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## THE IMPORTANCE OF IMPLEMENTING THE PROJECT OFFICE: A CASE STUDY OF A MEDIUM-SIZED ORGANIZATION

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### ABSTRACT

Implementing a Project Management Office (PMO) is a success factor for many organizations. The purpose of this article is to collect points to be analyzed during the implementation of the PMO and how it can influence the decision making of the organization's projects. The information obtained on the PMO was collected through a literature review and case study of a medium-sized organization. To be efficient, the PMO must be well implemented, must observe the reality of the organization and have the full support of top management.

**Keywords:** PMO, Project Office, PMBOK.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The globalization process in the world has made management and time keys to success in a project. Increased competitiveness among organizations around the world, product innovation, service and processes have contributed to project management. To understand this concept, we need to conceptualize what projects are. For Kerzner (2016), it is a well-defined, resource-consuming and operated enterprise under pressure of deadlines, costs and quality. In general, projects are considered unique activities in an organization. Nowadays, project management is seen as a business process, as it is essential for the excellence of the management of organizations, that is, business management occurs through projects.

Projects need to be managed and, according to the PMI (2013), project management is the application of knowledge, skills, tools and techniques appropriate to the project activities in order to meet their requirements.

Vargas (2009) clarifies that project management is a set of management tools that allow the organization to develop a set of skills, including knowledge and individual capabilities aimed at controlling non-repetitive, unique and complex events within a time, cost and quality.

With project management, new organizational forms make projects more numerous and strategically important. In addition, the organization's goals are to meet customer expectations, bypassing needs, adding value and producing more with fewer resources.

Project Management has as one of its goals to minimize the risks that occur during the course of a project. The PMBOK (Project Management Body of Knowledge) methodology proposes an organizational unit called PMO that, according to Vargas (2009), is a central place to conduct, plan, organize, control and finalize project activities. In addition, it integrates and supports project activities, analyzes data, and assists the organization's project managers in terms of how best to make the strategic decision for the project.

The increasing progression of processes gives rise to the concept of Project Management Office (PMO), which becomes a process support structure that guides projects in the organization. According to the PMI (2013), the PMO is an organizational entity to which are assigned various responsibilities related to the centralized and coordinated management of the projects under its control. The responsibilities of a PMO can range from providing support functions to project management to being responsible for the direct management of a project.

The concept of process is essential for project management. According to Hammer et Champy (1994), a process is a group of activities carried out in a logical sequence with the purpose of producing a good or service that has value for a specific group of clients. In order to produce this value, it is necessary to have process management, which can be understood as tasks carried out, decision-making in the day-to-day, goals achieved and, through them, generate results that add value to internal processes of the organization.

Therefore, the concern of the organization is the maintenance of processes for the production of optimized projects, with a high quality, delivered according to term, time and scope and that bring customer satisfaction.

Processes and goals are used by organizations to manage projects and these are responsible for increasing success in an organization. Organizational projects and processes are performed by people and these are determining factors for the process or project to fail or be successful.

### Alignment of project management with strategic management

To achieve success, organizations need to perform strategic management, which involves a series of goals to be achieved to modify the reality of the organization (Hitt *et al.*, 2011).

Drucker (1998) stresses that strategic management is an ongoing process to enable decision-making and the risks involved. In addition, it organizes the activities necessary to implement these decisions and, through feedback, it is possible to measure results, comparing with the expectations.

Strategic management is of utmost importance to the organization and project management must be tied together, since any choice that involves the initiation of a project is usually approved by top management. From there, the organization can verify the degree of alignment of the project with the strategies to, then, carry out the approval or cancellation of the project (Hitt *et al.*, 2011).

For Maximiano (2012), the strategic objectives involve the whole organization, establishing rules, targets, products to be offered, the environment that will be achieved, among other purposes. For the organization to meet the strategic goals, it is necessary to create projects that will reach the targets when they are aligned with the strategic management of the organization.

Kotler (2012) states that the primary goal of strategic management is to help the organization select and organize its business in order to stay healthy even if unexpected events



adversely affect its business or some of its products.

