

# LL<sup>2</sup>

## (Lessons Learned on Lessons Learned)

Ken Burrell, Pragmatic PMO Ltd

# Content

- Lessons Learned: What and why?
- Why are they important?
- What roles can the PMO play?
- Why don't we Learn from Projects?
- How transferable are Project Lessons?
- What do PM Practitioners think?
- What can we do better?

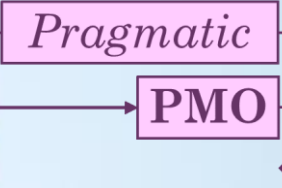
# Lessons Learned: What and why?

“Those who cannot remember  
the past are condemned to  
repeat it”

George Santayana  
Philosopher, 1863-1952



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“If history repeats itself, and the unexpected always happens, how incapable Man must be of learning from experience”

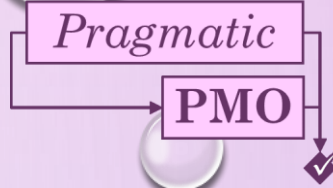
George Bernard Shaw  
Playwright, 1856-1950



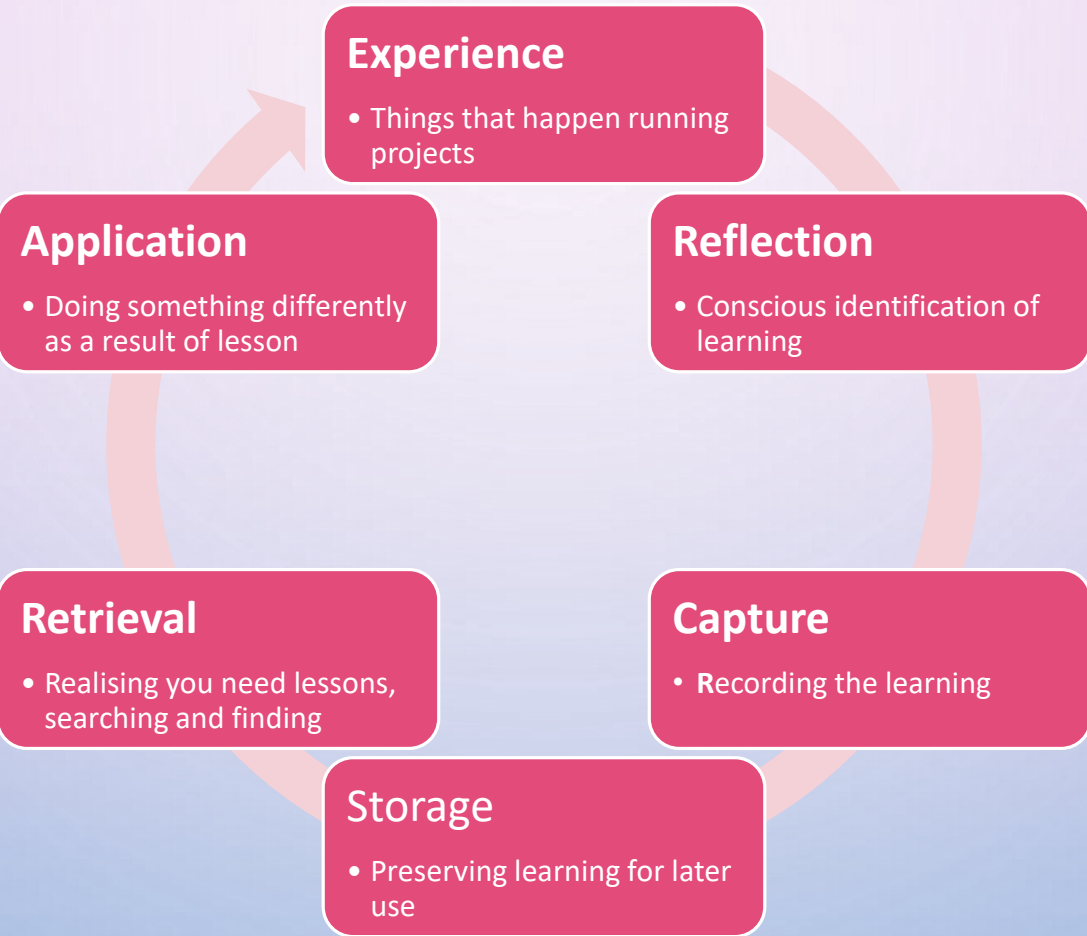
WATCH OUT

# What roles can the PMO play?

# A model of learning in projects



These boxes show how the PMO can help



- Signpost relevant info
- Provide contacts

- Facilitate collection
- Interpret and document

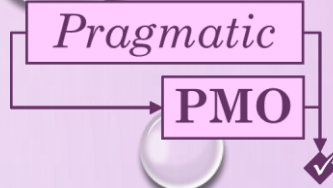
- Curate knowledge base
- Maintain repository



# Interactive Session 1

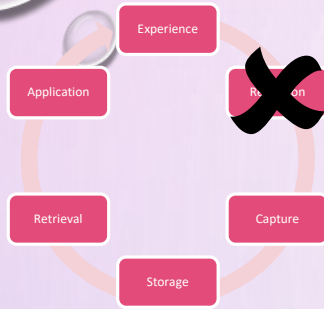
Eileen Roden, Chalk House





# Why don't we Learn Lessons from Projects?

All that is needed is for requires one of the steps to be ineffective



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## We don't reflect

Projects not closed properly, or even at all<sup>(a)</sup>

No Lessons Learned in closure because:

- Project too small / too simple
- Finished too long ago / hasn't finished yet
- Team has gone so can't ask them
- I don't have time
- Project was successful, so don't need to
- No point as no-one uses them

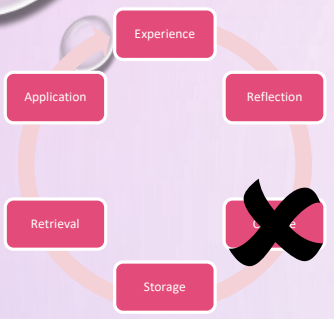
(delete as applicable!)



a) Ron Rosenhead [goo.gl/Vcfffuv](http://goo.gl/Vcfffuv)

Image "Mary waves goodbye" by [Quinn Dombrowski, flic.kr/photos/quinnanya/2125760202](https://www.flic.kr/photos/quinnanya/2125760202).

