

The curious case of the hybrid PMO

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Struggling to marry your project reporting, governance and progress measurement with the realities of Agile? It's time to reshape your PMO into one that effectively supports and demonstrates value regardless of delivery approach. Here, Greg Collocott, PM-Partners Associate Principal Consultant, discusses the obstacles to progress and the steps you can take to start building a bonafide, practical hybrid PMO.

I'll start off and just say what you're all thinking... 'What is an Agile or hybrid PMO?'

Well, at present, in many organisations, it's something of an elusive concept. Speak to most Agilists or Agile teams and they'll defend their forts starting with "projects don't exist in Agile", or "we focus on products not projects". Ask anyone in the PMO, and they'll relate tales of stress about how their unit was suddenly held accountable to report to the executive on these Agile projects that didn't follow the rules or the standards.

Given this scenario, the existing PMO typically ends up creating a mapping exercise that converts Agile progress into traditional reporting frameworks to keep the status quo and calm. But the reality is, that over time, this just doesn't work. And when a critical deadline is missed, things get ugly: PMO's stress out, work long hours, good people end up leaving. Often the result is one that leaves a horrible aftertaste about Agile workings in the organisation.

So, what are we doing about it? How can you achieve balance in your PMO between having a clear governance structure and oversight, and allowing Agile teams the flexibility to move quickly and innovate? What are the inherent issues at stake? And - most importantly - what changes are required in order to move your PMO from a state of struggling to justify itself, to one where it's proactively facilitating the delivery of value and ROI across teams.



Getting back to basics

Let's start at the beginning... What is the point of having a PMO in the first place?

PMO's are here to help us to demonstrate clear control over the value delivered through our investment into the organisation, right? They do this through the support, encouragement or just plain old enforcement of methodologies, practices, and toolsets. These in turn require experienced, certified professionals to run and manage change at this level of accountability.

Well, that's the theory anyway... what really happens in most cases is this: PMO's are established to reign in the loosely controlled spend that's apparently occurring in the organisation; to keep the ROI focused and sharp; to ensure that the company resources, a.k.a. people, are fully utilised, so we know that what we pay them is worth it and the company is getting value.

However, it's rare that you have a solid cohort of highly qualified and experienced project managers and teams to run this show

and use the tools and practices as they were intended. Often, PMOs are poorly resourced and multiple methodologies exist in parallel mini universes (large corporates) or in clashing universes (medium and smaller companies).

This leads to confusion since there isn't a simple, coherent language used to describe the change work underway. There isn't a simple portfolio or project toolset, configured and aligned to the project methodology. The PMO is constantly manually

adjusting everything to create reports because there simply isn't good enough data to automate them. We spend hours in update meetings and not enough time on decisions. Our governance is complex and futile. Our leaders are stressed and demanding. Our stakeholders aren't the happiest customers either.

Of course, given this reality, there is no silver bullet that simply puts all this to rest, but there are steps you can take to update your PMO and renew its purpose.



Evolving your current PMO

Yes, it's time to change the way we work - it's not about hacking into existing structures and bolting some extras on the side. If we go out with the best intentions of buying a new car that's efficient and comfortable, affordable and reliable and come back from the dealer with a Ferrari... and a rooftop tent, surfboard racks, a camper trailer, and mud wheels so we can plough the fields, we're not achieving our objective.

Likewise, there's no need to throw the baby out with the bathwater. We're talking about upgrading or evolving your PMO, not replacing it - done correctly, you can still handle all the traditional legacy work and make it easier to manage Agile projects as well.

Whatever the size or shape of your current PMO, the most fundamental considerations are, as follows:

- 1 **Fit for purpose** - what PMO principles and modes of governance best suit your organisation and the environment you're operating in? Ultimately, it's about optimising your PMO model.
- 2 **Process before tools** - buying a new tool isn't going to fix your problems - the same goes for just hiring a bunch of people. You need to review and improve the process.
- 3 **Understanding** - the people in your organisation need to know and understand how this process works. Most importantly, they need to own that process.
- 4 **Simplicity** - us humans love to complicate things. There is no better example of this than in the business case and PMO governance processes of a large organisation. Think about what you need to get the job done. Even in the most complex organisations we can find a simpler way to run faster.

