Área Temática: Gestão de Pessoas

THE BENEFITS OF A PROJECT MANAGEMENT OFFICE [PMO] IMPLEMENTATION: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH.

Resumo

A área de Recursos Humanos, em resposta às transformações digitais com o uso intensivo da tecnologia da informação nos processos de recrutamento, seleção, treinamento e retenção de talentos, também incorporou novas metodologias e ferramentas capazes de contribuir para o desenvolvimento e gerenciamento de projetos. A necessidade de inovação contínua e a melhoria dos processos tradicionais tornam a maturidade das práticas de gerenciamento de projetos ainda mais relevante para as empresas. Este artigo desenvolveu um estudo de caso em uma empresa global de logística, mais especificamente em um de seus departamentos de RH responsável pela gestão de plataformas globais, aprendizado e talentos, para identificar a possibilidade de implementar um Escritório de Gerenciamento de Projetos [PMO] em sua estrutura. Três projetos diferentes no departamento foram analisados por meio de entrevistas para compreender melhor o contexto organizacional, as necessidades de gerenciamento de projetos e o papel potencial de um PMO. No total, quatorze entrevistas foram realizadas durante o período de maio a agosto de 2022. Os resultados do estudo indicam um papel equilibrado para o PMO, aumentaria o sucesso dos projetos.

Palavras-chave: Escritório de Gerenciamento de Projetos; Recursos humanos; Abordagem Qualitativa; Estratégia de Transformação digital.

Abstract

The Human Resources (HR) area, in response to digital transformations with the intensive use of information technology in the processes of recruitment, selection, training and retention of talent, has also incorporated new methodologies and tools capable of contributing to the development and management of projects. The need for ongoing innovation and improvement of traditional processes makes the maturity of project management practices even more relevant to companies. This paper developed a case study on a global logistics company, more specifically in an area of the HR department responsible for managing global platforms, learning, and talent to identify the benefits of implementing a Project Management Office [PMO] in its structure. Three different projects in the department were analysed through interviews to better understand the organisational context, project management needs, and the potential role of a PMO. In total fourteen interviews were conducted during the period of May to August 2022. The study results indicate that the implementation of the PMO in the HR would increase the success fee in the project.

Keywords: Project Management Office; Human Resource; Qualitative Approach; Digital Transformation Strategy.

1. Introduction

Business strategy describes the way in which a firm decides to compete in the market compared to its competitors (Walker, Orville, & Ruekert, 1987). The introduction of Generation Z into the picture brings the need for innovation and changes inside Human Resources (HR) processes and strategies, for a company to continue relevant in the very competitive labour market we experience today (Huemann, Keegan, &Turner, 2007).

According to Mankins and Steele (2005), firms realize only 63% of their strategies' potential value, and Johnson (2004) reports that 66% of corporate strategy is never implemented. Strategy implementation has been frequently considered as the graveyard of strategy (Grundy, 1998). This is where structured and mature project management practices come into play. Shenhar, Dvir, Levy and Maltz (2001) emphasize that projects and especially project portfolios are “powerful strategic weapons” as they can be considered as a central building block in implementing the intended strategy (Dietrich & Lehtonen, 2005).

As the role of project management in the modern organization has grown, many organizations have identified a need to formalize the practice of project management (Letavec, 2006). In A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide), the Project Management Office [PMO] is defined as “a management structure that standardizes the project-related governance processes and facilitates the sharing of resources, methodologies, tools, and techniques” (PMI, 2021).

The framework of PMBOK gives standardization of project management methodology and process but it is often in opposition to the flexibility needed in the execution of a project in real life (Hobbs, Aubry, & Thuillier, 2008), however, it can be highly valuable to an organizational environment where you have complex networks of projects and stakeholders.

Failures in projects may arise from imprecise cost estimation, inadequate scheduling, scope expansion, and improper project plan execution (Mari, Raza, & Lahbar, 2023). The establishment of a Project Management Office (PMO) can serve to mitigate these risks, align with strategic objectives, and uphold guidelines, policies, and methodologies to enhance the efficiency of project execution (Meng, 2012; Mari et al., 2023). The PMO also plays a pivotal role in enabling an organization to adapt to evolving market trends and increased competition (Khokhar, Devi, Siddiqui, & Bhatti, 2022; Mari et al., 2023).

