

From Control to Strategy: Exploring the Evolution of PMOs

An exclusive interview with co-authors of *The Evolution of the PMO: The Rise of the Chief Project Officer – Part 1*¹

[\(<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0DY5VY4KV>\)](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0DY5VY4KV)

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General Introduction

A year ago, we set out to redefine project management leadership through a collaborative writing challenge. Today we're thrilled to announce the release of "The Evolution of the PMO: The Rise of the Chief Project Officer," now an Amazon bestseller. This groundbreaking work brings together insights from 40 global authors, each offering unique perspectives on modern project management complexities.

In this article, we feature a panel discussion with five distinguished contributors, sharing their experiences and insights from this collaborative journey on a topic: *Foundations of the PMO. Understanding the Origins and Core Concepts of Project Management Office.*

To enhance your engagement, we've included QR codes linking to exclusive YouTube content, providing deeper dives into key topics and behind-the-scenes discussions. These multimedia elements offer an interactive experience, connecting you directly with the thought leaders shaping the future of PMO.

This article captures the essence of our year-long collaboration and invites you to engage with the dynamic conversations driving innovation in project management.

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Interviews

Introduction

For decades, organizations have wrestled with the role of the Project Management Office (PMO). Once perceived as bureaucratic, rigid structures enforcing control, PMOs have evolved into strategic enablers that drive business transformation. But where did PMOs originate, and how have they transformed over time? To answer these questions, I sat down with a panel of esteemed co-authors from *The Evolution of PMO: The Rise of a Chief Project Officer*, a book that examines the journey of PMOs and their future trajectory.

Joining me in this discussion are **Louise Worsley, Sophia Walker, Luca Del Carlo, Mayte Sivera and Francisco-Javier Rodríguez Blanco**—seasoned project management professionals with diverse global experiences in PMO leadership.

Aina Alive (Aina): PMOs have existed in different forms for over a century, yet their role remains a topic of debate. Louise, in your research, you trace the origins of PMOs back to the early 19th century. Can you share how they first emerged and how their role evolved over time?

Louise Worsley: Absolutely. The earliest known form of a PMO can be traced back to 1806 in the UK, where the government established a project office to manage national tax schemes. This office served as an impartial entity that coordinated large-scale initiatives across multiple government departments.

However, the real growth of PMOs came in the early 20th century when governments needed to manage war-time logistics. These offices controlled finances, resources, and project execution on a large scale. But an interesting shift happened after corruption scandals—particularly in the U.S. with the *Tammany Hall* scandal—where mismanagement of public funds triggered a demand for greater transparency. As a result, project offices evolved into governance structures that ensured financial integrity.

Fast-forward to the mid-20th century, we see PMOs being used extensively in construction, engineering, and large-scale technology projects. But it wasn't until the 1980s and 1990s that we saw the transition from purely control-based offices to project support offices (PSOs), which focused on improving project delivery rather than just overseeing compliance.

Aina: Sophia, your work focuses on why organizations need PMOs. Given this historical perspective, how would you say modern PMOs justify their existence today?

Sophia Walker: Great question, Aina. The reality is that PMOs are no longer optional—they are critical to organizational success. As businesses scale, the complexity of managing multiple projects simultaneously increases. Without a centralized function ensuring alignment with strategy, organizations end up with conflicting priorities, inconsistent execution methods, and wasted resources.

PMOs provide a unifying framework that standardizes governance, facilitates knowledge sharing, and ensures strategic alignment. But it's also important to recognize that different organizations require different PMO structures. Some need a delivery-focused PMO, while others require a compliance-driven PMO that enforces standardized processes. The key is to tailor the PMO model to the organization's needs.

Aina: Luca, let's talk about the different types of PMOs. Many organizations struggle to define the right PMO structure for their business. How do you see the evolution of PMO types, and what factors influence their effectiveness?

Luca Del Carlo: Historically, PMOs have been categorized into three main types: Supportive, Controlling, and Directive.

- **Supportive PMOs** provide project teams with best practices, methodologies, and training. They don't enforce rules but rather offer guidance.
- **Controlling PMOs** enforce compliance, ensuring projects follow standardized processes, often through mandatory reporting and audits.
- **Directive PMOs** go a step further—they directly manage projects and assign project managers, giving them more authority over execution.

