

Strategic Implementation of a Project Support Office

A disciplined approach

Introduction

Organizations demand valid project delivery dates. First, leverage this mandate to develop valid project delivery schedules. Use this to increase the project management skill set of the Project Support staff and to instill project management methodology in the project teams. At the same time, assess the challenges and needs of the project teams. Second, get clarity on the purpose, mission, roles, and responsibilities of the three players (executive management committee, Project Support staff, and project teams) involved in product development. Third, plan the strategy and tactics of the Project Support staff – write its business plan. Finally, reinforce project discipline in the project teams using project launches and progress reviews as the tools to motivate adoption.

Charter of the project support office

- A Project Support office has to lead from behind. The power is in the project teams. The people in this office have to teach, coach, counsel, and confront the teams to deliver results.
- The project support staff will be the honest brokers, veracity auditors, and the truth vendors. They will provide tools and systems that stand up to corporate scrutiny.
- A Project Support office has to be intentional about relationships. Who will have account responsibility for the project types? Who is responsible for the relationship with the customer? Who relates to the executives.
- A Project support office has to be intentional about influencing projects. Whom has project team responsibility? Who is responsible for the relationship with the project team? This charge allows the creation of a project liaison, facilitator, or coordinator. How to amplify Project Support office influence is a challenge.
- A Project Support office staff could be four-hatted – one for their technical specialty, one for project team processes, one for project management, one for unique issues the business. Each person would know teams, project management, and the business besides their technical speciality.
- Project team liaisons must possess a strategic perspective. They will be responsible for instilling project management disciplines, project team processes, and learning. This person will need to understand the business, the business purpose for the project, and the competitive environment.

A project support office has to lead from behind.

Strategic plan for implementing project management methodology

- Is there a plan for teaching, then tightening the controls?
- How are SOP's promulgated?
- What about enlisting the executive management committee in implementing?

Strategic Implementation of a Project Support Office *A disciplined approach*

- What are the essential components of project management that must be used?
- What can be flexible? INTEL was flexible on letting the recast of remaining required effort. They were rigid for everyone reporting their effort and the effort remaining – weekly – every week for the three-year project cycle.
- There is a need to plan the business need and the project need for the project support office. Then, plan the implementation. This is a good way to teach others in the office the people issues of project management. Project startups are a place to instill the methodology on new teams. Plan-to-Plan[®] is an excellent tool for this.
- Many opportunities exist to leverage this implementation. Gaining veracity of the schedule offers many. Launching Project teams offer others. Installing requirements for plans, schedules, updates, and similar project management standards offers more. SOP's for project management procedures create another set of opportunities. These need to be incorporated in an Project Support office business plan.
- Address projects, project processes, project management, project team processes, project leadership, and organization project methodology.

Reaping the return on project management discipline

- Documenting the project management process provides insights into the entire process. Components will flow through the same set of tasks – design, procure, prototype, test, etc. and will have a similar task list. Each component will pass through the same gates as in a downhill ski slalom. With a scheduling program, each component could have its own project process. A project can then be a project of three hundred projects each with a set of reports and controls to ensure early warning.
- Once a new project team identifies the components, energy must be spent on estimating the effort or duration. There may be a reluctance to plan in detail. A planning process needs to ensure the right people plan in the right detail at the right time.
- The Project Support office can delegate the scheduling, reporting, and project management to the project manager. With 300 components (sub-projects, for example, each on a similar project path), the completion of each task is a deliverable. The key is keeping them all herded through the gates at a time appropriate for that component.
- Reducing project cycle time. As project management becomes ingrained, the opportunity becomes cutting cycle time. Put teams of people in separate rooms and ask each to cut the total project time by 25%, 50%, and 67%. They would report out using a structured standardized report. The brilliance will be impressive. An exercise such as this one would provide excellent opportunities for the next project team to implement.
- With a valid schedule, teams can measure their personal bests on the same project and between projects. Best in the class can be identified.

A planning process needs to ensure the right people plan in the right detail at the right time.

Implementation of product development software

- Simple, useful, project management software can be a powerful tool – a tool that records the plan, tactics, logic. Teams can provide their own schedules. They can teach the tool one-on-one. Teaching the tool allows teaching project management methodology. They best teach it with a real project. We use SureTrak because of its upward compatibility with P3.

Strategic Implementation of a Project Support Office *A disciplined approach*

- The tool could be on an intranet with a homepage for each project. Solutions need to have a global perspective. Updates can literally be daily. You will know what has been contracted, released, delivered, installed, and paid for. Know this for each project daily.

Risk analysis, contingency planning, and crisis management

- Project people may wait to hit a problem before dealing with it.
- There are excellent methods for looking at risk – we embed this in Plan-to-Plan® – then contingency-plan the options for responding to the problems before they happen.
- We can project the effort for each contingency, cost it out, and be ready to implement. There may be a myriad of known risks.
- As you reduce product time, risk analysis and crisis management become crucial. Damage control is paramount to keeping the project on line.

Imperatives

- The purpose, mission, goals, and metrics for the project steering committee needs to be defined. The steering committee becomes the agent of change for the corporation for project execution, project management, engineering, project processes, procurement, project team processes, project leadership, and organizational project procedures.
- Responsibility for projects, for project process, for project management, for the learning of the committee, project teams, for the organization, for project support people need crystal clear clarity.
- List values, expectations, beliefs driving projects. Both actual and desired require examination.
- Identify the responsibility for perpetual quality improvement of projects.
- Quantitize the project development (evolution) process, numbers of projects, types of projects, and their life cycles.
- Write progressive requirements for project management tools, controls, and processes.
- Develop metrics to measure the result, scope, performance, and quality of projects and project management processes.
- Adjust the role of the liaison to each project team. This role will vary.
- The construct of the project team needs to be defined. The construct needs to meet the needs of the project at each point in the life cycle.

Strategic Implementation of a Project Support Office

A disciplined approach

Strategy

- First, leverage the mandate to develop valid project delivery schedules.
 - Increase the project management skill set of the Project Support office staff and instill project management methodology in the project managers.
 - Assess the challenges and needs of the projects of all types.
- Second, get clarity on the purpose, mission, roles, and responsibilities of the three players (executive management committee, Project Support office, and business units) involved in product development.
- Third, plan the strategy and tactics of the Project Support Office – write its business plan.
- Finally, instill project discipline in the project teams using project launches and progress reviews as the tools to motivate adoption.