

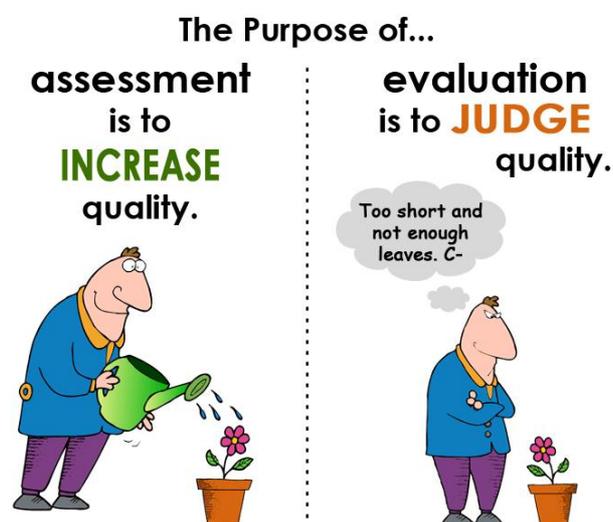
## GUIDELINE: SELF-ASSESSMENT TO CREATE A REFLECTING TEAM CULTURE

### Abstract

This guideline describes how management can use self-assessments as effective measures to encourage a reflecting work environment within the organisation. It provides insights to the benefits of such an assessment, how to conduct it and hands-on examples including a set of sample questions.

### What is it?

Allowing and supporting a reflecting culture within a project or organisation is a vital part of good project management. Self-assessment is a method that can support such a culture through structured reflection that encourages project participants to evaluate and review their own project approach or business. By definition, the self-assessment is an in-house process aiming to enable future development of approaches, attitudes and working methods. This guideline is based on insights from the Swedish project UppSol2020, where self-assessment has been applied.



Source: [www.pcrest.com](http://www.pcrest.com) (Pacific Crest)

As a project manager, you might find self-assessment to be a useful measure for considering the working process and operation by assessing the quality, value and direction of your project work; it promotes critical thinking and encourages reflection on the overall approach, while at the same time allowing an assessment of the work performed by individuals.

## When to use?

You can either use the self-assessment as a part of an evaluation or a check-up, or as a means to make project co-workers and partners reflect on their work. For more information regarding these topics, see the guidelines [User-centred KPIs for the evaluation of smart grids](#) and [How to improve your smart energy project through check-ups](#). The starting point for a self-assessment is the process of *how* the work is performed, while both evaluations and check-ups focus on *what* is achieved in relation to goals and pre-determined criteria.

Self-assessment can be used within your project or organisation:

- To encourage project participants to reflect on the work process, their own role as well as the role of the group.
- To find opportunities to improve *how* work is done within a group, and to pursue continuous improvement.
- To monitor and follow the progress of organisational improvement initiatives.
- To acknowledge best practices in work procedures.
- To facilitate advance quality planning.

Self-assessments take time and effort but it allows your project or business:

- To explore the reasons why things are (or are not) working well within the project and to make changes so that your goals and outcomes can be more easily achieved.
- To build a culture of reflection and analysis that helps team members improve the quality of their work, develop their individual and organisational competence and exchange experience with others.
- To develop your project in the desired direction.
- To identify and solve problems associated with approach, collaborations and work environment before they become too cumbersome.
- To provide input to larger evaluations, revisions or decisions for implementation.
- To identify good practice and help other projects improve the way that they work by disseminating findings from the assessment.

## UppSol2020

The aim of the Swedish project UppSol 2020 was to stimulate installations of photovoltaics among organisations in the region through a method which involved customers in a series of workshops. At the end of the project, the team experienced they had learnt a lot from the close interaction with customers and that the team members and the project had developed accordingly. However, there had been no time for reflection or for defining and putting words to the individual and organisational insights. The team took advantage of a reflection and evaluation process and decided to use part of it to describe their own development and

lessons learnt. To this end, a light version of a self-assessment was conducted. The assessment was collected and handled by a third party with insights into the organisation. A short questionnaire on the individual team member's expectations and opinions related to project work and project goals was sent to the project team via email. Lessons learnt and future development were also captured in this questionnaire.

The team members replied individually via email to the third party within a pre-determined deadline. The individual answers were never shared in detail among team members or project management, but the content of the questionnaire fed in to a focus group meeting with all project team members. The self-assessment aimed to provide an opportunity for individual reflection and thought among team members as a preparation for the group discussion without being documented in a formal report to project management.