Organizations often struggle because they set up a Controlling PMO when they actually need a Supportive one, or they establish a Directive PMO but fail to integrate it with business strategy. The most effective PMOs are adaptive—they evolve based on the company's maturity and project needs.

Today, we also see hybrid models, where PMOs combine strategic portfolio management, change management, and governance. Some organizations have even rebranded their PMOs into Value Management Offices (VMOs) to emphasize their role in driving business impact rather than just controlling projects

Aina: Maybe, you've been vocal about challenging the outdated perception of PMOs as bureaucratic roadblocks. How can PMO leaders reposition themselves as strategic enablers rather than administrative gatekeepers?

Maybe Sivera: Yes, and I'm glad you asked this. One of the biggest misconceptions about PMOs is that they are burdensome bureaucracies. This perception exists because, for years, PMOs focused too much on enforcing documentation rather than adding value.

To change this, PMOs must:

1. **Shift from process-driven to value-driven.** Instead of being seen as the "process police," PMOs should help organizations make better strategic decisions.
2. **Invest in education and talent development.** PMO leaders should create clear career paths for project professionals and ensure they have the right skills to engage with executives.

- 3. Embrace AI and technology.** New AI-powered tools can automate time-consuming tasks like status reporting, allowing PMOs to focus on higher-value work.

Ultimately, PMOs must become trusted business partners who facilitate growth rather than just enforce rules. If PMOs remain rigid and inflexible, they risk becoming obsolete.

Aina: Francisco-Javier, in your research, you highlight the challenges organizations face when evolving their PMOs. What are some of the common pitfalls, and how can organizations avoid them?

Francisco-Javier Rodríguez Blanco: One of the biggest challenges in PMO evolution is the resistance to change. Many organizations implement a PMO expecting immediate results, but they often fail because they don't take the time to align it with both senior management expectations and project teams' actual needs.

A common pitfall is creating a top-down PMO structure that focuses solely on reporting and compliance, without considering how project teams work. If project teams don't see value in what the PMO offers, they won't engage with it, leading to a lack of buy-in and ultimately failure.

To avoid this, organizations should take a gradual approach to PMO implementation. Instead of imposing rigid processes from the start, PMOs should focus on quick wins—for example, providing better project visibility through dashboards, offering useful training, or solving resource allocation challenges.

Another major challenge is balancing governance with flexibility. Some PMOs become overly rigid, adding layers of bureaucracy that slow down decision-making. On the other hand, if a PMO is too loose, it loses credibility with senior leadership. The key is to adapt the PMO's governance model to the organization's maturity and ensure it evolves over time.

Finally, a successful PMO must bridge the gap between leadership and execution. Senior executives need clear data to make strategic decisions, while project teams need support and guidance to execute effectively. PMOs that serve as a connector between these two groups—rather than just an oversight body—are the ones that succeed in the long run.

Aina: Given this evolution, what's next for PMOs? Will they continue to exist as we know them today?

Louise: PMOs will certainly continue to evolve, but the traditional "one-size-fits-all" PMO is dead. We are already seeing organizations move toward Agile PMOs, Strategic Portfolio Offices, and Chief Project Officers (CPOs) who sit at the executive table.

Sophia: Yes, and I believe AI and automation will further transform the PMO landscape. AI-driven predictive analytics will enhance decision-making, while real-time dashboards will replace traditional status reporting.

Luca: Agreed. The future PMO will be data-driven and technology-enabled, but its success will still depend on human leadership—understanding business needs, stakeholder dynamics, and strategic alignment.

Mayte: I also see the role of the Chief Project Officer (CPO) gaining traction. The CPO is not just a portfolio manager but a strategic leader who ensures project investments align with corporate goals.

Francisco-Javier: In addition to AI and strategic alignment, the biggest shift for PMOs will be adaptability. PMOs that remain static will become obsolete, but those that evolve with the organization's needs—whether that means integrating Agile practices, leveraging automation, or reshaping governance models—will thrive. Another key trend is blending PMO functions with business intelligence and enterprise risk management. The more PMOs can demonstrate measurable business value, the stronger their position will be within organizations.

Conclusion

The role of PMOs has undergone a dramatic transformation—from government-controlled offices managing war-time projects to strategic hubs driving business outcomes. While their forms and functions will continue to evolve, one thing remains clear: organizations need structured governance, strategic oversight, and value-driven project management more than ever.