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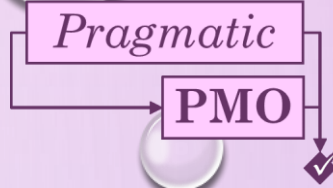


# We don't capture lessons effectively

- Experience may be written up
- Some may be missed
- Ineffective extraction of learning



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# Why?

- We undervalue our observations or think they aren't transferable
- We are unwilling to share our knowledge <sup>(a)</sup>
- Record *events* and *observations*, rather than *themes* and *causes*<sup>(b)</sup>
- There is personal risk in saying:
  - “*I* was wrong”<sup>(c)</sup>
  - “*You* were wrong”
  - “The *system* was wrong”<sup>(d)</sup>
- Anything **good** was because of what I did
- Anything **bad** was **beyond my control**

a) Desouza, K.C. and Evaristo, J.R., 2006. Project management offices: A case of knowledge-based archetypes. International Journal of Information Management, 26(5), pp.414-423  
b) Ron Rosenhead [goo.gl/brrLUf](http://goo.gl/brrLUf)  
c) Pragmatic PMO, [goo.gl/361YfE](http://goo.gl/361YfE)  
d) Linky van der Merwe [goo.gl/evhta4](http://goo.gl/evhta4)



# We don't store lessons in an accessible form

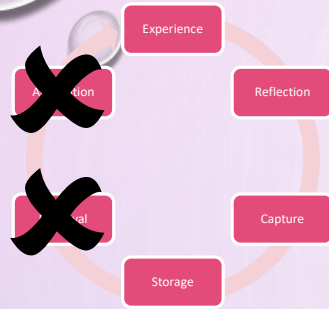
- Storage is unstructured
- Information is hard to find
- People leave – so knowledge deteriorates
- Despite 80% of organisations running Post-Implementation Reviews (PIRs), <20% are ever re-accessed<sup>(a)</sup>



a) Louise Worsley [goo.gl/Px4cQk](http://goo.gl/Px4cQk)

Image "Moving" by [Casey Marshal, flic.kr/photos/rsdio/39266297](http://flic.kr/photos/rsdio/39266297).  
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FILE  
LESSONS LEARNED  
REPORTS HERE  
SO WE CAN CONTINUE  
TO REPEAT FAILURE

