
The Strategic Horizon: How PMOs Are Expanding Their Role in a Complex World

An exclusive interview with co-authors of *The Evolution of the PMO: The Rise of the Chief Project Officer – Part 8*¹

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General Introduction

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

This article follows part five published in the October PMWJ. It captures more of the essence of our year-long collaboration and invites you to engage with the dynamic conversations driving innovation in project management

Interviews

Introduction

For many years, the PMO was defined by governance, reporting, and compliance. Those foundations still matter, but the expectations of organizations have shifted. Today, the PMO is asked not only to ensure delivery but to enable transformation — to integrate strategy, sustainability, and resilience in ways that traditional models were never designed to handle.

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This evolution is fuelling the rise of the Chief Project Officer (CPO), a role that reflects a broader horizon for project leadership: one where delivery is inseparable from strategy, and value is measured not just in outputs but in outcomes. To explore this horizon, I spoke with five leaders who are shaping the conversation in distinct but complementary ways.

- **Naomi Caietti** explores how PMOs can embrace growth mindsets, AI, and sustainability to prove their strategic relevance.
- **Rodrigo Cenizio Ferreira** uses the lens of Darwinian evolution to show why PMOs must adapt — and why the CPO role is the next step in survival.
- **Zubair Siddiqui** outlines Hybrid and Green PMO models that integrate performance, inclusivity, and sustainability.
- **Eman Deabil** makes the case for the Enterprise PMO as the secret weapon in high-stakes transitions such as mergers and acquisitions.
- **Peter Mihok** shows how professional communities amplify all of these ideas, accelerating maturity and recognition for PMOs worldwide.

Together, their perspectives reveal that the PMO's future is not a single path but a strategic ecosystem — one that adapts, integrates, sustains, and connects.

Note that backgrounds of the interviewees can be found at the end of this set of interviews.

Updated and Expanded Interviews

Aina: Naomi, you write that future PMOs must shift from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset. What does that look like in practice, and how can leaders make the shift themselves before expecting it from their teams?

Naomi: A fixed mindset in PMOs shows up as rigid adherence to “the way we’ve always done it.” I’ve seen leaders insist on templates and dashboards even when those tools no longer serve the strategy. A growth mindset is the opposite — it asks, “*What can we learn, and how do we adapt?*” In practice, that means creating space for experimentation, allowing teams to test approaches without fear of punishment, and celebrating lessons learned even when outcomes fall short of expectations.

For leaders, the shift must start internally. If you expect your PMO to be adaptive, you need to model it. That could mean admitting when a governance model is outdated and being willing to replace it or showing curiosity about AI rather than skepticism. Teams watch leaders closely — if they see leaders learning, adjusting, and asking better questions, they will follow. The growth mindset isn’t just about optimism; it’s about building resilience by treating every project as an opportunity to learn and improve.

Aina: AI is emerging as both a tool and a disruptor. How do you see PMOs harnessing AI to demonstrate value while also protecting the human aspects of leadership?

Naomi: AI is already transforming project management, whether we acknowledge it or not. Tools can now generate reports, analyse risks, and even suggest portfolio scenarios faster than any human team could. The danger is that leaders confuse efficiency with leadership. If AI produces a flawless status report but no one has the courage to interpret its implications, the PMO still fails.

The opportunity is to let AI handle the mechanics so people can focus on relationships, decisions, and vision. For example, AI can highlight emerging risks across a portfolio, but only a human leader can sit with stakeholders and say, *“Here’s what this means for our strategy — and here’s how we’ll respond.”* Protecting the human side means doubling down on emotional intelligence, negotiation, and storytelling. In fact, the more AI enters the PMO, the more valuable those human skills become. PMOs that learn to harness both — machine speed and human depth — will be the ones that prove their value in the future

Aina: Sustainability appears in your work as part of the PMO’s mandate. What practical steps can PMOs take today to embed sustainability into governance and portfolio decisions?

Naomi: Too often, sustainability is treated as a side initiative — a nice-to-have report or a line in the corporate strategy. For PMOs, the practical step is to embed it into decision-making the same way we embed cost or risk. That means asking: Does this project reduce waste? Does it advance our ESG commitments? Does it strengthen long-term resilience, not just short-term gains?

I’ve worked with PMO leaders who added sustainability indicators into their portfolio dashboards. At first, executives were sceptical — they wanted to see ROI, not carbon metrics. But over time, those indicators helped make smarter decisions. One company shifted investment toward digital solutions that reduced paper use and energy costs, and it actually improved profitability. That’s the key: showing that sustainability is not just about compliance or reputation; it’s about building organizations that can thrive long-term. PMOs can lead that integration if they are brave enough to make sustainability part of the performance conversation, not an afterthought.

