

The Intergalactic PMO Chaos Theory

Programme and project confusion

I've observed the efforts of a number of organisations to build a PMO. In some cases, the term PMO is used with the letter 'P' interchangeably representing the words programme and project because no one seems to know whether they are building a programme or project office, or a combination of both. That often derives from the confusion within the organisation over what exactly constitutes a project and a programme. There are plenty of people still naively referring to projects as programmes, and vice versa; but I digress.

Are you nodding already?

If you're sitting there nodding your head, I'm pleased that you know what I mean and you've probably seen the organised chaos that so much time, effort and money can often achieve in the hands of the right people. Don't laugh ...just continue to nod.

Then there's the need to introduce a project or programme office quickly enough to help with some immediate delivery needs. However, rather than implementing a PMO that can add value within 30 days of its conception, the PMO manager embarks on a PMO project that is equivalent in complexity to the construction of the next NASA space station, with the ability to serve a purpose scheduled for 950 days from the project launch date.

It's not rocket science

The fact is, it's not rocket science and many so called experts who persuade the uninitiated otherwise deserve a kick up the backside and to be sent back to school. You are nodding again aren't you?

Some organisations (especially start-ups) find themselves needing a PMO to help certain projects or programmes through their life-cycles and achieve the associated business benefits. These projects and programmes should serve as quick-wins for a start-up and they are often extremely important as they provide stakeholders with the reassurance they seek in those early times.

So off goes someone in the organisation to find a 'PMO expert' who can help build a PMO. However, far too often the organisation finds itself with a consultancy or individual who misses the point and rather than pragmatically enabling a PMO to quickly add value, the need for the next NASA project is unveiled.

The poor organisation is persuaded to set its sights on enjoying the benefits of a PMO way past this year and beyond the completion date of the projects or programmes that so urgently needed some basic PMO support. So why didn't the expert unveil a customisable out of the box compendium of PMO templates, processes and tools, instead of persuading the client that the wheel needs to be reinvented?

Short-term and long-term

A mature PMO takes time to achieve and that's a long-term objective. It's a bit like my sporting career as a water ski racer. The first objective was to win those local 20 minute races – long before I contemplated the 60 minute international events.

The point that I'm making is that there are PMO solutions that can add value to any organisation's projects and programmes in a very short space of time. A phased approach to a PMO is all that's needed to serve the short and long term needs of the organisation and to help a PMO's maturity evolve over time.

Excel is far from excellence

There are many topics I could focus on as I draw to the close of this short article so I've chosen just one that most management can relate to. We all have our back-up drives filled with Excel spreadsheets that have been gathered along the way. The risk register, the resource tracker and there are some project managers who have yet to progress to MS Project. Now your head should have stopped nodding and started shaking. Or are you laughing again?

The fact is, it's 2009 and it really is time to be big boys and girls and realise that there are plenty of affordable automated online solutions that can help any organisation's PMO and its project and programme managers become far more efficient and effective. Throw in some planning, kick the addiction to Excel, and these solutions can be delivering real benefits to the organisation within a month or two. It's ok to nod again because this can be a reality - so easily and so affordably.

In Summary

For an effective PMO, there should be three other critical aids standing alongside the right tools. They are; 1) People with the appropriate skills and experience; 2) Processes, and 3) Information.

With all of this in mind, I recommend that you begin to take a good look at the way you or others manage the PMO at your organisation. The food for thought is right here in front of you. It can form the basis for a few questions that might well establish whether the right people are managing your PMO. Because these people will help determine the success or failure of the projects and programmes that your stakeholders are observing from a distance, with their fingers poised above the eject button.

Incidentally, where is that online executive dashboard that the stakeholders want? Remember they've asked for an executive dashboard – not the Starship Enterprise!

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