

# **Implementing a Project Management Office**

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## **Abstract**

*As information technology projects became more cross-functional in nature, Oklahoma State University's Computing & Information Services (CIS) looked to managing projects from end to end in a consistent manner. Each area in CIS was managing their part of the project, but communication and coordination across the areas did not always go well. To help improve communication, coordination and successful project outcomes, CIS implemented a Project Management Office (PMO). CIS looks to the PMO to provide project management expertise on critical projects, cross-functional projects or single area projects. The PMO has developed a mission, goals, short-term objectives and long term objectives, which tie into the CIS goals and objectives. The PMO focuses on managing the project using a consistent methodology. To improve on the project management methodology, the PMO evaluates each project to outline lessons learned for future methodology modifications. The information from these projects along with other project management reference material is housed in a repository, which is available for departmental use. Also, to improve project management techniques, a training plan for project managers has been developed along with curriculum for project sponsors and project team members.*

*By managing projects in a consistent manner, the PMO is improving scheduling, communication, and successful outcomes from these projects.*

## Introduction of the Organization

Oklahoma State University (OSU) consists of approximately 5,000 faculty and staff with 22,000 students. OSU has a main campus located in Stillwater, Oklahoma with four branch campuses throughout the state of Oklahoma. Computing & Information Services (CIS) at OSU is responsible for providing information technology and customer support for OSU, its branches and four other institutions under the OSU/A&M Board of Regents.

## Problem/Initiative Statement

CIS began performing several large cross-functional projects in the late 1990's. While several areas did their portions well, the coordination and communication didn't always go well. Something was missing and CIS set out to find it.

In the beginning of this endeavor, time was spent researching solutions to our problems. Gartner Group and the Project Management Institute (PMI) were resources utilized. The research provided CIS with many problem areas, such as:

- Problems in coordination and communication were due to a lack of an overall project manager
- Too many projects started and not understanding priorities
- Lack of project management skills

To address these problems, CIS established a Project Management Office (PMO) in September 2000 tailored to its needs. The goals were to:

- Manage critical, strategic, cross functional projects,
- Be a role model to the organization for project management and

- Establish project management techniques.

This best practice will outline the activities CIS performed and is still performing to implement a PMO.

## Design & Implementation

When determining how to start, CIS chose to start small. Besides the author, two full-time employees were chosen. These staff members spent the first year learning. Since the PMI's project management methods were chosen as the basic foundation, time was spent understanding them. The introduction course offered by the PMI was attended along with reading the PMI's "A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge" (PMBOK). Numerous textbooks, websites, and conference attendance were reviewed as well. The goal was to learn the necessary project management processes for implementation in CIS.

Along with the project management basics, there was also the need to be recognized as project management experts within the organization. The PMI has the industry accepted Project Management Professional (PMP) certification and CIS' goal is to have certified PMPs on staff. To date, CIS has two in its organization. To help meet this goal, a PMP training plan has been developed and is available to anyone within the organization.

Team members outside of the PMO were provided training during the implementation as well. CIS contracted with the OSU College of Business Administration to provide three courses – Myers-Briggs Personality Assessment; Team Building; and Basics of Project Management. This provided everyone with basic skills for working in a project-oriented environment. The PMO also developed curriculum based on the roles, methodology and tools available, both to be discussed later in this paper. The organization is beginning to realize the benefits of project management and staff is willing to participate on PMO projects. Both are desired outcomes of the training.

While the PMO staff was learning and training, they also spent time applying those skills to the projects they managed. As the author had already led several large projects, the main objective was helping the organization understand priorities and committing to projects. Her role was to execute large cross-functional projects in the new environment. For the other two project managers, smaller projects were assigned to build their skills. This method worked quite well as this approach helped them build confidence, experience project management first hand, and assist the organization in learning project management. At this time, areas request the PMO's involvement in their projects, which broadens the sphere of project management influence.