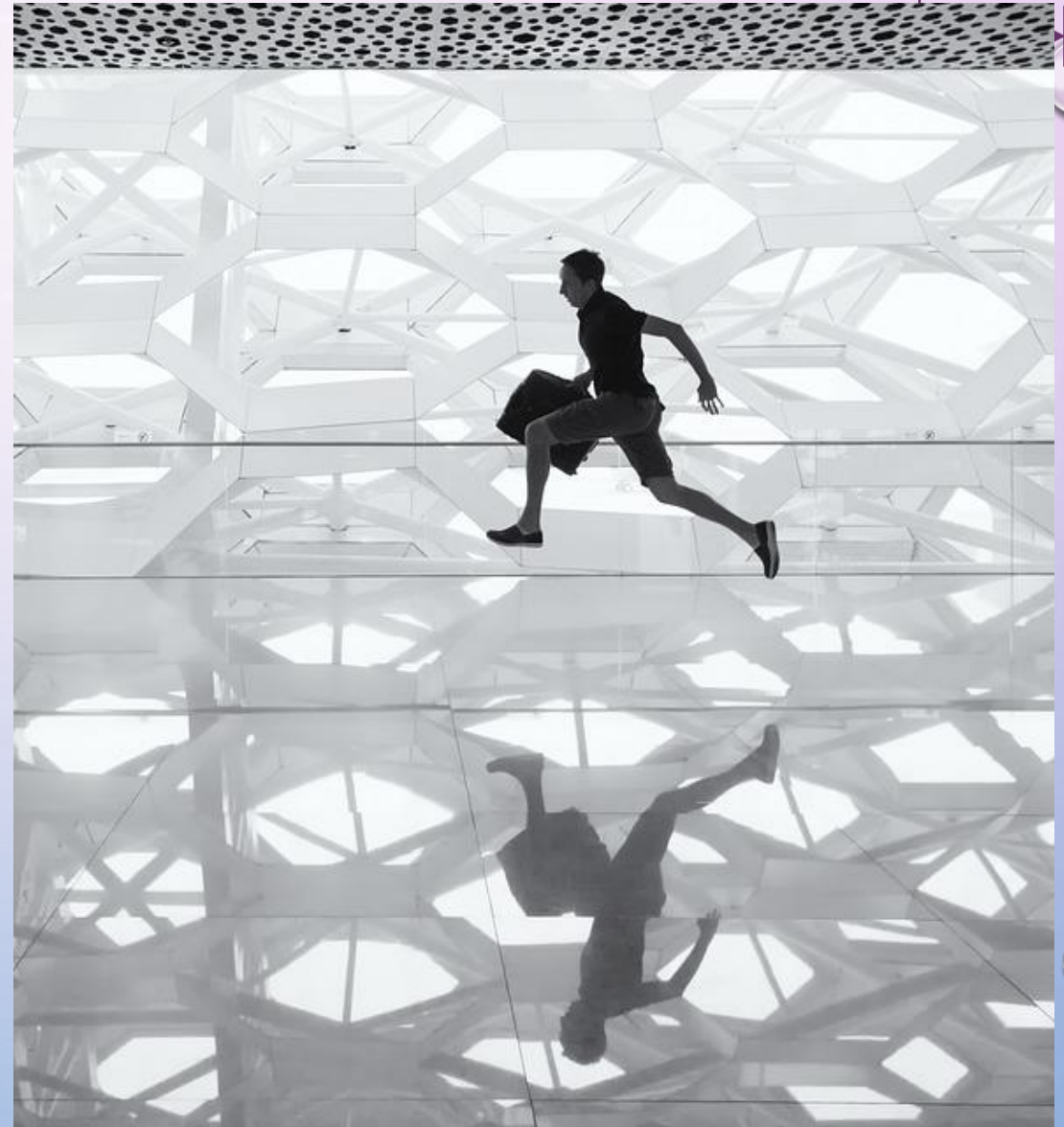


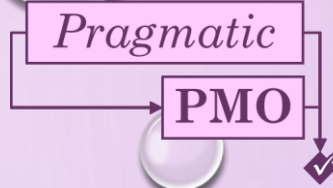
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## We don't review and apply past lessons

- We are in a hurry or under pressure to start on our new, shiny projects
- We want to demonstrate activity and appear productive
- We are too busy to review Lessons Learned





But...

- We find time to repeat the mistakes of the past
- We find the time and money to do things wrong and have to do them again properly
- We even have a name for the technique used to generate this time and money...
- **Schedule and Budget Overrun**

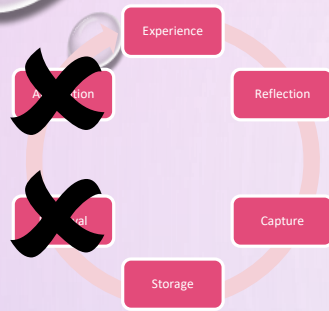


“Everything that needs to be said has already been said. But since no one was listening, everything must be said again”

André Gide

Author, 1869-1951





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# We believe that we and our current project are unique

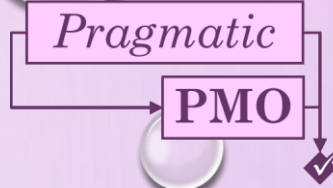
No-one has ever built one of **these**,  
or managed as much **complexity** as this,  
or worked under such tight **constraints**.

So **nothing** that has **ever** happened  
in **any** project before  
could **possibly** be applicable  
to the one **we** are running **now**

Uniqueness is used as a rationale to not look for  
learning elsewhere



Image "Odd one out" by [Son of Groucho](https://www.flic.kr/photos/sonofgroucho/1436844248), [flic.kr/photos/sonofgroucho/1436844248](https://www.flic.kr/photos/sonofgroucho/1436844248)  
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## But...

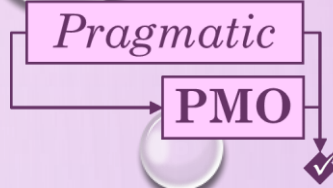
- **Projects** deliver, launch or move **stuff**
- **Projects** have delivered **stuff** like ours before
- **Stuff** has been delivered in **industries** like ours before
- **Stuff** has been delivered against similar **constraints** before
- But maybe **we** haven't done it ourselves yet

Think more laterally and creatively about what we compare to.

# So just how transferable are Project Lessons?

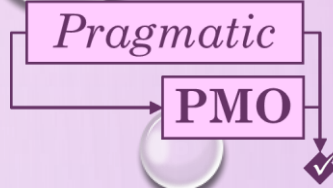
Survey conducted by Pragmatic PMO Ltd

[goo.gl/cAg16q](https://goo.gl/cAg16q)



# Survey parameters

- Aimed at PM and PMO people
- Based on scenarios
- Running since Jan 16
- Promoted through my own site, APM PMOSIG, and PMO FlashMob
- 79 responses (of which 50 complete)

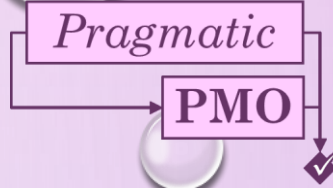


# Example Scenario

- Business Relocation and Transformation Project
- 75% of the team were contractors; contracts agreed for only arbitrary short periods
- Would have liked to keep contractors until end of stage and hand-over of a deliverable, but
- When offered renewal, several contractors had already accepted new engagements.

Do you think:

- a) Learning can only be applied to **very similar** future projects.
- b) Learning can be applied to **broadly similar** future projects.
- c) Learning could be **applied widely** across (even dissimilar) future projects?



