

**Delivering Successful PMOs**  
**How to Design and Deliver the Best Project Management Office for Your Business**  
**By Peter Taylor & Ray Mead**  
**(A book review by R. Max Wideman, FPMI)**

The views expressed in this article are strictly those of Max Wideman.  
The contents of the book under review are the copyright property of the authors.  
US spelling generally adopted throughout. Published here August 2017

***Introduction***

Author Peter Taylor is not new to this site. Previously, in February 2012, we reviewed his book: *The Lazy Project Manager*. Having attracted the reader's attention by this startling and unlikely book title, we found the contents of that book were anything but a question of "laziness" as might be assumed by most readers at the beginning. In any case, since then, he and co-author Ray Mead have been most diligent in their pursuit of *How to Design and Deliver the Best Project Management Office for Your Business*.

According to the authors:<sup>1</sup>

"Delivering Successful PMOs is intended to be the companion book to *Leading Successful PMOs* (Gower) by Peter Taylor. This was a guide to all project based organizations providing a common language to describe the variety of possible PMOs. It also explained how to do the right things, in the right way, in the right order, with the right team, and identifying what made a good PMO leader."

But at the outset of their book, the authors provide a warning.<sup>2</sup>

"The sheer scale of PMO implementation in the last 5 years has invariably led to numerous botched attempts to deliver them. The authors themselves know of several organizations who have abandoned the idea of implementing their PMO or have even dismantled a PMO that has been running for several years."<sup>3</sup>

"In each case there is one central theme: The PMO failed to deliver and/or failed to demonstrate value."

And the authors go on to suggest that:<sup>4</sup>

"The PMO, in the wrong hands, quickly develops a bit of an image problem. Project managers end up seeing it as the 'project police' enforcing the use of standards, forms and templates that add little value to the projects that they are working on."

This seems to us to be hardly surprising, if the corporate entity in question is unable to establish a name that makes clear the purpose and function of this organizational entity. That is, helping rather than hindering.

But happily, relief is on the way. The authors' Chapter 4 starts their latest book on a very thorough and easy-to-follow journey towards designing and succeeding in establishing a PgMO.<sup>5</sup> But to start with, the authors point out:<sup>6</sup>

- Success needs to be planned up front.
- There must be a strong and clear business case.
- There must be clarity of the extent of investment required, as well as the time required to plan, start-up, operate, and transfer the PgMO into the very fabric of the organization.
- There must be strong sponsorship for the PgMO.
- You need a plan developed by someone who knows how to truly deliver a successful PgMO.

And since the authors note that, at the time of writing, the availability of such people are in short supply, they are only too willing to help.

### ***About the authors***

**Peter Taylor** is a dynamic professional who has achieved notable success in Project Management. Over the past eight years he has been leading three PgMOs.<sup>7</sup> In the last three years he has focused on lecturing and writing, with over 200 presentations around the world in over 25 countries and with new books that include: *The Project from Hell*; *Strategies for Project Sponsorship*; and *Leading Successful PMOs*.<sup>8</sup> He is the author of two best-selling books on 'Productive Laziness': *The Lazy Winner* and *The Lazy Project Manager*. Now, he recently released yet another book: *The Social Project Manager*. He can be reached at [peter.b.taylor@btinternet.com](mailto:peter.b.taylor@btinternet.com)

**Ray Mead** has a BA (Hons) in French, Spanish and Marketing from Southampton University and studied his MBA at Surrey in partnership with Jiao tong University in Beijing. He is the founder and CEO of p3m global, a specialist project, program and portfolio management consultancy. Ray has 18 years of project management experience gained across many different industries and in many different countries, including extended or frequent stays in Spain, Germany, China, Australia and Saudi Arabia. Prior to becoming involved in consultancy he worked as a project manager in the telecommunications industry.<sup>9</sup>

### **Book Structure**

The contents of this book are set out in thirteen chapters and two Appendices as follows:

Introduction

1. A Short Reflection
2. A Further Justification
3. Destined to Fail ...
4. ... Or Designed to Succeed?
5. Introduction to the Plan
6. Phase 1 – Plan PMO
7. Phase 2 – Start Up PMO (A Phase)
8. Phase 3 – Set Up PMO (D Phase)
9. Phase 4 – Operate PMO (E Phase)
10. Phase 5 – Transfer PMO
11. Lessons Learned
12. Some Further Thoughts

13. More Inspiration  
Appendix 1 Maturity Models  
Appendix 2 p3m global  
Further Reading  
Glossary

This book has a total of 154 pages. Many of the chapters listed above consist of only one to four pages, but by far the largest is Chapter 8 (Set up PMO) with 28 pages. This book is one of the few that includes a Glossary. Its four pages list 34 terms that are generally relevant to Program Management.

While the authors are careful to point out the various roles that a "PMO" might play, in this book they are equally careful not to settle for any one interpretation of the letters "PMO". That's because there are a variety of possible interpretations of the label "PMO". For example: "Project Management Office", or "Program Management Office", or even "Portfolio Management Office". Obviously, these mean different things to different corporate organizations, with very different corporate expectations. Nevertheless, the authors hasten to add that "PMO" does *not* stand for "Projects Mostly Over-budget!"<sup>10</sup>

This book is well written in a clear easy-to-read style. It is also well supported by figures, tables and bullet lists for easy reference. In our view, it provides realistic advice for any organization contemplating setting up a "PMO" where the prevailing project throughput warrants it.

