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Research Article

The Role of Project Management Office (PMO) in Construction Sector: A Qualitative Case Study in the Department of Municipality and Transportation (DMT) in Abu Dhabi Emirate

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Abstract

Project management office (PMO) has become more and more necessary in many businesses in recent years as a result of its beneficial effects on the projects that are being undertaken. Although this situation is also present in the United Arab Emirates, particularly in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, PMO does not function as it should. Since there is currently no literature that expressly discusses the job of the PMO, this study aims to provide the PMO's role so that they can effectively move out their project mission. Three primary tasks are carried out in this study using a descriptive qualitative research style. Initially, ascertaining the PMO's functions based on the literature review. Secondly, basing the presurvey on the results of the literature review on the PMO's functions. Establishing focus groups to deliberate, confirm the pre-survey results, and ascertain the PMO's function is the third step. Throughout the seven PMO functions, this study identified numerous roles for PMOs. Respondents to the survey were PMOs, even though it was conducted as part of the PMO in the DMT in the UAE's Emirate of Abu Dhabi. The results provide an opportunity for further research on the PM competency framework and add to the newest developments in PMO literature, according to practitioners and certain academics from the United Arab Emirates.

Keywords: Project Management Office (PMO), Construction sector, Qualitative, Case study, Department of Municipality and Transportation (DMT), Abu Dhabi, Emirate.

INTRODUCTION

The domain of project management within the construction industry, as articulated by Lippi and Mateusz (2019), involves the processes of initiating, organizing, executing, monitoring, and concluding projects to achieve predetermined goals within specified timeframes. Aftab et al. (2016) characterize it as the careful oversight and management of project aims and objectives. The Project Management Institute (PMI) emphasizes the importance of employing knowledge, skills, tools, and methodologies to fulfill project demands (Abdelghany et al., 2017; Wijesundara et al., 2024).

The Association for Project Management elaborates on the concept of project management, defining it as a holistic process that encompasses the stages of definition, planning, monitoring, control, and delivery to achieve specified benefits (Moehler et al., 2018; Udriyah et al., 2019; Horani et al., 2023). It is recognized for its structured methodologies and vital interpersonal skills, including collaboration, leadership, and teamwork, which collectively serve as a crucial mechanism for efficiently and effectively addressing intricate challenges (Silva et al., 2021). This study specifically examines the qualitative dimensions of the Project Management Office (PMO) within the Department of Municipality and Transportation (DMT) in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi.

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The role of the Project Management Office (PMO) within the construction environment will be examined, highlighting its impact on the effective execution of projects within the department. To adopt a robust project management methodology, the organization must undergo structural changes and establish new roles and departments, with the project office being a pivotal component (Tulembayev et al., 2019). Projects are inherently fraught with uncertainty (Haghighi et al., 2019; Abeywardana et al., 2023). Consequently, it is essential for an organization to be structured in a manner that provides comprehensive visibility across all projects to effectively manage this uncertainty. To address this need, a Project Manager (PMO) is appointed to oversee projects and provide valuable insights for the decision-making process. Since 1994, the importance of the PMO has significantly increased. Research indicates that up to 76% of senior executives have established three PMOs at the executive level (Hobbs & Aubry, 2010a; Wulandari et al., 2023; Ranawaka et al., 2023).

Project Management Offices (PMOs) have the capacity to evolve in order to enhance their importance within organizations. In 2012, the projects they participated in had an average financial value of \$100 million (Faridoon, 2014). According to a 2019 survey conducted by the International Project Management Association (IPMA) and the Australian Institute of Project Management (AIPM), only 40% of companies utilize PMOs to coordinate various projects, which is considered a relatively low adoption rate for project management offices (Klynveld et al., 2019). PMOs are recognized as valuable resources that aid organizations in executing their projects more effectively. Notably, while the global average for PMO effectiveness stands at 41%, it has been reported that three out of four active PMOs provide project managers with a more structured approach (ESI International, 2013).

