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Service Improvement
and Redesign tools

Lessons learnt



Lessons learnt

What is it?

The likelihood of implementing change and the speed at which you can achieve this is affected by prior experience of change and how well or badly it was handled. When contemplating change in an organisation and how to manage it, you may find it useful to spend some time learning from past experiences. This will enable you to maximise and build on previous successes – and avoid repeating previous mistakes.

This tool will help you to identify past experiences and consider their implications for planned change.

When to use it

Use this simple tool at the beginning of a project to reflect on similar projects to shape your approach and [action plan](#). Repeat it at the end of your current project to allow future projects to learn from your experience.

It can also be used throughout your project – for example, before you implement changes or if you have to [revive a stalled effort](#). Other examples of when to use the learning from change approach include:

- when you want to introduce a new set of procedures (standard operating procedures (SOPs)) or ways of working
- before the introduction of a new computer system
- before a major training activity
- before a piece of research.

How to use it

Identify four or five major changes that your organisation or team has undergone in recent years. These can be any size. They may have resulted from internal actions – areas in which you and your team identified a need for change – or external influences such as new targets following a change in government. If possible, it may be useful to meet with the project manager to reflect on the questions below.

For each change, consider the following questions:

- What was the project trying to achieve?
- What actually happened?
- How is it viewed by colleagues now?
- Was it successful? What evidence supports this conclusion?
- What were the positive things about how it was implemented?
- What were the negative things about how it was implemented?
- What are the key learning points for any change that I might want to introduce?

The answers to these questions can then inform your new change project, your approach, how you manage it and how you involve your team. Ensure you document the answers to the questions, eg in a lessons learnt log and disseminate them so that good practice is shared and the opportunity for others to learn from mistakes is not missed.

An [after action review](#) (AAR) is a structured approach for reflecting on the work of a group and identifying strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement that can be used to help you identify your lessons learnt. It usually takes the form of a facilitated discussion following an event or activity or at the end of a project to populate a lessons learnt log. The aim is to have as many of the people involved in the project as possible contributing to the AAR and being clear that the focus is on learning rather than holding people to account.

Additional resources

Collison, C and Parcell, G (2004) *Learning to Fly: Practical Lessons from One of the World's Leading Knowledge Companies*, Capstone: Chichester (you may find chapters eight and nine particularly useful).