

Bridging the Gap: Reflections on PMOs Today and Tomorrow

Interview with Frédéric Casagrande

PMO Expert

Winner of the Europe PMO Leader of the Year Awards 2021



Interviewed by Yasmina Khelifi

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Introduction to the interviewee

[Frederic Casagrande](#) started his Project Management career in 1997. As a Board Member of the PMI® PMO Community of Practice, he took part in the launch of the PMO Symposium that he chaired in 2011 and 2012 and served as a Judge for the PMI® PMO of the Year award in 2013, as a Judge for the PMO Global Alliance PMO Global Awards in 2018 and 2020. Since 2007, he focused his career on setting up, developing and operating Program Management Offices in various industries (Telecommunications, Real Estate, Theme Parks, Airports, Defense, BPO, Nuclear Energy). He is also a prominent public speaker and has delivered many acclaimed keynotes on Project Management, PMOs and Strategy Execution since 2008.

Interview

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Q1: First of all, thank you for accepting an interview request from PMWJ. Could you explain the role of a PMO? Are there local definitions of PMOs? For instance, in France some of the PMOs I know are junior colleagues, not technical and it looks more an administrative role.

Frédéric Casagrande (Casagrande): This may sound like an easy question, but the answer is slightly more complex than you would think. I have always been a firm believer that there are two types of PMOs: “Yours” and “Not Yours”. In other words, when defining what a PMO is, people are generally defining what THEIR PMO is. But if I had to try and formulate a generic definition of the term, I would say that it is a tool for an organization to maximize the value of project and program management practices. And exactly as it sounds, it will manifest in many different forms, depending on each organization’s requirements.

The acronym “PMO” itself can mean so many different things: For some, it stands for “Project Management Officer” and represents an individual’s role, but it usually refers to an organizational unit, like “Project Management Office”. Even then, the “P” can mean “Program”, or “Portfolio”. Some organizations may have a totally different name for that unit, although the role remains similar.

Unfortunately, due to this very loose definition, there is a common misconception that “PMO” equals only “Project Support”, as you alluded to. In reality, there is much more to it. As an example, in my current organization, the PMO personnel are all seasoned, qualified and certified Projects and Programs Managers, who – among other things – coach and mentor other practitioners in the whole organization.

Q2: How did you become PMO?

Casagrande: In 1997, I started one of the first web agencies in Alsace, France. It took me a couple of years to put a label on what I was doing and to realize that I had become a Project Manager. In 2006, I joined PMI® and became a member of the PMO Specific Interest Group, where I met other individuals sharing that passion for everything that was above and beyond just managing a Project or a Program.

Building on my previous experiences and the wealth of knowledge shared in that group, I presented to the CEO of the large pan-European telecommunications operator I was working for a business case about why our organization needed a PMO. A couple of months later, he gave me a chance and that was the first Program Management Office I established.

Q3: What are the skills to become a PMO? Are there some certifications? What are the overlap between a project manager and a PMO?

Casagrande: First of all, the skills to become part of a PMO will largely depend on what the PMO is expected to deliver in an organization. If you are tasked with setting-up a PMO in your company, there is no cookie-cutter approach available. Based on research, several models have been developed over the last decade, and associated certifications have started to appear.

I could name a few, but besides the potential legitimacy you gain from being certified, for someone to be successful at establishing a new PMO anywhere, it is the ability to ask the right questions to the right people, and really, deeply, analyze and understand their responses. It is then your ability to build a Service Catalog matching these needs, and closing the gaps that will be critical to the success and longevity of your PMO.

While there is evidently a large number of skills that are transferable from each side to the other, there is very little to no overlap in roles and responsibilities. I see Project Managers as Performers of the Project Management Processes, while most PMOs will focus on Governance, Oversight and Controls.

Q4: What changes did you observe in the PMO world in the recent years?

Casagrande: Since I entered the PMO space in 2007, I have seen it come to prominence worldwide. From the first collaborative attempts at standardizing our field, with the “PMO Accord” written with other volunteers from PMI® PMO Specific Interest Group in 2008, to the birth and growth of the PMO Symposium, the emergence of other global communities like the PMO Global Alliance, and the appearance of a plethora of other groups, models, certifications, etc.

I have seen a worldwide shift from the archaic view that a PMO is only “*a management structure that standardizes the project-related governance processes and facilitates the sharing of resources, methodologies, tools, and techniques*” to something much larger, more complex (and difficult to define), and much more valuable.