The significance of Project Management Offices (PMOs) is on the rise in India, with 76.8% of PMOs indicating that their performance has enhanced customer satisfaction (ESI International, 2012). This suggests that organizations utilizing a PMO significantly influence both project outcomes and stakeholder engagement, both internally and externally. A PMO is responsible for providing essential support services to the project management team. As businesses strive to effectively manage current and future projects, the necessity of having a PMO is becoming increasingly apparent (Ichsan et al., 2023). Similarly, the presence of PMOs in Abu Dhabi is becoming essential. The global landscape of project management reflects a parallel situation in the Abu Dhabi Emirate of the UAE in recent years. A survey conducted in the UAE revealed that some companies lack an official PMO. Research by Almansoori et al. (2021) and Alhammadi and Memon (2020) indicates that organizations with established PMOs

experience a significant positive effect on the execution of strategic initiatives, which subsequently influences overall organizational performance. Ichsan (2020) found that this trend is also observable in other industries.

This research indicates that as many as 87% of the 125 participants, who held various job titles such as senior program manager, manager/lead/specialist, PMO officer, and PMO leader, reported the presence of a formal Project Management Office (PMO) within their organizations. Conversely, only 9% of the respondents indicated that they either did not have a formal PMO or lacked plans to establish one. Furthermore, 66 individuals, representing 55% of the 120 respondents, did not believe that top management was satisfied with the existence of the PMO, contrary to what might be expected. Consequently, it can be concluded that the demand for PMOs is increasing across various sectors in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. The responsibilities attributed to PMO managers are evolving, and the intended functions of the PMO were not executed as planned within the Department of Municipalities and Transport (DMT). To facilitate the effective implementation of diverse projects, the establishment of a PMO is deemed necessary at the DMT in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. The author asserts that it is crucial to explore the fundamental responsibilities that PMOs are expected to fulfill, particularly given the ambiguous nature of PMO operations in the Abu Dhabi Emirate.

It is essential to identify the responsibilities of the PMO manager to effectively execute the duties of the PMO, considering the importance of these functions. Unlike the frameworks proposed by PMO professional associations in other countries, the framework assumed for the Department of Municipality and Transportation (DMT) in the Abu Dhabi Emirate is thought to have been created with a more practical perspective. Importantly, there exists a notable deficiency in research that examines the roles of PMO managers and leaders, highlighting the need for an in-depth exploration of their specific responsibilities and their impact on the DMT organization.

This research plays a vital role in addressing the existing gap by performing a comprehensive literature review through a qualitative research approach that is organized into two phases: surveys and face-to-face group discussions (F2FGD). The objective of this study is to enrich and update the current body of PMO literature, thereby facilitating further research aimed at enhancing the skills of PMO managers. The primary aim is to improve the capacity of PMO managers to position the PMO as a central element in achieving project success within organizations. This study not only seeks to identify the individual and organizational functions of PMO managers within the DMT but also aims to offer insights into the evolved role of the PMO. Furthermore,

it intends to aid in the formulation of a competency framework for PMO management. By addressing the research question, this study has significant implications for PMO managers, equipping them with the necessary competencies to guide the PMO towards becoming integral to organizational project success. Additionally, this article aspires to make a noteworthy contribution to the PMO Value Ring, a framework articulated by Duarte et al. (2019). The PMO Value Ring aids PMO managers in understanding the various stages involved, thus enabling them to manage the PMO effectively within their organizations. Through these contributions, the study aims to enhance the comprehension and application of effective PMO practices within the context of the DMT in the Abu Dhabi Emirate

LITERATURE REVIEW

Project management office (PMO)

The Project Management Office (PMO), as described by Wedekind and Philbin (2018), is a specialized organizational entity created to improve project outcomes through the implementation of standardized methodologies. This framework promotes a more profound understanding of project management practices and enables the integration of lessons learned throughout the project lifecycle. In accordance with the findings of Oliveira and Martins (2020), the primary function of the PMO is to assist project managers, teams, functional departments, and various levels within the organization, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the organization. Moreover, Katunina (2018) asserts that PMOs operate as organizational frameworks specifically designed to standardize project management processes. This standardization plays a crucial role in promoting the exchange of tools, resources, and methodologies, as highlighted by the Project Management Institute in 2013. Additionally, Braun (2018) underscores the PMO's position as a central hub for various initiatives, showcasing projects that hold significant strategic importance for the organization as a whole.

