

The office – Professional Development and the PMO

"They want how much?" the CIO asked incredulously. "I only budgeted \$80K per annum for the role, its only glorified Admin after all!" The recruiter sighed, picking up the job description for the PMO manager, then started reading out loud "Provide guidance, coaching and leadership to the Project Managers. Establish Training and Accreditation standards, custodian of tools and Project delivery methodology, facilitate Portfolio prioritisation and Resource management". "Perhaps", she asked helpfully, "we could get someone two days per week for your budget."

One of the subtle roles of many PMOs is to facilitate professional development in and around Project Management. Professional development, for the Project Management community, whether for Project Managers or Project Management support staff, usually involves a mixture of training courses, coaching/mentoring and networking/discussion sessions. For professional development to work well, the PMO Manager should be someone who people respect and look up to, someone senior who understands project management and can provide the necessary leadership.

The Project Management community need not report to the PMO from a Line Management perspective for professional development to occur. In some respects, particularly coaching and mentoring, it is better not to report to the person providing the mentoring/coaching since natural power dynamics exist in those situations. For coaching/mentoring to work well, the mentee must be confident they can disclose in full their issues or lack of knowledge without fear. A person will be unlikely to confess lack of knowledge to the very person who will soon review their salary and performance.

In terms of Project Management, people will want to learn about a variety of things:

- The basics of Project Management (especially junior people)
- Lessons learned from other projects
- The organisation's terminology, methodology and policies
- The organisation's tools and standards for their use
- Dealing with difficult people (general and specific)
- Leadership, influencing, conflict resolution
- New and emerging topics, e.g. Agile, Lean, etc.

Since learning comes from a combination of seeing, reading, listening, doing, explaining and making mistakes, a variety of delivery options will

be needed. The PMO is often in a rare position of being able to provide the effort associated with co-ordinating and preparing such training. We have observed that the Project Management community, while keen when asked about training, is often elusive and "too busy" when the training is actually made available. For this reason it may be better to refer to it as Professional development and to provide simple "bribes" such as pizza and soft drink over lunch. The PMO is in a unique position to see learning's across projects and consider broader organisational risks and issues; it is also likely to have a relationship with all Project Managers.

Building respect and confidence then allows the PMO to provide their primary role, which is to facilitate Governance and improve Project delivery through improved Project Management. Once trusted the PMO can provide advice, suggestions and even hands on support to Project Managers.

Which brings us back to the expectations of the PMO Manager and their salary. If the PMO Manager is to have the respect of the Project Management Community then ideally they should have been a PM. Given they also need experience around PMO specific capability; it logically follows that they should be paid equivalent of a senior Project Manager. You tend to get what you pay for, pay less and you risk the PMO becoming considered "glorified Admin" and fail in the longer term.

As an aside, the PMO could have a significant role in professional development of the next generation of Project Managers. Given the project support roles (Project Admin, Scheduling, Issues/Risk/Change tracking etc.) are the foundations of Project Management, and are often supplied by the PMO anyway, the PMO should seriously consider graduate programs. Such programs can provide good, keen, cost effective resources and kick start a young person's career. For an investment of some time and effort, the payoff is huge for an organisation. This worked for us.

About the author

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