Hybrid Project World

OUTSIDE THE BOX Forum:
In the Hybrid Project World
The PMO is Obsolete –
Long Live the PSO!

Robert K. Wysocki, PhD
President
EII Publications

In the digital world stand-out organizations are continuously evolving towards customer-based and technology-driven structures. The projects have also evolved from structured methodologies to hybrid frameworks characterized by the characteristics of the project, the culture, processes and practices of the enterprise and the dynamics of the deliverables markets. So, just as projects are unique so is the best way to manage them unique. After all, project management is nothing more than organized common sense. The challenges of the digital world have made this a factor that cannot be ignored. The Hybrid Project World is closely aligned to and supportive of the digital world. In the Hybrid Project World, the original concept, role and responsibility of the Project Management Office (PMO) is no longer applicable. It needs to be replaced by the Project Support Office (PSO).

What is a Project Management Office?

At the enterprise level the PMO's primary responsibility has been standards development and enforcement of the strategical processes and practices associated with alignment of projects and programs to the strategic plans of the enterprise. At the division level the PMO's primary responsibility has been standards development and compliance enforcement of the tactical processes and practices regarding project management methodologies. The PMO is the communications vehicle to senior management with respect to project performance reviews and reporting of the same. Unfortunately, business process advancements having been driven by technological advances have put the PMO in harm's way.

What is a Customer-based Enterprise?

At the highest level to be customer-based is to be an enterprise that practices meaningful customer involvement across the life span of projects, programs and portfolios. The life span is comprehensive and it challenges your most creative efforts. At the project level a 3-phase robust framework can be defined as the architecture for customer-based environments as follows:

- ➢ Ideation Phase
- ➢ Set-up Phase
- ➢ Execution Phase

However, you might further define this robust process for a specific project in order to embrace meaningful customer involvement it listen to the voice of the customer and it must be:

➢ Adaptive
➢ Flexible
➢ Creative

That flies directly into the face of compliance to standard processes and practices.

Why is the PMO Obsolete?

The transition to a customer-based and technology-driven organization requires a number of fundamental changes to how the organization operates. These transitions are not new and can be traced back to the 1970s under the label of End User Computing. Understand at the outset that this evolving world by its very nature is a high-risk world. It is a world populated by new products and processes and new partnerships both internal to the organization as well as external to the organization. To be successful requires project management approaches that are flexible, adaptive and creative. The same observation can be made in the Hybrid Project World. This is clearly some type of agile world but with new challenges. The first of those challenges is to become customer-based. The customer is no longer an after-thought but rather is seen as an active participant in all business processes. The PMO, with its focus on standards and compliance enforcement, does not align with these project support needs. It is a proactive organization when a reactive one is needed.

What is a Project Support Office?

The Project Support Office (PSO) as its name indicates is a supportive organization. It provides a variety of resources and services as requested by the Hybrid Project Managers (HPMgrs).

PSO Resources

The Resources are a portfolio of tools, templates and processes that can be used and adapted to fit any hybrid project situation. This portfolio will evolve over time because of contributions from outside organizations, from professional bodies and from employees drawing on their experiences.

PSO Services

Many of the PSO Services are also common to the PMO but the objectives of the PSO may be quite different. That difference stems from the fact that the HPMgr is not following an established standard but rather has designed their own project management approach based on the unique characteristics of the project and the situation in which the project is being executed. In other words, the PSO Services are defined within the context of how the project is being managed. In the PMO World they could rely on a defined standard but not in the PSO World. The only thing the PSO can draw upon are the PSO Resources and how they have been adapted to meet the needs of the project under question. So, the PSO Services can be likened to a consultant-based relationship.

A typical list of the PSO Services could include:

▪ Consulting
▪ Training

- Requirements elicitation facilitation
- Software application evaluation and support
- Vetting of proposed tools, templates and processes

These services are offered on an as requested basis and are adapted to a specific project situation. The PSO has to assume that a project management approach has been designed by the project team to meet the specific conditions characterizing the project.

Why is the PSO Appropriate?

The Hybrid Project World is a (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity) VUCA World [Elkington, et al, 2017] dominated by customer-based and technology-driven projects that are probably disruptive in that they have never been encountered before. They are clearly steps into the great unknown whose final deliverables cannot be defined up front. How to succeed in this VUCA World won't happen by following standard processes. It can only succeed by taking a collaborative and creative position from the very moment the project mandate was delivered. An end state can be envisioned and its high-level requirements defined but how to achieve it awaits iterative learning and discovery. The PSO is equipped to be adaptive, flexible and creative in support of such projects and the project team.

REFERENCES

[Elkington, Rob, et al, 2017]. *Visionary Leadership in a Turbulent World: Thriving in the New VUCA Context*, United Kingdom: emerald Publishing.