A PMO plays an important function in the standardisation of project management practices in an organisation. A PMO is an enabler of project management effectiveness through lessons learnt from both project success and project failure perspectives Hans and Mnkandlab (2022).

Managing multiple sets of projects simultaneously is a challenge that organizations have to master today in order to implement their strategic objectives (Dietrich & Lehtonen, 2005). Multi-project PMOs have emerged within these multi-project management environments as a major device to develop competence in project management, manage single project performance and coordinate multiple projects and actors (Unger, Gemunden, & Aubry, 2012).

The study titled "The Role of Project Management Office in the Multi-Project Environment" authored by Khokhar et al. (2022), sheds light on the function of PMO as facilitators in the context of managing multiple projects. This research delves into the difficulties encountered by organizations when handling numerous projects and investigates the ways in which PMO can efficiently coordinate and assist project teams to ensure the achievement of successful project outcomes (Mari et al., 2023).

This paper analyzed a leading multinational logistics company that has over 600.000 employees worldwide and is constantly looking to improve its HR processes and platforms to maintain its competitive advantage in the labour market. The company studied has a complex structure, with an extensive range of projects happening regularly. And this case study highlights the significance of HR's strategic role within the company, necessitating the creation of new projects to meet organizational demands.

The PMO is a part of a complex network linking strategy, projects, and structures (Hobbs et al., 2008), often seen as a means to coordinate, standardize, optimize, and manage project practices (Letavec, 2006). This study aims to enable a more strategic project management approach by implementing a PMO within HR department, offering the opportunity to analyze and enhance project performance, success, and the support structure for continuous improvement initiatives among project managers.

The survey question is: In such big company, should be productive two adopt a PMO structure? To answer this question, it was done fourteen interviews to understand the main challenges of the project managers and how they think that a PMO could help them.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Project Management

The definition of project management is a "[...] temporary endeavour undertaken to create a product, service, or result [...]" (PMI, 2013, p. 3). The temporary nature signifies that it possesses a beginning and end and is structured through a life cycle distinguished by five process groups, as identified in the PMBOK® Guide: initiation, planning, executing, monitoring and controlling, and closing (PMI, 2013).

Therefore, project management involves the planning, organization, direction, and control of resources to achieve a defined objective within a relatively short timeframe, set to accomplish specific goals and objectives (Oliveira & Martins, 2018). A project is a unique and singular activity to achieve specific outcomes upon its conclusion. It is comprehensive enough to necessitate specialized coordination and meticulous control over deadlines, relationships, costs, and performance (Meredith & Mantel, 1995; Oliveira & Martins, 2018). Viewed as a fusion of organizational resources, a project is designed to generate or enhance something that previously did not exist. The overarching goal is to contribute to an improvement in performance capabilities during the planning and execution of organizational strategies (Cleland & Ireland, 2002).

The essential prerequisites for initiating a project include having a justifiable reason to start, ensuring that the rationale remains valid throughout the project's lifecycle, and possessing a documented and approved justification (OGC, 2011; Oliveira & Martins, 2018). To attain this, the implementation goals and expected benefits must be clearly articulated in business terms and documented.

2.2 Project Management Office

As projects continue to gain significance within organizations, the subject Project Management Office (PMO) start to become more relevant for the academic’s survey (Rodrigues, Rabechini, & Csillag, 2006; Oliveira & Martins, 2018). The PMO are emerging as crucial elements assisting organizations in enhancing their business management. This is achieved through the establishment of a formal structure, which serves to minimize associated risks, alleviate inherent conflicts between projects and operations, and provide suitable methodologies for effective project implementation.

From a structural perspective, the PMO is a formal component in the organizational chart of a company providing support and advisory functions in a

functional structure, its carries executive responsibilities, managerial support, planning, monitoring, and control of project activities within the organization, encompassing specific projects, programs, and portfolios (Oliveira & Martins, 2018).

This entails a pragmatic approach through an executive-endorsed plan that engages key stakeholders possessing a strategic perspective of the organization. These stakeholders play a pivotal role in defining the project's justification and disseminating it across all organizational levels. This communication serves as guidance for decision-making processes, ensuring that the project stays aligned with the predetermined objectives and anticipated business benefits (OGC, 2011; ISACA, 2012; Oliveira & Martins, 2018).