Clear definition of the purpose of the project and business is the key to achieving positive results. According to Ferreira (2010), the word profit can be defined as: what was earned and/or received through a commercialization or economic act. The profit target should be linked to the strategies. This composition of profit and strategic management enables the organization to understand metrics that help in making decisions, information on investment in any project or sector of the organization. The return of profit to any activity and in the strategic planning of the organization is a differential factor to boost a project in implantation.

It is often thought that success in a project is simple, that it is enough to empower people, deliver tasks on time, and that good management is the key to success; however, organizations forget that, behind all these characteristics, there is the need to organize the project team. PMI (2013) in the PMBOK chapter on Project Human Resource Management describes that, to develop the project team, it is necessary to:

- Enhance the knowledge and skills of team members to increase their ability to complete project deliverables, reduce costs, reduce deadlines, and improve quality;
- Enhance the feelings of trust and consensus among team members to improve motivation, reduce conflict, and increase teamwork;
- Create a cohesive and dynamic team culture to increase individual and team productivity, team spirit and cooperation, enable training and mentoring among team members to share knowledge and experiences.

With the alignment of the goals and the project team, the PMO will play the key factor in the planning, development and execution of a project.

### Research methodology

Given this scenario, the need for studies that contribute to a qualitative and descriptive analysis has increased. Such analyzes are necessary for the understanding of the implementation of a Project Office in the scenario of a medium-sized organization. According to Diehl (2004), the qualitative research describes the complexity of a given problem, and it is necessary to understand and classify the dynamic processes experienced in the groups and contribute to the process of change, making possible the understanding of the most varied individualities.

According to Dalfovo et al. (2008), qualitative field studies do not have a precise meaning in any of the areas where they are used. For some, all field studies are necessarily qualitative and identify with participant observation.

In this context, the following question was defined as a problem in this study: how can the implementation of the Project Office influence the decision-making of the organization's projects? We sought the general objective of evaluating the influence of the implementation of a PMO in a medium-sized organization with a view to project management. In addition, it was intended to understand and describe the implementation of the PMO in relation to the research and identification of the best PMO typology for a medium-sized organization in order to meet their needs and to collect information through a questionnaire for the application of best practices in project management.

This article seeks to present the process of implementing a PMO that uses the "type" Autonomous Project Team. The motivation to carry out the work described in this article occurred through a bibliographical research, based on the performance of a PMO in the researched organization with the purpose of improving the process support and deploying teams of the projects of an organization in order to obtain a better performance of the organization's projects.

The profile of the interviewees was senior management and project management. There were pre-defined questions, but the interview was conducted in a free way from the answers presented. The questions asked for the participants were related to: scenario in which the PMO was implemented and the reason for the choice, perception of improvement in the processes and the profit of the organization after the implantation, influence of the PMO in the decision making and increase of the level of commitment.

According to Yin (2015), the case study is the form of research that composes a method used to contribute to the knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social and political phenomena. For this, the work developed aims to study the strategies applied by organizations to implement the Project Office in medium-sized organizations. The qualitative research was performed through a semi-structured interview with a descriptive approach in a service organization, whose main portfolio is the service of municipalities. Data analysis was performed through content analysis by the categorization of subjects covered in the interviews.

### PMO case study of a mid-sized organization

The organization researched in the case study has provided information technology services for 7 years. It has about

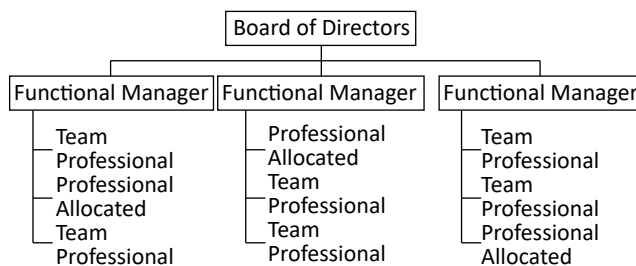


200 partners nationwide to serve the parent company and subsidiary of the clients. It acts in the provision of services to companies in the civil construction, metallurgy, mining, industrial assembly, education, steel and banking sectors. In addition, it offers the service portfolio with shared services center, managed services, structured cabling, service desk system and plans to offer the service of projects for implementation and support.