More info: <http://www.stunsenergi.se/projekt/uppsol-2020.aspx>

## What do you need to do?

As mentioned above, self-assessment is an internal process. The design of the self-assessment must be adapted to your available resources and the purpose of the assessment. You could take the following elements into account regardless of the scope:

### 1. Plan carefully

As project management, you are in charge of initiating the self-assessment, and determine timing and scope. If possible, form a group to run the process, and plan for detailed activities.

Some things to consider related to the outline of the assessment might be:

- Does the assessment have a clear aim?
- What questions will it answer?
- Is the scale of the assessment proportionate to the size of the project?
- Who will be involved in managing and running the assessment?
- How will the findings be used?

The assessment involves team members to provide critical and valuable feedback on progress, work environment and different approaches/views to the project management. The following methods can be used, either individually or combined, to gather input from team members:

- a. Surveys: either formalised questionnaires or an informal e-mail that raises a number of questions.
- b. Interviews or discussions with individual team members.
- c. Diaries: team members are provided journals where they can document their observations and reflections on organisational aspects for a certain period of

- time. Pre-determined subjects might be used to support the team member in the reflection process.
- d. Focus group meeting: group interview focused on a number of questions or themes.
  - e. Workshops: more of a creative session compared to focus group meeting, where the team members meet, raises issues that need to be dealt with and preferably work out action plans.

Examples of questions to team members are provided below.

## ***2. Involve your team members***

Inform all team members that will be involved and make sure they understand the method and the measures as well as the purpose of the assessment.

## ***3. Implement***

The self-assessment might be done anonymously to encourage people to also lift critical positions. Additionally, individual self-assessment activities, such as surveys, give the team members a chance to provide input without needing to declare one's opinions or experiences in group. The individual answers are preferably collected and handled, even when not demanded by the purpose of the assessment (for example when individual surveys are used in preparation for workshops or focus group meetings). When not collected, there is a considerable risk that the team members will not take the time to reflect on the situation, project work, approach etc. This in turns affects the outcome and purpose fulfilment negatively, since the assessment aims at getting the thinking started.

The collection of input from team members can be done by a third party to ensure an outside perspective and objectivity. This might also encourage team members to speak more freely.

## ***4. Collect and review***

Management collects all feedback and analyses it. The results will show what parts of the project or business that need to change, or are proceeding well, from the team members' point of view.

## ***5. Provide feedback***

The outcome of the assessment, as well as how it will be used and affect your project and organisation, is preferably presented to the team members. If feedback wouldn't be provided, the willingness to contribute to future assessments may be reduced among team members.

## Examples of questions for a self-assessment

Area	Question
<b>Project conditions</b>	
<b>Project group composition</b>	<p><i>What competencies are there in the project group?</i></p> <p><i>Are these the right competencies, considering what the project wants to achieve? If not, what competencies are missing in the group?</i></p> <p><i>If there are or have been competence gaps, what is the strategy for covering these?</i></p>
<b>The project in the organisation</b>	<p><i>Has the project been communicated and acknowledged adequately within the organisation? How?</i></p> <p><i>Is there sufficient knowledge about the project in the organisation? If not, what could be done differently?</i></p>
<b>Project goals and time plan</b>	<p><i>Are there clear and realistic goals and a time plan?</i></p>
<b>Project implementation</b>	
<b>Activities and setup</b>	<p><i>Have the right activities been undertaken in order to achieve project goals?</i></p> <p><i>What other activities can be implemented to reach overarching goals?</i></p> <p><i>Has the project set up been satisfying? Why/why not?</i></p> <p><i>What could have been done differently?</i></p>
<b>Work situation and collaboration</b>	<p><i>Have there been any exceptional or problematic work situations during the project? If so, describe those situations briefly.</i></p> <p><i>Has the collaboration between members of the project group been satisfactory? Why/why not?</i></p> <p><i>Could anything be changed to improve this?</i></p>
<b>Role of the individual team member</b>	<p><i>How do you perceive your role and your contribution to the project work?</i></p> <p><i>Are there any aspects you would like to change? If so, how?</i></p>

## Project results

*What were your expectations for the project? (On a personal level, group level, project level, community level etc.)*

*How were these expectations met so far?*

*What are your most important lessons learnt from the project so far? (Organisational, methodological, factual etc.)*

*Do you think that the project will reach its goals? Why/why not?*

*What aspects (organisational, methodological, factual etc.) need to be improved, in order to reach the goals?*