The PMO´s deployment must be aligned to the organizational to the overall direction with the business strategy to give to the company a competitive advantage, that is essential for survival in the external environment. The PMO integrates data and information from corporate projects and evaluates the progress in achieving strategic goals. It naturally connects portfolios, programs, projects, and measurement systems, according to the Project Management Institute (PMI, 2013).

The PMO offers the opportunity to increasing the success fee because its approach uses to apply the best practices to prevent common pitfalls and, in this way, to avoid failure (Mari et al., 2023).

2.3 The Project Management Office Approach

A PMO serves as a best practice´s repository in planning, estimating, risk assessment, scope definition, tracking skills, reporting project deadlines, and maintaining standards and methods. Its role is not to force how staff should perform their tasks but to offer the project manager and the project team a foundational framework for the initiation, planning, execution, control, and end of their projects. Essentially, the PMO provides a starting point and guidance for these essential project processes (Oliveira & Martins, 2018).

To achieve its success, it is necessary define the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) to measure and monitor the activities under their responsibility, thus, the PMO assumes the ability to demonstrate its value and effectiveness for the organization, improving the organizational performance (Oliveira & Martins, 2018).

2.4 The PMO and the Business Strategy

The strategy is always linked with the need to get results and use an efficacious way to reach them. Strategic management comprises a series of managerial decisions that fit the organizational long-term performance, encompassing strategy formulation, implementation, evaluation, and control. Strategic planning, as highlighted by Kerzner (2006), involves defining the organization's future destination and how to get there. The execution of these strategies occurs through the implementation of programs, projects, budgets, and procedures (Oliveira & Martins, 2018).

While the 3rd edition (PMI, 2004) of project management standards refers a PMO as a centralized structure, the 4th edition emphasizes the importance of aligning the PMO goals to the business strategy and objectives based on organizational needs. In contrast, the 5th edition (PMI, 2013) shifts focus to a management structure capable to perform several types of structure and different projects strategies. These structures vary in the degree of control and influence delegated to the PMO entity.

3. Methodology

In order to validate the value added to the implementation of a PMO into the organizational context in study, this research was segmented into analysis topics. The materials and methods were defined to reach the final goal of proving if a PMO could

be implemented in the referred context, how it could be implemented and what should be the role of that PMO.

According to Singh, Keil, and Kasi's Delphi study (2009) on PMO implementation challenges, key obstacles include inflexible corporate culture, lack of experienced project managers, and inadequate change management strategy. Therefore, understanding the role and implementation process of a PMO in the studied department requires clarity on the current organizational structure and decision-making levels. Research on relevant positions, functions, and tasks was conducted via interviews and available materials on the company's transparency portals.

Pellegrinelli and Garagna (2009) highlight that a PMO can be a battleground between empowerment and control, people and processes, and political factions. Therefore, a global PMO, as studied here, should align with Business Unit interrelationships. After identifying the company's structure, the department's role was examined to understand project impacts. This identified essential factors for a customized PMO implementation. An interview with the Vice President (VP) gathered this data and in this interview, it was mapped the most relevant projects for the department's central strategy within the company's 2025 vision.

A developed PMO offers services and organizational focus in project management areas. Its mission is fulfilled through training, consulting, mentoring personnel, and enhancing project teams, promoting best practices and communication (Rad & Levin, 2002). Properly integrating a PMO requires understanding project management practices, team dynamics, including the Project Manager's role and support across decision-making levels. Interviews with project members and Product Owners collected qualitative insights on project execution.

Finally, it is important to understand the effect of current project management practices on project performance and success. Project success is measured by the business objectives, while the project management success is evaluated instead with traditional criteria such as respect for costs, schedule, and quality (Cooke-Davies, 2002). To obtain this data, information was collected in interviews with the Project Managers, project members and the Vice President of the department.

The Project Management Office (PMO) remains a focal point in project management research (Muller, Gluckler, & Aubry, 2013). In this study we explore in a qualitative approach, the case of multi projects company, exploring, together with the project managers and Stakeholders, how, and if, the PMO would help to increase the project’s success fee.

In this paper it was used the Case Study Methodology, for Yin (2014, p. 17): “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the case) in-depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident. In other words, you would want to do case study research because you want to understand a real-world case and assume that such an understanding is likely to involve important contextual conditions pertinent to your case”.

