HELPFUL HINTS
FOR
GROUP LESSONS LEARNED

We often think about completing Lessons Learned sessions at the end of a project/ engagement. In fact, this is an analysis that should be done throughout the implementation. Here are some suggestions for structuring this process.

1. Determine the Lessons Learned documentation format before projects begin. Ideally, have everyone who is working on/affected by projects in your area agree to a standard format. This will drive consistency in information captured and will help team members know how to be thinking about lessons learned along the way.(See attached sample)

2. Capture lessons learned in categories. For example, lessons learned about: this particular client; this process; the technology; this team, etc. It's easier to think about a category of ideas than everything at once.

3. Create a lessons learned accountability process in your organization (one that gets used consistently on every project). Make it clear who will be implementing the lessons learned (fixing problems and/or ensuring the successes get repeated). This will probably mean involving your senior management and the functional managers in your organization.

   We have found that some lessons learned simply require the next, similar team to implement them. Others require that someone be fixing or changing something right now in order to prevent future problems. Create accountability for both types. Minimally, make sure that you, as a project manager, review previous lessons learned documents at the beginning of your projects and find ways to implement the ones that are appropriate for your project.

4. Track lessons learned all along the way – especially if your project will take months or years to complete. It's too hard to remember everything at the end. In fact, we find it very helpful to make lessons learned a topic (an agenda item) in every major team status meeting.

5. Be sure to avoid blame language in this documentation (especially if you want people to actually read and implement what you write). Stay focused on *next time* and on things that can be actually be affected by the people in your organization.

6. Encourage your organization to assign someone as the central custodian of lessons learned. This person ensures that all lessons learned are appropriately kept in a location (likely a database) that can be accessed by others. With lessons learned stored electronically, searches for documents that might apply to your project will be easy.

7. Use structured brainstorming techniques to extract the greatest number of good ideas. Research shows that this is at least twice as effective as traditionally run brainstorm free-for-alls.

8. Schedule and complete a post-mortem Lessons Learned at the end of the projects as well to capture missed items

9. Remember that lessons learned should include what was done that was successful. We want to make sure these things get repeated.