In order to execute on these projects, tools were chosen to facilitate the project management functions. The tools chosen were Microsoft Project, WBS Chart Pro, Crystal Reports, and an in-house developed Project Management Information System (PMIS). Some areas of the organization had been performing portions of the project

management methodology with the in-house PMIS, which is considered the foundation tool. Time has been spent enhancing the PMIS to include goals, ideas, project requests and additional project documentation to facilitate selection, prioritization and ongoing project management activities. In conjunction with the PMIS, Microsoft Project and WBS Chart Pro have been used to outline tasks, show dependencies between tasks and for scheduling. These three tools have complimented each other and each plays a major role throughout the project management phases. The next phase of enhancements include integration of the PMIS and Microsoft Project.

While tools were chosen, an overall methodology was not yet defined. The idea was to execute several projects to learn how the organization would adapt and what would be beneficial to the project manager and the project team. After the execution of several projects, the PMO began the development of a common methodology. The methodology consists of an overall flow chart; a step-by-step walk through, and templates along with checklists to insure that the right information is being captured. All PMO managed projects use the methodology, which helps with consistency and discipline. People know what to expect on a PMO project. Twenty projects were completed so far this year using the methodology and several are still in process.

A project management methodology is only complete by capturing lessons learned from a project for future use. The PMO developed a repository to house this knowledge along with other project management resources. The repository documents are inputs into the project management methodology, so continuous improvement can

take place. The repository provides examples to help teach new project managers. As an example, the PMO hired two part-time student employees in August. By November, they were leading small projects utilizing the repository and methodology. The goal is to continue using these resources to build project management skills within the organization.

After continuous research and seeing how the PMO would fit in the organization, a mission and objectives along with roles and responsibilities were developed. The mission helped provide a framework with the objectives outlining where the PMO's focus would be. All activities and projects are driven from these objectives. To show progress, plans are presented each quarter to senior management outlining what was completed during the quarter and what is planned for the next quarter. This planning continues to show how the PMO was making progress and could continue enhancing the organization.

Understanding what is being expected helps with performance and buy-in. Roles & responsibilities were defined to assist with understanding what each team member needs to do to help with the successful completion of a project. The roles of project sponsor, project manager, and project team member were defined. These roles and responsibilities are discussed at each project kick-off meeting as well as being incorporated into the PMO training curriculum. It helps everyone focus on what he or she should be doing and what not worry about.

The PMO also has the role to provide reporting to management. These reports are generated from the data housed in the PMIS using Crystal Reports. These reports outline current projects, project statuses for the week, and approved projects waiting on resources. The PMO is also looking at time reporting to provide management with a look at how the staff is spending their time. These reports provide management with the necessary information to understand resource allocation, schedule bottlenecks and provides an overall picture of the organization's projects.

To get these pieces in place, took a lot of hard work, perseverance and dedication plus some funding. The majority of the money was spent in training. In the first two years, \$30,000 has been spent on training courses, conferences, books, computer based training and magazines. The PMO developed all the above materials with three staff members in one year's time. The PMO is focusing on developing in-house project management training along with the knowledge captured in the repository for training purposes.

## Benefits

The benefits of the PMO are numerous.

- CIS senior management made project management a key skill set for the organization by outlining it as a major objective. Just recently, the PMO's role has been expanded and additional resources are being assigned.
- Management provided the ability for the PMO to grow at its own pace. This provided the PMO with the ability to start small and continue to develop.

- PMO projects are executed well and have established schedules.
- A communications plan template has provided consistent overall communications on PMO managed projects.
- There is an understanding of priorities within the organization, which provides the necessary resources at the right time on PMO managed projects.
- The PMO has improved the success of completion. If a project is given to the PMO, the staff is committed to a successfully completed project.
- The methodology and roles have provided consistency and discipline, which are needed for a successful implementation of project management.
- The knowledge captured continues to provide improvement and refinements to the techniques used by the PMO project managers. This knowledge also is accelerates the time needed to train someone in project management.
- The organization is beginning to see the benefits of project management through the successful completion of PMO projects.

#### Future Benefits:

- Managing risks
- Information on the total cost of a project
- Optimization of resources
- Consolidated scheduling for the organization

### Retrospect

If CIS did this again, the mission and objectives would have been outlined earlier.

Also, besides reviewing industry project management trends, reviewing project

management at a higher education institution would have been helpful. This best practice should assist an organization with the previous item by providing an overview of tasks to implement of a Project Management Office.