



**TITAN**  
CONSULTING

**PROJECT MANAGEMENT: THE POSTMORTEM**



## THE POSTMORTEM

by Bob Pawlick

Please allow me a philosophical remark.

In every single area of human endeavor, there are always at least two ways of looking at the endeavor, one positive and one negative. As a Project Manager, prepare for both. It dramatically reduces your risk of getting ambushed.

Ambushed is a strong term. In Project Management, the postmortem is the second most likely place for an ambush to occur. (The first is during the project funding process.)

The postmortem is neither a last shot at something or someone you disagree with, nor is it a final chance to recap the success of the project. Looking at the postmortem from another person's view, it is not the last shot at you.

Remember that every project has a beginning and an end. This chapter describes the end. It is sometimes called, "Project Closing" and consists of two parts:

1. Close all the books on the current project. This is public.
2. Pick your personal targets on what to do better the next time. This is private.



At this point, your success is measured on how smoothly the project ran. Success is not measured on how the result performed in operation. That will take some time, say six months.

End of my philosophical remark.

Now is an opportunity to close the files on the project. If consultants were hired, they go home. If the company set up a project billing code, it gets closed. If it has open work orders, they get closed.

Our goal is to transition the project from a capital item to an expense item. Project closing is best thought of as the closing of a capital project. As the project goes into production, it needs to be supported in some way. Often for a large implementation, a Center of Excellence, COE, will be set up. The COE is chartered to support the production mode of the project. For smaller projects, the ongoing support blends into an existing IT support organization. Please note

that the support either as a COE or an IT support group, is an operational expense, not a capital investment.

There is a big chasm between capital investment and operational expense. From finance, they are viewed very differently.

The purpose of Closing is to have an orderly transition from Capital Investment to Operational Expense. Functional enhancements are NOT brought forward as a support effort. GAP resolution is NOT brought forward as a support effort. All those little things that were determined during the project as not having a measurable end, and therefore, not project tasks, ARE brought forward. So, “monitor MRP runs weekly” becomes a support effort, as does “create new Material Master Records” or “create new Customer Records.”

So, how do you handle little, but high impact, enhancements and resolution of high-priority gaps? You have three choices:

1. Forget them. This is hard to do. However, it is the most likely thing to occur.
2. Cost justify them as another project. Note that their value, cost justification, should have been removed from the business case when the item got moved to a GAP.
3. The very best projects keep a reserve, say, 20%, from which such enhancements can be funded. SAP did this with its development.



Finally, remember that the success of the project will be measured in about six months when the financial sponsor evaluates whether or not the operation and the project met his goals.



## THE CLOSING

“The Closing” is a nightmare to most projects. The reason is that most of the detail needed has become a vague recollection. However, if you have kept the project plan updated with actual, you are already done! Here is another reason to update the project plan with actual results. Closing has occurred as little pieces along the way. There are no surprises.

Conduct a “Project Closing” meeting with the stakeholders. Present two views on the project: statistical and operational. Solicit input from each member of the steering committee as to how they saw the project. Record their answers. Thank the group for their contribution.

Last, visit accounting and ask them to close the project billing codes.

## PERSONAL TARGETS

I think that this is the most important point of Closing.

Think of yourself as a football coach. At the end of a season, you must call the season “over.” Whether it is successful or not, it is still finished. You must begin to look forward to the next season. The question is, while thinking over the past season, what do you want to carry forward to the upcoming seasons? In other words, how can you be your own best critic? How can you improve something that likely went very well?

Don’t overdo a good thing. Remember that an excellent football coach can build a winning offense from one play that can be perfectly executed repeatedly. If your list has more than three items, cut it down.

You already have a very good insight into the next season:

1. You know the schedule of whom you will play,
2. You know a lot about the coaches of the other teams,
3. You know the strengths and weaknesses of your upcoming personnel, and
4. You know the strengths and weaknesses of each upcoming opponent.

Now, during the off season, is the time to formulate your strategy. A good coach will say that the game is won or lost on the practice field. An excellent coach will say that the game is won by the strategy developed during the off season. Strategy comes first; Practice comes second, and Winning will follow.

Carpe diem.



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