

QuickTip – Gap Analysis

Gap analysis is a steering technique. It is like reading a map to determine where you are, where you want to be, and routes to get there. Gap analysis determines the current state, the desired state, and steps to get from one to the other. Applied periodically, it is a useful way to ensure forward progress through the fuzzy front end of a new initiative or project.

When to Use

- You want to start a team off in the right direction.
- You want to align objectives among the team.
- You need to verify that you are still on track.

Procedure

Gap analysis can be an individual or a team activity, depending on who is doing the steering and who you want aligned. If done as a team, gap analysis tends to build alignment and commitment to a shared direction and approach.

Identify and write down the desired state. These are the essential attributes of where you want to be. Depending on what you are steering, the attributes could be project deliverables, product features, or operation parameters. This list of desired attributes should be short and SMART (specific, measurable, assignable, realistic, and time-bound).

Write down the current state of each of the attributes identified in the desired state. The descriptions of current and desired states should describe the situation, not causes or solutions. For example, a desired attribute could be “The charter for the project is ready for review by June 1”, not “Add more developers to get the charter done faster.”

Then for each attribute identify specific actions to get from the current to the desired state, as shown in the example below.

Attribute	As-Is	Desired	Action Steps
Project Charter	Not started as of 7/1	Ready for review by 8/1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. John write first draft by 7/18. 2. Mary and Fred agree on scope versus cost tradeoff by 7/9. 3. ...

Considerations

1. If the actions to get from current to desired state are not apparent, use other divergence and convergence tools to generate possibilities and select the best options. Popular tools for this include cause-and-effect analysis (Fishbone or Ishakawa diagrams) and flowcharting.