

Applying Project Management Principles to Key State Government Processes¹

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ABSTRACT

In 2012, the Texas Department of Public Safety established its first ever Enterprise Project Management Office (EPMO) to ensure that the Department focused on key priorities, maintained visibility on executive level initiatives, and completed projects successfully.

After a successful implementation of the EPMO, the principles related to the EPMO were applied to other important processes throughout the agency, including strategic planning, the legislative process and procurement. Each new process has benefitted greatly from utilizing project management principles.

The authors will share their lessons learned on how they have effectively translated basic project management processes like planning, scheduling and cost analysis throughout the Texas Department of Public Safety. They will also share examples, tools, and techniques the audience can turn into actionable items within their organizations.

IMPLEMENTING AN ENTERPRISE PMO

In December of 2011, the Director of the Texas Department of Public Safety established an Enterprise Management Office to ensure that all of the Department's priority projects were completed efficiently and effectively and to ensure he had visibility into the process along the way.

To accomplish what the Director wanted, the new EPMO leadership had to do more than establish a charter. They also had to market this concept to the various stakeholders within the agency to prove the value of the new process. In theory, most stakeholders agreed that transparency, communication, prioritization, resource alignment and risk mitigation were valuable goals for the agency. However, in practice, those concepts translated into new processes and seemingly "more work". This required the EPMO leadership to not only institute a new

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project management philosophy that had not typically been utilized by the organization, but also required an extensive use of change management skills.

The EP MO leadership systematically met with every group of stakeholders, tailoring the communication style to the audience. They had to determine how to properly “sell” the concept. For some stakeholders, it was enough that the Department is a para-military organization and the head of the organization said it needed to be done. Others listened to the sales pitch and nodded their heads and silently decided that they were not going to participate. After acknowledging the concerns of all stakeholders, the EP MO began implementing their new processes.

The new processes included requiring each division requesting a project that required financial or human resources to answer a series of questions. Essentially, requestors were asked to complete a business case. The Department uses a two-step approach to the business case. Step 1 requires the requestor to answer a series of high level questions that allow executive leadership to determine whether to explore moving forward with the project. Step 2 requires additional information needed to capture information on cost and benefit and return on investment. The EP MO facilitates providing all stakeholders the opportunity to have the required amount of input in such a way that the Department can most efficiently complete the request.

Sample questions include:

Step 1:

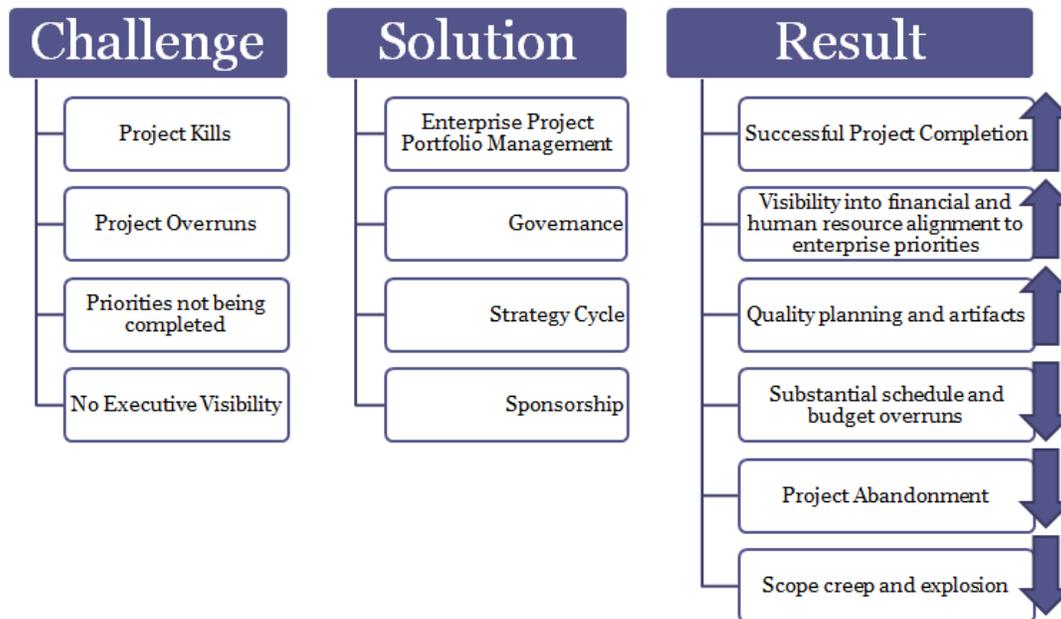
- What are you trying to accomplish or what problem are you trying to solve?
- What needs to be done in order to accomplish that?
- Do you anticipate any efficiency will be gained by the Department as a result of the project?
- Does this project relate to the Department goals? If yes, which goals does it relate to and how?
- Does the project relate to another workload driver such as Legislative mandates, strategic objectives, audit findings, etc?
- Did you receive dedicated funding for this effort? If so, describe how you are tracking the funds and explain the funding stream. If not, list the budget this request would be charged to.

