

From PMO to P.O.O. ... ?

By Sandra Rijswijk-van Tilborg

In the past couple of month the questions about the Agile Way of Work and PMO have risen sky high. In the Netherlands we see more and more organisations working with Agile Scrum or other Agile ways of work and more and more full Agile Transformations.

Questions arise concerning the role of project management, program management and PMO? Looking at the definition of PMO, Project Program or Portfolio Management Office, it does not fit within an Agile environment without Project and Program managers.

On the internet you can read a lot of articles from opponents and supporters of PMO on this topic. Very few give experiences. In this article I'd like to discuss my experience when it comes to PMO-work in an Agile environment.

PMO is all about doing the right things and doing them the right way. Theories about PMO do not state or even pretend to know what the right way is. PMO's advice, support and facilitate the structure and way-of-work best suitable for the organisation.

Originally organizations were very project based. The past years brought a shift in focus towards product focus and eventually business value focus. Adding value to business is the ultimate goal of a PMO! That's what we're about.

Most of the work is also being dealt with within the scrum teams or tribes. To be quite honest, I am very happy with this progression. Now the activities, risks, lessons learned are being owned, registered and felt by those who deal with them every day. That can do nothing less than improve quality and it makes no sense what so ever to include a PMOfficer in these processes. Now, this doesn't mean there is no role for PMO.

Experience has taught us that an officer is very much needed in the environment around the teams and tribes and by the product owner. Therefore not a PMO (due to lack of a PM) but a P.O.O. → Product Owner Office is needed.

The tasks of the P.O.O. (don't forget the dots....) can be grouped in 4 categories:

1. Information supply to senior management (Guard (defend) your teams and guide your Senior Management in the new way of management!)
2. Cumulative knowledge management. Best Practices for your organization, spread across the organization and over teams and tribes.
3. Translating the results towards auditors.

4. Support and facilitate the Product Owner in the vast amount of work he/she has. For example in gathering information about the several teams. For instance on velocity per increment.

Our biggest eye-opener and issue was group three. Even when you have changed your whole organisation into Agile way of working and thinking, including more focus on business value and not so much on time and money, external auditors most likely aren't aligned yet.

Most companies will even still have departments working in non-Agile ways of work.

Auditors want to compare everything in the same format.

The last thing you need is the PO or the teams to invest time in translating your product backlog into a traditional business case; or have the PO spend all his time figuring out the financial details. These are tasks the P.O.O. can and should take on.

About the Author



Sandra Rijswijk-van Tilborg

The Netherlands



Sandra Rijswijk-van Tilborg is a PMO Manager with Sogeti Netherlands. After finishing International Business and Management Studies and Business Administration, Sandra joined Sogeti in the Netherlands in 2008. After several successful assignments in Information Security as project management and PMO, she became expert manager on PMO. Together with her team she set up several PMO-services and advises companies on how to improve or set-up PMOs. She coaches PMO officers in their tasks.

Sandra can be contacted at sandra.rijswijk@sogeti.com