Cavalcanti (2016) states that the PMO is one of the modern organizational elements that is increasingly common. It can have different functions like:

- Disseminate and standardize good project management practices;
- Recruit and train project managers;
- Evaluate the progress of projects;
- Verify the strategic alignment of the projects and, among other functions;
- Evaluate the performance of project managers.

It is possible to characterize the organizational structure of the surveyed organization as light or weak matrix because in all projects, the coordinator has the functional responsibility. According to Vargas (2009), this type of structure is used when the project is simple and small or it is the organization's first project management initiative. Figure 1 shows that the professional assigned to the project is also responsible for coordination.



**Figure 1.** Light Matrix Structure.

Source: Elaborated from Vargas (2009)

There are characteristics that can be found in a PMO depending on its structure in the organization of action: it can be the information centralizer and the helper in the decision making through the use of templates, lessons learned and knowledge base. Depending on the PMO's "power", PMO can control deadlines, costs, schedules, and even project quality, as well as supporting project progress by identifying problems, supporting project managers, and motivating teams (Vargas, 2009).

According to Cavalcanti (2016), in the light matrix structure, the project manager may not have full authority over performance evaluation, budget control, and payment of personnel, which may remain under the responsibility of the functional manager.

The organization under study underwent several changes in management. However, it was pointed out the need to improve the processes of the organization and, through research, it was verified that the implementation of the PMO would be a differential to restructure processes, departments and projects. The phases detailed in the article for the implementation of the PMO were: planning, implementation, operation and continuous improvement.

The Project Office is the organizational unit that manages, plans, controls, provides support, and stores project-relevant information. Given the information described about the organization that was the object of the research, the PMO to be implemented in the organization would be the Autonomous Project Team (APT), which is a type of Project Office. Vargas (2009) defines that the Autonomous Project is a project office separated from the organization's operations, aimed at the management of a specific project or program, where the responsibility for the success or failure of the project is that of the PMO. It is also known as Isolated Project PMO.

For Keeling et Branco (2014), the project is the very source of information for its management. The Autonomous Project Team structure is characterized by a weak direct management, that is, the information obtained for project management come from a manager or leader who has experience in the field. Another characteristic of this type of PMO is that the responsibility for managing the project is the project team' as there is no support from the organization.

It was found through the research that it would be necessary to deploy an Autonomous Project Team PMO, since the organization was not mature enough to deploy the Project Office called Enterprise Project Support Office. The projects are not linked to the operations department and the project management would be carried out without the support of the organization.

According to Mohrman et al. (1995), there are three types of autonomous work teams, and we can apply them in structuring a PMO of Autonomous Project Teams:

- Work teams: responsible for selling, manufacturing and offering a product or service adding value;
- Improvement teams: responsible for improving processes in the organization, generating quality



in the products created and services provided and always after the end of a project, the organization could allocate these professionals in the first team in order to qualify the project started from the beginning;

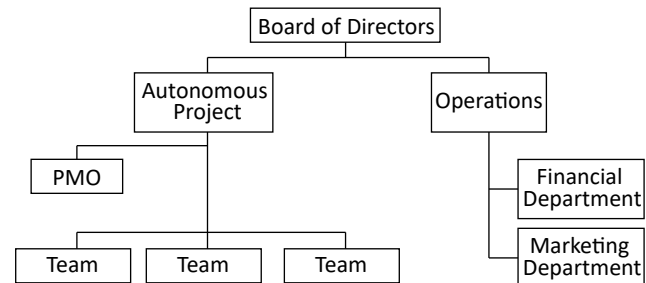
- Integration teams: responsible for integrating previous teams and improving the process as a whole.

For Fleury et Vargas (1994), the task with greater freedom and autonomy is performed by a team that performs the work that was assigned without the need to define the employees' functions. The team receives the little detailed task and has the autonomy to plan during the development of the work.

