Capturing Those Lessons Learned

~ By Gina Abudi

Do you capture your lessons learned? If you do, how effectively do you capture them?

There are many reasons why lessons learned are not captured, or, if they are captured, not used, including:

- Lack of time
- Lack of management support
- Lack of resources
- Lack of clear guidelines around collecting the information
- Lack of processes to capture information
- Lack of knowledge base to store and search information captured for future use

We all have good intentions to do so, but often don’t get around to effectively capturing lessons learned from projects. Often, if we do try to capture lessons learned, we do so at the very end of the project - getting the team together to try to remember what worked and what didn’t. With short projects - maybe just a few weeks in duration - this might work well some of the time. The team hasn’t forgotten anything. Just catch them before they are off to the next project!

For longer projects though, it is difficult to wait until the end to attempt to capture what is learned. Too often team members are ready to move on, or they have forgotten much of what should likely be captured. Better to track lessons learned throughout the project, as much as possible. For example, track the following as it occurs on the project, including the team’s response to the situation, the resolution/outcome, and comments:

- Risks or issues
- Quality defects
- Vendor issues
- Change requests

By tracking these situations throughout the project, everything is fresh in your head as it has just occurred. You can then compile the information at the end and develop a more comprehensive lessons learned.

Other areas worth capturing on projects, detailing what worked well and where improvement is needed include:

- Requirements management
- Scope management
- Schedule development and management
- Cost estimating and budget control
- Quality planning and management
• Resource allocation
• Teamwork/team performance
• Problem solving/issue resolution processes
• Communication management
• Stakeholder identification and management
• Status reporting
• Risk identification and management
• Procurement planning and management/vendor management
• Process improvement initiatives
• Change management process

Detail also areas where the team performed exceptionally on the project and areas where improvement is needed. Delineate options for improvement - be specific.

For each area (process) reviewed, capture:

- What is the situation/issue that occurred during the project
- What actions were taken or alternative considered to fix the issue
- What worked well
- What can be improved upon
- Other information that may help other project team members
- Shared learning, what is your advice to future project teams

**Finished Capturing? Your Job's Not Done!**

Once you have captured lessons learned - make sure they are easily referenced by other project teams. Keep them in a location where they can be easily found and searched - maybe a project portal or intranet site. Start every project by accessing past project lessons learned. Track improved effectiveness and efficiencies on projects based on applying the lessons learned from past projects. In this way, the lessons learned from past projects help to increase the success of future projects. Make a component of every project a requirement to review the lessons learned from past projects.

**Summary**

Capturing lessons learned is of vital importance. Unfortunately, it is often forgotten at the end of the project - people just want to move on to the next assignment. By assigning an individual on the project (ideally an individual trained in capturing what is learned) to lead the capture of what is learned from the beginning of the project, and tracking throughout all the stages of the project, you won't feel so pressured at the end to fit it in.

The more mature the project management function within the organisation, the more likely that lessons learned are captured, internalised and applied to all future projects. Effective transfer of knowledge from what is learned is not solely to other project teams, but also to the organisation as a whole. These organisations which are more mature will capture lessons learned not just from the project team, but also from customers, contractors, and other internal staff. These organisations likely also have a formal process for capturing what is learned to ensure there are consistencies among all project teams.
Gina Abudi has over 15 years consulting experience in a variety of areas, including project management, process management, leadership development, succession planning, high potential programmes, talent optimisation and development of strategic learning and development programmes. She is Partner/VP Strategic Solutions at Peak Performance Group, Inc. in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Gina blogs at www.GinaAbudi.com. She has been honoured by PMI as one of the Power 50 and has served as Chair of PMI’s Global Corporate Council Leadership Team. She has presented at various conferences on topics ranging from general management and leadership topics to project management. Gina received her MBA from Simmons Graduate School of Management.

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