Step 2:

- Will this project have an impact or benefit to how another division conducts their business?
- Does this project require a new contract or changes to an existing contract?
- Identify all dependencies and related efforts.
- Describe the project milestones.
- Describe the measures that will be used to determine whether the project was successful.
- Describe any alternatives to conducting this project.

Requiring requestors to fully consider all of the information and alternatives needed, as well as using dashboards and roadmaps to visually represent the status of all of the major initiatives was successful to fulfill the Director’s initial vision of transparency and visibility.

RESULTS



APPLYING PROJECT MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES THROUGHOUT THE ORGANIZATION

As the role of the organization evolved, the project management principles used to streamline the project request and assessment process and for resource allocation planning was soon applied to other key processes across the Department.

Procurements & Major Contracts

In 2013, the EMPO was merged with the organization in the Department responsible for procurement and contracts. The procurement division had an overwhelming workload due to an entirely manual process and there was no visibility, transparency or clear prioritization regarding the items the staff were working on. This caused procurements to be delayed, frustrating leadership throughout the Department.

The EPMP leadership reviewed the various processes that the procurement staff were utilizing and noticed that basic project management principles of scheduling, communication and prioritization could be applied to the operation to gain improvement.

As a preliminary step, all communication regarding status of procurements was streamlined. Previously, each individual requestor would reach out to the individual line employee working on their request. The requestor would explain why their request was an urgent need for the agency and the employee would comply. However, because all requestors had “the agency’s most urgent need”, this led to nothing being accomplished within a reasonable timeline and frustration all around.

Using project management principles of communication, identification of scope, milestones, and project change management, and project scheduling and work package development, the constant availability of information to requestors eliminated their need to constantly ask for updates. Also, because the information provided was reliable, trust was able to be repaired between requestors and employees.

Project Management principles were also applied to the process for executing high dollar contracts within the Department. The State of Texas has specific requirements for executing contracts over \$1 million and some of the requirements include partnering with other state agencies to review and approve the solicitation itself before it can be sent out for bid. Because major contract customers may not be procurement experts, all of the various steps can sometimes be confusing.

By applying project management principles, the procurement staff are more easily able to explain the statewide process to customers, helping to alleviate any confusion or frustration by ensuring the understanding at the beginning of the process. They are also able to manage customer expectations by providing them with regular status reports and tracking progress through work breakdown structures.

In addition, project management tools such as status reporting, along with business tools such as dashboarding, were used to monitor and track these high dollar contracts and to ensure that the customer is constantly aware of where the request is in the process.

Contract Status Template

 Internal Use Only (rev 03/13)		Contract Name		Sponsor: Division:	
Funding Authority: Description of Contract:		Overview of Current Status:		Date of Report:	
Acquisition Plan		Status	Completion Date		
Request Submitted					
Executive Contract Review Board (ECRB) Review					
Gather Business Requirements					
Prepare Solicitation					
Post Solicitation					
Executive Review and Approval					
Negotiations					
Award					

Strategic Planning and the Legislative Process

The new process of gathering information through the EP MO also translated into improving strategic planning at the Department. The Department is primarily funded with state appropriations and those requests are made two years before the funding may be awarded. This requires intensive planning at the time the request is made.

Applying the project management principles used for enterprise projects, the Department was able to systematically request the same information about the need, resources and alternatives to ensure that they request the proper amount of funding and requested funding for those items that were most important to fulfilling the Department's mission. The due diligence to gather that information at the beginning of the process helps to validate and justify the various requests made.

These principles are also applied throughout the legislative process. As the State Legislature has ideas for additional projects and mandates for state agencies, there is a process for agencies to explain the impact of the specific mandate to their resources. Using the same principles utilized

by the EPMO, the Department was able to more precisely respond to the requests, with the newfound ability to explain the impact, based on specific estimates and information.

These requests maintain visibility on the Agency's roadmap as "below the line" projects that are either planned for the next legislative session pending funding or as projects that could be funded through other alternative avenues such as grants.

CONCLUSION

Though the concept of project management was new to many people at the Department, the basic principles were easily applied and adapted to successfully support various state government processes. These same principles could be applied to processes in any industry and at every level.

The authors learned that the key to successfully applying these principles was not to use jargon that the audience is unfamiliar with. Instead, it required the EPMO leadership to skillfully tailor every conversation with every stakeholder in a manner that demonstrated the value the process would provide to them. Once there was buy-in from the initial process, it was much easier to translate that process across other disciplines.

Essentially, applying these principles enables leadership at the Department to operate against the same set of priorities, allocate resources to the most important efforts, ensure stakeholders are included, and schedules and expectations are tracked and managed.

Multiple efficiencies were gained as a result of implementing project management principles such as increasing successful project completion rate by approximately 60% and decreasing processing time for most procurements by approximately 40%.

About the Authors



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