Consequently, the Project Management Office (PMO) plays a crucial role in establishing standards and methodologies aimed at enhancing project performance. It also functions as a support mechanism for project-related activities at various organizational levels (Tham et al., 2017; Pambreni et al., 2019; Herath et al., 2023). By promoting knowledge sharing and standardization, the PMO significantly enhances organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Additionally, its strategic role includes acting as a demonstration center for initiatives that hold considerable significance for the organization as a whole, as highlighted by Braun (2018).

Organizations engaged in project-centric activities, whether in the public or private sectors, recognize the necessity of implementing Project Management Offices (PMOs). As

noted by Khoori and Hamid (2020), a PMO empowers the organization's project management division to interact effectively with both the project and business landscapes, thereby assuming the responsibility of improving the organization's overall project management proficiency. The PMO plays a crucial role in standardizing processes, which promotes the efficient exchange of tools, methodologies, resources, and strategies for effective control management and the development of established routines, as emphasized by Rigassi and Campos (2018).

Aubry and Hobbs (2010) enhance this viewpoint by highlighting another advantage of implementing a Project Management Office (PMO), which is the increased value contribution of project management. This enhancement is realized through the PMO's effective and economical use of resources, as noted by Scheiblich et al. (2017). Consequently, the PMO serves not only as a promoter of standardized processes but also significantly contributes to the optimization of resource utilization, thereby improving the overall value obtained from project management efforts (Zheng et al., 2023; Sudha et al., 2023).

The creation of Project Management Offices (PMOs) is thus recognized as a crucial strategy for organizations engaged in project-driven endeavors. By implementing a systematic framework for project management, promoting the exchange of knowledge, and optimizing resource allocation, PMOs play a vital role in enhancing the success and value derived from projects in both the public and private sectors.

PMO Functions

Recent research has illuminated the complex roles of Project Management Offices (PMOs), offering detailed definitions derived from thorough investigations. As noted by Ichsan et al. (2023), the core function of a PMO is to deliver a holistic perspective on the projects being managed. To transform into a center for organizational learning, PMOs are urged to participate in reflective learning practices and position themselves as repositories of knowledge pertaining to project activities, as highlighted by Arbabi et al. (2020), Lacruz and Cunha (2017), Lucca et al. (2020), and Paton & Andrew (2019).

A number of scholars, such as Braun (2018), Duarte et al. (2019), Fateev & Zaporozhets (2020), Otrá-Aho et al. (2019), Paton & Andrew (2019), Wedekind & Philbin (2018), and Zouheir et al. (2019), characterize the Project Management Office (PMO) as fulfilling a supportive function. This role involves providing methodologies for projects, delivering services and assistance, and actively overseeing and regulating ongoing initiatives. Such a collaborative framework is consistent with the shifting perception of the PMO as a facilitator and enabler within the organizational project environment.

Furthermore, a third category of Project Management Office (PMO), referred to as strategic alignment, has been recognized. Research conducted by Bagherpour & Erjaee (2017), Braun (2018), Bredillet et al. (2018), Ershadi et al. (2021), Fateev & Zaporozhets (2020), Ichsan (2020), Ko & Kim (2019), and Otra-Aho et al. (2018) emphasizes its functions, which include overseeing project portfolios, enhancing project value, and contributing to overall project success. This strategic alignment highlights the PMO's active role in influencing and directing the organization's project environment towards achieving long-term goals and success. The evolving perception of PMO responsibilities illustrates its adaptive function in organizational project management. Beyond consolidating diverse perspectives on business performance and optimizing project processes, the PMO also serves as the manager of project evaluations, thereby facilitating a fourth method through which PMOs improve project performance (Carvalho et al., 2018; Fateev & Zaporozhets, 2020; Junqueira & Passador, 2018; Lacruz & Cunha, 2017; Siregar et al., 2018).