Aina: Rodrigo, you use Darwinian evolution as a metaphor for PMOs. What are the “survival traits” that determine whether a PMO thrives or becomes obsolete?

Rodrigo: The metaphor resonates because organizations are ecosystems. Just like in nature, survival doesn’t favor the strongest or the most intelligent — it favors those who adapt best to change. For PMOs, that means cultivating traits that allow continuous renewal. The first trait is **relevance**. A PMO that measures itself only on compliance or process output is like a species specialized for an environment that no longer exists. The

moment conditions shift, it becomes irrelevant. Thriving PMOs constantly ask: *“How are we enabling strategy, not just tracking delivery?”*

The second trait is **resilience**. Environments are volatile: digital disruption, economic shocks, pandemics, mergers. A PMO that can only function under ideal conditions won't last. Resilient PMOs build redundancy into skills, diversify their governance models, and anticipate shocks through scenario planning. Finally, the most overlooked trait is **influence**. Technical excellence without influence is invisible. PMOs that earn a seat at the strategic table, that learn the language of value and outcomes, are the ones that endure. Those that cling to old templates and wait to be invited risk extinction. Evolution is relentless — PMOs that stop adapting eventually disappear.

Aina: How do you see the transition from PMO Director to Chief Project Officer reshaping executive decision-making in organizations?

Rodrigo: The CPO is not just a rebranded PMO Director. It represents a fundamental shift in where decisions are made and how strategy is executed. Traditionally, portfolio decisions were driven by finance or operations, with the PMO acting as a compliance arm. The CPO changes that dynamic by bringing delivery expertise directly into the executive suite. This means decisions about investment, risk, and transformation are informed not only by financial forecasts but by the realities of execution.

I've seen this change in action: when a CPO sits at the table, discussions about strategy become more grounded. Executives stop asking only, *“What do we want to achieve?”* and start asking, *“What can we achieve, and how should we structure delivery to maximize impact?”* That shift is profound. It reduces the gap between ambition and capability. It also accelerates organizational learning — because the CPO can feed back lessons from the portfolio into strategy in real time. In this sense, the CPO is not just a role — it's the evolutionary adaptation that ensures organizations don't keep making the same mistakes at the top. It's the missing link between vision and value.

Aina: In your chapter, you emphasize governance and agility working hand-in-hand. What's the biggest mistake organizations make when trying to balance these two forces?

Rodrigo: The biggest mistake is treating governance and agility as opposites — as if you have to choose one and sacrifice the other. I often see executives frame it as a trade-off: *“Do we want control, or do we want speed?”* That's a false dichotomy. Governance and agility are not rivals; they are complements. Governance provides clarity on priorities, boundaries, and accountability. Agility provides adaptability, speed, and learning. Together, they create a balanced system where teams know where they're going but have the freedom to adapt the path.

The mistake lies in extremes. Overemphasize governance, and you strangle adaptability. Overemphasize agility without governance, and you get chaos disguised as innovation. The PMO's role is to integrate the two — to design lightweight governance that ensures

alignment while leaving room for teams to respond to change. I often tell leaders: governance should be like guardrails on a mountain road. You need them to stay safe, but they should never dictate your exact speed or force you into one driving style. The art is in knowing how much governance is enough, and where agility creates the most value. PMOs that learn this balance don't just deliver projects — they shape organizations that can both run and change at the same time.

Aina: Zubair, you highlight the Hybrid PMO and the Green PMO as models for the future. How do these models help organizations balance performance, inclusivity, and sustainability?

Zubair: The Hybrid PMO and the Green PMO are not just new labels; they are responses to challenges. Organizations want improved performance via fast delivery, cost control, and predictable outcomes. At the same time, they face new demands: sustainability targets, diverse workforces, and complex global challenges. A traditional PMO cannot reconcile those pressures, but hybrid and green models can.

The Hybrid PMO provides flexibility: it combines the discipline of traditional governance with the adaptability of Agile and Lean. That allows teams to operate in the mode that fits their context – not one-size-fits-all. The Green PMO goes further by making sustainability and inclusivity explicit success factors. That means projects are not judged only on time and budget but on environmental impact, social contribution, and long-term resilience. I believe PMOs that adopt these models will not only deliver projects but will also deliver credibility, showing organizations and their stakeholders that project management is a driver of sustainable performance, not a drag on innovation.

