

# How the right maturity assessment can help your PMO add strategic value

By Dalene Grobler, PPM executive consultant at Project Portfolio Office

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An organisation's project management office (PMO) should play a vital role in delivering on the business's strategy. (See Project Portfolio Office's previous article, entitled: 'Is the PMO helping your organisation become 'project-fit'?'). However, gaining an understanding of this action plan – and the company's maturity to execute its declared strategy – is a necessary first step in unlocking a PMO's value. A clear view of stakeholders' needs and expectations is also key to this process.

PMOs do not operate in a vacuum. Whether strategic, tactical or operational, they are part of a larger (and often very complex) organisational 'ecosystem' with many parts and role-players. It is therefore critical that the PMO has an in-depth understanding of the broader business, with a solid view on how it uses, supports, enables and engages with projects, programmes and the portfolio as a whole. An organisational maturity assessment can provide the company with this valuable insight.

## Where to start?

Selecting a suitable maturity assessment model can be challenging, as there are a number of options available. Key considerations to be taken into account when selecting a suitable model include the following:

- A PPM assessment is more insightful and adds greater value than a PMO assessment. There are two main alternatives when it comes to type of maturity assessment: those that hone in on the PMO's maturity, and those that are mainly focused on the broader organisational project and portfolio management (PPM) maturity. Our recommendation is that a view is taken of the entire organisation's PPM maturity – of which the PMO is a key component. This approach, which provides a holistic examination of the challenges and successes around project delivery, can deliver far more value to the organisation. Also, restricting your focus to the PMO alone during a maturity assessment may allow you to improve the PMO's processes and delivery, but it does not take other influencing factors into consideration.
- The model should be method and standard agnostic. Current methods and practices used within the company may influence your decision on the type of model to be used. A key consideration here is to avoid those that are based on, or more aligned to, a specific body of knowledge or standard. Because many PMOs have evolved rapidly over the last year or two, as they adopt a variety of new PPM practices and standards such as agile, it will be more difficult to measure the impact of these new measures should the model be method- or standard-specific.
- The model should be sufficiently diagnostic so as to uncover root causes and recommend practical actions. An organisational maturity assessment should be diagnostic enough to uncover root causes and provide you with practical actions or suggested working techniques to ensure growth and improvement.

### **Don't believe everything you hear**

It is important also to be aware of several misconceptions around what a maturity assessment is – and what it is not – as follows:

**1. You have to be at the highest level/score** – The reality is that very few organisations are! There are many factors that influence the decision on what the appropriate or ideal level of maturity should be; it's all about understanding what capabilities your organisation needs to address and improve current challenges or gaps, and aligning the target state to these. This requires the involvement of all PMO stakeholders (which should include senior executives, heads of departments and so on) to ensure that you have the required commitment and support to improve right from the start.

**2. Self-assessments don't add value** – A self-assessment can be an excellent starting point, as it will provide an initial view of the likely level of the organisation's current maturity. Yes, it might be biased, but if you consult widely and bring in an independent consultant to help moderate the results, it can deliver great insights and focus areas. The decision to subsequently carry out a full maturity assessment for a more diagnostic view could then be taken, or initial improvement initiatives can be started.

**3. It is a time-consuming and intrusive process** – This does not need to be the case. The key factors that will influence the duration include the size and complexity of your organisation, and also the availability of key stakeholders. If the larger part of the assessment, however, is focused on content review (looking over frameworks and actual project documentation, for example), then it can take as little as three weeks. Apart from having discussions with stakeholders to understand value expectations and challenges, the assessor should only conduct interviews if more information is required or if there is a need to diagnose specific gaps and issues.

**4. Maturity can be improved quickly** – It is very easy to fall into the trap of trying to do too much, too fast. Improving PPM maturity takes time – anything from 12 to 18 months. The best approach is to implement incremental changes that can be easily absorbed and adopted. By breaking it down into manageable chunks, it is possible to maintain commitment and support throughout the journey. You should also not underestimate the level of internal change required to increase maturity. It is important to start the journey with a clearly defined change plan that ensures stakeholders understand the benefits and take improvements to heart.

### **Maturity assessment value is there for the taking – if you do it right**

The real value of a maturity assessment lies in the insight it offers, as well as the improvements that are identified and can be implemented. A maturity assessment that is not sufficiently diagnostic will not provide clarity on the identification of improvement initiatives or the resultant maturity score progress.

It is crucial then to choose a maturity assessment model that will deliver both sufficient detail as well as practical actions and suggested working techniques to ensure growth and improvement. Having the courage to accept open feedback on the organisational state – which includes the work of the PMO – will allow for a better understanding of the organisation's PPM maturity, and thus provide tremendous value.

For more information about Project Portfolio Office's maturity assessment service, please click [here](#).

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#### **Editorial contacts**

icomm Nicola Read (+27) 83 269 2227 [nicola@pr.co.za](mailto:nicola@pr.co.za)  
Project Portfolio Office Guy Jelley (+27) 83 457 6505 [guy@go2ppo.com](mailto:guy@go2ppo.com)