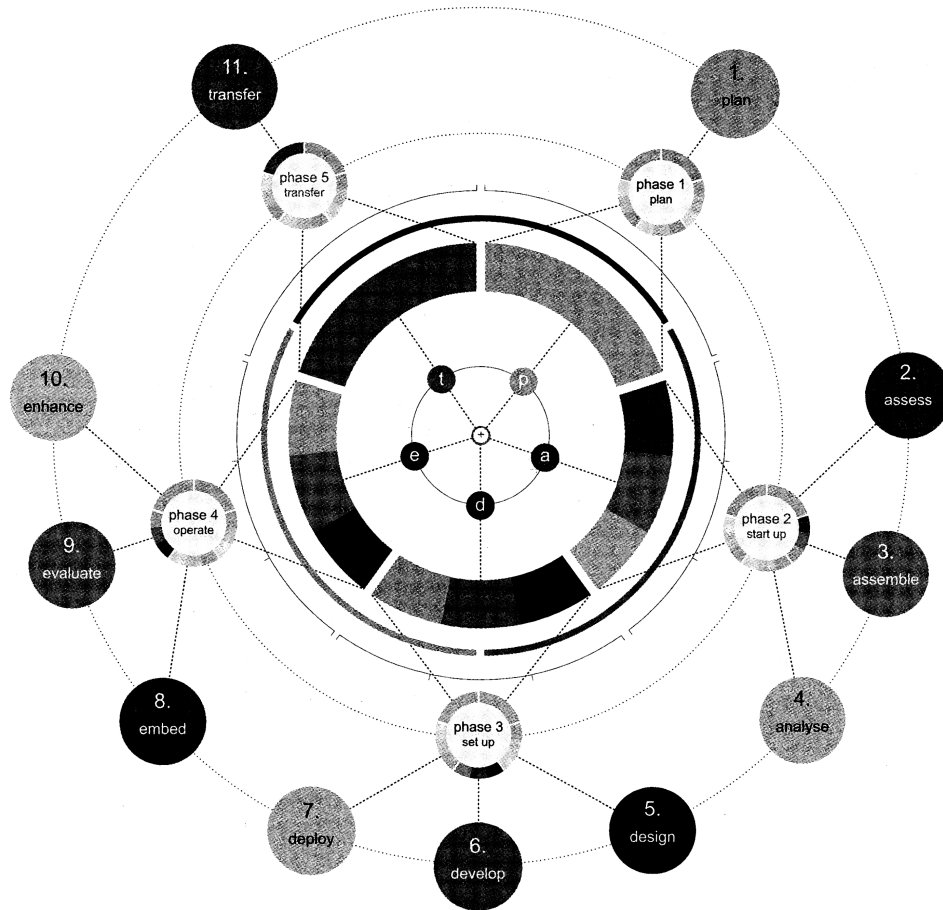
### **What we liked**

After justifying the concept of a PMO as described, the real meat of the book starts with Chapter 5 – Introduction to the Plan where, right off the bat, authors Peter Taylor and Ray Mead state categorically:<sup>11</sup>

"Delivering a PMO is a project. ... So, as a project, it should have clear deliverables, well-defined stakeholders and sufficient allocation of resources. Moreover, it should be a model project, approached with the same degree of rigor and professionalism that will be expected from all the projects in its future care. It should be the shining light, the standard by which all other projects are measured and the platform for many other future project successes."

That's a pretty tall order, but highly desirable.

After listing and describing the primary steps for a successful PMO delivery, the authors offer for the occasion their own copyright framework, PAD3T™, as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: The Authors' working framework as applied to establishing a PMO<sup>12</sup>**

This diagram shows a life cycle of five phases encompassing eleven stages as denoted by the two outer rings. The authors state that this design is the product of their own experience, but that not all phases or stages may be necessary, depending on the needs of the organization in question.<sup>13</sup> The authors then describe each of the phases and their respective stages in great detail down to the work package level.<sup>14</sup> All of this is in language that should appeal to an upper management level.

This takes us through to Chapter 10: Phase 5 – Transfer PMO. In the intervening chapters, the authors provide typical advice for instituting projects of this kind, covering every step of the way. These recommendations will be of particular help to those using the book as a recipe for establishing a PMO for the first time. Interestingly, in this journey we encountered some topics that we were not expecting to find in this book. For example:

- "Stakeholders should be made aware that, as each stage is planned and executed, planning accuracy ranges should narrow to Definitive Estimates (-5% to +10%) for each work package."<sup>15</sup>
- "It is generally accepted that competency is a combination of Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes (KSAs)".<sup>16</sup> And "Competency assessment has long demonstrated value to organizations in areas such as recruitment and selection, performance management, employee development, succession planning and organizational change."<sup>17</sup>
- Tips for engaging and interviewing senior directors and executives, followed by a 5-point list of generic criteria as to the suitability of an executive for interview.<sup>18</sup>

- The MoSCoW technique for quickly classifying the relative importance of requirements for the outcome of a project.<sup>19</sup>
- Need for capacity analysis where "more and more is 'pushed into the project sausage machine'. An implied capability planning assumption of infinite capacity that is never a reality."<sup>20</sup>
- Descriptions of four types of PMO: Supporting; Controlling; Directive; and Blended.<sup>21</sup>
- A list of ten essential content headings of a typical PMO Charter, covering Overview & Objectives, and the PMO Scope.
- Tips on Change Management; Marketing Plan; Training; and Deploying a Portfolio Management component.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps the most remarkable finding is a five-page table in which the Functional Area Maturity expectations of 18 PMO Functional Areas are described on each of five progressive stages of maturity. This table would provide a valuable tool for assessing the overall progress of a PMO towards top quality service and value to its sponsoring organization.

The book concludes with ten Lessons Learned (by the authors) — well, nine actually, the tenth being to learn from the previous nine!

## Downside

According to the authors *Introduction*:<sup>23</sup>

"Delivering Successful PMOs is intended to be the companion book to *Leading Successful PMOs* (Gower) by Peter Taylor, which was a guide to all project based organizations. It provided a common language to describe the variety of possible PMOs, explaining how to do the right things, in the right way, in the right order ... "

Given the admonition to do things in the right order, one might reasonably expect the first order of business would have been to establish a unique name for "Program Management Office", now the subject of this book. But apparently, that was not to be. Indeed, the authors now explain that:<sup>24</sup>

"On paper, PMO stands for 'Project Management Office' ... Confusingly, PMO can also mean Program Management Office, again depending on its function."