Aina: Many PMOs still operate with outdated practices. What's the first step a leader should take if they want to modernize without overwhelming the organization?

Zubair: The first step is not a new tool or a new framework – it is awareness. Leaders must first acknowledge the gap between current practices and future needs. Too often, PMO modernization fails because leaders rush to adopt the latest trend without preparing the culture. If your team still believes project management is just paperwork, introducing Agile will not fix the problem.

So, the first step is education and dialogue. Run sessions with executives to show them how modern PMOs add value. Engage project managers in workshops where they experience hybrid practices in action. Create safe experiments: pilot a sustainability metric on one portfolio or try Agile reporting on a single project. By starting small, you build evidence and confidence. Modernization is less about replacing everything overnight and more about showing people a better way forward. When they see value, adoption follows naturally.

Aina: You frame your chapter as a call to action. What message do you most want PMO leaders to carry back to their organizations today?

Zubair: My call is simple but urgent: stop defending the PMO as an administrative function and start championing it as a strategic driver. Too many PMOs are still fighting for survival because they limit themselves to compliance and reporting. If we do not evolve, we risk irrelevance.

The message I want leaders to take back is this: **project management is no longer about controlling change – it is about enabling it.** That means owning sustainability goals, embracing inclusivity, leveraging technology, and stepping up as partners in strategy. PMO leaders must advocate for their seat at the table, not wait to be invited. We have the knowledge, the tools, and the frameworks. What is needed now is courage – the courage to redefine what the PMO is for and to lead organizations into a more resilient and sustainable future.

Aina: Eman, you call the E-PMO a “secret weapon” in mergers and acquisitions. What does the E-PMO provide that no other function can during such high-stakes transitions?

Eman: Mergers and acquisitions are one of the most disruptive events an organization can experience. Departments focus on protecting their own priorities — HR worries about redundancies, IT about integration, Finance about reporting. Each has valid concerns, but what’s missing is a function that sees the whole. That’s the E-PMO. It operates above silos, ensuring that integration is not just a financial or operational exercise, but a coordinated transformation.

What makes the E-PMO unique is its ability to orchestrate. It provides a single version of truth across functions, aligns portfolio decisions to the new strategic reality, and sets the cadence for how progress is tracked. Without that, M&As become fragmented, and the promised synergies turn into missed opportunities. In short, the E-PMO isn’t a side player — it’s the only function designed to integrate strategy, governance, and delivery in one framework. That’s why I call it a secret weapon: it can mean the difference between creating value and losing it.

Aina: Resistance and fatigue are common in M&As. How can an E-PMO maintain alignment and morale when teams are uncertain about their future?

Eman: The human factor is often underestimated. You can design the perfect integration plan, but if people feel ignored or threatened, execution will stall. The E-PMO has to become a channel for communication as much as for control. That means creating forums where employees can raise concerns, ensuring that change management is part of the portfolio, and making leaders visible during the transition.

One practice I’ve seen succeed is linking projects directly to outcomes people care about. If employees understand how a systems integration will make their jobs easier or protect customers, resistance softens. Another is pacing. M&As create fatigue because everything feels urgent. The E-PMO must help leaders prioritize and phase changes, so

teams don't collapse under unrealistic loads. Morale is not built with slogans but with transparency and pacing. When people see that the integration is structured and humane, alignment follows.

Aina: Looking beyond M&A, how do you see the role of the E-PMO evolving as organizations face disruption from digital transformation and global crises?

Eman: The E-PMO is evolving into the strategic nervous system of the enterprise. M&As are only one scenario where integration is critical. The same logic applies to digital transformation, ESG compliance, or navigating global crises like pandemics. In all these cases, organizations need a central function that connects strategy to execution across portfolios.

I believe the future E-PMO will increasingly use advanced analytics and AI to anticipate risks, scenario-model disruptions, and support leaders with decision intelligence. But just as important, it will expand its mandate from compliance to stewardship. That means guiding organizations through disruption with resilience — ensuring not just that projects are delivered, but that the enterprise adapts and sustains value in uncertainty. The E-PMO of the future will not simply manage change — it will be the *engine* of transformation

Aina: Peter, you argue that communities are as important as formal structures in advancing PMO maturity. How can organizations leverage professional communities to accelerate their internal transformation?

Peter: Communities are often underestimated because they don't appear on the org chart. Yet they hold immense power. In every profession, innovation often comes not from the hierarchy but from practitioners sharing what works, what fails, and what's emerging. For PMOs, engaging with professional communities means gaining access to tested practices, benchmarks, and new frameworks before they are mainstream.

