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In Hindsight

Post-project reviews can help companies see what went wrong—and right.

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The best leaders do not rely on others to direct them in performing good business practices; instead, they blaze the trail in seeking, creating and applying best practices. Post-project reviews are an excellent example of demonstrating leadership—or lack thereof. Many project managers don't initiate post-project reviews unless they're told to do so by a higher-up or it's mandated as part of their project management methodology.

But the post-project review is an essential part of project closeout. There is no better way for an organization to consistently improve itself and become more competitive than to perform routine reviews and to apply the lessons learned going forward.

Still, reviews have a mixed success rate because of weak or absent leadership in their execution and especially in the application of the lessons learned. Following this 12-step process, however, can help you and your organization improve its review process.

1. Mandate post-project reviews as part of your organization's project management methodology. All team members must continually look for ways to improve how projects are conducted.

2. Request that resource managers not attend. Their presence often causes others to not be as forthcoming in identifying areas for improvement.



3. Avoid having the project manager conduct the review ... Instead, an outside project manager, preferably a trained facilitator, should lead to maintain objectivity.

4. ... but include the project manager in the discussion. This person is likely the most valuable player and typically sees the project more comprehensively than others.

5. Do not focus exclusively on what went wrong. Pay as much attention to what went right to ensure these lessons aren't overlooked on future projects.

6. Don't try to look for solutions during the review. Doing so guarantees other parts of the review will be rushed and far less effective.

7. Don't try to solve all of the issues identified. Focus on the top three problems and top three well-performed actions.

8. Ask resource managers to review the remaining lessons learned. These are the people responsible for improving the productivity, quality and work culture of their departments. As such, they should determine which, if any, of the issues should be addressed.

9. Prepare a formal report of the review results for senior management. The review team should meet with the higher-ups and demonstrate it cares about moving the business forward.

10. Perform post-phase reviews at least every six months on long-running projects. Doing so enables you to identify lessons learned while they're still relatively fresh. Also consider conducting mini post-milestone reviews every month or two.

11. Apply the lessons learned to future projects. Create a new project review board to ensure future projects benefit from the lessons learned.

12. Assign action items on new projects. These action items address the relevant top items from recent post-project reviews that have not yet been institutionalized in the processes across the organization.

I often hear the excuse that there's no time to perform post-project reviews. Nice try. Only naïve or weak leadership would hold on to such a lame excuse for consistently ignoring learning from the past and applying those lessons going forward. **PM**

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