The Project Management Office (PMO) plays a crucial role in governance control, maintaining the ongoing oversight of projects that support the operational functions of the business (Eriksson & Leiringer, 2015; Fateev & Zaporozhets, 2020). Additionally, the PMO is instrumental in promoting innovation. It is vital for managing creative projects, securing long-term competitive advantages, and driving growth (Ershadi et al., 2021; Sergeeva & Ali, 2020). Furthermore, the PMO energizes the project execution process, provides administrative assistance, and enhances both employee productivity and customer satisfaction. It acts as a catalyst for organizational performance (Desmond, 2015). This research has identified several perspectives regarding the role of a PMO manager (Roden et al., 2017):

- Sharing relevant standards and establishing project management protocols
- Communication with the organization's stakeholders.
- Interaction throughout the organization and adherence to project, program, and portfolio methodologies
- Overseeing correspondence and comments
- Analysing and reporting

Furthermore, various additional functions relevant to the duties of the PMO manager have been identified in other research, as illustrated in Table 1: (Faridooon, 2014; Jerbrant, 2013; Roden et al., 2017; Zouheir & Rachid, 2020).

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative methodology, structured into two principal components: the survey and the focus group discussion (Azam et al., 2021). The methodology progresses through several stages, commencing with the formulation of research questions in the introductory section, followed by the identification of pertinent research sources. This process entails the use of keywords to facilitate the search for relevant information, the collection of data, and the subsequent analysis of findings to respond to the research questions presented in the introduction. The initial stage emphasizes the development of clear research questions that will steer the investigation, thereby establishing a foundational framework for the study and delineating specific areas of interest and inquiry. Following this, the research team identifies appropriate research sources, employing keywords to navigate the existing literature and gather information aligned with the study's objectives. The data collection phase encompasses systematic surveys and comprehensive focus group discussions, which together provide an in-depth understanding of the subject matter. Surveys yield structured responses, while focus group discussions facilitate a qualitative examination of participants' viewpoints and experiences.

The analysis phase ultimately integrates the gathered data to extract significant insights that respond to the research questions outlined in the introduction (Azam et al., 2023). This process entails the application of qualitative analysis methods to interpret survey responses and identify essential themes from the focus group discussions. Consequently, the methodological framework adopted in this study guarantees a detailed and systematic investigation of the research questions, employing both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect, process, and analyze pertinent data. This extensive methodology seeks to offer valuable insights into the function of the Project Management Office (PMO) within the Department of Municipality and Transportation (DMT) in the Abu Dhabi Emirate's construction sector.

Table 1: PMO managers Function.

S.No.	Function	Author
1	Project support includes organizing a team, helping the project team, handling stakeholders, and keeping an eye on and reining in the projects advancement.	Faridooon, 2014
2	Strategy alignment: Taking part in strategy planning and portfolio management while ensuring the project success.	Jerbrant, 2013
3	Overseeing governance: Engaging with stakeholders and assisting with organizational operations.	Roden et al., 2017
4	Leading the team, conducting project assessments, enhancing project standardization, and updating higher management on project progress are examples of project performance enablers.	Urbancic et al., 2004
5	Enabling organizational performance: Being in charge of each project's conception and execution.	Zouheir & Rachid, 2020

Survey and face-to-face group discussion (F2FGD)

Upon concluding the literature review, the findings were further elucidated through a pre-F2FGD survey completed by the participants. This process validated the PMO manager's responsibility in fostering a PMO community within the Abu Dhabi Emirate. Additionally, the DMT provided a list of individuals who expressed their willingness and capability to serve as resources for the author's F2FGD. A selection of approximately fifteen participants, which included the PMO head and educational professionals, was made. Only one F2FGD was conducted; however, the author distributed a pre-F2FGD questionnaire, designed in Microsoft Word, as a preparatory measure prior to the F2FGD.

