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Service Improvement
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Reviving a stalled effort



Reviving a stalled effort

What is it?

If a project has stalled, this tool will help you to re-energise it by identifying and addressing the reasons.

Start by conducting a project status review to help you decide whether the project is still a priority and worth reviving. This tool will then help you create an action plan and provide suggestions for reviving the project.

When to use it

Service improvement involves change, but the sheer scale of the changes involved can mean that projects can stall. To counter this, you need a strategy for setting priorities and getting worthwhile projects back on track.

Signs that your improvement project is stagnating include:

- Stakeholders view it as a low priority.
- People have stopped attending meetings regularly.
- Actions are not carried out.
- General momentum has been lost.

All or any of these signs indicate the need for a project status check in order to review the need for change and its relevance to the present climate.

How to use it

Step 1

Ascertain the project status and examine the reasons for its failure. Ideally, the original change team should carry this out but if that isn't possible, go ahead with those available. Use the questions below to frame discussions and then complete the table.

Figure 1: Table to ascertain the project status and examine reasons for failure

Criteria	Yes	No	Why/why not?	Corrective measure
Is the change still needed?				
Is the change wanted?				
Is the change still relevant to the strategic direction?				
Would we be better off if we had implemented the change?				
Were the aims clear to everybody?				
Was measurement of change understood by everyone?				
Did we recognise the signs that the change wasn't on track?				
Can we do anything about it?				

Next, decide as a group how important completion of the project is to your organisation. This will enable you to decide whether it should be revived or closed.

Step 2

Regardless of whether you revive the project or cancel it, carry out a lessons learnt review and share the results. The questions in the following table will help to identify why the project has stalled. Discuss them with the original change team if possible. The answers will help shape an action plan for reviving your project. If you have decided to close it, they will provide valuable learning for future projects.

Figure 2: Table to identify why the project has stalled

	Yes	No	How/who?
Structural			
Have key personnel left?			
Has structure hindered change?			
Financial			
Have we exceeded our budget?			
Has the budget been redirected?			
Cultural/political			
Was the approach to change appropriate to our situation?			
Did people have realistic expectations?			
Have people understood exactly what is expected of them?			
Was the timing of the change right?			
What role did politics play in the change failing?			
Have other priorities got in the way?			
If our approach were different, could we have achieved better results?			

While working through these specific questions, also consider the following:

- Why didn't we recognise earlier that the change effort was not on track?
- Why didn't we do anything about it earlier to put it right?

Step 3

This analysis will provide the basis for applying the corrective measures necessary to restart the project. Actions you can take include:

- Restructuring the team – are the right people involved? Ensure everyone is clear about their new role.
- Get higher profile involvement from executive level and clinical engagement/involvement.
- Involve well known and well respected staff.
- Return to the aims of the project – do they need to be revised? Ensure they are clear and commonly understood.
- Address staff concerns and uncertainties that have arisen as a result of the project.
- Increase investment (time, people, finance).
- Adjust the scope of the project if necessary (this may be to increase or reduce).
- Re-brand the project if necessary.

Reviving a stalled effort may raise questions. If people feel they have already seen the project fail, they may want reassurance that the change is necessary and that the aims are valuable. You need to convince them that this time, the project will be followed through to completion.

If the team has decided not to continue with the project, ensure it is formally closed. First, make sure you have the authority to do so from the project sponsor and reporting groups, then inform everybody involved in the project of the decision. You should also include an end of project report with a summary of the lessons learnt.

Step 4

It is important to learn from what went wrong in this and previous projects. Take note of the signs that were identified during the project status and lessons learnt reviews. Do not make the same mistakes twice!