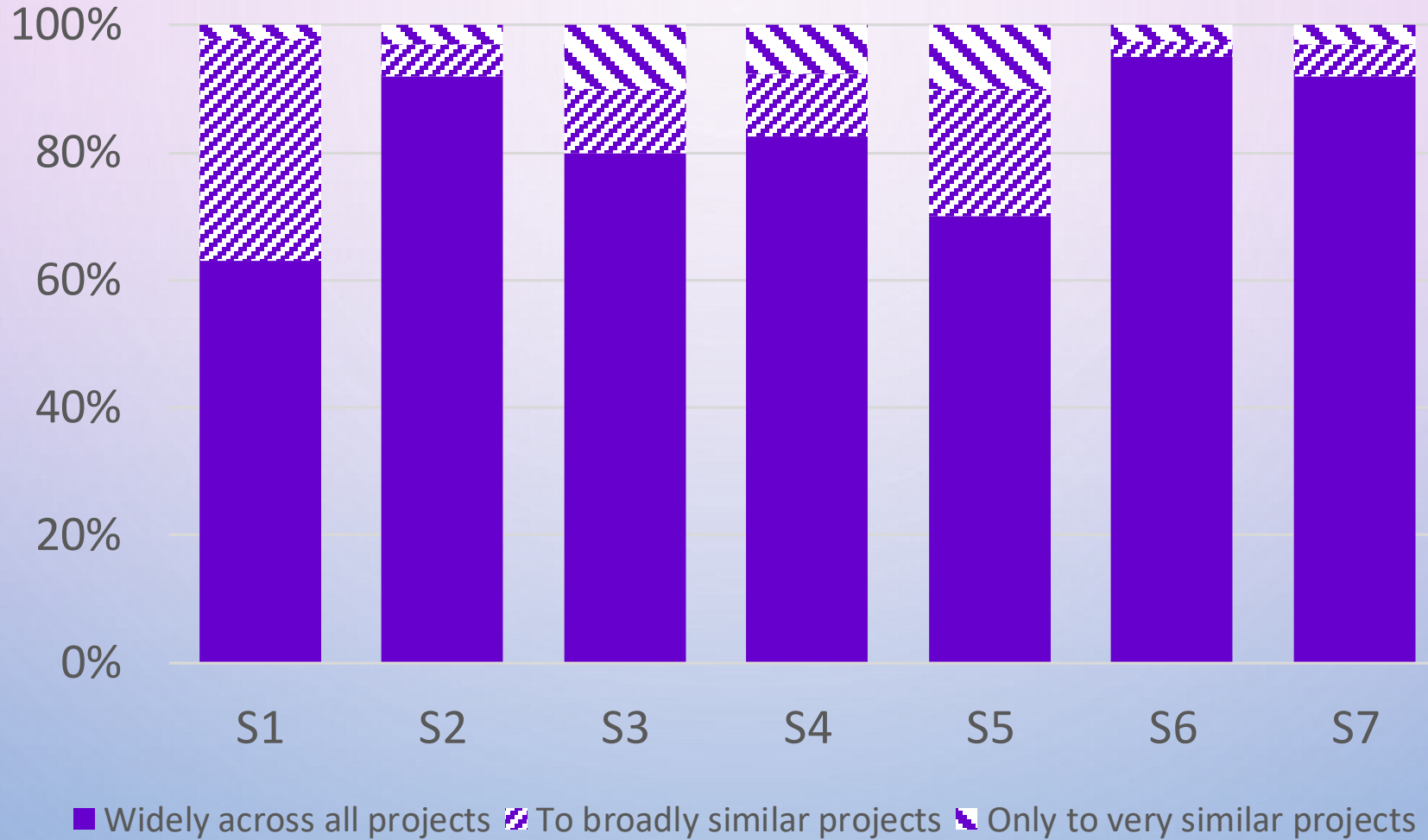
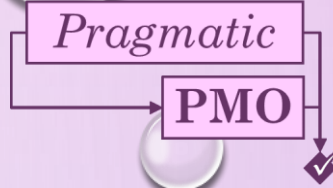
# What your peers thought

- a) 2% thought learning can only be applied to **very similar** future projects.
- b) 4% thought learning can be applied to **broadly similar** future projects.
- c) 94% thought learning could be **applied widely** across (even dissimilar) future projects?

## Comments:

- “This is the nature of contracting, you need to make commitments early to ensure continuity”
- “Could be applied to internal as well as external resources, and perm as well as contract”
- “Need to look at renewals in time to allow for sign-offs, so contracts are renewed without a break”
- “Identify ‘key people’ and manage like any other risk; plan accordingly; add to stage end checklist?”
- “Need to beware if you have slippage and you only have contractors lined up to the end of the phase”
- “Continuity helps delivery – who knew?!”


# This lesson can be applied...





# General themes

- Many “lessons learnt” are merely observations, with no suggestion on doing things differently. Two or three actionable recommendations are more useful than 20 observations without any suggestions.
- Lessons should not be seen at a detailed level but at an approach level; the knowledge and information component of projects has the same characteristics no matter what the ultimate deliverables might be.
- Learning can be split into
  - **Personal:** Different way of looking at / approaching future situations; not necessarily about process
  - **Organisational:** changing / improving / expanding what is within the method / standards, etc.
- Need to address both of these, which can be further split into
  - **People:** Behaviours, attitudes, culture
  - **Process:** Things to do / not do; IF this applies THEN do that
  - **Project:** Things that really only apply to similar projects
- For more insight, take the survey [goo.gl/cAg16q](https://goo.gl/cAg16q) and read the follow-up article

A black and white photograph of two men in business attire sitting on a ledge by a large window. They are looking down at tablets or documents they are holding. The background shows a cityscape with buildings and a balcony railing. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows and highlights from the window.

