

Project Closure: The Forgotten Art

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Every project starts with a bang, but often ends with a whimper.

We've all seen it. A project team, energized and focused, launches a new initiative. Months or years later, the final deliverable is shipped, and the team disperses. But does the project truly end there?

The Illusion of Closure

Often, what we perceive as project closure is merely the completion of a final task or the delivery of a product. While these are significant milestones, they don't constitute true closure. **True closure** involves a comprehensive review, a thorough evaluation, and a formal handover process. Ultimately an outcome is achieved, understood and evaluated against its initial objectives. And an owner for that change initiated.

Why is Effective Closure Crucial?

1. **Securing Benefits:** A well-closed project ensures that the intended benefits are realized. Without a formal process to track and measure these benefits, they can easily dissipate.
2. **Learning and Improvement:** By conducting a thorough post-implementation review (PIR), teams can identify lessons learned and areas for improvement. This knowledge can be invaluable for future projects.
3. **Effective Change Management:** A successful project closure involves integrating the project's outcomes into the organization's business-as-usual operations. This requires careful planning and execution to minimize disruption and maximize adoption.

The Role of the Sponsor

The project sponsor plays a critical role in ensuring effective closure. They should:

- **Champion the PIR:** Actively support the PIR process and ensure that it's prioritized.
- **Hold Teams Accountable:** Demand that teams complete the PIR and address any issues identified.
- **Share Lessons Learned:** Facilitate the dissemination of lessons learned across the organization.

The Challenge of Effective Project Closure

While the importance of effective project closure is clear, numerous challenges often hinder its successful implementation.

Common Challenges:

- **Lack of Prioritization:** Project closure is frequently seen as a low-priority task, especially when teams are eager to move on to new initiatives.
- **Insufficient Funding:** Budgets are often allocated for project initiation and execution, but not for the final stages of closure.
- **Resistance to Change:** Organizational resistance to change can impede the adoption of project outcomes and the implementation of lessons learned.
- **Time Constraints:** Tight deadlines and pressure to deliver can lead to rushed closures, compromising the quality of the final review and handover.
- **Lack of Sponsorship Support:** Without strong sponsorship, it can be difficult to secure the necessary resources and attention for effective closure.
- **Poorly Defined Closure Criteria:** Ambiguous or incomplete closure criteria can make it challenging to determine when a project is truly complete.

Overcoming the Challenges

To address these challenges and ensure successful project closure, consider the following strategies:

- **Prioritize Closure:** Make project closure a core part of the project management plan from the outset.
- **Secure Adequate Funding:** Advocate for sufficient budget allocation at the project outset to support the closure activities.
- **Engage Stakeholders:** Involve key stakeholders in the closure process to build consensus and minimize resistance.
- **Allocate Sufficient Time:** Schedule ample time for closure activities to avoid rushing the process.

- **Foster Strong Sponsorship:** Cultivate a strong relationship with the project sponsor to secure their support.
- **Define Clear Closure Criteria:** Establish clear and measurable criteria for project completion.

A Holistic Approach to Project Closure

Effective project closure is not merely a checklist exercise. It requires a holistic approach that considers the long-term impact of the project. By understanding the challenges, adopting best practices, and fostering a culture of genuine continuous improvement, project managers can ensure that their projects leave a lasting legacy.

Remember, a well-closed project is not just a project that ends; it's one that begins a new chapter, building on its successes and learning from its failures.

Key Delivery Steps to Effective Project Closure:

1. **Formalize the Closure Process:** Develop a standardized process that outlines the steps involved, from initiating the closure phase to conducting the final review.
2. **Conduct a Comprehensive PIR Process:** A thorough PIR should evaluate the project's performance against its objectives, identify lessons learned, and assess the realization of benefits.
3. **Transfer Ownership:** Clearly define who is responsible for maintaining and supporting the project's outcomes post-closure.
4. **Archive Project Documentation:** Properly store project documentation for future reference and audit purposes.
5. **Celebrate Successes:** Recognize the team's achievements and acknowledge their hard work.

By investing time and effort in effective project closure, organizations can maximize the return on their investment, deliver more sustainable outcomes, improve future project performance, and enhance their overall project management capabilities.

Let's break the cycle of forgotten projects and ensure that every project leaves a lasting legacy.



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