



10. Organize a pitfall session when working on (compliance) projects

Challenge

Within all kinds of organizations, we work in teams on the realization of (large) projects. If team members work intensively with each other for a longer period of time, a form of tunnel vision or groupthink can arise. The project staff become blind to the risks and other impossibilities, as it were, because they are enthusiastically working on a new project. When that is the case, they are no longer objective to determine whether their project – and the goals, responsibilities and tasks formulated for it – is feasible.

Think, for example, of the implementation of new or changed laws and regulations. The laws and regulations must be translated into the organization and made practicable. And it is precisely in such a situation that a project group can be or become 'blind'.

Solution

To prevent this, it makes sense to organize a session with people inside and outside the project with the aim of identifying all risks and possible difficulties. As soon as a project proposal has been made, you invite various colleagues – preferably with a varied background and experience – for a so-called pitfall session.

Facilitator

Appoint a facilitator, this can be the compliance professional. The facilitator lets everyone have their say, including those who are initially reluctant. It is important that the facilitator realizes that unexpected situations can occur, and it is advisable to think in advance how best to respond to them.

Pitfall session

During the meeting, the purpose of the project is explained and the project proposal is explained. Then you ask the participants to write down everything that could possibly go wrong and to describe this as a risk. Ask participants to write down the risks for themselves before these are shared with the group. This way you prevent a form of groupthink to arise within the session itself.



For the project staff: initially they should just listen and not get defensive. They should take advantage of the fresh, critical eye and input of your colleagues. It is important that the session takes place in all openness and confidentiality. If possible, no recording will be made.

Next, it is important that the project staff can ask questions: what is the risk, why does this risk occur, why do you see this as a risk and not as an opportunity, are there other possibilities. It should not be a complaining cure, there should be constructive feedback. Criticism and discussion prevent accidents and new ideas can emerge.

This approach can be quite confronting for the project staff. However, it is intended to identify and remove possible weak spots from a project at an early stage. On this basis, it may even be possible to determine that the project is not feasible – or feasible, but in a different shape or form – and the project may be amended or even cancelled.

Final project proposal

After this meeting, the project owner will take the new information into account in the final project proposal and the team can get started on the basis of a better balanced and elaborated proposition.

Pilot

Subsequently, it may be useful to organize a pilot within (part of the) business. The organization and the environment is changing rapidly. After the pilot you want to share the "lessons learned" within the project team. One method for this is the A.A.R. approach: After Action Review. Within this approach, an analysis is done with the team of what happened, why something happened and how we can do it better in the future.

This approach is used e.g. by the military and by fire fighters:

<https://www.firerescue1.com/what-firefighters-want/articles/after-action-reviews-because-the-perfect-fire-doesnt-exist-gKEdQHxfIPX6rWLb/> Generally indicates that the following questions are discussed:

1. What was the plan?
2. What really happened?
3. Why did it happen?
4. As a team, what can we learn from this experience?
5. Are there any learning points we should share with others?

This input can then serve as a start for a new pitfall session. There are several A.A.R. approaches to be found on the internet.

This instrument can be used more widely than just for compliance assignments. This is about a project proposal – but of course this is just as true in Agile-based work environments.



Actors

- Compliance Professional
- Risk professional
- Stakeholders (of the project)
- Project staff

Techniques

As a facilitator, the Compliance Professional can contribute to creating an open atmosphere and respond positively to identifying the risks.

Role Compliance Professional

Facilitating.