

Project Updates and Status Reports



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The Report

No matter what size or type of project you are involved in or managing, there is inevitably a status report required and update or steering meeting planned regularly.

There are numerous sources and recommendations of format, content and process of project status reports but these.

All organizations have their own preferences when it comes to style and format but the essentials don't really differ from company to company.

The project status report must have a purpose. The first question to ask is "Why?"

Some PMO (Project management Offices) in organizations sleep walk with their various templates and formats for these reports but ideally, they should be reviewed regularly.

The project status report is an essential element of Project Governance and control. Typical contents can include but is not limited to:

Current Status against Plan

Recent Activity

Planned Activity

Budget Performance

Resource allocation

Risks & Challenges

Within these headings all areas of the project can be discussed.

In addition to a communication of status this is also an opportunity to highlight any areas of concern and seek guidance, advice or support in the resolution of issues.

This may seem obvious but these meetings work best when a policy of openness and honesty is adopted.

Regular status reporting is necessary to be an effective means of communicating on all aspects of the project. It helps to maintain traction and visibility for the project. The frequency of reporting is often a function of the duration of a project and its importance to an organization. For projects with a short duration (i.e. less than six months), it is better to have weekly reporting so that issues are raised and dealt with sooner. For projects with a longer duration, bi-weekly or monthly reporting may be more suitable or desirable. As the project nears and end or a period of high activity the frequency may increase somewhat as required to manage that activity.

Project Report Content

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When preparing the content, think for a minute before just blindly filling in the detail. Look for the reasons why the stakeholders may want certain information included in a report.

What is the next significant milestone?

Are there any blockers in the way to achieving the milestone?

Is the process to achieve the milestone fully understood?

Where there any contentious issues at the previous meeting – have they been resolved?

Remember that a project has been set initiated by a business to assist the business in achieving objectives or to reduce risk or resolve an issue. Always try to gear the project update into how close you are to making those business objectives a reality. This would be “Why” the project was initiated in the first instance.

Is there any important factor that needs to be discussed that is not included in the regular format of the project update meeting?

Be sure to raise it. If you are going to raise an issue it is always a good idea to have a solution or proposed way forward to present for the stakeholders to approve.

Delivery of the Project Status Report

The delivery of the Project status report is generally in the form of a meeting. These can be face to face meetings or web based meetings. Both have their advantages and drawbacks.

Face to face meetings are a great way to engage and build strong relationships. You can read the facial responses and body language and adjust your presentation to suit.

Web meetings force people to stick to an agenda and provide each participant with a specific time slot – but talking over each other can have a negative impact on the meeting.

It is important to be clear and concise on all points to which you are presenting. Don't say anymore that you must on any point. You may have someone in the audience who is out to impress and you or a project you are working on could be their target.

Limit your answers to yes or no and keep the detail to a minimum.

If you have some items you are uncomfortable discussing – then start with these and prepare a position on each of them. i.e. – What would you not like to be asked?

Format of the Project Status Report

Typically most organizations will utilise a format or a template whereby it is required to complete certain fields weekly for presentation to a steering team. In a new organization, it will always take a bit of time to get used to company jargon and pinch points. Don't consume yourself too much with the template being used. This is unlikely to change in the short term so make your content suit the fields in the template. Too often I see Project managers complaining and wasting time on the report template when it is fixed and not changeable. Focus more on the facts of your project. You can always add in a comment verbally at the end of your presentation if needed. If you are asked to create a format then let the facts shape the format, do not let the aesthetics of a neat format guide your update.

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In Summary – Project Updates

1. Preparation is Key.
2. Ensure your Finances, Risk Log and Activity Records are Up to Date.
3. If needed – speak to one or two of the stakeholders in advance of the update to float any potential sticky items past them.
4. Rehearse your Update in Advance (if you are expecting to deliver bad news – rehearse with a colleague)
5. Be Frank, Open and Honest.
6. Address any questions with short closed precise answers.
7. Don't be afraid to ask for advice and Support.
8. Remember as soon as a project issue is identified – you can commence to work towards a solution!

Need help?

If you are struggling to come to terms with repetitive project issues and you need some advice or support, contact us by email: info@systeme.ie with some background on your particular issue and we'll be in touch.

Download our Project Rescue Guide here [Project Rescue Guide](#)