After several paragraphs elaborating on this dilemma in their previous book, the authors summarized their position by stating:<sup>25</sup>

"That was a long explanation; in simpler, shorter terms a PMO was described as:  
'Doing the right things, in the right way, in the right order, with the right team.' "

But why pussyfoot around this naming convention? Why not establish a suitable label for use throughout the whole of this book? Hopefully this would have become sufficiently well known to be entrenched worldwide. If nothing else, that would be of significant benefit to book sales. Our choice as a short-form for "Program Management Office" is PgMO, which we have adopted throughout this critique. This follows the style of reference for "Project Portfolio Management Office" that is steadily growing, i.e. "PPfMO".

Referring back to "Working Framework" shown in Figure 1 earlier, we are not clear why the sequence of work is displayed as a circle. That's considering that the outcome of this project is the transfer of the new organizational element to its new masters. Assuming the project to be successfully delivered, then why would it need to be repeated into another cycle? However, as noted earlier, the authors do recommend it be applied to the new projects for which this entity will be responsible.

Another thing that we noticed in particular is that the authors gave no indication to the potential reader about the applicability of an organization having a need for a PgMO in the first place. Surely that must be an organization with a sufficient number of projects and potential projects that are all competing for limited corporate financing and resources? If this is true, then it seems to us that the most likely organizations that have sufficient competing projects to justify a PgMO are those in the Information Technology sector.

So potential readers of this book should keep that focus in mind.

### ***Concluding thought***

One vital point that we have not touched on is the question of "Monetizing the PMO". Here's what the authors have to say about that:<sup>26</sup>

"A PMO costs! It is obvious. There is the money to staff and to run the PMO together with any incurred operational expenses and systems investments and, when the PMO interfaces with other parts of the organization – as it should, there is associated cost to that time and effort. Of course, the belief from those that sponsor a PMO is that delivering more successful projects will more than save the money invested. And that is the primary purpose of any PMO, to deliver healthier and more successful projects appropriate to the business strategy of the organization.

PMOs are not traditionally a profit centre and as such they don't generate revenue themselves, although it can be strongly argued that they do facilitate making money [or saving it] through the delivery of those successful projects."

In which case, dear reader, for PMO survival, be sure to:

1. Make a careful study and record of the performance of your present project management teams before you even think about implementing a PMO. This will provide a basis for comparison and justification in the future.
2. Carry out a regular health check on your PMO once installed, to establish the level of service and performance being provided as well as the levels of success of the resulting projects. Hopefully, armed with this data, you will be able to establish a regime of "continuous improvement" to justify the PMO's continuing existence.<sup>27</sup>

R. Max Wideman  
Fellow, PMI

---

<sup>1</sup> Taylor, Peter, & Ray Mead, *Delivering Successful PMOs*, Gower Publishing Limited, Surrey, UK, back cover.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p11

<sup>3</sup> While many shut downs may well be due to poor PgMO management, nevertheless in difficult economic times financing becomes scarce, projects are shelved, hence less need for a PgMO and since it is an overhead, it becomes the first target to downsizing.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> To avoid confusion with other meanings of "PMO", we have adopted the label "PgMO" throughout this review. See further comment under *Downside*.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p16 – some relevant extracts from the ensuing text.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, back cover

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p xi – p xii

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p xi

- <sup>10</sup> Ibid, p4
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid, p17
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid, p19
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid, p27
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid, pp27-28
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid, p33
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid, p35
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid, pp40-41
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid, p43. MoSCoW stands for '**M**ust have; **S**hould have; **C**ould have; and **W**ould like.'
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid p45
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid, p54-56
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid, pp73, 75, 77, and 78
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid, p1
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid, p3
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid, p4
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid, p117
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid. For tips on performance evaluation, including Health Checks and Audits, refer to pages 88-92.