“  
History doesn’t  
repeat itself ...

but sometimes  
it rhymes”

Mark Twain, Author  
1835-1910

“  
Learn all you can from the  
mistakes of others. You won't have  
time to make them all yourself”

Alfred Sheinwold, Writer  
1912-1997

“The best way to find out how to do something is to ask someone who has already done it”

Ron Schulz  
Lecturer

Ron Schulz  
Lecturer



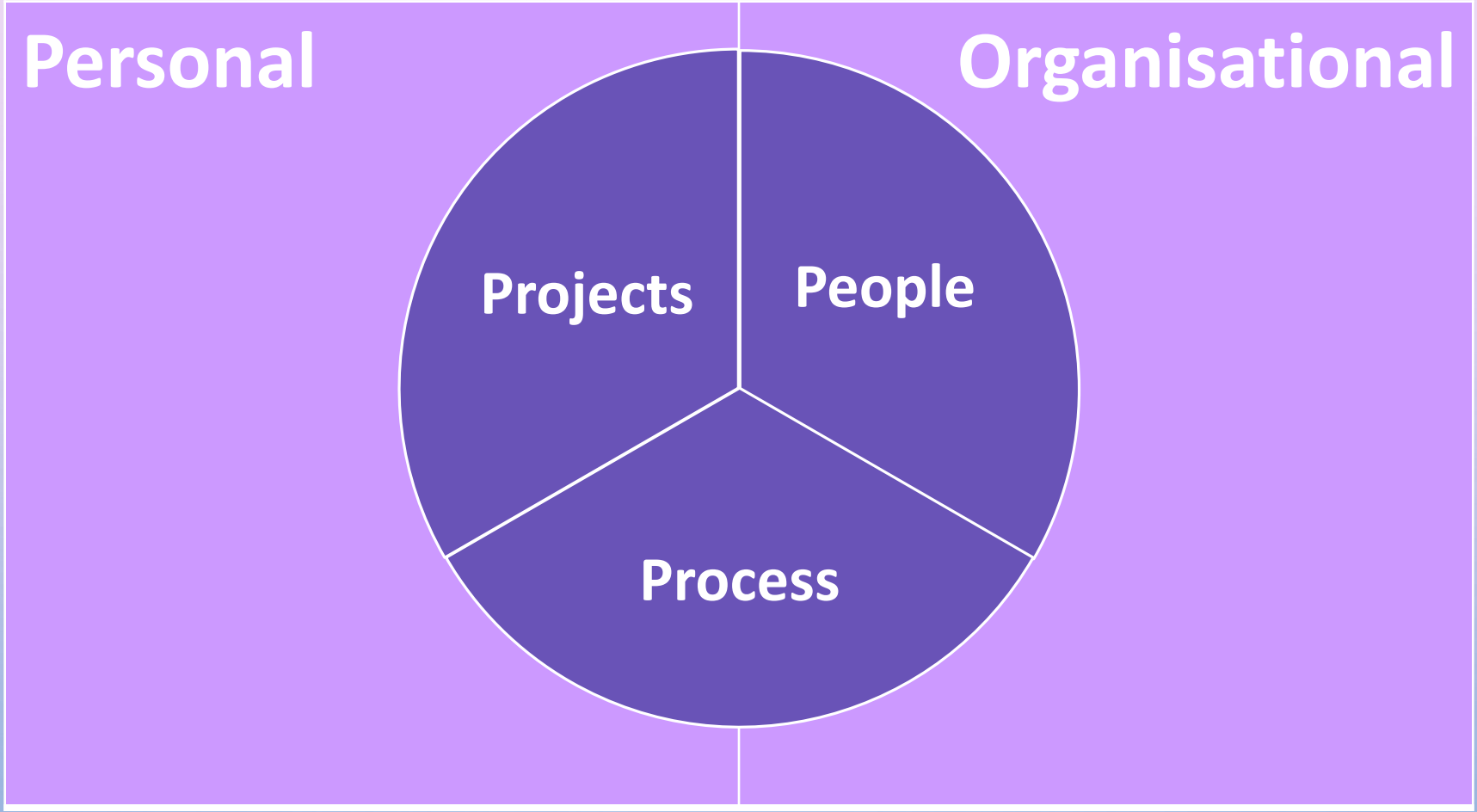


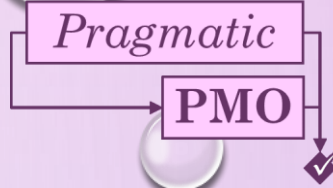
# Interactive Session 2

Eileen Roden, Chalk House

So, what can we do better?

# Categories of Learning





# We must reflect

## Organisational:

- PMO to own guidelines
- Instil culture of reflection
- Formal feedback within four weeks

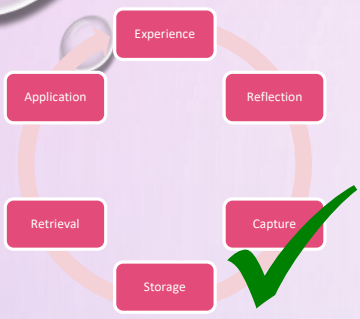
## Personal

- Reflection is part of professionalism
- Reflection as a personal objective?



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# We *must* capture lessons effectively

## Personal

- Document experience / observations for the benefit of ourselves and others
- Take responsibility - Be courageous – show your scars

## Organisational

- Carry out “next level up” analysis (PMO?); Look for parallels
- Adapt process
- Big Database
- Check lists?
- Pre-load RAID register?



Bob P

Image “Voracious green lynx, hanging on by one claw” by [Bob Peterson](https://www.flic.kr/photos/pondapple/6518471571), [flic.kr/photos/pondapple/6518471571](https://www.flic.kr/photos/pondapple/6518471571), Licence at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>



# We *must* store lessons in an accessible form

## Organisational

- Structured Storage
- Doc repository
- SharePoint
- User Tags



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# We must review and apply past lessons

## Personal

- Ask around – colleagues, wider network
- Look into corporate records – ask the PMO?

