

## DDL Project Office

It was close to the end of December in 2009 when I stumbled across the following advertisement job advertisement:

Functions:

Project Management / running project management office

Industries:

Mining & Metals

My curiosity aroused, I read further and discovered that the position was for an “Initiative Manager” to further develop the company’s capability in planning and executing change initiatives. I also discovered that Mining and Metals actually meant diamonds. This was beginning to look interesting. Having been PMP certified for several years and with significant experience in both project and programme management, the prospect of setting up a project office from scratch with the appropriate processes, methodology, tools and reporting capability began to look very attractive.

Three months later, and my first day as Initiative Manager. I was introduced to my new colleagues who gave me a warm welcome but who were slightly mystified by the new role. The CEO on the other hand, provided a very clear mandate: the company needed to grow in sales, become more efficient, more productive, and be able to achieve and maintain compliance. One of the ways to do this was to structure these initiatives in a project & portfolio environment.

My first priority was to analyse what was already available and run/close existing projects. The Executive Management Team needed to establish what was being spent on initiatives, gain an overview of current status, and plan for new initiatives.

It soon became evident that while the term “initiative management” was new to the company, there had been a previous attempt at structuring project management. On the company intranet there was a website where project documents were stored and a list of templates and documentation based on Prince2 project methodology. However, the projects themselves were not coordinated and they were run in a very ad hoc fashion. The existing project management offering was not popular with my new colleagues: seen at best as confusing and at worst as just plain avoidable, it was overloaded with process and documentation which had led to unwillingness to follow any procedure or to register new projects for fear of the red tape that would follow. However, because it was used by everybody, the intranet was the logical place to provide an initiative management offering although it was clear that a complete overhaul was necessary.

Using the [P3M3](#) project office maturity model, I determined that we were in the first “Initial” stage, meaning chaotic, ad hoc, and heroic, and established a goal of moving through the “Repeatable” stage to reach the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage, “Defined” or “institutionalised” which means the process is defined/confirmed as standard business process.

But before any kind of new capability could be launched, I had to concern myself with the business of the day. Having reviewed the existing projects, it was decided that some would be retired, others merged, but also that we would progress some through to completion. Suddenly projects that had been languishing for up to a year were receiving attention, new goals were being set, deliverables were finally realised and there was progress to report to our Executive Management Team.

At the same time, new projects were being launched and further options discussed.

With the redesigning of, for example, a project charter and business case and the introduction of a financial plan, we began to see the introduction of authorized projects with set budgets and timelines! The introduction, yes – but without a visible initiative management (project office) offering there were still some hearts and minds to be won.

By mid 2010, I had defined an end to end process that would guide users through the steps of initiation, planning, execution and closure based on PMP methodology. For each step, there was text and explanation and revised templates tailored to company needs.

I was very much helped in this effort by a process mapping tool, [Nimbus](#), which enabled me to map step by step instructions. The application made it easy to question, reshape, and improve processes easily and determine the impact of change on them. Because Nimbus uses activity boxes with named resources, inputs and outputs it was possible to see not just if a process was correct in theory but also if it would work in practice. After several reviews and input from the Executive Management team, the processes and methodology were finalized.

The next step to realising a project office was to design and implement the intranet website with the necessary project tools to take us to levels 4 and 5 of the [P3M3](#) maturity model.

My vision was to have a one-stop shop where users could register an initiative and follow it through its entire lifecycle. Issue and risk logs, change logs, reporting, portfolio management, and governance all available in one place. Best of all, each initiative would have its own defined work space with direct links to all the processes, methodology and tools.

But having a vision and being able to translate it into web parts in SharePoint are two different things. Specifying my requirements to our SharePoint consultant was easier said than done: I had a good idea of what I wanted shown on the homepage, but as I thought more and more about the links that would need to be provided there, it became clear that my intranet site was growing into a beast of more than a hundred pages. One thing I knew - for this to be a success it would have to be user friendly, attractive, and workable for all departments in the company.

Still uncertain of the “how”, I sat down with our SharePoint consultant and showed him my sprawling spreadsheet. It seemed quite logical to me as a PMP but to him it was jus confusing. It was only late in the afternoon that he suddenly turned the 3 ft spreadsheet 90 degrees around and said “now I get it!”

There followed two and a half months with only a day here and there to work on the website. Yet as it began to take shape, I began to see more and more possibilities. For example, using a check box system with traffic lights available on the project workspaces, anyone could see at a glance what the status of a project. Also, the fact that progress was recorded in the same way meant that projects could be measured against each other.

It was just a few days before Christmas when we went live, and the holidays meant that it was mid January before any impact was felt. Nevertheless, positive feedback started coming immediately and in the next few months the benefits of the new offering became obvious. Having a dedicated area for each project, being able to add alerts to outstanding issues, providing a vehicle for change management, and visible processes and procedures proved their worth.

So, where are we eight months after the project office launch? I mentioned hearts and minds earlier, and that is very much what it’s about today. A project office needs commitment from management and employees. It requires a way of working that doesn’t rely on a typical hierarchical organization. The learning curve from chaotic to repeatable, defined, and managed has been a steep one and we still have a way to go. But on the plus side, Initiative Management, both project and portfolio, is steadily being adopted by the company. Initiatives are registered and launched in a standard way so that there is a general understanding and commitment. Every project is graded, measured for risk, backed by a strong business case and has an authorized budget. We’re still guilty of imposing impossible deadlines, but since each project is now planned, we have a much higher success rate. As a company, we have a clear vision of the projects we need to prioritise in order to reach our strategic business goals and the means to realise them.

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