It is essential that the Autonomous Work Teams be consolidated in the organization. After this consolidation, it is necessary to carry out steps that better structure the project team and then proceed to the planning itself. The following items describe the step-by-step approach used to structure the stand-alone team in the surveyed organization:

- 1º- The Beginning of the Work of Autonomous Teams:** the role of the leader is enabled by the top management. The leader begins to delegate some functions to his or her led and they will be able to solve their own problems.
- 2º- The transition:** achieving maturity in the tasks received, teams can resolve conflicts between their members, seek and give information among themselves, have contact with the rest of the organization without the presence of the leader. Thus, the leader can trust the team by dedicating less to the internal part and getting involved in the external part in order to know how to deal with the external environments, since the PMO involves acting in these two environments.
- 3º- The team acting autonomously:** In this scenario, teams are able to be responsible for managing activities that demonstrate ability to take over. The leader stays away from the team and is dedicated to understanding the external client's need and becomes a mediator between the two teams. In the internal team, the leader becomes a supporter.
- 4º- The consolidation of the teams:** At this stage the team is responsible for their own work, they solve their own problems and the leader becomes a resource for the team, who decides when they need the help and the assistance they need.

In the contextualization of the implementation of the PMO of the organization studied, the model presented in Figure 2 was adopted:



**Figure 2.** PMO Model with Autonomous Project.

Source: Vargas Available in: < <https://ricardo-vargas.com/pt/slides/tipos-de-escritorios-de-projeto-pmo/> > Access in Aug. 2017.

According to Quelhas et Barcauí (2004), one of the most used ways to increase the maturity in project management in the present times has been the formalization of the implantation of projects office in the organizations.

In the planning stage for the implementation of the PMO Autonomous Project Team, a plan was presented to open this Project Office and this Project Office will discuss the qualities and capacities that were implemented to reach the expectations of the organization and receive the acceptance and support of the organization.

To begin the scope, simple pilot projects were made available for the Autonomous Project Team. At this time, the board gave the project manager and his team a simple project in order to meet customer expectations and the organization understand the need for a PMO. In order to work in the Project Office, human resources, costs, professional qualities and skills were raised.

A document informing the organization about the negative and positive risks of implementing the PMO was created. The organization's board was aware of the possibilities that could occur during the implementation and execution process.

The organization under study used simple pilot projects to learn and understand the PMO's performance. It started in a simple way, with the ability to serve the client and apply the best practices without using complex projects.

To begin the implementation steps with the Autonomous Team feature, a more adapted project manager was chosen in the organization and presented a high rate of compliance with deadlines, costs and quality in projects. This manager was responsible for the insertion of the PMO in the organization.



After choosing the project manager, the organization provided a working environment for the manager and his team. These were responsible for materials and equipment to perform their tasks in order to raise project performance.

In one project, it is not enough that the project manager is the best and uses the best practices. The team must be well structured and mature. People should understand their value and their role in the project. Mature teams can plan and execute projects in an intelligent and promising way.

In the implementation, it was necessary to evaluate the methodology applied in the organization and to understand its role. The involvement of people who have strong political power in the organization can be a strong point in the implementation, even if this is a pilot project.

In the phase of project operation, what was defined in the planning was applied; there was constant evaluation of progress; the PMO continuously responded to the needs of the business; and the problems were solved, informing the best practices obtained. You cannot get best practices or lessons learned quickly. In the implementation, the Project Manager informed the best way to solve problems and to launch, in the knowledge base, information of lessons learned and how to proceed in the future.

If the initial objectives that were proposed in the implementation of the PMO are achieved, the goal will be to improve the processes that have been defined previously, to update documentation, templates, to improve and update the media, to structure and train the team to obtain better quality in the service progress, update the knowledge base, and record the lessons learned. Thus, the PMO will gain maturity and trust of the organization.

If the goals are not met, the ideal would be to record the problems that have occurred, to seek better results, to improve the planning and execution of the implementation, and, most difficult, to recognize the errors so that the organization does not commit them again.

