

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? We run the monthly cycle as a closed loop, with the pack as the by-product rather than the purpose.

Roman Bazelchuk · Director, NEC Planning Solutions Ltd · info@necplanningsolutions.co.uk · 0330 223 7709