Questionnaires were distributed to the email addresses of each respondent for the purpose of gathering information. During these initial activities, invited PMO managers were requested to outline the responsibilities of a PMO manager based on their professional experience and established best practices. Upon completing this task, the respondents submitted their findings via email. This activity primarily aims to identify the functions of the PMO. The roles of the PMO, categorized into seven distinct groups, are based on a synthesis of insights from literature reviews (Yesica et al., 2022). Subsequently, the respondents detailed the responsibilities associated with each PMO role that the PMO manager is anticipated to fulfill. The PMO manager provided a table with 12 lines allocated for each function, enabling respondents to select the options that align most closely with their perspectives. While it is not mandatory to fill in all 12 lines, respondents are required to specify the roles of at least two PMO managers. Variations and similarities may exist among the preparatory activities.

In conclusion, the results were established by evaluating comparable functions that the participants confirmed. Invitations to the F2FGD were sent out once the preparatory activities were compiled. The subsequent phase involves reviewing the F2FGD process in its entirety. The findings from the pre-F2FGD are examined, and the job descriptions for each PMO role are presented in the following schedule.

Subsequently, the participants were given the opportunity to express an alternative viewpoint or to either accept or reject the job description. The feedback was collected through a Google Form. Participants completed the associated Google Form after the job description for each position was displayed on the screen. Once the results from the F2FGD are available, the authors will compile

the information gathered and present a summary of the responsibilities that the PMO manager is expected to fulfill in alignment with the PMO functions. The process of summarization will involve utilizing an assessment method in the form of a scoring system to aggregate the responses from the F2FGD participants. The criteria for evaluation are outlined in Table 2.

RESULTS

After analyzing the outcomes of the face-to-face group discussion (F2FGD), an assessment technique was employed to chart all results. It was found that the respondent either approved or rejected each job description, both prior to and following the F2FGD. PMO managers are engaged in 60 distinct roles. The findings from the F2FGD were summarized and deliberated upon in the subsequent sections.

Knowledge Management

The PMO Manager is responsible for supervising the processes and tools associated with Project Management (PM) and Knowledge Management (KM). This role ensures that accessible data and resources operate effectively, collects information regarding implementation progress, identifies risk issues, and generates reports on the initiatives led by the PMO as a centre of PM knowledge. Additionally, the PMO Manager organizes the latest PM methodologies utilized across various project phases.

Supporting role

The PMO manager is responsible for improving the team's skills, choosing, developing, and managing the suitable project methodology, interpreting project strategy guidelines to ensure adherence to project implementation parameters, and acting as the organization's sole dependable source for expert project management implementation and staff training in the application of project methodologies.

Strategic alignment

The responsibilities of the PMO manager encompass the establishment of priority sequences and modifications to project statuses, the definition, development, and oversight of processes, as well as the coordination of the roles and principles that the PMO must maintain in collaboration with key management stakeholders. This role also requires teamwork skills and resources essential for managing organizational transformation and the project portfolio of the organization.

Table 2: Assessment criteria adopted from (Ichsan et al., 2023).

Description	Respondent Answer	Score
PMO job description	If respondent Agree with PMO description	The score will be (1)
PMO job description	If respondent Disagree with PMO description	The score will be (0)
PMO job description	If respondent Disagree but makes entries	The score will be (1)

Enabler for project performance

The PMO manager possesses a keen understanding of business dynamics, establishes project priorities, ensures transparent communication with stakeholders, allocates tasks in alignment with the company's vision, mission, business models, key performance indicators, and objectives, and collaborates with essential management stakeholders to define the roles and principles that the PMO will adhere to the project manager.

Governance Control

The Project Management Office (PMO) manager is responsible for encouraging stakeholders to comply with the governance framework set forth by the PMO. This role involves supporting the maintenance of key baselines, including scope, schedule, and budget, as well as supervising project control, verification, and validation processes to ensure product quality. Additionally, the PMO manager monitors project progress and ensures that team members are operating effectively.

Innovation Enabler

The PMO manager is tasked with orchestrating an innovation competition, acknowledging the winners, providing project management certification services, performing project evaluations and retrospectives regarding future tool applications, and actively encouraging the PMO team to fulfill their responsibilities and participate in technological training. Additionally, the manager engages in new methodologies and diverse tasks within the project, including defining, measuring, analyzing, improving, and controlling, as well as employing various project management techniques in real project scenarios.