3.1 The Company and Interviewers Description

To achieve outcomes, the research employed the qualitative method, a case study. Qualitative research aims for inductive, subjective, and contextual understanding (Morgan, 2013). This study used open-ended interviews to develop theories about the department's organizational and project management context.

The study analyzed three projects (P1, P2, P3), conducting 14 interviews, including VP, Team Leader, project managers, and members. Eleven were from HR in

the studied department; three held IT roles linked to HR projects. Demographically diverse, based at Bonn HQ in Germany, more details in the Table 1.

Table 1. Description of interviewees

Occupation	Project or program	Number of Interviewers
Vice president HR	P1, P2 and P3	1
Project Manager HR	P1, P2 and P3	2
Project Manager and Project member HR	P1 and P2	1
Team Leader HR	P1 and P2	1
Project Member HR	P1, P2 and P3	6
Project Member IT	P1 and P3	3

Font: Original data from research.

In each interview conducted, was guaranteed to the interviewees the anonymity, the interviews were not recorded; however, notes were captured during all interviews and carefully transcripted after.

Following data collection and analysis, this study aimed to comprehend the department's project management needs and its readiness for a PMO integration within the current structure. This comprehension informs a final implementation proposal, encompassing the suitable PMO role classification and essential considerations for effective project management support within the department.

3.2 Projects Descriptions

There were 3 projects analyzed in this paper, all of them mapped to be the most strategic ones for the delivery of the department's and company's vision by the Vice President.

- **Project One (P1)**: it aims to deliver a new internal platform for all the group's employees worldwide. This project has not only a strong IT orientation but also a major change management need to have a successful implementation. The impact of this project on the way the company does business demands the involvement of many stakeholders in the process creating a very complex structure. The project is currently in the development phase and going through minimum viable product (MVP) processes predicted to continue until at least the next year before the actual roll-out of the platform group-wide.
- **Project Two (P2):** this project is a continuous improvement initiative to a globally established platform in the company. Therefore, this initiative can be identified as a program that encompasses several different projects within its scope. This is a well-accepted term among program members that identify the current phase of the object of study as "in run mode". The improvements are based on user stories that are created via employee feedback. Each user story generates a new project within the team that uses a SCRUM methodology to maintain an agile routine and mindset for fast implementation and continuous improvement.
- **Project Three (P3)**: this project is creation of a new career website for the company, it considered closed and happened between the end of 2020 and the middle of 2021. The project, although identified to use an Agile approach, did not follow a traditional Agile structure. This project also had a technological

background, demanding a big stakeholder management effort among the different divisions of the company and with the provider of choice.

3.3 Corporate Structure Description

The company has a vertical hierarchy, structured into four categories: group functions, operations, global business services, and customer solutions and innovation. Corporate functions are managed at the Headquarters, while operating business is overseen by five divisions. Global business services handles internal activities like procurement, IT, and finance. Customer solutions and innovation manage partnerships with major partners.

The department under study is part of a subcategory in the Human Resources (HR) area within the Corporate Center responsible for the employee's experience, technology and data. The scope of the department is focused on designing, implementing and managing group-wide talent processes and HR platforms by partnering with divisions to contribute to business success. Therefore, the global platforms for learning and talent are all developed and managed by the team.

The decision of projects within the department's portfolio is mainly led by the Strategy 2025 of the company. The decision-making process involves several stakeholders in different hierarchical layers, from global HR Board members to divisional representatives and legal entities overall responsible for legal compliance of the group.

4 Results and discussions

We divided this topic into five different sub-sections with the objective to present the results easily. In these topics we discuss the main challenges and findings. Thus, topics are:

- The Stakeholders and the Project Decisions
- Project Management Methodology
- Project Manager Roles and Responsibilities
- Project and Project Management Success
- Project Management Office Role

4.1 The Stakeholders and the Strategic Project Decisions

The interviews revealed that stakeholder involvement transcends strategic project portfolio selection, extending deeply into all project phases. This dynamic, identified as a significant challenge by project members, hampers the project team's autonomy in decision-making. Feedback from interviewees included statements like '...the team did not want that provider, it was a top-down decision' (I3, P3, Project Manager), 'There was a lot of expectation but not a realistic timeframe' (I10, P3, Project Member), and 'The ones that took the decision were not involved in the project.' (I10, P3, Project Member).

