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PROJECT CONTROLS · REPORTING CADENCE

Measure Your Own Lag

Most teams know their reporting frequency and nobody knows their lag. Work through this on your own project and it produces one number: the days between something becoming true on site and a decision being taken because of it. On a monthly cycle it is usually between 35 and 49. Write the number down before deciding whether it matters.

1 Count the days

- [ ] **From the start of the reporting period to the data cut-off.** Anything true on day one of the period waits this long before it is even collected.
- [ ] **From cut-off to the update being complete.** Collection plus production, and count the real elapsed days rather than the days somebody was working on it.
- [ ] **From the update being complete to the meeting where decisions are taken.** This is the gap nobody measures and it is frequently the largest of the three.
- [ ] **Add the three together.** That is the age of the oldest fact informing a decision taken at that meeting.

State it: *the total, in days, and the date you measured it.*

2 Test whether the loop closes

- [ ] **Name a decision taken because of last month's report.** Not a discussion, a decision, with something different happening as a result.
- [ ] **Find where that decision was written down** and who owned it. If it exists only in minutes, it was not owned.
- [ ] **Check whether the next cycle reviewed it.** A loop that does not return to the previous decision is a sequence of reports, not a control cycle.
- [ ] **Count the cycles since the last decision that changed a date.** If the answer is more than two, the process is measuring rather than controlling.

State it: *the last decision the reporting caused, and its date.*

3 Test whether the programme is a tool

- [ ] **Ask when anyone last opened the programme between updates,** for any reason. If nobody did in the last month, it is an output rather than an instrument.
- [ ] **Ask what happens when an update is late.** Pain means people were waiting for it. An apology means nobody was.
- [ ] **Ask a delivery lead to explain next month from the programme.** If they explain it from something else, that something else is the real programme.
- [ ] **Check whether the look-ahead and the update are the same document.** If they are, one of them is being written for the wrong audience.

State it: *which document the delivery team actually plans from.*

Frequency is how often you report. Cadence is whether the loop closes.

4 Check the collection is not the bottleneck

- [ ] **Count how many people have to respond** before the update can be built, and how many of them are late every period.
- [ ] **Check the format matches what they already hold.** Progress arrives late mostly because supplying it is harder than not supplying it.
- [ ] **Check the question is the same every period.** A changing request resets the habit each month and guarantees a chase.
- [ ] **Check somebody owns the chase** and that it starts before the deadline rather than after it.

State it: *who is late every period, and what would make it easy for them.*

5 Shorten the lag before the interval

- [ ] **Move the cut-off closer to the decision** rather than reporting more often. Weekly reporting with the same lag produces the same drift more often, at greater cost.
- [ ] **Move the decision closer to the cut-off.** The meeting calendar is usually the easiest of the three gaps to change and the last one anybody looks at.
- [ ] **Separate the look-ahead from the update** so neither is written for the wrong reader.
- [ ] **Finish every cycle with decisions and owners** carried into the next one, because measurement without that step has never moved a completion date.

State it: *which of the three gaps you will shorten first, and by how many days.*

The three numbers

Everything above reduces to these. If you cannot fill them in, that is the finding.

- [ ] Days between the start of the reporting period and the decision that follows it.
- [ ] The date of the last decision the reporting actually caused.
- [ ] The last time anybody opened the programme between updates.

Reporting on time and still finding out late? Book a 30-minute call about project controls and reporting.

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