

The Softer Side to PMO Implementation

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It seems that everywhere you look these days, someone is writing up a horror story about Project failures and the lack of benefits associated with Project Management or a PMO (Project Management Office).

Having been involved in a number of PMO implementations, there seems to be a theme appearing relating to what I call the softer aspects of the project, namely the change impacts.

A lot of time is dedicated to identifying the 'hard' tasks of defining the charter, business case, WBS (more on this later), risks, communications plan, scope and schedule, all of which are important, but little time is dedicated to the 'soft' tasks associated with HR Management.

When a PMO is being implemented, it is focused on providing a consistent, best practice approach to managing project portfolios and is often treated as a standard project. Whilst this is actually what it is, it is a project that needs a focus on the impact of change on all those involved and those on the periphery.

Change is a part of any project, but is more prevalent in projects where business activities and processes are being significantly altered. It is important that we recognise the impact this type of project will have on all those concerned and ensure adequate effort is put into supporting them through a challenging time.

The change aspects of a PMO implementation will attract the following types of activity, all of which should be included in the WBS elements (see I told you I'd get back to it later) of the task list:

- **Preparing and delivering** a road show to those impacted by the construction of a PMO and its activities to explain the business needs being addressed by it and what affect this will have on both the ways of working and roles and responsibilities.

- **Mentoring** for those whose role is changing to ensure any concerns are addressed as early as possible.
- **Advice** for those who will not be directly affected but who are interested in the scope and impact of the project.
- **Provision** of information at all stages of the implementation.
- **Gaining agreement** on the Project Management structure to be put in place from senior management.
- **Management** of the training plans for those with new or changed duties and delivery of specific training courses.
- **Impact Assessment** of any software requirements on the infrastructure
- **Investigated** potential issues with historic data integration for lessons learned and any knowledgebase existing.

This is very much the domain of the soft skills of people management. It is important that anyone affected by the implementation of a PMO is fully aware of the changes that will be made to their roles and environment. It is far better to have a culture of information sharing in which staff are aware of what is happening and what is going to happen, as this encourages buy in at an early stage and minimises the negative impact of resistance to change.

A typical PMO implementation will include the introduction of a system to encourage compliance and monitor activity against projects in the portfolio. This in itself will bring in a raft of changes in ways of working, from how time is recorded and reported to project management software and portfolio management.

All of this needs to be introduced to those involved through a programme of training on new business practices and systems, ensuring the emphasis on why this is being done is clear.

It is a responsibility of the PMO to manage conflict resolution and to this end the PMO representatives should be confident of their abilities in this soft skill. This, along with the need to manage internal relationships, especially when moving towards integrating the PMO systems with HR and Finance systems, highlights the need for interpersonal skills

At the end of the day, it pays to remember the soft skills of people management when implementing a PMO, as the PMO should be a centre of excellence within the organisation, and be a driving force behind change programmes and a source of support for all resources.

About the Author:

Laurence Nicholson is a PMP, a MAPM, and a Fellow of the Association of International Professional Managers (FPMA). He has been leading international technology projects for over 18 years at all levels, and 5 years ago left PA Consulting Group and joined 'Xoomworks', a start-up Consultancy, where he now heads the Project Management Practice as a Senior Manager

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