## Do's and don'ts

- **Allocate resources.** In many projects and organisations, allocating time and resources from everyday work can be a problem. The extent of the assessment can, however, be adjusted to your project and the current situation. The key is to provide an opportunity for the team members to reflect. Thus, project management must clearly emphasize the value of prioritizing the self-assessment.
- **Keep it simple.** The project team should be able to quickly and easily give input to the assessment, and it should at the same time be stimulating – or it will most likely not be done. The number of questions you ask should therefore not be too many, and could preferably be formulated to encourage reflection. Thus, questions that could be answered with a simple yes or no should be avoided. The tone and language should be customized to the members of the project team to make the assessment engaging.



- **Be flexible.** The assessment can be flexible both in structure and complexity. Conducting the assessment in an informal setting, such as over a cup of coffee, may be as effective as more formal and structured ones. The important thing is to encourage the team members' reflection, while the structure and setting can be adjusted to suit the team. The outcome of such group discussions are preferably documented in short notes, which for instance can be used by the project management or as starting point in workshops aiming to work out solutions to the identified challenges. Furthermore, you can easily adjust the self-assessment to different levels of complexity; the most basic form resembles self-declarations, in which, for instance, a form is sent to team members on a single occasion. This basic type of assessment is often conducted by one person with the purpose of looking at a specific aspect in the project organisation. On the opposite extreme is the self-assessment that resembles self-evaluations; systematic evaluations that result in a formal report. These assessments are often conducted regularly by a group of project participants assigned to the task, with regular meetings.
- **Follow your principles.** Organisational principles can help the team members in their daily work and to keep the project work on track. If your organisation has stated principles, make sure to take them into account when working out the assessment structure. For instance, in the project UppSol2020, the customer focus is an explicit working principle. As part of the self-assessment process, the team regularly reflects on their current activities and whether they fulfill this and other principles. If there are no such official principles, the project team might define and agree on their own working principles to help guide the everyday work and support the self-assessments throughout the project.
- **Don't overlook your own flaws.** One of the greatest risks of conducting a self-assessment is that spotting flaws in your own project is not an easy task. Important aspects might therefore be overlooked. Thus, project management should try to adopt an outside perspective when planning and designing the self-assessment, but also to take all relevant input into consideration, including those that might be inconvenient or disagree with your point of view or values.
- **Don't forget to set and keep an agenda.** It's vital to plan your assessment carefully; choose a suitable approach and methods and motivate the choice at the start. Plan how to structure the information you receive from different methods and how they complement each other. You might also consider if the results can be integrated in a final evaluation.

## Further reading

- Holmer, J. (2003). *Självvärdering som stöd för personal- och verksamhetsutveckling. Idéer, exempel, vägledning, forskning*. Publication of The department of Work Science, The Faculty of Education, Göteborg University no.1. Only available in Swedish.

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This guideline was developed in the S3C project, and is freely available from [www.smartgrid-engagement-toolkit.eu](http://www.smartgrid-engagement-toolkit.eu).

S3C paves the way for successful long-term end user engagement, by acknowledging that the "one" smart consumer does not exist and uniform solutions are not applicable when human nature is involved. Beyond acting as a passive consumer of energy, end users can take on different positions with respective responsibilities and opportunities. In order to promote cooperation between end users and the energy utility of the future, S3C addresses the end user on three roles. The *smart consumer* is mostly interested in lowering his/her energy bill, having stable or predictable energy bills over time and keeping comfort levels of energy services on an equal level. The *smart customer* takes up a more active role in future smart grid functioning, e.g. by becoming a producer of energy or a provider of energy services. The *smart citizen* values the development of smart grids as an opportunity to realise "we-centred" needs or motivations, e.g. affiliation, self-acceptance or community.

S3C (2012-2015) performed an extensive literature review and in-depth case study research on end user engagement in smart grids, resulting in the identification of best practices, success factors and pitfalls. The analysis of collected data and experiences led to the development of a new, optimised set of tools and guidelines to be used for the successful engagement of either Smart Consumers, Smart Customers or Smart Citizens. The S3C guidelines and tools aim to provide support to utilities in the design of an engagement strategy for both household consumers and SMEs. The collection of guidelines and tools describe the various aspects that should be taken into account when engaging with consumers, customers and citizens. More information about S3C, as well as all project deliverables, can be found at [www.s3c-project.eu](http://www.s3c-project.eu).