

Lessons learned should not be considered the final step of a process; but instead the beginning of an experience.

History shows us that experience is almost always the best teacher. We solicit the advice of battle-hardened warriors because of their experience and we revere the counsel of elder statesmen for the same reason. In fact, the phrase "History shows us..." itself belies the value of experience. One certainly learns from one's own experience, but this is often a slow process and may come with great cost. Alternatively, one may quickly build vast amounts of experience at little cost by learning from others. This is precisely the point of the Lessons Learned programme: to share experience and avoid making the same mistake as others before us.

For the lessons learned process to be effective, two factors are key: leadership involvement and a

What is a Lesson Learned?

A lesson learned is useful information gained through experience that an organisation should retain for future use and that might be relevant to other organisations. Depending on the lesson, it could be a successful procedure or outcome that you wish to repeat or it could be a means to avoid an undesirable result you have experienced.

So, in order to identify lessons, you can ask yourself: What is not working that can be improved? Or, what is working well and can be shared with others?

Innovation through Lessons Learned

Lessons learned is about change and innovation, with the objective of obtaining improved capabilities. The process begins gathering insights (observations) and conducting analysis to find out the best solution to resolve the observed problem. The lessons learned process then produces innovative ways to change to the way we operate; i.e., tactics, techniques and procedures, doctrine, equipment, etc. The final step is distributing the knowledge of those changes so others can benefit from our innovative activity, and we can benefit from the innovations of others. It is this last piece, sharing, that in many ways is the most important for the lessons learned process – we must learn from others to make things better and to help transform NATO.

It is not by chance that lessons learned is a major pillar of transformation. The added value of the work being completed within Allied Command Transformation (ACT) is the essence of innovation such as transforming NATO's training, capabilities, and strategic thinking.

The Importance of Lessons Learned in ACT

Lessons learned are designed to improve the efficiency of a process. Individuals or teams can

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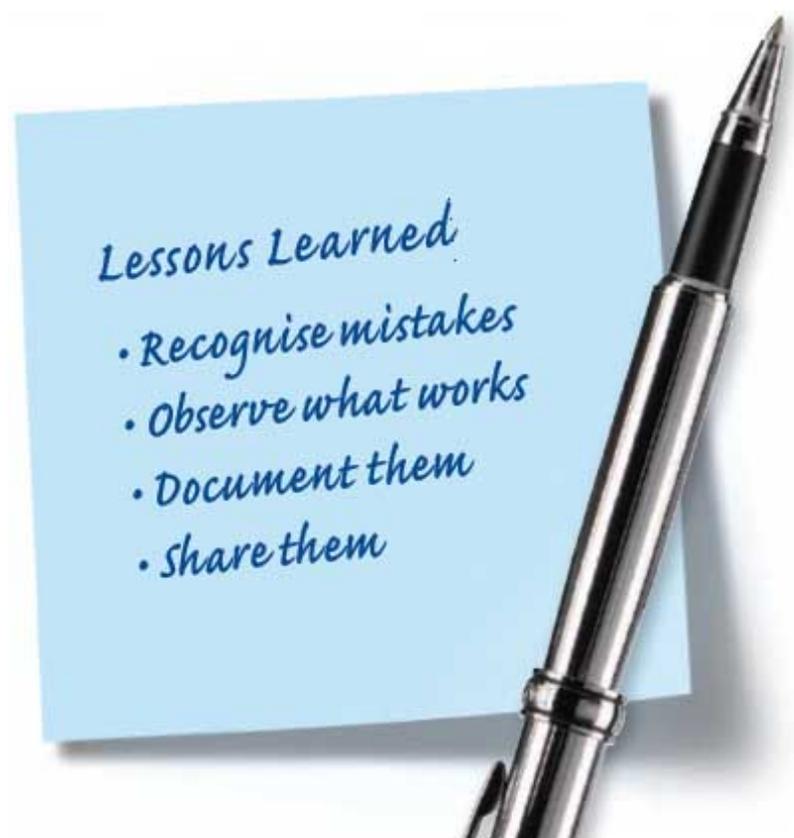
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benefit from the knowledge gained through the experience of those who have gone before them.

In today's rapidly changing security environment, the ability to identify and implement innovations quickly is of paramount importance to NATO's ability to undertake the full range of Alliance missions. Lessons learned contribute to the successful reform and transformation of the Alliance, and is an essential component of any organisation committed to continuous improvement and development. Establishing and sustaining a robust NATO Lessons Learned capability and the associated means and tools to implement change is a visible indication of the willingness of the Alliance to adapt, develop and transform. It is these activities are at the heart of ACT.

On a smaller scale, the more we embrace lessons learned as a part of our working culture, the quicker and more efficiently we can respond to current and future threats.

An example is the fight against C-IED, which we can see as a race between NATO and our adversaries to reach a faster decision cycle: how to respond to new IED devices and techniques before the enemy can change them.



Minimal Effort, Great Results

Capturing lessons learned from projects is key for any organisation. Unfortunately, project teams usually move quickly from project to project and capturing lessons learned is seldom a priority. To ensure efficiencies over time and development of best practices, it is essential to capture and document, in writing, lessons learned on projects and on daily work. Lessons learned are a useful tool in every area of expertise or discipline.

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a constructive culture that avoids blame.

Every command and body within NATO maintains a lessons learned structure and process. Importantly, this includes written guidance, training and advocacy from the Commander.

Experience is the Best Teacher

Every year, experienced personnel within ACT leave and with them depart a vast amount of experience. This experience can be preserved if documented in the form of written and accessible lessons learned and best practices. The resulting documentation will assist those who join ACT to quickly take advantage of what their predecessors learned. ACT as a whole must be committed to the lessons learned process. Each staff member, to a certain extent, is an observer, an analyst, or an implementer making it invaluable for individuals to make a difference.

Experience is indeed the best teacher, but we need not rely only on our own experience. By documenting and sharing lessons learned, everybody can quickly gain years of experience.

[Back to Cover](#) [Next Article](#)