The Phased Approach to Project Management Implementation

~ By Thomas P. Stevens

If you are thinking about using a project management consulting company to assist your organisation with implementing a Project Management Office (PMO), there are a couple of important factors that you should consider when choosing the right firm.

According to PMAlliance, Inc., an Atlanta, Georgia based project management consulting company, implementing a PMO can present significant challenges. For that reason, a phased approach to PMO implementation is not only crucial but also a distinguishing characteristic of successful project management consulting firms. Experienced project management consultants know that a phased approach:

1. Helps to overcome resistance to change
2. Allows for lessons learned in early phases to be incorporated in systems installed in later phases and
3. Establishes a solid foundation of available project-level data prior to rolling-up enterprise-level information

Second, successful project management consultants also know that, when it comes to designing a PMO, there is no such thing as a "universal solution." To be effective, a PMO must be tailored to your organisation’s project types, management/staff capabilities, and organisational culture. A phased approach to implementation allows the necessary time (in the initial phases) to gather first-hand information about project characteristics, personnel, and cultural nuances so that the delivered solution can be tailored appropriately.

The Four Phases of Project Management Implementation

1. Initiation Phase

Throughout the initiation phase, project management consultants use pilot projects to build process momentum, overcome natural resistance to change, and gain first-hand knowledge of your organisation. The goal of this phase is to successfully mobilise your organisation, remediate any current at-risk projects, and set the stage for the next two installation phases. During this phase, the project management methodology is introduced and software training is conducted; but only for those individuals who will be specifically associated with pilot project teams. Also, a plan for the project-level installation phase is developed and key tools are created that will be utilised during the remaining installation phases.
2. Project-Level Installation Phase

The second phase utilises information gathered from pilot projects in the initiation phase to roll-out structured project planning and control processes for all remaining projects, as well as to formally establish the Project Management Office. This phase can include the creation of PMO job descriptions, formal guidelines for project planning/control, a project web site, and a web-based activity update system - basically the necessary infrastructure to support the consistent, successful application of project management techniques by the PMO. Project Management Training is also rolled-out to the entire organisation during the project-level installation phase. By the conclusion of this phase, the nucleus of a Project Management Office is in-place, all project team members have been trained, and the project management consultants are ready to begin transitioning from their role of supporting project team requirements to supporting the PMO staff.

3. Enterprise-Level Installation Phase

During the enterprise-level installation phase, tools are implemented that are focused on managing an organisation's entire portfolio of projects. Examples of these tools include; enterprise performance metrics, a management "dashboard" to gain summary-level visibility to project status, and project scheduling based on limited resources and project priority (enterprise resource levelling). The intent of these types of tools is to (1) provide management with timely and accurate information about the status of the all the projects being undertaken by the organisation and (2) support business decision-making that impacts the successful completion of projects such as: changes to staffing, funding, project prioritisation, and workload.

During the enterprise-level installation phase, the Project Management Office staff has already begun to assume some of the day-to-day responsibilities for developing and maintaining ongoing project plans. In doing so, the PMO staff is able to free-up the project management consulting firm to focus on the design and implementation of the enterprise-level tools. By the end of this phase, all responsibility for developing and updating individual project plans have been transitioned from the Project Management Consultants to the PMO staff.

4. Maintenance Phase

The final phase marks the important transition of the Project Management Office from the project management consultants back to the organisation. In addition to supporting the day-to-day responsibilities for planning and controlling individual projects, the PMO staff will now become the focal point for providing the enterprise-level information and analysis required by management.

At this point in the project management implementation process, the organisation has been well trained, numerous success stories have been created and communicated, virtually all projects have well-developed project plans, and there is widespread support for investing in a formal project planning and control process. Also, the Project Management Office infrastructure is in place, the PMO staff has been trained, and management has necessary visibility to the key project portfolio level information.

Successful completion of this phase creates long-term continuity by implementing the necessary policies and incentives to permanently inculcate project management into the culture of the organisation. Ideally, formal project planning and control processes will become recognised as a required core competency and an essential function within the organisation.
Deliverables to Expect From Your Project Management Consulting Company

Phase 1: Initiation Phase

- Initial communication(s) to management and assistance in the identification of pilot projects
- Project management methodology and software training for identified pilot team members
- Project plans and formal control processes in place for all identified pilot projects
- A library of project "templates" for use during the installation phases
- Standardised project coding structures and project-level report formats
- Finalised requirements and a plan for the project-level installation phase

Phase 2: Project-Level Installation Phase

- Network-based, structured project plans and formal control process for all targeted projects
- Rollout of PM/software training to all project leaders and team members
- Training and mentoring of PMO personnel
- Implementation of the initial PMO infrastructure
- Finalised requirements and a plan for the enterprise-Level implementation phase

Phase 3: Enterprise-Level Installation Phase

- Implementation of the enterprise-level PMO infrastructure
- Turnover to PMO staff of the day-to-day responsibility for developing and maintaining individual project plans
- Finalised requirements and a plan for the maintenance phase

Phase 4: Maintenance Phase

- Turnover to Project Management Office staff the responsibility for supporting all of the project management requirements of the organisation
- Recommendations to management for policies and incentives required to permanently establish project management as a core competency and essential function

Conclusion

Without a doubt, the design of a Project Management Office must be tailored to the specific needs of its organisation in order to be effective. A universal "cookie cutter" approach does not recognise differences in project types, management, or staff capabilities. As a result, standardised solutions tend to have a low probability of success. A phased approach not only maximises the effectiveness of the project management consulting firm, but also of the organisations that they serve. It allows time in the initial phases to gather crucial, first-hand information, overcomes resistance to change, and leads to a well defined and successful Project Management Office at the end.
Thomas P. Stevens, PMP is the President and founder of PMAlliance, Inc. and holds a master’s degree in Business with a focus on Decision Science and is a registered PMP (Project Management Professional). PMAlliance is an international project management consulting firm that helps Fortune 1000 companies improve the execution of their mission-critical projects. For the second consecutive year, Inc. magazine has ranked PMAlliance Inc. among the fastest growing Project Management Consulting companies in the United States. Through its Duration-Driven® methodology, PMAlliance enables its clients to successfully complete their most important projects on time, within budget and to the intended level of quality. Please visit their website at www.pm-alliance.com