The VP, during the interview, revealed that the department's size and project wave nature didn't align with PMO implementation. However, there was a PMO collaborating with the HR Board on HR project portfolio. The VP noted authority remained within divisions, posing challenges for PMO success. This organizational dynamic not only impacts PMO allocation but also project execution. Company's project management context is shaped by corporate structure and culture. Complex decision-making structure significantly influences PMO role and necessitates change management for successful implementation.

4.2 Project Management Methodology

Although the department works on very complex projects with global implementation, the project management culture is not well established. It had only identified one professional within the department that is fully dedicated to Project

Management. This professional is located under the Vice President and provides support cross-project and with multi-background expertise. In addition to this PM, the department also uses internal and external consultant services to support big projects.

In one of the interviews, it was pointed out that 2 years ago, an internal training service provided support by leading a workshop about SCRUM methodology since the department did not have any experience whatsoever in agile. After this workshop, it was presented by Interviewee 2 a vision for the development of Project Management capabilities inside of the department for all team members in the course of the next few years, involving not only agile but also IT Project Management basics. This was put on hold due to the prioritization of other responsibilities within the scope of the department.

The absence of a robust project management structure seemingly didn't affect project deliverable quality in the department. However, this gap became evident in responses about project practices. The studied projects followed an agile approach, with members suggesting key improvements. One project manager noted, 'We used agile methodology, but it was chaotic. It was not a structure, it was just about delivering it fast' (I3, P3, Project Manager). Notably, I3, a first-time manager, lacked training. P1 members also highlighted limited Product Owner autonomy, leading to pre-determined timelines and confusion, resembling a waterfall approach.

Some of the key factors identified by interviewees for these problems to happen were the lack of authority of project managers, the lack of support for the role in the department, and the lack of training and knowledge about PM within the department. A change of culture within this context is essential in order for the successful implementation of the PMO role. The same change could also be supported by the PMO role, by strengthening project management awareness and processes.

4.3 Project manager roles and responsibilities

The Vice President made the choice of Project Managers for the projects in study. The criteria pointed to be key for the allocations was: “They should have technical expertise in the product. They need to satisfy the users and customers” (I1, P1, P2 and P3, Vice President). In order for that to happen, in the view of the same interviewee, project managers should serve as a central point to guarantee the successful delivery of the products in a customer-centric way, with a solution-oriented mindset and strong team management skills, being the “equivalent to a manager” (I1, P1, P2 and P3, Vice President).

Anantatmula (2010) emphasizes how a project manager's leadership influences project outcomes. Cleland (1995) highlights unique challenges for project managers in matrix environments without formal authority. Smith (1999) adds project uniqueness and team complexities increase role complexity. A skilled Project Manager greatly impacts project success. Interviews consistently revealed expected Project Manager roles, responsibilities, skills, and values. Participants emphasized the Project Manager's key responsibilities: 'The Project Manager should ensure the right people do the right thing' (I6, P1, Project Member) and 'The Project Manager should link work streams together' (I14, P3, Project Member).

Taking into consideration that management expectations and stakeholders management were indicated as two of the main pain points for the projects studied, accordingly to all interviewees, the Project Manager's role is essential to facilitate the exchange between different stakeholders in order to defend the project member’s interest: “They should fight for the project and be able to start discussions with management” (I2, P1 and P2, Project Manager).

Other responsibilities such as: setting up the project structure, setting up meetings, facilitating decision-making, team management, budget and schedule

management were pointed out in most of the interviews. Most importantly, the Project Manager should not make product-related decisions within the project, but rather be responsible for facilitating the decision-making process between the project team and in alignment with stakeholders' expectations: “The PM should ensure delivery on what was agreed, not have them doing the work for the product owners” (I6, Male, Project Member).

When it comes to the skills needed for a project manager, the interviewees pointed out as hard skills: project management methodologies including agile methodology, budget management, schedule management, stakeholder management, team management, risk management, planning and goal setting, and resources management. As for soft skills: communication, persuasion, empathy, motivation, active listening, and leadership.