## Organisational

- Require that PMs review of existing records before starting a new project
- PMO as knowledge broker – signpost the way
- Ensure the question “What did we do last time?” asked at the beginning of every project

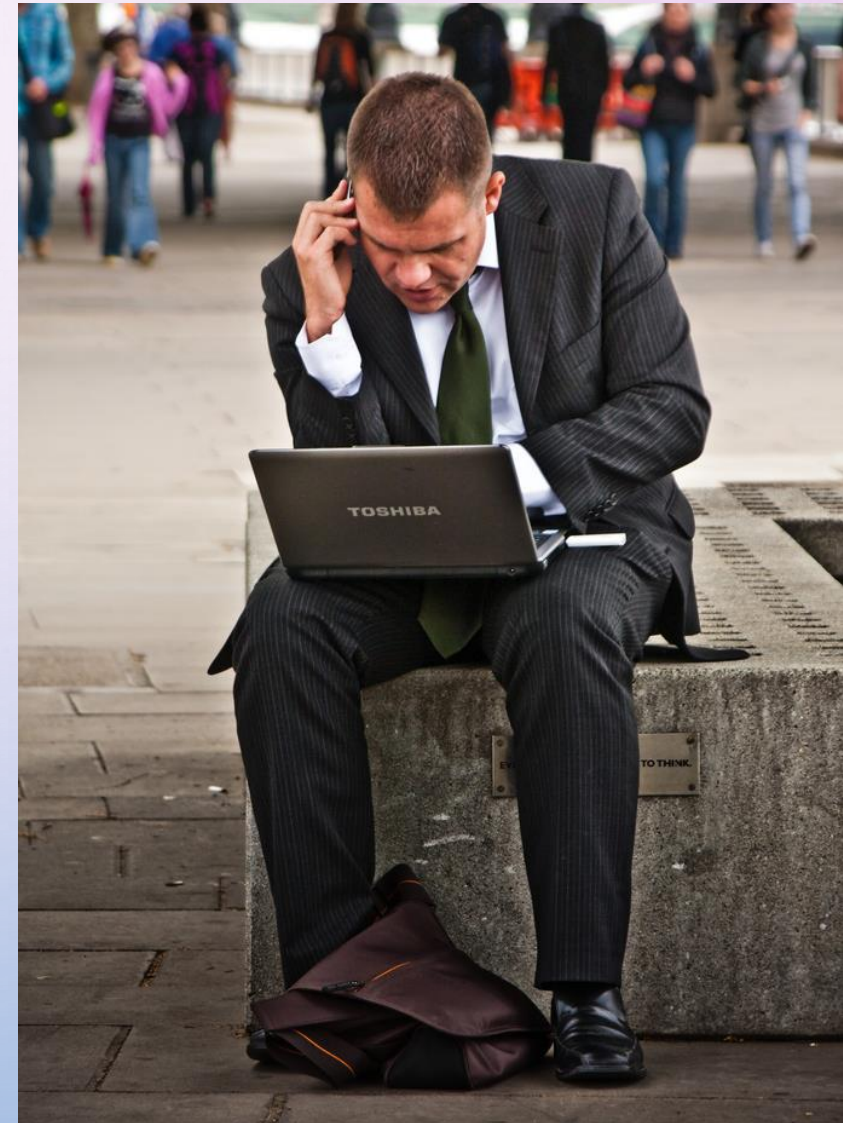
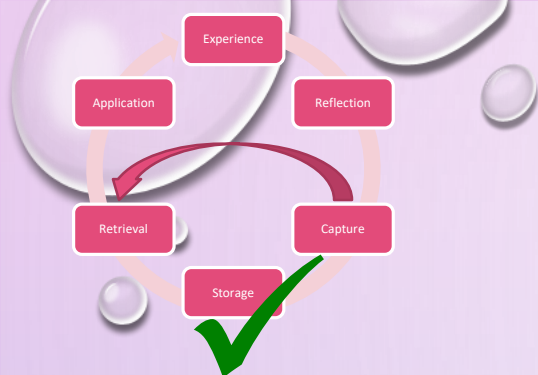


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Some practical suggestions...



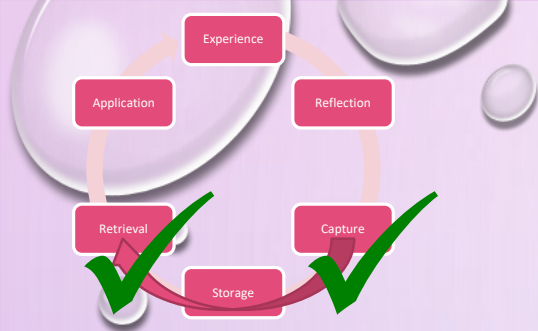
## Call 3<sup>[1]</sup>

- Before you can get a new project approved
- Call 3 people identified by the PMO for a 30 minute phone call
- Hear their stories
- Implement their learning



Image "Young Business Man Holding a Tablet – Mock-Up" by Pic Basement, flic.kr/photos/128199777@N08/16037555845  
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[1] The "Call 3" Lessons Learned approach published with the permission (and enthusiastic support) from [John McIntyre of Ticketmaster](#), who asked me to write-up his idea.



