

## Thank God it's all over...

At last the d..... project is finished, and we can move on to something else.

But just a moment: the seeds of success for the next project are sown in the way we close this one, so let us take a little time to close this thing down in an orderly manner.

Obviously if we have been outsourcing a large part of this project we may have to undertake specific processes to do with vendor performance documentation, contract closure, retained fees and so on. Let us put those specialist processes aside and focus on the closure of a relatively simple project, run with internal or body-shop team members.

In most organisations there will be final acceptance and handover documents to be signed, to prove that the project team have delivered the right thing. I'm more interested in three other areas of project closure that contribute to the success of the next project.

I suppose the first one is the obvious one, the Lessons Learned Review. I'm not going into the detail of how to run such a review here, but there are a couple of practical points that need consideration.

Without a checklist of project management deliverables and processes to review the session may degenerate into a witch-hunt. It is not difficult to create a checklist, but it needs to be done, that's all. Make sure that it helps you to focus on the methodology and the deliverables. This is an area where an effective Project Support Office can make a big contribution, either by compiling the checklists or even facilitating the review itself.

The second practical point concerns the reason for carrying out a review. There is only 1 reason, and that is to improve future projects (we cannot change the one that has just finished). This gives us the challenge of getting the results of our review into future projects. If you cannot do this, don't waste your time with the review! At the very least your organisation's project management lifecycle should contain, in the initiation process, a reminder to the project team to go and look at the reviews from past projects. You could make sure that all project managers get sent a note telling them that a new review has been carried out, and the results are now available on a shared drive somewhere. I'm more in favour of the former approach, as it comes at a time when a project manager may be looking for help with a specific project, rather than simply reading about what happened on a project he/she may have no interest in.

The second area of interest of mine in project closure is linked to the Lessons Learned Review. Not only should we be storing results of reviews, but project management deliverables as well. Nicely indexed project initiation documents, plans (in all meanings of the word), risk assessments and so on can be extremely valuable

as learning documents. The storage of such files needs careful consideration, but this is yet another opportunity for the Project Support Office to shine.

There was a big corporate fashion in the 1990s for 'The Learning Organisation'; here is one example where we have a valuable opportunity to learn, but often just throw the knowledge away (also known as filing or archiving). Come on, we can do better.

Finally I'm interested in the people side of project closure, and there are several types of people to consider.

Obviously the project manager will want to thank the team members individually. This does not have to be a huge party in the local pub. Simple thanks are often more sincere than the office party paid for out of the motivation budget, or whatever.

However, the project manager can send people back to their day jobs with things much more valuable than a hangover. It is useful to consider what the project has to offer the average technical resource, beyond employment. There are opportunities to get involved with new technology, new application areas and new business areas. There are opportunities to develop new personal skills, such as planning, presentations, report writing and so on. There may be opportunities for travel, or that other wonderful luxury, no travel, or training, whether formal or informal.

It may be worth asking each team member at the start what 'extra' things the project might hold for him/her. You may have to deal with the 'I want a Ferrari' twits, and you cannot guarantee to deliver everything for everybody, but you may get some very useful information about the aspirations of the team members. The act of asking is a positive motivation action, and if you cannot deliver, then being able to show (from the plans) why you cannot deliver, can also be positive in its effect. You may identify some useful task/resource assignments that will work very well for all concerned.

Follow this up with a request to the team member to keep a record of achievement during the project, listing all the tasks accomplished, deliverables created, and training received. The project manager can simply review and countersign this record and it goes back to the line manager of the resource as a valuable document, for performance appraisals and personal development.

This will not cost the project manager any effort, but will make two sorts of allies for future projects. The team member will look back on time spent on your project as a good thing, and his/her line manager will think you are a hero for helping to provide input to the staff appraisal system. The next time you have to go looking for project resources you will be greeted in a positive and responsive manner (and it cost you nothing...).