Are you geared for your project?

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I have recently taken up a new role, leading a large global IT transformation program in the engineering industry. It is pretty exciting, and also very challenging, given I am new to the industry, and the organisation, and technically not with IT or engineering background. However, a project/program manager does not need to be an industry or subject matter expert (or dare I say, shouldn’t be!) to be able to successfully lead and deliver a project/program they have been assigned. And, this new challenge has once again highlighted to me the importance of Lessons Learnt ….

Lessons Learnt are usually captured at the end of a project as part of the Post Implementation Review, and reflect things we have done well or could have done better in order for future projects to leverage that knowledge and not repeat the same mistakes. A systemic issue I have noted with Lessons Learnt is that they are usually just recorded and filed rather than actually “learnt” and applied. So, why is it that we don’t learn???

There are probably several reasons but I thought I’d cover off these three for now:

1. **Learn before you start!**

One of the most useful things I have adopted from PRINCE2 framework is to review lessons learnt from previous projects at the very commencement of your new initiative. And, then to share them with your team at the kick off meeting. Your organisation most likely has a Lessons Learnt knowledge base or register which you can refer to. You will also surely have your own lessons learnt. Otherwise, there are unlimited examples you can research on the internet. The important thing is to do it early in the project so that you can apply the wisdom to your planning, risk management, stakeholder engagement and all other aspects of project management.

1. **Don’t leave it till the end**

Reflect, record and share your own lessons learnt throughout the project.

Don’t leave it till the PIR which happens at the end of the project. At this late stage, the team is usually not that focussed as everyone is looking to their next assignment rather than reminiscing on the past, and we may not have a very clear memory of all the things that happened, why they happened and what could be/should be passed on in terms of lessons learnt. So, what I do now is encourage the team to capture what they learn as they go through the project journey. We then review what we’ve learnt either at the end of a project phase or after we achieve a major milestone. This way the experience is still fresh in people’s minds and relevant, so that we can provide some practical tips for the “next generation” and also most importantly, apply the findings to our own project going forward! There is nothing worse than repeating your own mistakes!!!!

1. **Apply, apply, apply**

Lessons learnt are only useful if you apply them. Just knowing about them doesn’t add any value. Think about it, someone else has already been through the pain, or come up with a brilliant idea to attack a problem or carry out an activity in a way that can make YOU a star on our project. So, why not use it???

So make a change today, turn your “lessons filed” to real “lessons learnt” and get geared for your project like a pro BMX rider ☺

Till next time!