After analyzing the answers from the interviews, it was clear that among all skills mapped as important for the success of project management, the main gaps seem to sit under the hard skills for most projects, especially stakeholder, budget, and schedule management. The understanding and experience with IT-related Project Management was not mentioned by any of the interviewees although all projects had a strong technological background.

Another interesting factor raised by some of the interviewees was related to the values that the Project Manager should have. One of the Project Managers said that within the role of a Project Manager, “It is important to have passion. They should fight for the project and be able to start discussions with management” (I2, P1 and P2, Project Manager). Passion showed to be an important leadership attribute for the PM in order to motivate the team and facilitate discussions within the organizational context of the company. Another project member stated that: “The PM needs to be comfortable and brave to call out things and drive changes” (I6, P1, Project Member).

Although the choice of Project Managers may continue to sit under the responsibilities of the Vice President of the area, guaranteeing the department has the professionals equipped with the right knowledge and capabilities to support the projects and teams is the role of a PMO (Tshuma, Steyn, & Van Waveren, 2020). To have such a role within the structure, can be a very important milestone in terms of changing the project management culture in the company giving PMs more authority.

4.4 Project and Project Management Success

Success in this paper can be separated into two main topics that are relevant to the PMOs role: project management success and project success. The project management literature agrees that there are two components of project success, (Jugdev & Müller, 2005; Morris & Hough, 1987). Project success factors are elements of a project that can be influenced to increase the likelihood of success; these are independent variables that make success more likely. Project success criteria are the measures by which we judge the successful outcome of a project; these are dependent variables that measure project success (Huemann et al., 2007).

There have been various attempts over the history of project management to define suitable criteria against which to define and measure project success (Mcleod, Doolin, & Macdonnell, 2012). Perhaps the most well-recognized of these is the long-established and widely used “iron triangle” of time, cost, and quality (Cooke-Davies, 2002; Ika, 2009; Jugdev & Müller, 2005). For P1, P2 and P3 these criteria were identified as important for project success. However, the interviews showed a clear unbalance between the prioritization of those criteria.

The analysis of interviews from P1 and P3 show that delivering a product according to a specific timeline was not viewed as the most important criteria for project

members, but very important for management to acknowledge their team performance. Instead, the project members pointed out as the main criteria for them the quality management. It was highlighted especially the user acceptance and the fulfilment of user needs, which serves as the lighthouse to guide the project requirements as well as the corresponding timeline to meet those expectations.

The unsatisfactory prioritization led by top-down decisions was identified when asked to Project members if they considered the project successful. One of the members of P3 stated that “The website is online, but I wouldn't call it a success. The product was the bare minimum, not the website our company should and could have” (I12, P3, Project Member). I10 from Project 3 also added that “It would be very ridiculous to call it a success” and “There were a lot of expectations but not a realistic timeframe. I am proud and happy that we delivered something, but it was less than you can imagine. We needed to completely change the project because there was no time to think properly”. In P1 it could be identified the same duality between identifying the project as successful for meeting the timeline of delivery and the actual success in terms of quality.

One example was the comment made by one of its members stating that “I can call it a success because we are live with something and we are learning something from this experience.” however, he also added that “There is more desire to have something visible and not to develop something.” (I6, P1, Project Member).

In a study made by Westerveld (2003) the success factors were grouped into leadership and team, policy and strategy, stakeholder management, resources and contracting. Amongst the interviews conducted for this paper, it can be identified three of those factors being acknowledged as both the most important for project success and also, the main improvement points that influenced the negative perception of the deliverables of projects P1 and P3.

According to project members interviewed, good Leadership and team experience is essential for the good development of the project and key success factors. In P3, members stated that the PM role was fulfilled, there was good team management, and the product was delivered on time, however, they would not consider the project successful. Project member I10 from P3 said that “She (the project manager) was great as a project manager.

The way she managed the project was good. There was the right balance of people”. In P2 a strong PM was essential for project members to have a consolidated routine, leading to good team dynamics and project development. On the other hand, in P1, still an ongoing project and considered successful for its deliveries so far, there was a clear frustration of Project Members regarding the leadership and team management style. This was identified in answers like: “In this project, there is still the “these are the consultants” and “this is the project team”.