Bringing your hybrid PMO to life

With these fundamentals in mind, achieving progress comes down to getting a few key changes across the line. Regardless of how we work, we need:

- » **Good, consistent governance** - this means following the same governance at a high level.
- » **Prioritisation** - whether Agile or traditional, all work should be prioritised in the same way.
- » **Measurement** - everything needs to be measured (if you're not measuring, there must be no value).
- » **Support** - our leaders/executive decision makers need to fully support this way of working.

So, how do you achieve these goals in practice? Of course, a full answer warrants more space than this article affords, but as a good starting point, we need to establish the following:



- » **Simplified roles with clear responsibilities** (within your PMO, governance and project structures) and empowered people in these roles NOT delegates. This will help to ensure that the right level of accountability and governance is applied across projects.
- » **A few, clear processes** to support these roles, hinged on best practice and with prioritisation management at the core. This is critical to streamlining delivery and enabling the organisation to effectively prioritise and manage its Agile/ hybrid portfolio.

» **Clear documentation** – the more succinct the better, i.e. one or two pages outlining the processes and practices that everyone can understand. And focus on visuals over lots of words – lengthy documents won't gel with Agilists and they're unlikely to read them.

» **Key metrics** for visualising progress and value at each level of the organisation. This means a focus on scope – this is what we need to measure, inspect, adapt, refine, monitor, prioritise and possibly vigorously discuss, as this is how we think about the value being delivered.

(Note: Keep in mind that 80 per cent of the value is delivered in the first 20 per cent of the effort. Everything after that is cream and icing. So, while it probably flies in the face of everything you've learned, there are times where it might be better to stop before the full project or programme is complete because you have actually achieved enough value for the customer.)

» Appropriate and clear communication – for success to happen your executives need to be on board and 100 per cent a part of this journey. To this end, you need to bring them with you every step of the way. This includes establishing appropriate measures for every project and providing a consistent reporting framework and documentation that enables them to make informed, data-driven decisions.

This last point is critical as the actions of executives will have to demonstrate the need to create an enhanced PMO. Once they get a taste of what they like and they're comfortable that the reporting reflects what they're hearing on the ground, they'll start demanding more of the same, and the teams will follow that lead.



Shifting your thinking

All of the above will help to establish and drive your enhanced, hybrid PMO. But there's one essential ingredient missing: you need to be courageous and open to change both in your thinking style and how you perceive your role.

A lot of PMOs spend vast sums on new processes and tools but ignore new ways of thinking. You need to start by acknowledging and then driving a shift in culture. Your role is to assist in the delivery of value, not to police how that value is achieved. If you come from an old school traditional project management background, it's high time to adopt more of an agile mindset.

This means stepping away from the assumption that everyone should adhere to your processes, templates, governance and rules, and embracing the fact that the PMO/ePMO needs to be a partner, a consultant and a proactive servant leader that operates collaboratively with stakeholders and teams. To help in this regard, take the '[gemba walk](#)' – go and meet your delivery teams, spend time finding out how they work, what they're working on and why. To improve any process, you first need to understand it.

By taking the right steps and shifting your mindset, you can start to transform your PMO into one that provides the best service whichever delivery method or approach is being used. As you embrace what it means to be a hybrid PMO, you'll be on a path to a new world, working proactively with teams and stakeholders to achieve great things for the better outcome of the organisational strategy and needs.

To find out more about evolving your PMO for Agile delivery, [contact our expert team](#) or call 1300 70 13 14. Or consider [boosting your team's knowledge and capabilities in this area with our new two-day course Running an effective hybrid PMO.](#)



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With extensive senior-level experience in financial services and hands-on expertise in enterprise agility, Greg excels at goal-driven delivery across Agile-based projects, programmes and portfolios. As a consultant and business agility coach, he has delivered numerous initiatives and set up management governance in line with service delivery of production and development teams. With a focus on effective communication and managing and delivering on expectations, he ensures best of breed solutions are executed from within your teams and that value and revenue targets are met. Greg's approach is all about driving clear, no nonsense, truth to achieve a better outcome for his clients.