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## Call 3<sup>[1]</sup> Pack

- Prepare a pack as though you're talking to someone on the phone
- Make it personal
- Make it powerful
- Make it passionate

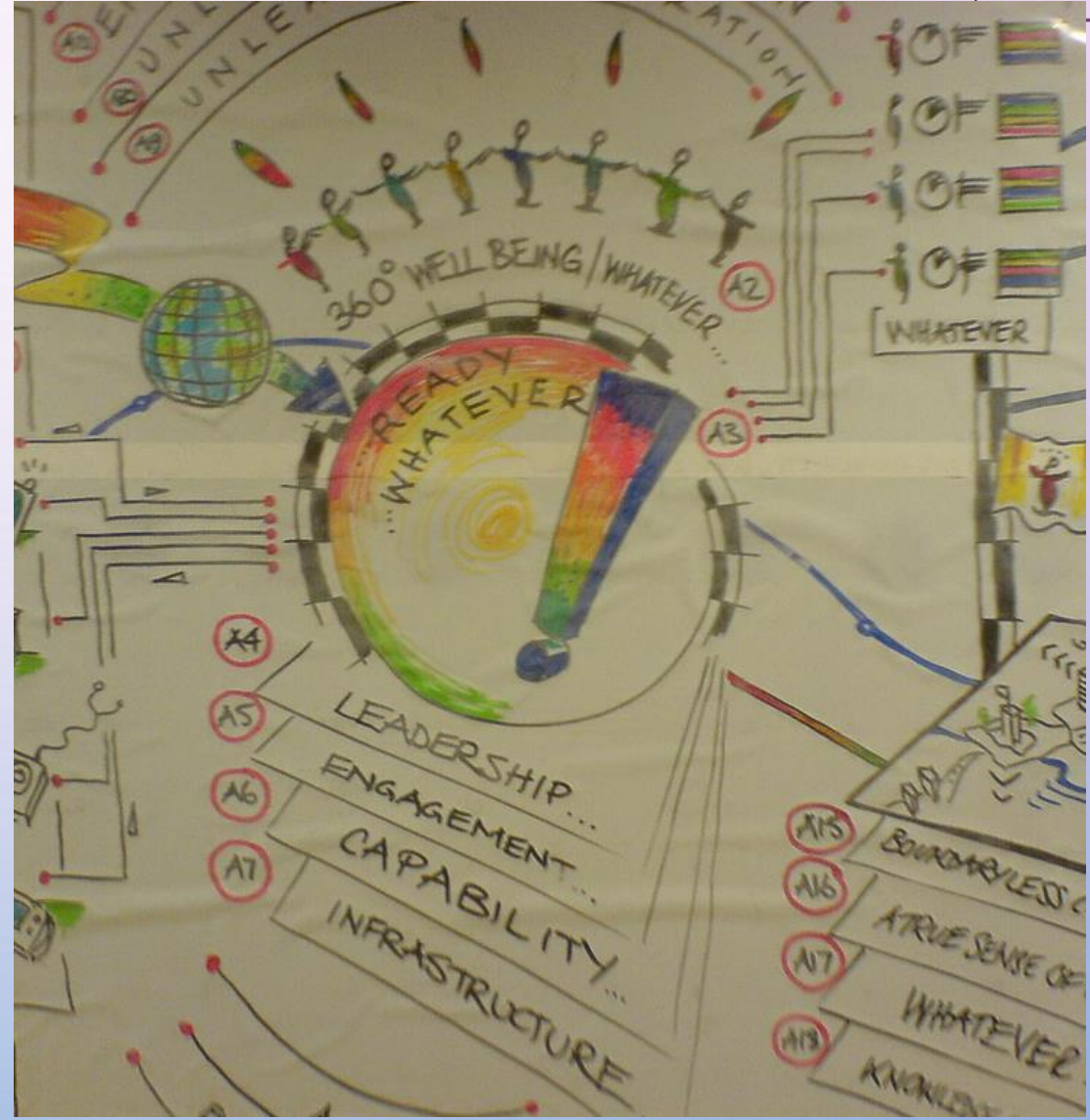
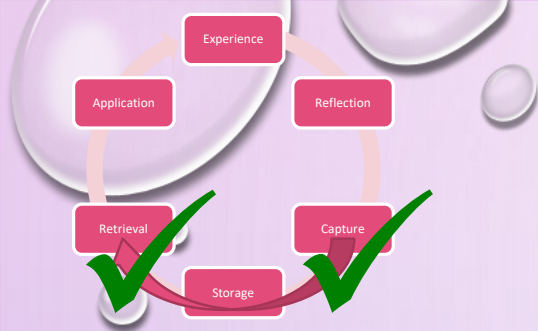


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## LL Vlog<sup>[2]</sup>

- Film LL presentation or Talking Head (can use phone)
- Make it genuine; don't polish it
- PMO edit and file video
- Tag with metadata, include persistent contact details
- Allow users to tag and rate / like 👍

