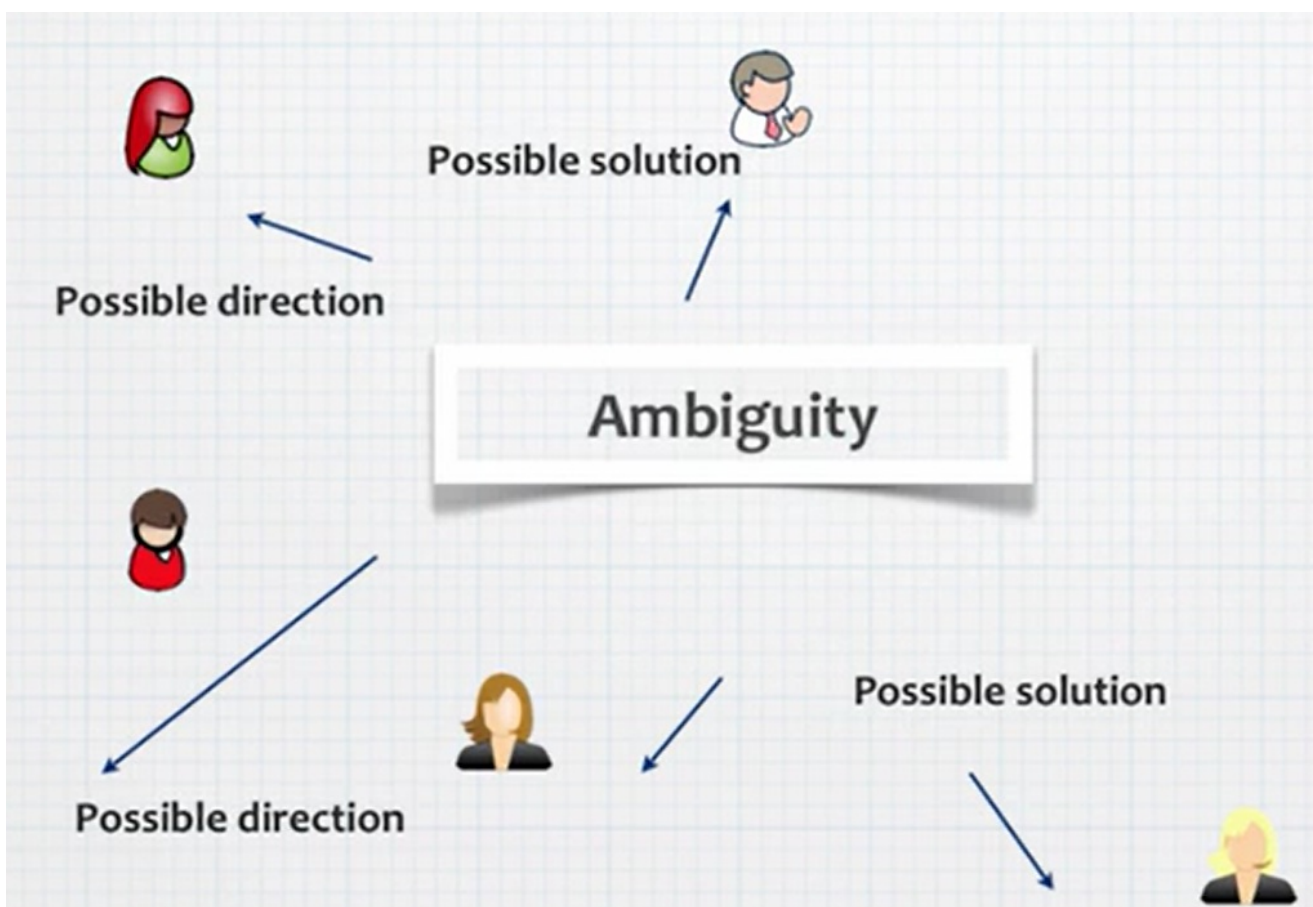


## WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson covers embracing ambiguity. It discusses ambiguity, how it can be handled, and how to leverage it. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

## 1. Ambiguity

Ambiguity is generally a lack of clarity or certainty. It's a lack of structure with precision. Below you have your team. As you can see, these arrows are in all different areas. They're not structured, they're not uniform.



Situations such as creative areas or areas that have many evolutions can go in many different directions. It's important to be flexible enough or fluid enough to look outside of the box and evaluate these areas.

