

How to build a successful PMO (in 4 easy steps)

Often Project Management Offices/Program Management Offices (or any other acronym that fits under P M O– but that is an entirely different topic) are considered too difficult, timely or costly for businesses to implement. While it is true that setting up a PMO could be all of those things. I'd argue that building a PMO is just like building anything; a house, office building, or a product; it's made of stages and steps. And when a tried method is followed, success is as simple as the 4 questions outlined below.

Question one: Where are you heading?

This part is where the business really has to be able to articulate what it wants out of its PMO. Do we need a PMO? Is it necessary or just the flavour of the moment? If the answer to this question is yes, the organisation will need to ask: do we have a vision for our PMO? As mentioned above, PMOs come in all shapes, sizes (and of course acronyms!).

The aim of this question is to understand what the business is building, constructing, designing or, simply put, the end goal.

At this stage, it is all about vision. It's not necessary to plan every part of the PMO, but rather to understand *why*: do we need it. The *"how"* and the *"what"* will come later. It is vital, at this point, that the implementation of your PMO is conducted just like any other project. How will the benefit of this PMO be measured by the business? What will "value for money" mean? Incorporate these into key performance indicators, establish regular monitoring. Grab the attention of senior management, have a project sponsor from the beginning and run this as an organisational/business change project.

Question two: What is the design of your PMO?

This stage is all about the end product and the details of what will it look like. Why not start with the one of the most important people in the process: the end users. The question we're trying to answer is: what are the needs of your business (considered in light of the vision for your PMO)? The answer to this is often about the level of capacity and skills. This can be achieved by conducting a survey, doing interviews, or other means to assess project capabilities. If this doesn't seem appropriate, this can also be achieved by simply inviting communications about what a PMO would mean to the business. You may want to ask stakeholders in the process. It's most important at the end of this step that you understand the needs, concerns and expectations of participants in the PMO relationship.

Question three: How will you plan and build your PMO?

Based on the design of your PMO, select your Governance structure and methodology. The methodology selected has to be based on the skills of current staff and the direction of the organisation. A mature organisation may be able to define their own methodology while others will use more simplified tools. Remember templates that produce lots of paper does not equal great project management (it can lead to DBP – death by paper). Just as having Microsoft project does not make you a scheduler.

When it comes to staff or "trusted advisors" as I call them, be specific. Provide job descriptions, target interview and most of all ensure that all candidates understand the vision. Managing the change of introducing a PMO should also not be underestimated. Plan your change, communications and end user "buy-in" strategies to address the following questions: How will this change be implemented? What kind of support is available for the staff (note: training is not always the answer)? Why should they care about the change? How will this change impact their working lives?

Finally, establish a review or feedback line/email account (you will need to answer question four below).

Question four: What will you change?

Review your PMO - wait at least 12 months to review how things are progressing, be patient and allow the skills to develop the business to become accustomed to the PMO before changing it. Of course this point has to be balanced against common sense, if something is causing a significant operating issue then fix it now! Otherwise be patient.

Capture requests for feedback over the time of the project and duration of its use. Collate these, be transparent and communicate the feedback with the business. Fix, refurbish or detonate those parts that of your methodology or the PMO approach that just don't work. Look at the outcomes of the feedback from the business and act accordingly.

To use a building analogy - sometimes the foundation needs work, other times you're ready for the in ground pool!

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