There is no power for the team” (I6, P1, Project Member) and “Even with how much the consultants improved the project, they still sometimes need to listen more to what the project members have to say. They don't take feedback on.” (I9, P1 and P2, Project Member). These comments emphasize the PM's success in this study’s context, to be strongly connected to team management more than technical expertise.

Stakeholder Management is the second most important factor for project success according to the interviews conducted. These results can be summarised by the following statement by the Project Manager from P2 and Project Member from P1: “what consumes most time for PMOs is fulfilling requirements from stakeholders. Don't underestimate how much effort it takes.” (I4, P1 and P2, Project Manager and Project Member).

The last factor identified was resource management. All Project Members did not deal exclusively with the development of the projects, but also with run activities from their roles within the company. The unrealistic time frame set for the projects and the pressure from management did not match the resources available. This meant for many of the interviewees to work overtime and burn out.

Project Member I14 said that his success measure was: “That I got out of the project without burning out. People got out really sick during the project.” (I14, P3, Project Member). I12 from Project Number 3 also added playfully that for her, the success measure was to “simply survive". She highlighted that some of the main reasons behind this strong statement was that she did not choose the workstream, so it was very overwhelming.

Her allocation to the project was not based on knowledge on the topic but rather because of a resources gap causing a lot of stress and frustration. I9, a member of P1 and P2 also reported that although she is allocated to both projects, there is still a clear gap of prioritization in resources capacity coming from management expectations.

Project management is planning, organization, monitoring and control of all aspects of a project, with motivation of all included to achieve project goals in a safe manner, within agreed schedule, budget and performance criteria (IPMA, 2006). PM literature has already proven that it is possible to have a successful project with unsuccessful project management, and vice versa (Radujković & Sjekavica, 2017).

A PMO, as a centralized and coordinated management unit for the projects under its domain, should serve in this context balancing the achievement of project success and project management success according to the best interest of project members, users, and stakeholders.

4.5 Project Management Office Role

According to the generic definition of a PMO provided by the Project Management Institute (2008), a Project Management Office is: “An organizational body or entity assigned various responsibilities related to the centralized and coordinated management of those projects under its domain. The responsibilities of the PMO can range from providing project management support functions to actually being responsible for the direct management of a project” (p. 443).

This generic definition is widely accepted. However, Muller et al. (2013) in their paper “A relational typology of Project Management Office” separated this role into three main typologies listed below.

According to Muller et al. (2013) the first typology is the serving role. A PMO exert a serving role if they operate as a service unit to internal and external units, project managers, and project workers. Typically, a PMO offers a number of support functions to projects in order to increase resource efficiency and outcome effectiveness.

In a serving role, a PMO extends the administrative capacity of a project and provides operational support in projects through training, consulting, and specialized task execution. It responds to stakeholder needs and ensures overall project performance.

The second is the controlling role. At the other end of the asymmetry, PMOs take a controlling role when they operate as management units for projects under their domain. Depending on the scope of managerial authority for which they are commissioned, PMOs may be responsible for the enforcement of project management standards such as methods and tools, for the control of compliance with set standards, for evaluation of project performance, and sometimes even for the assessment of employee performance and career promotion (Muller et al. 2013).

A third role, not particularly acknowledged in PMO research is the partnering role. The partnering dimension has received limited or no attention so far and is not explicitly acknowledged in the seminal PMI definition (PMI, 2008).

Partnering refers to a relationship that is characterized by reciprocity, mutuality, and equality. Partnering implies lateral communication between a PMO and other— equally qualified or equally commissioned— PMOs, project managers, or project workers. More concretely, a PMO takes on a partnering role when it engages in equal knowledge sharing, exchange of expertise, lateral advice-giving, and joint learning with equal-level stakeholders (Muller et al. 2013).

The Serving role was pointed out as relevant especially due to its characteristic of extending the capacities of the project team. The Vice President stated that in projects with big complexity such as P3, this role was essential because “The PM was stuck on delivering. There was no possibility for growth or engagement” (I1, P1, P2 and P3, Vice President). Interviewee number 11 also stated that “It is a 5 because it takes the stress from the team to find the right support and set up, giving room for the team to focus on what matters. It means free time for the deliverables.” (I11, P1 and P2, Project Member).

However, some project members also stated that specialized task execution did not fit the context of the projects in question. The main argument was that most projects demanded knowledge of very specific processes of the department and that this could not be provided by a PMO. The main exception was to increase stakeholder management capacity.