## 2. Resistance to Ambiguity

Oftentimes, people have a negative reaction to ambiguity. They want to clarify things as soon as possible so they can feel comfortable. People in these situation tend to lean on previous methods.



### THINK ABOUT IT

Why do you have ambiguity?

You're going to find ambiguity in situations that involve teams working in evolving areas, such as technology or the creative process, because they change often.

While this flexibility and lack of structure can pose an issue for many teams, some level of ambiguity is inevitable. It's worth your time to be comfortable with this. If you resist ambiguity, you tend to:

- rush solutions
- ignore complex areas that may raise flags
- hesitate to try out new roles

This leads to negative capability. Deliberately exploring ambiguous areas can be a powerful tool. You may push yourself to a potential you didn't even know you were capable of reaching. It's important to be flexible and explore these areas.

Flexibility and ambiguity go hand in hand. People who have developed a high tolerance for unclear situations and lack of structure are generally able to be more flexible. They're willing to try new roles and they tend to handle complex situations effectively. Individuals who are more resistant tend to handle change poorly.

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## 3. Techniques for Handling Ambiguity

When you're faced with ambiguous situations, what can you do to reduce the stress associated with them?

What are some techniques for handling ambiguity? There are several key steps to look at:

- **Why?:** You can understand why a situation is ambiguous. Ask yourself these questions: What are the unique and complex elements of the situation? What is the hallmark of complexity? Can you use it as a cue to identify the elements involved in the situation and how they interact with each other? Are there conflicting positions that need to be addressed? Where are the factors involved, and how can we avoid oversimplifying them or rushing to a solution to avoid conflict and reduce ambiguity?
- **Identify:** It is important to understand where the unknowns are? Situations may be unclear because there are areas that are unknown or only partially defined. This presents an opportunity to research or analyze, to cast new light by asking questions and looking into those complex areas. It may be time to acknowledge that some areas cannot be easily fixed or resolved, and this is where you will discover new alternatives.
- **Acceptance:** You will find you need to accept that there is no one right answer. This is where you ask yourself, "Am I pushing too hard for one solution or one right answer?" There may be many effective ways of doing things. Accepting that there is no one right way increases the ability to tolerate a situation where the answer is unclear.
- **Perspective:** Trusting your own perspective is important when there are many approaches to analyze. Do

you have a good understanding of each team member's strengths? It is logical to analyze the approaches that are a good fit for the team. This means understanding the individual strengths that are offered. Solutions generally float up by leveraging the capabilities and the strengths of all the people involved in the team and by adding skills and resources where needed.

- **Risk:** You have to be willing to risk consequences. Before you jump too quickly, what are the consequences of each possible solution? Since there are trade-offs or blind leaps of faith regardless of what path is taken, sometimes risk is unavoidable, and it may be important to root your direction in the team's best guess, which is usually a better idea than taking no action at all.

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## 4. Leveraging Ambiguity

On the note of discovering positive ways to handle ambiguity, you have leveraging ambiguity. Ambiguous situations are generally found in creative areas. Methods and processes that have been established and therefore previously relied upon time and time again provide no opportunity for innovation, collaboration, and improvements on the methods and techniques used.

Creativity is constrained when we're using the same methods by the same rote, or technique, that we've used repeatedly because it's worked in the past. This ultimately renders that method, technique, and process ineffective. By questioning methods or underlying assumptions, a team can introduce ambiguity, and therefore possibly discover new ways of doing things.



New solutions can be introduced by focusing on the end goals rather than the process in place. By looking at the end goal and ignoring the current processes, you may find a new path to a new solution. This is the time to reach for the stars. You can temporarily put aside existing resources and skills to avoid that hammer-and-nail syndrome.



Create something new. Throw it out there, brainstorm, and collaborate. Avoid evaluating each step and simply generate possibilities. Later in the process, logistics can be identified and the realistic nature of achieving these new ways can be created.

These approaches serve the purpose of widening that thinking beyond the box and pulling yourself out of an entrenched old way of doing things.



**Ambiguity** is a lack of structure, precision, and detail. It's more fluid. **Resistance to ambiguity** can lead to negative compatibility. There are **techniques for handling ambiguity** that include identifying the unknowns, trusting your own perspective, accepting that there may not be one right answer, and being willing to risk it. **Leveraging ambiguity** can pull and lift a team out of entrenched, old systems, and allow new solutions and new methods and techniques to be implemented.