The future belongs to PMOs that can adapt, innovate, and integrate technology while maintaining a human-centered approach. For PMO leaders, this is both a challenge and an opportunity—to redefine their roles as strategic business enablers.

For more indepth discussion, explore the co-authors utube videos through the following links:





About the Interviewees



[Louise Worsley](#)

South Africa



Louise Worsley has been a project management consultant, lecturer, and coach for over 30 years, advising on project capability and portfolio management across Government, Finance, Retail, Petrochemical, Defence, and Transport sectors. An associate researcher at the University of Cape Town, she has authored several publications, including *Stakeholder-led Project Management*, focusing on stakeholder engagement and governance.

A judge for the Global PMO Awards and former chair of South Africa's PMO judging committee, she actively mentors aspiring professionals through the international *Mentoring Club*. Louise is currently writing on hybrid project-based governance and researching stakeholder complexity in projects. As she transitions into retirement, she is considering a PhD to explore AI-driven stakeholder management and innovations in project governance.



[Luca Del Carlo](#)

Toronto, Canada



Luca Del Carlo is a PMO expert and strategic leader with extensive experience in high-risk, complex technology initiatives. He specializes in establishing and optimizing PMOs, driving alignment with corporate strategy, governance, and business value.

A recognized thought leader, Luca has successfully advanced PMO maturity, optimizing portfolio management, stakeholder engagement, and risk mitigation. He equips organizations with frameworks and methodologies for sustainable growth, delivering measurable efficiency gains and enhanced project success.

Committed to mentorship and continuous improvement, Luca empowers professionals with the skills to navigate today's dynamic business landscape. His focus on strategic impact ensures that every project contributes to long-term business success.



[Francisco Javier Rodríguez Blanco](#)

Spain



Francisco Javier Rodríguez Blanco is a Telecommunications Engineer, PMP and PMO Practitioner. He has more than 25 years of experience in managing international projects in the telco sector (network deployments, organizational transformation, new product introduction, customer support, software development or quality) in multinational and multicultural environments, under traditional, adaptive or agile and hybrid approaches. After holding different positions at Motorola and Nokia, he currently works as Project Director at Accenture. In addition to his work, he is an international speaker, author and part-time professor at different business schools on project management programs.



[Mayte Mata Sivera](#)

Utah, USA



Mayte Mata Sivera is a seasoned project leader based in Salt Lake City, Utah. She is passionate about strategic project management, leadership, and growth. With global experience managing complex projects across industries, she brings valuable insights into navigating business challenges. As a speaker and co-author of *The Volunteer Journey to Project Leadership*, Mayte inspires professionals to thrive in project leadership roles. Connect with her on LinkedIn for perspectives on project management, leadership, and volunteerism.



Sophia Walker

The Bahamas



Sophia R. Walker is a Business Professional with strategic and hands-on experience in corporate environments specifically in the financial services and telecommunications industries. With over 25 years of experience in the corporate world, Sophia has developed her expertise and demonstrated a proven ability to bring the benefits of technology to solve business issues while managing costs and risks.

Sophia has a Masters Degree in International Business and is a Certified International Project Manager with an extensive background in technology and data governance. Sophia is now a business owner having moved into her own design and consulting business full-time, AIFOS Design & Consulting.

About the Interviewer



Aina Aliiva

Toronto, Ontario, Canada



Aina Aliive (Alive) is an experienced Agile Coach and a Business Consultant with 20 years of experience in different industries, from hospitality and tourism to banking and engineering, a Founder & CEO at Bee Agile and a CEO & VP of Marketing at The PMO Strategy and Execution Hub.

She is a keynote speaker on Agile, Project Management, Negotiation, People Management, and Soft Skills topics. She was a guest instructor at NASA in 2022 & 2023 with topics on Conflict Resolution & Negotiation and Facilitation Techniques.

Her book, "It Starts with YOU. 40 Letters to My Younger Self on How to Get Going in Your Career," hit the #1 position in the #jobhunting category on Amazon and is featured in a Forbes Councils Executive Library.

She also contributed to the books "Mastering Solution Delivery: Practical Insights and Lessons from Thought Leaders in a Post-Pandemic Era", "Green PMO: Sustainability through Project Management Lens" and "Agile Coaching and Transformation: The Journey to Enterprise Agility".

Aina was also a Finalist in the Immigrant Entrepreneur of the Year category in 2021 by the Canadian SME National Business Award

She can be contacted at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/aina-aliieva/>