The lack of concrete examples of how the serving role could support the projects leads to a smaller prioritization of this role compared to the others. Taking into consideration the presence of entities within the group like the Global Business Services and the in-house consulting, the specialized task execution could be undertaken without the need for a PMO dedicated exclusively to this role within the department. In alternative, the serving role could also be implemented in a PMO placed at a higher hierarchical level. In this case, the PMO could serve as support to PMs across divisions, identifying the company’s needs and coordinating the resources.

In the interviews, the controlling role had a very heterogeneous set of answers. Interviewees from P2 showed particular interest in this role, highlighting that the current PM and SCRUM master have a similar role and it showed to be very important for the successful development of the program. One project member from P1 said that “It is easy for the Project Members to get lost in the tools and not focus on the delivery. It is important to have a clear approach to follow, a structured work. However, it is not more important than the rest of the roles.” (I6, P1, Project Member).

Standardizing the methods and tools can be of great use taking into consideration the feedback received about the miss practices of agile methodology in the projects analyzed. But, it is important to also take into consideration the cultural and emotional effects of such a role. Project Member I7 stated that “There is an emotional component to this role. I don't see the need for it, so for me, it would be a 2. Being controlled from outside the project team does not seem very good. There is this emotional part to it.” (I7, P1, Project Member). Another interviewee elaborated on the cultural aspect of the role within the organizational context: “We need more KPIs to steer more the success of the project. I am more used to more controlled projects. But this role is not fitting into the department culture. It would probably not be accepted in the department.” (I13, P1, Project Member).

When analyzing the Partnering role, it is important to also consider the feedback gathered during the entire interviews, not limited to the PMO role questions. With the

biggest average from all roles, partnering gains the attention of Project Members when it engages in improving communication within project teams and between projects in the department.

As a department with several teams with global responsibilities and dealing with multiple stakeholders, one of the project members said: “We have so many topics that have dependencies and we need to see the connection to be efficient. We have complex and dynamic topics, and without collaboration, it would be challenging. This role would be helpful to avoid silo thinking.” (I2, P1 and P2, Project Manager). The ability to share knowledge and experiences between stakeholders may bring out the possibility of avoiding the same mistakes among projects and guarantee growth and development in the department.

Although it was a very well-perceived role, two members presented some concerns defending that this role may be a little beyond their perception of what a PMO should be entitled to do. One of the members said “it is a bit of a fuzzy role. It is hard to see how it would be implemented” (I8, P1 and P2, Project Member) referring to the potential lack of concrete responsibilities that this role could have when compared to the other two.

The partnering role would play an important part in developing knowledge within the department and sharing expertise to improve the project's performance. Within the scope of the department, this role could serve as a bridge between IT and business, translating business needs into product requirements and improving the quality management of projects.

A partnering role based PMO could build a community of project management within the department for current and ongoing projects and programs. Innovation would also be a big plus to this role since it would help the team build new solutions from past knowledge so the projects are on evidence-based data.

Nevertheless, the partnering role should come together with the controlling role. The structuring of the PM practices in the department is essential for the PMO to gain the trust of the main stakeholders. Therefore, the knowledge built from the partnering role together with the foundation and standardization by the controlling role will help achieve both project success and project management success.

5 Final Remarks

The very close average scores and the comments in the interviews lead to a more balanced role according to the PMO triangle presented in “A Relational typology of Project Management Offices” by Monique Aubry, Johannes Gluckler and Ralf Muller (2013). At the central part of the triangle, the balanced PMO role is positioned, reflecting equilibrium in the intensity of controlling, serving, and partnering (Muller et al., 2013).

However, the overall analysis of interviews points to a slight inclination toward the controlling and partnering role. The PMO would sit under the strategic role of the Vice President providing support in the overall management of projects and project portfolio.

After careful analysis of the results, it can be concluded that the implementation of a PMO could be of great value to the department. However, it would be important to conduct further research on a higher organizational level and cross-divisions, to understand the cultural and behavioural change needed for the successful implementation of the PMO role.

In future research, it would also be valuable to identify the possibility of consolidating the PMO structure across the company, creating a network of support for PMs. For a company with a global presence and countless internal and external

projects, this would be essential to create world-class project management experts and knowledge.

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