Organizations can leverage this by creating structured pathways between community insights and internal governance. That might mean encouraging PMO staff to participate in global forums, sponsoring membership in alliances, or hosting internal sessions where external learnings are shared. I've seen companies accelerate their maturity curve dramatically by importing not just best practices but *next practices* from communities. It's like plugging into a global laboratory. The organization benefits by not having to reinvent the wheel — and by staying ahead of trends that would otherwise take years to recognize internally.

Aina: Communities often thrive on voluntary energy, while PMOs operate in corporate hierarchies. How do you bridge the two so that community insights translate into executive action?

Peter: That's a critical tension. Communities are fueled by passion and shared purpose, while corporations are governed by hierarchy and budget. To bridge the two,

you need translation. Community insights have to be reframed in the language of value and risk so executives will pay attention.

For example, if a community discussion reveals that hybrid PMOs are reducing project cycle times by 20%, that's not just an anecdote — it's a business case. When PMO leaders present it that way, executives see the relevance. Another strategy is embedding community champions within the organization — individuals who stay plugged into external networks and act as conduits. They convert community energy into actionable initiatives. Over time, this builds credibility. Executives begin to see communities not as hobbies but as accelerators of competitive advantage

Aina: Looking ahead, how do you see global PMO communities influencing the recognition and authority of the Chief Project Officer role?

Peter: Communities are already shaping the CPO role by making it visible. Ten years ago, "Chief Project Officer" was hardly discussed. Now, thanks to global alliances, books, and forums, it's part of the professional vocabulary. Communities create a shared narrative: they define what a CPO is, what value the role brings, and how it differs from traditional PMO leadership.

As more stories are told — case studies, successes, even failures — the concept of the CPO gains legitimacy. Boards and executives who engage with these communities begin to ask, "*Should we have a CPO too?*" That's influence at scale. I believe global communities will be the tipping point for the CPO's widespread adoption. Not through mandates, but through collective proof that the role adds value. Communities give PMOs a louder voice, and that voice is now being heard in boardrooms

Aina: The Chief Project Officer (CPO) role is emerging as a strategic partner to the C-suite. What qualities or experiences should future CPOs cultivate to succeed where traditional PMO leaders could not?

Naomi: Vision, adaptability, and digital fluency — the ability to harness AI while never losing the human side of leadership.

Rodrigo: Strategic decision-making. A CPO must understand evolution and survival — how to pivot organizations when conditions change.

Zubair: Inclusivity and sustainability. Future CPOs must be able to lead not only for profit but for long-term social and environmental value.

Eman: Enterprise-wide perspective. The CPO is not a project controller but an integrator who can lead through crises and disruption.

Peter: Influence and community leadership. CPOs must be visible, credible, and recognized across professional networks, not just inside their companies.

Aina: Naomi, Zubair, both of you write about sustainability as part of the PMO's mandate. Naomi, you connect it to the future-facing growth mindset, while Zubair frames it in the Green PMO model. How do you see sustainability moving from aspiration to measurable practice inside organizations?

Naomi: By making it part of governance. If sustainability metrics sit alongside cost and schedule, they stop being aspirational and become operational.

Zubair: By embedding ESG indicators into portfolio dashboards. When leaders see sustainability driving efficiency and resilience, it moves from rhetoric to practice.

Aina: Rodrigo, you argue that PMOs must evolve or risk extinction. Eman, you describe the E-PMO as a “secret weapon” in high-stakes transitions. Peter, you show how communities amplify maturity. How do each of your perspectives connect to the rise of the Chief Project Officer role?

Rodrigo: The CPO is the evolutionary leap — the adaptation that ensures PMOs survive by leading strategy, not just tracking it.

Eman: The CPO embodies enterprise integration. They unify functions, protect morale, and ensure resilience when the stakes are highest.

Peter: Communities give legitimacy. By shaping the narrative and demonstrating value, they accelerate recognition of the CPO globally.

Final Reflections

The PMO has reached a crossroads. It is no longer just a support office or a reporting function — it is becoming a strategic ecosystem.

Naomi challenges us to shift from fixed to growth mindsets, embracing adaptability, AI, and sustainability as everyday practices. Rodrigo reminds us that only PMOs that evolve — through influence, resilience, and the CPO role — will survive. Zubair calls for Hybrid and Green PMOs that prove performance and sustainability are not opposites but partners. Eman shows how the E-PMO safeguards value during disruption, from M&As to digital transformation. Peter reminds us that communities amplify all of this work, turning individual voices into global momentum.