In response to the survey, the main objective of the PMO implementation was to make a profit, to seek reduced costs for projects and to be successfully assured. For Crawford (2001), there is only one way to visualize how the projects of an organization are being performed: to have focal point in the Office of Projects. The PMO manages the projects and allows the organization to create organizational processes of management, adding value in an integral, repeated and precise way.

The Project Office is very influential in an organization, since it serves as the basis for solving frequent problems in projects such as: lack of frameworks, unprepared managers, lack of project management, poorly structured quality processes, lack of specification of scope, time and costs incorrectly calculated, among others.

The PMI (2013) describes some benefits that organizations in Brazil have achieved with project management and the use of a Project Office: better quality of project delivery, clear information when the team needs information, minimizing project risks, integration in the areas of organization, greater customer satisfaction, reduction of project deadlines and costs, better team productivity and better financial returns.

According to Prado (2004), the organizations that have the project structure for more than a year realize that the PMO goes through a maturation that evolves to the excellence in the execution of the projects. The maturation comes from the transformations of the functions performed. After the creation of the project office, activities focus on advisory, training, methodology implementation and software use for better project management. As a result, in the course of the projects, the tasks described above decrease and the organization understands the ideal way to improve the process of executing a project. From then on, other tasks come, such as auditing projects and processes.

## 2. CONCLUSION

It was verified that, in the researched organization, after the existence of the Project Office, the success of the projects was constant and due to the relationship between the PMO and the Project Management. The maturation was achieved over the years and became the key point of the organization.

It can be seen that, after the implementation of the Project Office, the operational results of the organization improved and one of the Project Managers reported that in the PMO implementation process project quality improved approximately 25%. When the PMO of Autonomous Projects was structured, the improvement in the execution of the projects obtained an increase of 40%. This improvement is due to the use of people allocated to the project and the transfer of people who were not aligned with the strategic goals. Project Managers reported that, with the PMO structuring, there was great use of time and improvement in the execution of the tasks, since the information was centralized in the Project Office. In addition, one of the Directors reported that data was measured during the deployment process and the



organization has always updated such research, since implementation has brought benefits to the organization.

It was noticed that all the interviewees positively accepted the implantation of the PMO in the organization. One Director interviewed stated that the greatest motivation for this structuring was to make a profit from the execution of well-qualified projects. The organization improved the quality of services provided and obtained a better competitive structure among other organizations that already had the PMO. Moreover, the interviewees informed that it is worth to implement the PMO, because, in addition to profit and competitive advantage, the projects started to have a prominence in the organization. The employees started to get the information about the execution of the projects in the Project Office itself. Before the Project Manager passed the information and wasted time telling each of the team how they should be used. Today, employees who have questions consult the PMO, saving Project Manager time and making information always available.

The implementation of a PMO must be tied to the reality of the organization. It is not enough to want to deploy a more complete model if it cannot meet the expectations of the business and does not have people capable of knowing how to contribute to the execution of the project. The project manager of an Autonomous Team must know how to apply the best concepts learned throughout their work in project management, motivate and value their team and always seek organizational learning.

The planning, implementation and operation phases should focus on the team so that the implementation is well planned and align the operation to the defined strategic objectives and, in case of positive results, the improvement of the process should always seek the maturation of the PMO to improve their image in front of the organization.

Organizations are realizing the need for a PMO and value their benefits, which help in promising project management. The PMO is capable of delivering better results for projects and therefore for strategic management. Other benefits include: providing information for decision-making, storing lessons learned, reducing project risks by improving the decision-making process, increasing the project team's productive capacity, reducing project deadlines and costs, besides obtaining profit and competitive advantage in the market.

According to Kerzner (2016), the PMO has been transformed into a corporate intellectual property control center, which should maintain data capture and dissemi-

nation to the various stakeholders. The Project Office is a structure in the organization, which, in addition to improving the execution of the projects, starts to develop all the areas of the organization involved in the management. To be efficient, the PMO must be well implemented, observing the reality of the organization. And, this implementation should have the full support of top management.

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