

# Projects closure



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Closing a Project Projects are by definition, temporary endeavour with commencement and ending periods. Wysocki (2012) identified project closure as the fifth process group in PMLC where the final product derived from the project is presented to the client according to specifications. The question of “ how well did you do? ” will be answered when client approves of the output, asset/output gets installed, audit tests post-implementation status and a final report submitted.

The client’s acceptance of a project deliverable is a very important milestone as it sets in motion a key activity called “ closure” which effectively brings to an end the project life cycle. (Wysocki, 2012) also identified closing a process that involves the following milestones: i. Getting client acceptance ii. Ensuring that all deliverables are installed iii. Ensuring that documentation is in place iv. Getting client sign-off on the final report v. Conducting post-implementation audit vi. Celebrating the success

Client Acceptance – As a key trigger for project closure and a major milestone to every PM, client acceptance signifies that project output meets specifications and thus, brings to an end the “ temporary endeavour” called project. At this stage, the project deliverables are reviewed and a verdict is passed by the client. This can be via a formal acceptance test procedure (ATP) between the client and the project team where the project team demonstrate key features of the project to confirm clients expectations while the client keeps a checklist to ensure compliance with scope requirements. In NLNG project closure procedure requires a thorough user acceptance test (UAT) with the project sponsors and end/super-users meeting the project handling firm before a project is declared closed. Client acceptance can also

be informal for small projects that require just datelines or a few deliverables in place. A brief hand-over ceremony or a communication to the client by the PM is good enough. Most community development projects in NLNG do not require a formal UAT.

Installation of Project Deliverables – After UAT project outputs/deliverable are installed and a “ go-live” is declared. Installation of project outputs according to Wysocki (2012, 314 – 315) can take any of the four approaches viz; phased, cut-over, parallel or by business-unit. Phased installation as the name implies, takes bit-by-bit installation of project deliverables in a specific order. Company-wide re-organisation projects are likely examples here.

Cut-out installation replaces an old system with a new one after the new system is tested in a test environment. Most upgrade project are installed using this approach. Parallel installation requires the new deliverables installed while the old is still running. This is referred to as “ parallel run” in IT projects as it permits a comparative study of the two systems. By-business unit installation is where project deliverables are spread around business units that may necessarily be in one location.

Project documentation – Young (2010) noted that project documentation involves Project Closure Report, Post Implementation Review Report and data archiving that will be used to measure project’s success in term of outcomes as defined at the early planning stage. Project documentation serves to keep track of the project schedules, records of estimates of key project inputs, UAT activities and how the changes were managed, challenges and key learning points during project implementation and go-

live. It also involves development of manuals for user training and other resources as may be required by the post go-live project owners.

Ultimately, both client and PMs have a role in what becomes of project documentation. While the PM ensures that those documents serve to provide avenue for assessing project outcomes, client's understanding of the document is particularly important during and post go-live project phases.

Final Report sign-off: – A clear understanding of project documentation following a UAT will bring about another milestone in project close called “sign-off” where the client formally accept deliverables as installed alongside all the relevant documentations.

By this, the client fully takes responsibility of the project and since this is a post go-live situation, the client accepts and sign-off the Project Closure Report which formalizes the closure of the project. The report is however, usually prepared by the Project Manager and presented to the client or project sponsor for sign-off. Post-Implementation Audit – This comes moments after go-live to identify if project goals have been achieved since the new/changes project comes on board.

It assesses key project goals set at the beginning, durations and resources, value proposition achieved, key learning points and what works (or not worked) since go-live. It is an audit because it is undertaken with a view to ensure compliance with set objectives. A post-implementation audit report is delivered as documentary of the project history highlighting key project goals and success factors, project methodologies, risk management strategies, client satisfaction assessment reports, etc.

The audit report can serve to re-assure project owners of the benefits of the newly implemented project or it highlights major challenges/exposures of the new system. While the former validates initial project objectives, the later opens up avenues for quick intervention to mitigate losses and value erosion as a result of the new project. Celebrating Success – Part of project close is a ceremonial arrangement to recognise that the project has actually ended. Most go-live activities require elaborate celebrations with souvenirs and adverts to herald the arrival of a new project.

In NLNG, projects go-live are celebrated with gift/souvenirs, bonuses and other incentives to project team members and other relevant parties. Community development projects have cultural dances and other local events to go with. Business Risks Associated with Skipping Project Close-out – Project close out is an essential part of PMLC as it answers the “ how well did you do” question and thus skipping it poses significant exposure to not only the project, but broad business or welfare objectives of client.

Non-closure also impacts on the PMs resources and corporate reputation. Key risks associated with non-closure of projects include; ? Increasing tendency for non-implementation of the entire project or failed/part implementation that wont be noticed until a later period ? Absence of client acceptance test may hamper a proper UAT which normally provides the avenue for addressing project gaps ? Improper documentation will eventually affect optimal utilization of project deliverables.

Also, absence of user manuals could trigger misuse of project outputs and bring about recurring cost of maintenance ? Absence of project installation and hand-over exposes the project falling into the wrong hands as no proper

change management has been put in place. ? Lack of client sign-off exposes both parties to breach of contract and litigations while project teams and sponsors may develop animosity due to accusations, counter-accusations and blame game as project risks manifest. Lack of post-implementation audit may deny the client the benefit of assessing project objectives/targets against actual results post go-live. This entails that all the risks inherent in this new project are assimilated and may not be easily addressed.

References

1. Young, M. L. (2010) PM Hut: A Complete Guide to Closing Projects. Available at: <http://www.pmhut.com/a-complete-guide-to-closing-projects> (Accessed: 20th April, 2013)
2. Wysocki, R. K. (2012) Effective project management traditional, agile, extreme, 4th Edition. Wiley, Indianapolis.