Enabler for organizational performance

The responsibilities of the PMO manager encompass establishing platforms to promote collaboration, comprehension, and assistance among stakeholders, formulating business protocols for project management and conducting customer satisfaction surveys for each initiative, as well as working in conjunction with other department leaders to identify, prioritize, and enhance the project processes.

CONCLUSION

This study investigates the role of the PMO manager by utilizing the identified functions of the PMO. While numerous articles have addressed the responsibilities and tasks associated with PMOs, there is a notable lack of discussion regarding the specific role of the PMO manager. Given the increasing demand for PMOs in the UAE and globally, it is essential to reassess the position of the PMO manager for any newly established PMOs within DMT in the

Emirate of Abu Dhabi. This research consolidates various scholarly articles that examine the seven functional roles performed by PMOs. These roles encompass knowledge management, support, strategic alignment, governance control, project success facilitation, innovation, and enhancement of organizational performance, as derived from the reviewed studies.

The findings from the two phases of the study, which included the validation of the identified functions of the PMO and utilized the pre-F2FGD results from respondents as a data source, are influenced by these seven PMO functions. Specifically, a pre-F2FGD survey was administered to assess respondents' perceptions of the PMO manager's role based on the identified functions, incorporating the content related to PMO functions. Subsequently, the collected data were analyzed and presented during the F2FGD validation process. This research does have certain limitations. Primarily, the F2FGD was conducted with respondents who have experience as PMO practitioners, PMO leaders, and educational professionals. Additionally, this study was carried out as a case study within DMT in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, UAE, which specifically contextualizes the findings within the UAE and utilizes DMT in Abu Dhabi as the respondent base. Consequently, the results are tailored to address the needs of PMOs in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. Future research exploring the state of PMOs on a global or institutional scale, focusing on specific sectors or industries, would undoubtedly provide a more comprehensive understanding.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This study makes a substantial contribution by clarifying the changing skill sets necessary for Project Management Office (PMO) Managers and project managers in the Department of Municipality and Transportation (DMT) in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. Given the critical role these professionals play in increasing project visibility, it is essential to comprehend and improve their competencies for the success of the organization. Furthermore, this research not only highlights the present landscape of competence development but also provides important perspectives on customizing these skills to address the specific requirements of the DMT within the construction industry.

A key element examined in the study is the differing roles of PMO managers within various organizations, a situation that corresponds with the principles of contingency theory. Acknowledging this variability is essential, as it enables organizations to customize the duties of PMO managers according to their specific needs and contextual circumstances. By comprehending the varied expectations placed on PMO managers, the study offers a detailed viewpoint that assists organizations in identifying the most vital PMO functions necessary for improving project management effectiveness in their distinct environments.

The results of this research provide practical guidance for organizations in delineating and enhancing the roles and responsibilities of PMO managers in alignment with their business needs. Specifically, the research underscores the necessity of creating a well-defined framework and program aimed at cultivating the skills of PMO managers. This development is crucial for improving their ability to address the challenges associated with their positions, thereby promoting more efficient project management within the organization.

Additionally, the suggested framework for the development of PMO managers' competencies can act as a significant resource for organizations aiming to improve their PMO operations. By tailoring competencies to meet the distinct requirements of the DMT in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, organizations can bolster the overall efficiency of their PMOs, thereby ensuring a substantial contribution to the success of projects.

The implications of this study's findings reach far beyond the specific context of the DMT in Abu Dhabi. Organizations across various sectors and nations can utilize the proposed framework and insights to customize their PMO functions according to their distinct environments. Conducting similar research with participants from a range of industries and legal systems in different countries can further substantiate and enhance the proposed competence development framework. This approach not only broadens the applicability of the findings but also aids in advancing the global comprehension of effective PMO management practices. In summary, the contributions of this study are extensive. It addresses the particular competencies required by PMO Managers and project managers within the DMT in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi while also offering a framework that organizations can adapt to improve the effectiveness of their PMO managers. This research serves as a significant resource for organizations seeking to optimize their project management processes and outcomes, thereby enriching the wider conversation on effective PMO management across various organizational and cultural settings.

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