14.4 PREPARING THE FINAL PROJECT REPORT

The final project report is the administrative record of the completed project, identifying all its functional and technical components, as well as other important project history. A final project report is valuable to the organization precisely to the degree that the project team and key organizational members take the time to conduct it in a systematic fashion, identify all relevant areas of concern, and enact processes to ensure that relevant lessons have been identified, learned, and passed on. The important point to remember is that a final project report is more than a simple recitation of the history of the project; it is also an evaluative document that highlights both the strengths and weaknesses of the project's development. As such, the final project report should offer a candid assessment of what went right and what went wrong for the project over its life cycle.

The elements of the final project report include an evaluation of a number of project and organizational factors, including:[28]

1. *Project performance.* The project performance should involve a candid assessment of the project's achievements relative to its plan. How did the project fare in terms of standard metrics such as baseline schedule and budget? Did the project achieve the technical goals that it set out to accomplish? How did the project perform in terms of stakeholder satisfaction, particularly customer satisfaction? Are there any hard data to support the assessments? The final project report is an evaluative document that should offer candid criticisms, where appropriate, of the project's performance and, if performance was deemed substandard, the most

likely causes of that performance and recommended remedial steps to ensure that similar results do not occur in the future.

2. *Administrative performance.* The project's administrative performance evaluation refers to the evaluation of any standard administrative practices that occur within the organization, and their benefits or drawbacks in developing the just-completed project. For example, in one organization, it was found that all project change order requests had to be endorsed by five layers of management before they could be addressed, leading to a long lag between the time a customer asked for a change and when the decision was made to either accept or reject the change request. The result of this analysis led to a streamlined change order process that made the organization much faster at responding to clients' change order requests.

3. *Organizational structure.* The final report should offer some comments on how the organization's operating structure either helped or hindered the project team and their efforts. It may be found, for example, that the standard functional structure is a continual problem when trying to respond quickly to opportunities in the marketplace or that it represents a problem in communicating between groups involved in the project. Although it is unlikely that one bad project experience will trigger an immediate demand to change the company's structure, repeated project failures that point squarely to problems with the organizational structure can eventually create the impetus to make changes that will better align the structure with project activities.

4. *Team performance.* The final report should also reflect on the effectiveness of the project team, not only in terms of their actual performance on the project, but also with regard to team-building and staffing policies, training or coaching, and performance evaluations for all project team members. In short, the team performance assessment should address the efficacy of the company's staffing of its project teams ("Did we find the best people within the organization to serve on the project?"), its team-building and training activities ("How are we ensuring that team members are adequately trained?" "If team members need training, do we have programs to provide it?"), and postproject evaluation policies ("Does the project manager have the ability to evaluate the performance of project team members?" "Does the project manager's evaluation carry weight in the subordinate's annual review?").

5. *Techniques of project management.* In the final report, it is useful to consider the methods used by the organization for estimating activity duration and cost, as well as any scheduling processes or techniques used. It may be found, for example, that the organization consistently underestimates the duration time necessary to complete tasks or underestimates the resource costs associated with these tasks. This information can be extremely helpful for future project estimation. Further, other techniques that are used for project management (e.g., scheduling software, rules and procedures, etc.) should be critically reviewed in order to suggest ways to improve the process for future projects.

6. *Benefits to the organization and the customer.* All projects are guided by a goal or series of discrete goals that have, as their bottom line, the assumption of providing benefits to the sponsoring organization and the project's clients. A final analysis in the final project report should consider the degree to which the project has succeeded in accomplishing its goals and providing the anticipated benefits. One important proviso, however: Remember that in some cases, the benefits that are anticipated from a completed project may not occur immediately, but over time. For example, if our goal in constructing a housing development is to return a high profit to our company, it may be necessary to wait several months or even years, until all lots and houses have been sold, before evaluating whether the goal has been achieved. Thus, we have to always try to maintain a balance between assessments of immediate benefits and those that may accrue over time.

The goal in requiring a final project report is to lay the groundwork for successful future projects. Although the final report is used to reflect on what went right and what went wrong with the current project, it is fundamentally a forward-looking document used to improve organizational processes in order to make future projects more effective, project activities more productive, and project personnel more knowledgeable.

Learning organizations are keen to apply the important lessons learned from experience. As one senior project manager has explained, "It is the difference between a manager with 10 years' experience, and one with one year's experience 10 times!" The more we can apply the

important lessons from past projects through activities such as final reports, the greater the
lihood that our project managers will evolve into knowledgeable professionals, as oppos
simply repeating the same mistakes over and over—the classic definition of a manager
"one year's experience 10 times."

CONCLUSION

"The termination of a project is a project."[29] This statement suggests that the degree to w
a project team makes a systematic and planned effort to close out a project affects whethe
termination will be done efficiently and with minimal wasted effort or loss of time. In the ca
projects that are naturally terminated through being completed, the steps in termination ca
thought out in advance and pursued in an orderly manner. On the other hand, in circumsta
where the project suffers early termination, the closeout process may be shorter and more ad
that is, it may be done in a less-than-systematic manner.

This chapter has highlighted the processes of both natural and unnatural project tern
tions. One of the greatest challenges facing project teams during termination is maintainin;
energy and motivation to make the final "kick to the finish line." It is natural to start loc
around for the next project challenge once a project is moving toward its inevitable conclu
Our challenge as project managers is, first, to recognize that it is natural for team members to
their enthusiasm and, second, to plan the steps needed to close out the project in the most effe
way. When the project's termination is treated as a project, it signals that we are intent on ha
our projects end not with a negative whimper, but with a positive bang.