

How to Optimise Lessons Learned

How do we capture the business improvement opportunities that are buried in our experience?

This is an important business challenge: if we **learn** from our experience we can:

- ❑ Avoid repeating costly mistakes
- ❑ Use our successes to benefit future performance.

Getting this right allows us to reap the benefits of the weight of our firm's experience over time. In its absence we start each day with a blank sheet of paper. What worked best in what circumstances? How does this understanding influence what we should do next? Consolidating what we know provides a springboard for what we do next.

The **purpose** of the lessons learned process is to reflect on our experience and work out what should be done differently next time around. The **challenge** is to ensure that appropriate insights reach the heads and hands of those who can benefit (rather than locking away findings in databases or project files).

Our Clients:

We have led Lessons Learned processes for major projects and incidents:

- ❑ Roads and tunnels \$2.5 billion construction and handover
- ❑ Water infrastructure - pipeline construction, commissioning and handover
- ❑ Strategic alliance performance: long term operations, maintenance, mechanical and electrical alliances for major infrastructure organisation
- ❑ Whole of government response to exotic pest and disease outbreak
- ❑ Incident response in operations control centre
- ❑ Developing a Lessons Learned resources kit and skilling client staff in Lessons Learned design and facilitation.

Our Processes:

Successful Lessons Learned processes are distinguished from less successful efforts by the characteristics listed in the table overleaf. Our Lessons Learned process incorporates the design and facilitation features noted.



Success Factors for Lessons Learned

Failure Factors for Lessons Learned

✓ About the future. Analysing what happened in the past is not an end in itself; it's a springboard for what we do next.

✗ Post mortem. Focussing on the fine detail of what happened at the expense of the business improvement opportunities.

✓ Improvement focused. Focus on how we can benefit from what we have learned.

✗ Blame. Focus on whose fault it was rather than how we can improve next time around.

✓ Team process. Lessons learned is a group (not individual) process. Key team members need to be involved to capture a rich understanding of experiences and perspectives.

✗ One view. Having one or two people only giving their view, or people contributing views separately or sequentially.

✓ Stakeholder perspectives. Include stakeholders, partners, customers, alliance partners - they could well define project 'success' and 'failure' very differently from the project team.

✗ Internal focus. Not taking stakeholder / customer perspectives into account.

✓ User involvement. Involve those who will use the outputs – allow them to shape the key questions and focus areas.

✗ Not taking into account who will use your outputs and how they will use them.

✓ Timing. The process should be used soon after the project has ended, whilst details and experiences are top of mind.

✗ Leaving it too long – people forget and move on (psychologically if not physically).

✓ Accountabilities nominated. Specific outcomes with clear accountabilities (who is going to do what, when) should be identified.

✗ Listing observations or conclusions with no specified action points to improve performance. We only benefit from those lessons that are *applied*.

✓ Facilitated process. Using a facilitator frees the team up to focus on the *content*; whilst the facilitator concentrates on the lessons learned *processes*.

✗ Leaving it to a team member to drive the process whilst also trying to contribute to the lessons themselves.