There is now a global acknowledgement that something exists outside of the boundaries of managing Projects and Programs (i.e. the performance of project management activities as a project manager) that really matters to the success of organizations. And every effort to promote this is extremely positive as it leads to improvements for individuals, for organizations, and for the profession as a whole.

Q5: Are PMOs needed in the post covid19? Why? And, if yes, in all countries?

Casagrande: To answer that question, let’s look at Project Management trends for a moment. The volume of Projectized work worldwide is set to increase at a much faster

pace than the number of Project Managers, and all “industry experts” have forecasted a deficit in Project Management Talent worldwide. The nature of these projects evolves and they grow in complexity. All of this leads to more ambiguity when it comes to Project Management, and hence more requirements for someone to reduce this ambiguity.

The global pandemic that hit us for more than a year has only exacerbated these trends, and I see a very bright professional future for people who are “PMO savvy”. When I look at all the emerging trends, methods, technologies, models, certifications, tools, techniques, in a world where remote working will remain a large part of the norm, there will be no alternative to most organizations than to rely on PMOs to help navigate this new world and make the best out of their Project Management practices.

Q6: What are the criteria to define if a PMO is needed in an organization?

Casagrande: You could argue that I’m biased, but for me, the answer to that question will always be “Yes”! I believe that based on what works they do, every organization needs to evaluate what “*tool to maximize the value of project and program management practices*” they need. The form it takes will vary, but I’m deeply convinced that there is a purpose for a form of PMO in every organization.

Q7: You have created the PMO Awards. Why?

Casagrande: First of all, let me clarify: While I have been involved in the development of several of them (and served as a Judge on many of them), I have not created PMO Awards. The PMI® “*PMO of the Year Award*” was the first of its kind. It was initiated in 2006 by PM Solutions® and hosted by the PMI® PMO Community of Practice since 2010 during the PMO Symposium. Since then, other forms of recognitions have emerged in that field, including the “*PMO Global Awards*” from the PMO Global Alliance.

I believe that it is important in the development of a discipline to encourage good practices, and public recognition is probably one of the most powerful ways to ensure the best practitioners share what led to their successes with the rest of the community. It also drives other practitioners and the rest of the community to not only adopt these practices, but to improve their own and strive for excellence in what they do.

Q8: You are the winner of the Europe PMO Leader of the Year Awards in 2021. How do you feel? Did you apply for it and why?

Casagrande: Over the years, the PMO Global Alliance has developed several awards categories, including several specific to individuals. I am the recipient of the Europe PMO Leader of the Year Award for 2021, and one of the four finalists in the World PMO Leader of the Year Award for 2021.

Knowing both the nomination and the judging processes, I am extremely proud of this accolade, as it represents the highest form of peer recognition for the past 20 years of my life, not only as a PMO practitioner, but as a volunteer for diverse professional organizations centered around Project Management, and PMOs in particular; as a public speaker and a thought leader. My nomination by several of my team members is a testament to years of trying to be the best team leader I can, and to years of growing high performing teams and demonstrating the value proposition of PMOs across industries and continents.

Q9: Do you have a last message to PWJ readers, please?

Casagrande: I think the future of PMOs will be intricately linked to bridging the gap between Strategy Design and Strategy Execution. For most organizations, growing in the coming years – or even surviving for some – will be a monumental task for which both the design and the delivery of their strategy will be of paramount importance. You will increase your chance of success if there is a PMO at the junction between the two sides of this puzzle.

About the Interviewer



Yasmina Khelifi

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Yasmina Khelifi, PMP, PMI- ACP, PMI-PBA is an experienced project manager in the telecom industry. Along with her 20-year career at [Orange S.A.](#) (the large French multinational telecommunications corporation), she sharpened her global leadership skills, delivering projects with major manufacturers and SIM makers. Yasmina strives for building collaborative bridges between people to make international projects successful. She relies on three pillars: project management skills, the languages she speaks, and a passion for sharing knowledge.

She is a PMP certification holder since 2013, a PMI- ACP and PMI-PBA certification holder since 2020. She is an active volunteer member at PMI France and PMI UAE, and a member of PMI Germany Chapter. French-native, she can speak German, English, Spanish, Italian, Japanese and she is learning Arabic. Yasmina loves sharing her knowledge and experiences at work, in her volunteers' activities at PMI, and in projectmanagement.com as a regular blogger. She is also the host and co-founder of the podcast [Global Leaders Talk with Yasmina Khelifi](#) to help people in becoming better international leaders.

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