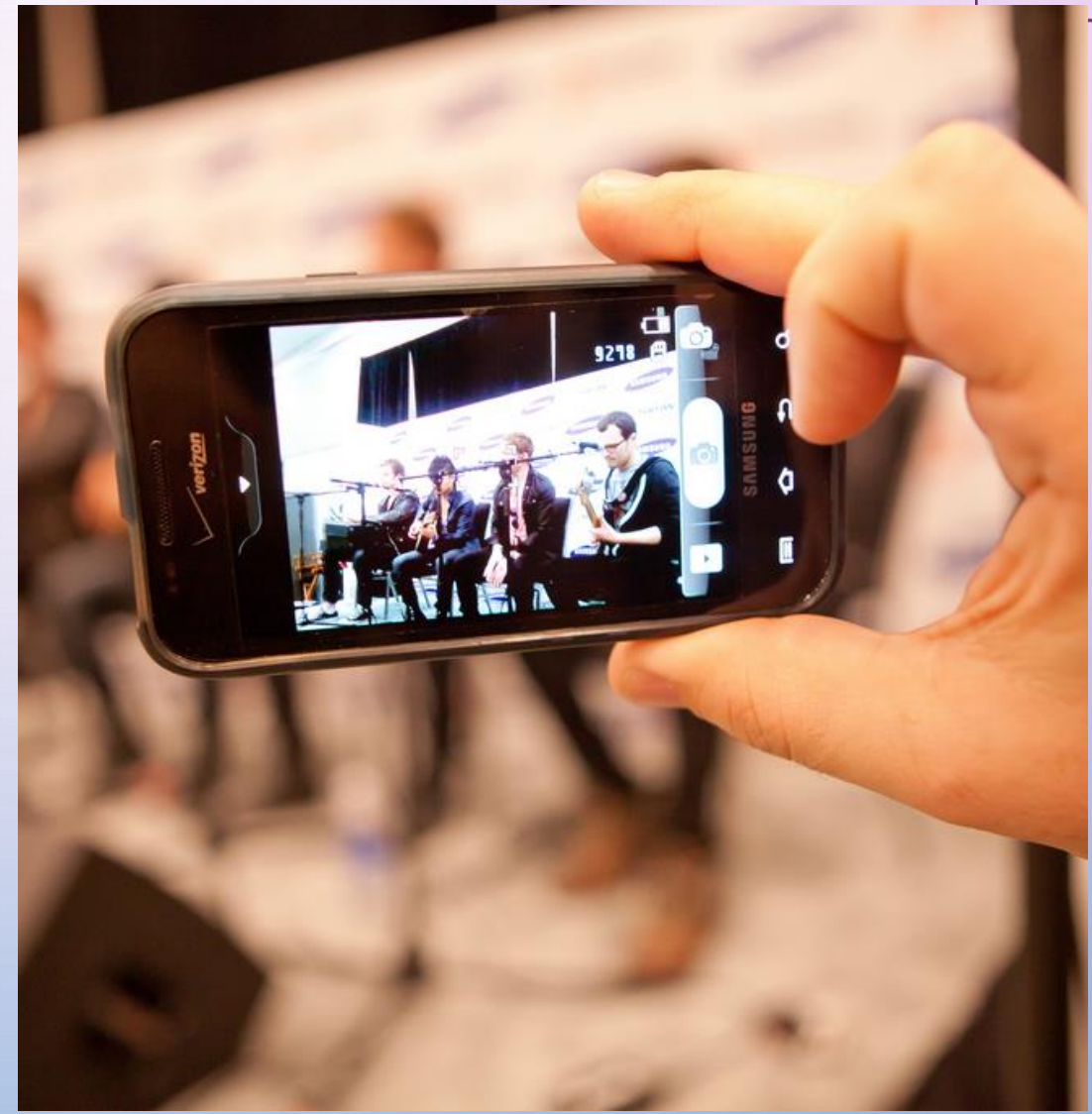
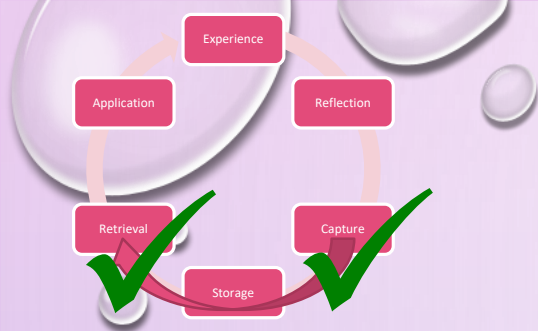


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[2] Find out more about this approach (and see an example) at [goo.gl/LMnUxi](http://goo.gl/LMnUxi)



# Create a learning culture

- Lunch & Learns
- PMs to present to each other; run sessions
- PM subjects; Lessons Learned; Problems I'm facing; Scar shows; Success stories
- Create a supportive PM community



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## Further Reading

- **Ron Rosenhead**
  - Are lessons learned? Not really [goo.gl/Vcfffuv](https://www.google.com/search?q=goo.gl/Vcfffuv)
  - On the need to distil [goo.gl/brrLUf](https://www.google.com/search?q=goo.gl/brrLUf)
  - Do we really learn from successes or errors? [goo.gl/VhK31J](https://www.google.com/search?q=goo.gl/VhK31J)
- **Louise Worsley**
  - On sharing success stories [goo.gl/oETaSL](https://www.google.com/search?q=goo.gl/oETaSL)
  - PMO as knowledge broker [goo.gl/Px4cQk](https://www.google.com/search?q=goo.gl/Px4cQk)
- **Linky van der Merwe** – Challenging status quo [goo.gl/evhta4](https://www.google.com/search?q=goo.gl/evhta4)
- **Ian Seath** – on Uniqueness [goo.gl/YHmDw2](https://www.google.com/search?q=goo.gl/YHmDw2)
- **Pragmatic PMO**
  - Take the LL Survey, benchmark against your peers [goo.gl/cAg16q](https://www.google.com/search?q=goo.gl/cAg16q)
  - On LL generally [goo.gl/2ycOVI](https://www.google.com/search?q=goo.gl/2ycOVI)
  - The Campaign for Real PMs #CAMRPM [goo.gl/361YfE](https://www.google.com/search?q=goo.gl/361YfE)
  - A more personal storytelling approach [goo.gl/LMnUxi](https://www.google.com/search?q=goo.gl/LMnUxi)

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