ROLE OF THE PROJECT MANAGEMENT OFFICE (PMO) IN AN IT ORGANIZATION

The modern business world is embracing Agile practices to help them navigate the treacherous waters of our technologically advanced and rapidly changing environment. Lean teams filled with cross-discipline members focused on collaboration and ownership of duties are accomplishing tasks at breakneck speeds and with higher rates of success compared to older methods of development.

This new way of approaching work is commonly known as [DevOps](#) and has created cascading effects throughout entire industries. As developer teams ramped up their production speeds, other departments needed to step up to keep pace, so DevOps brought together members of previously disparate silos and housed them under a single roof. This structuring creates teams that can focus on the aspect of the product they are working on while making decisions and exploring options that best enable them to create the desired experience.

DevOps attempts to tap into the power of human ingenuity and collaboration to allow creativity to flourish, giving people more ownership of their projects. This trend caused a fair amount of disruption for traditional management systems which generally relied on information flowing from the top down.

While many organizations flourished with the open-armed adoption of Agile and DevOps systems, other companies floundered. One of the issues with unfettered DevOps is a focus on releases and pushing out changes with little regard to the company's big picture.

Some DevOps teams lose focus on the consumer's needs and the company's resources and focus entirely on releasing new features whether they're necessary or not. Not all businesses seemed ideal for the application of Agile practices, especially without adding modifications such as standardized procedures. Establishing a core set of best practices and standards for all projects throughout the organization was a key for these companies to ensure everyone could maintain the newly expected pace while still delivering quality results. This is where a PMO can help.

What is a PMO?

A project management office (PMO) is a team or department that sets and maintains standards for project management throughout an organization. They are in charge of creating procedures and best practices that will help operations go smoothly, complete on time, and result in quality deliverables. Their focus is on the successful completion of projects and monitoring the impact and effectiveness of the procedures they outline.

The PMO is constantly looking for ways to enhance project execution and increase efficiency. They achieve this primarily by creating actionable plans which provide standards for undertaking projects in a structured and repeatable way. The repetition is a key component because it ensures past success will lead to future success. It also enables them to tweak aspects of the procedures to fine tune the approach and dial in the efficiency of the system.

This mindset of establishing standards and handing down formulaic responses to incidents can seem stifling to many developers and runs the risk of inhibiting creativity and personal freedom within one's role. This is why it's essential for modern PMOs to focus on providing structure by funneling company and customer priorities into actionable goals which are then handed out to individual DevOps teams for them to tackle in a less encumbered manner. This frees up DevOps teams from having to worry about the big picture while still giving them the room they need to flex their ingenuity and agency.

Keys for Successful PMOs

Modern PMOs aren't the cat-herding managers of the past, but they're also not the long-haired, laid-back gurus that are more suited to yoga studios than business presentations. A successful PMO that can operate within today's Agile business world sits somewhere in the middle of those two extremes. They should have a deep understanding of the organization's strategy, culture, and customers. PMOs bridge the gap between the company's primary stakeholders, its customers, and the teams working on the projects.

A successful Agile PMO will shift with adaptations of strategy to align itself with the changing world. They will act as mentors for project managers and team members to provide oversight and insight into the reasons behind the decisions. The most successful PMOs understand the importance of providing staff with an understanding for why changes should be made so they can make informed decisions when they encounter obstacles.

Does Your Organization Need a PMO?

Just like not every organization necessarily needs to adopt Agile principles, neither does every organization require a PMO. Some companies function smoothly on Agile alone and their teams have enough personal investment and understanding of the company's big picture that guidance

and best practices aren't required. If your DevOps teams are already performing at high levels and aren't wasting effort on superfluous "features" with much frequency, why rock the boat? Every organization is different in its culture due to the people within it and their personalities. This means no single solution will be a magic bullet which can be applied to every organizational challenge.

If your organization is having issues focusing on impactful changes that aid the customer and benefit the company, then adopting a PMO might be just the thing for you. They can help align teams with organizational goals and strategy to ensure teams don't waste time. Some organizations may see the role of PMO as an unnecessary overseer that will stifle creativity. PMOs and Agile practices can find a happy meeting place where the two work together in harmony. PMOs can help prevent decision paralysis and ensure that teams have the information they need to best complete their projects.

The intention behind DevOps is to create teams that collaborate across every discipline to eliminate information silos and cut down on wasted time changing projects from the hands of one silo to another. Agile PMOs help ease this process and detail strategy guidelines that account for the company's big picture and ensure focus remains on the highest priority of activities. They help prevent bottlenecks while confirming that development occurs at a constant speed and doesn't waste time on low throughput efforts.