The Three Different Types of Project Management Offices

~ By John Reiling

There are three basic types of Project Management Office (PMO) organisations, varying in the degree of control and influence they have on projects within the organisation. You will need to determine which type you need to establish in order to have an effective project office.

The three types of PMOs include:

1. Supportive PMO

The Supportive PMO generally provides support in the form of on-demand expertise, templates, best practices, access to information and expertise on other projects, and the like. This can work in an organisation where projects are done successfully in a loosely controlled manner and where additional control is deemed unnecessary. Also, if the objective is to have a sort of “clearing-house” of project management information across the enterprise to be used freely by project managers, then the Supportive PMO is the right type.

2. Controlling PMO

In organisations where there is a desire to “rein in” the activities, processes, procedures, documentation, and more - a controlling PMO can accomplish that. Not only does the organisation provide support, but it also requires that the support be used. Requirements might include adoption of specific methodologies, templates, forms, conformance to governance, and application of other PMO controlled sets of rules. In addition, project offices might need to pass regular reviews by the controlling PMO, and this may represent a risk factor on the project. This works if a) there is a clear case that compliance with project management organisation offerings will bring improvements in the organisation and how it executes on projects, and b) the PMO has sufficient executive support to stand behind the controls the PMO puts in place.

3. Directive PMO

This type goes beyond control and actually “takes over” the projects by providing the project management experience and resources to manage the project. As organisations undertake projects, professional project managers from the PMO are assigned to the projects. This injects a great deal of professionalism into the projects, and, since each of the project managers originates and reports back to the directive PMO, it guarantees a high level of consistency of practice across all projects. This is effective in larger organisations that often matrix out support in various areas, and where this setup would fit the culture.

The best type is very specific to the organisation, culture, and history of what works and what does not. But the objectives are - more or less - to:
1. Implement a common methodology
2. Standardise terminology
3. Introduce effective repeatable project management processes
4. Provide common supporting tools
5. Ultimately, the objective is to improve levels of project success within the organisation

Being aware of these types can help you and your organisation more easily accomplish this.