Lessons Learned

The 'lessons learned' approach describes a log that is generated upon the completion of each project. The purpose of this log is to use the knowledge accumulated in past projects to inform the execution of future projects. This enables organisations to learn from past mistakes, or actions that resulted in successes, so that they can be avoided or reproduced in the future. It is important to communicate the knowledge gathered in these logs throughout project teams, or even the wider organisation. To do so, captured lessons can be distilled into a report, or 'key messages'.

Examples of categories that may be included in the log are:

ID: A unique identifying number.

Date logged: Provides context regarding the time period.

Logged by: Records author so that the individual may be asked for further information.

Lesson type: What the lesson refers to. This can include project stages or knowledge areas; including risk management, quality management, or time management.

Lesson name: A name given to ensure easy reference.

Problem/success solution: An unambiguous description of the lesson.

Impact: A description of the impact or consequence of the failure, or success.

Recommendation: A description of the actions taken in response to the failure, or success.

Using the 'Lessons Learned' technique

Step 1: The format for the lessons learned log is developed by project managers or other organisational decision makers

Step 2: A decision is made as to when the lessons learned log is to be completed. This can be at the conclusion of the entire project, upon completion of project stages, or throughout the projects lifetime.

Step 3: The decision is made as to how the 'lessons learned' will be gathered. This can be through collecting emails, conducting a workshop, informal conversations, or using the content of documents created by the project management team.

Step 4: The mechanism for completing the log is decided. It may be part of a project management tool, a spreadsheet, or a standard word document.

Step 5: It is decided who is to compile and report the lessons learned in the log. Generally, the project manager is selected for this task.