Together, these five perspectives point to the same truth: the PMO of the future is not defined by templates or reports. It is defined by its ability to adapt, to integrate, to sustain, and to connect. And at its horizon stands the Chief Project Officer — not as a distant aspiration, but as the natural evolution of leadership when delivery becomes strategy.

Interviewee Information



Naomi Caietti

California, USA



Naomi Caietti is an ePMO strategist, fractional PM, and AI product consultant with over 20 years of experience in IT and project management. A best-selling author and speaker, she specializes in AI adoption, workflow automation, and scalable portfolio delivery. Naomi has led enterprise-wide projects in data center recovery, software modernization, and organizational change, working with remote teams across industries. In 2025, she launched an AI Literacy Initiative while continuing to advise startups, healthcare, and education organizations on strategy, leadership, and value-driven delivery.





Peter Botond Mihok

Ottawa, Canada



Peter Mihok is a certified project and PMO manager with over 15 years of experience leading complex, cross-functional initiatives across market research, consultancy, audit, and government sectors. He specializes in bridging strategy and execution through project and program management, organizational transformation, and process improvement. Active in global professional communities and a contributing author to several collaborative books, Peter brings a proactive and collaborative leadership style that consistently delivers measurable results.





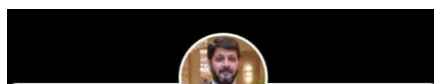
Zubair Siddiqui

Dublin, Ireland



Zubair Siddiqui is an MBA and a Certified Project & Portfolio Manager with a wide range of experience in project/programme/portfolio management, change management, setting up & running PMO, strategic planning, contract negotiations, sales & marketing, accounts & finance and retail management.

Possess leadership skills with in-depth experience in successful team building, problem solving and have a proven record of excellent blend of vision & innovation with a practical & realistic approach; understands the role & interrelation of organizational functions and has experience in managing cross-functional & organizational lines in a dynamic, fast pace multicultural environment.



Zubair Siddiqui
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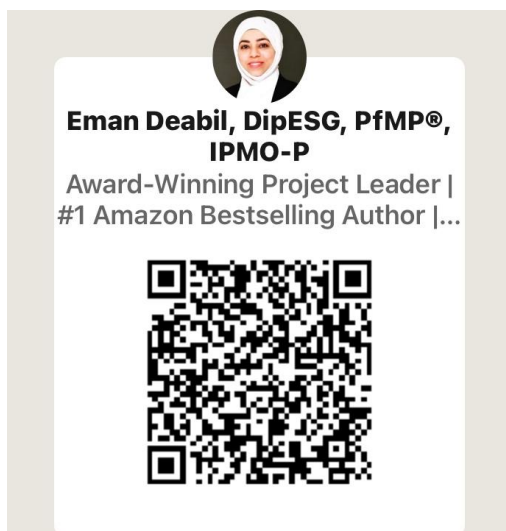


Eman Deabil

Bahrain



Eman Deabil is an award-winning project leader and #1 Amazon bestselling author with over 15 years of experience in strategy design, execution, and PMO leadership across diverse industries. She holds multiple credentials, including PfMP, PMP, PRINCE2, IPMO-P, SIP, CBSCP, and a diploma in ESG from the Corporate Governance Institute. Eman has led successful implementations of Balanced Scorecards, project portfolios, and performance dashboards, while also delivering tailored training and knowledge transfer. Passionate about innovation and collaboration, she is dedicated to helping organizations achieve strategic objectives and optimize performance through evidence-based frameworks.





Rodrigo Cenizio Ferreira

Parana, Brazil



Rodrigo Cenizio Ferreira is a certified project manager (PMP, PMO-CP) with strong experience in leading engineering and project management initiatives. Based in Curitiba, Brazil, he combines a background in electrical engineering with expertise in portfolio and team management across office and field environments. Rodrigo holds postgraduate degrees in Energy Systems, Business Management & Innovation, and an MBA in Project Management. Passionate about PMOs and project leadership, he actively volunteers as Director of Portfolio Management for the PMI Paraná Chapter.



Rodrigo Cenizio Ferreira, MBA, PMP, PMOCP
Engenheiro Eletricista | Gerente de Projetos
| PMP | MBA | PMO-CP. Entusiasta pela Engen...



About the Interviewer



Aina Aliieva

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Aina Aliieva (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

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