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Having a Project Support Office

The case for a project (or programme) support office

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The case for a project (or programme) support office

This paper outlines the many benefits of creating and developing a project or programme support office. The office can be set up to provide overall support for both projects and programmes. For speed and ease of reading we have referred to project management only. Where project management is mentioned, it may also be appropriate to use the word programme.

What is a project support office (PSO?)

"It is a business function charged with providing the organisation with the necessary supporting infrastructure and services to ensure that its portfolio of projects are being effectively and efficiently directed, managed and delivered."

There are a number of types of PSO and each one will provide the organisation with a number of services and levels of support. You will need to identify the one which suits your needs best and build it specifically for your organisation.

What does a project office do and what are the benefits?

What they can do	The benefits to the organisation
<p>1. Supporting the written Project Management System</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> staff will know where they can get support for their projects <input type="checkbox"/> staff in the PSO will encourage, cajole etc people to use the same processes e.g. getting approval to ensure there is consistency of delivery across the company <input type="checkbox"/> use the same terminology and know what their responsibilities are e.g. project sponsor or project manager <input type="checkbox"/> it will ensure people practice prevention by carrying out risk and stakeholder analysis as well as putting plans into operation to manage them <input type="checkbox"/> realistic project plans will be developed and delivered <input type="checkbox"/> the PSO will ensure monitoring of projects becomes an active process <input type="checkbox"/> formal project closure takes place with learning identified
<p>2. Providing a repository for experience & knowledge gained in the organisation</p>	<p>There are many lessons learned on projects. But, they remain with that individual or project team. The project office can identify the real lessons learned and disseminate these to others on similar types of project. This can save valuable time and effort across the project community</p>

<p>3. Coaching project managers and project sponsors</p>	<p>This is a critical role for the organisation. It can save valuable training costs by using staff in the PSO to actively coach people to use the internal PMS</p>
<p>4. Business cases are well defined</p>	<p>This will ensure that there is a solid reason for the project – the business case - as well as ensuring there is a link with the overall objectives of the organisation.</p> <p>It is often true that project managers struggle to identify the true costs and true benefits of projects. The PSO will through its internal expertise be able to support staff in this important area.</p>
<p>5. Identifying the links between projects</p>	<p>There are often links with different projects and unless you are able to take a helicopter view it is difficult to see where these are. The PSO will ensure links are clear working with the relevant project managers and senior managers</p>
<p>6. Managing risks consistently and effectively</p>	<p>The PSO will be in a unique position being able to see across projects ensuring that any new risks, avoidance or containment strategies that are developed can be applied to other projects</p>
<p>7. Monitoring & control processes</p>	<p>All projects need to be monitored effectively. The PSO can support the project sponsor and project manager by helping to create robust monitoring and control processes. It is not envisaged that the PSO will take over the formal monitoring role of the project sponsor</p>
<p>8. Providing a library facility</p>	<p>Where does the final paperwork finish up for completed or abandoned projects? What is the quality of this paperwork like? The PSO can provide a library service – storing project files but also advising on the type of documentation that is necessary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> for audit purposes <input type="checkbox"/> for research purposes e.g. estimates, planning schedules <input type="checkbox"/> for legal reasons
<p>9. Use of project management software</p>	<p>There are many project management tools on the market to support the drive to deliver projects effectively. The PSO should be the central hub of any software use They can provide the training and internal support needed for the company</p>

10. Capturing experience and knowledge	The PSO can provide a wide range of data on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">□ the skills needed to manage a particular project□ the skills available in the organisation□ methods that work and methods that do not work□ measurement criteria e.g. success criteria, estimates of time and cost against particular activities□ common faults in previous projects including lessons learned reports
11. Providing specialist skills	It is never the intention the PSO provide the staff to manage the project. They may however provide consultative support or a range of other skills by agreement. They can also facilitate bringing in of specialist skills and expertise
12. Benefit management	It is essential that all projects have agreed project benefits set out early in its life. These need to be monitored as well as linked into an overall benefits management plan for the authority. The PSO will do this.
13. Simplifying project management structures	There are many project management structures – some hugely complex involving many partners others very simple. The PSO will support each project advising on the most appropriate structure and working with the key players to get it right

There is no one specific role for a Project office; it is company specific, one will maybe advise, the other may control, the other actually do some of the project for you. You will need to develop a business case for a PSO and develop it in line with the specific needs of the organisation.



Services provided by Ron Rosenhead & Project Agency

I provide a wide range of services. Some of these are listed below:

- ❑ Delivering practical project management training:
 - designed to ensure project managers and project team members understand the processes and skills to deliver effectively
 - running PRINCE2 qualification programmes or PRINCE2 training workshops
- ❑ Developing in-house project management systems i.e. a customised project management system ensuring consistency of approach - complete with templates
- ❑ Running briefing sessions for project sponsors so they can understand their important role in projects
- ❑ Carrying out audits of projects – after project completion, end of stage or an audit of internal project management approaches.
- ❑ Organising and running start up workshops for groups pre project – ensuring projects get off to a really effective start
- ❑ Developing effective business cases.
- ❑ Effective project leadership.
- ❑ Working with senior managers identifying the key projects for the organisation and their priority
- ❑ Individual coaching support to project managers and project sponsors
- ❑ Developing programme management strategies and establishing project [programme] support offices

Please contact me here: www.ronrosenhead.co.uk/contact or call 020 8446 7766 for further information