

Coach Rather Than Do

Many publicly funded organisations create Program or Portfolio Management Offices (PMOs) to help improve performance by coaching and coordinating across many project delivery teams. But people working in PMOs often feel pressured to get involved in work on individual projects, leaving less time for coaching, tactics, and training. When the PMO gets distracted playing the ball instead of coaching for the season, everyone misses more goals.

People who manage projects in publicly funded organisations rarely identify as professional project managers. For people with great skills in operationally relevant professions but limited training or experience in project management, it is tempting to rely heavily on the specialist project capability in a PMO.

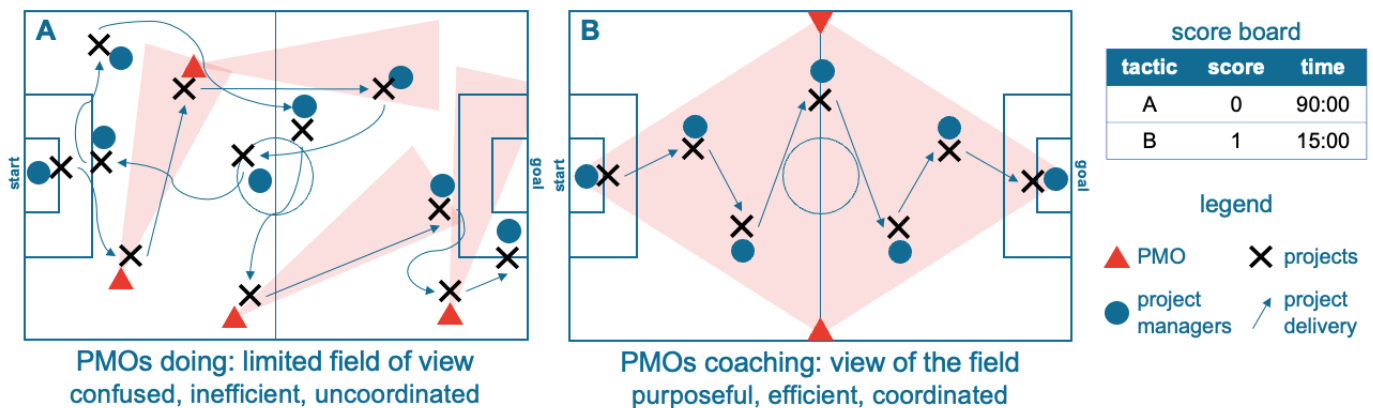
Accountability between PMOs and projects can be confusing, especially in organisations with many projects. It is easy, and often appealing, for the project teams who are actually accountable for delivery to assume that the PMO 'owns' every project.

The experienced, task-oriented project professionals who work in PMOs want projects to succeed. When issues arise, they can sometimes swing into action automatically instead of supporting others to act.

When PMOs divert their limited time and resources to work on individual projects, they inevitably do less of their critical work coaching and coordinating across projects. If nobody is monitoring and guiding all that effort, inefficiency shrinks the capacity of the whole organisation, reducing rather than increasing output.

When a PMO gets involved in project delivery, the lines of accountability between support and delivery functions are blurred. It also undermines the PMO's independence in monitoring project performance and escalating issues.

Lending a hand can look like a quick win, but longer-term goals suffer when a PMO shifts from building organisational capability to lending a handful of skilled resources to one project at a time.



Clearly defining roles and responsibilities of the PMO, executive sponsors, and project teams makes it easier for everyone to play their part with confidence. PMOs should take every opportunity to demonstrate and reinforce the value of each role, including their own, so everyone sees the benefit of staying in position.

Part of the work of a PMO is to train and coach others to become great sponsors and delivery team members. That includes teaching them to be accountable for actions and outcomes, not just for making decisions that someone else will implement.

PMOs should observe patterns and provide advice and insights that improve individual projects and whole programs. To see, escalate, and resolve systemic issues, they need to focus on the whole field of play.

When everyone understands the unique roles and value of the PMO, sponsors, and delivery teams, they are more likely to respect the boundaries between those roles. That leaves PMOs free to focus on their important work monitoring performance, coaching, and coordinating work across projects. Small PMOs can do more good for their organisations in the long term by coaching many people to manage many projects better, than by delivering a few projects themselves.

PMOs help organisations to succeed by seeing patterns on the field and working hard to improve the performance of the players and the team. That means watching from the sidelines rather than chasing the ball. A PMO can only maximise, and demonstrate, its value by staying focused on strategy, tactics, and training to help more projects kick more goals.