

The Missing Step - Bringing a project to a close

Considerable effort is placed on planning a project, building a business case, identifying resources and scheduling the timescales. One aspect of project management which is often overlooked or even omitted is a formal closure procedure.

A formal post project review is important to determine whether the project;

- remained in scope
- achieved the agreed objectives and deliverables
- kept to the scheduled timescales
- did not exceed the budget
- outcomes have been handed over thoroughly as business as usual

The process helps to capitalise on any opportunities or threats for future business or projects which may have been identified during the project.

All the key stakeholders of the project should formally close the project and appraise its success. A report should be formulated following brainstorming session identifying lessons learned. The following list of headings can be used as a guide for structuring the report.

Project Close Report

Purpose

This report is the Project Manager's report to the Project Board on how well the project has performed against the original planned cost, schedule and identified risks and dependencies, the business case and final version of the project plan.

Achievement of Objectives

The report should outline the main objectives and whether they were met. It would be more appropriate to summarise the overall success and include a detailed schedule in the appendix. Reasons for not meeting objectives and any actions to be carried over also need to be documented.

Project Performance

An overview of how the project performed against targeted time, costs and resources and how well the project ran according to the original plan. This is the time to review the team members and how they performed, where there enough resources? How were the team dynamics?

Project Outcomes

Create a detailed list of the outcomes and changes that have been made or recommended. Refer to the original plan if any proposed recommendations were made and compare with the actual outcomes.

Change Management

This section should include a final analysis on change issues received during the project and consider the following;

- The total impact of approved changes
- Analysis for all quality work carried out.
- Post-Project Review date and plan.

Lessons Learned

The purpose of the Lessons Learned section is to bring together any lessons identified during the project that can be usefully applied to other projects. At the close of the project it is completed and prepared for dissemination. As a minimum, lessons learned should be captured at the end of each stage of the project; ideally a note should be made of any good or bad points that arise in the use of project management tools and techniques at the time.

The following list should be considered;

- Has every management control has been examined?
- Have all the reasons for all the tolerance deviations and corrective actions been recorded?
- Is input to the lessons learned log being done at the end of each stage?
- Is there an analysis of the success of quality reviews and other types of test used?

Suggested contents

The Lessons Learned Report should contain:

- Which management and quality processes:
 - went well
 - went badly
 - were lacking
- A description of any abnormal events causing deviations from plans
- An assessment of technical methods and tools used
- Recommendations for future enhancement or modification of the project management method
- Useful measurements on how much effort was required to create the various outputs

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The final review of the project can often be viewed as a negative process. Team members may feel that this is an opportunity to point fingers for less successful projects. The report will inevitably be subjective; the key to success is involving all key project stakeholders at every step of the process and gathering as much information as possible in order to produce the least biased case. Using the lessons learned report to kick off the next project will help prevent history repeating itself and empower a much more motivated project team to deliver results.