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How to Increase Project Management Office Maturity Levels Through Multiple Releases *(Part 4 of Series)*

By Chris Craig-Jones



A “release” is a project that addresses a group of recommendations for improving project, program and portfolio management maturity. In short, a “release” is a grouping of recommendations that feed into a project. This article, the fourth of a six-part series, outlines how to effectively

utilize multiple releases and provides recommendations for a maturing Project Management Office (PMO).

Evolving Your Level of Maturity

Releases involve people, processes and technology, and should be measured for effectiveness. Each release will provide incremental improvement over the previous releases. Every process-improvement release should be executed between 60 to 90 days, with an agreed follow-on period for operation use before the effectiveness of that release is re-benchmarked. It is an iterative process of continuous release, use and benchmark.

The balance here is to come back regularly with measurable value for the following key stakeholders:

- Operational project managers, who will need to be sold on changing culture to accommodate the new process
- Tactical departmental managers, who will be held accountable for instituting the new process
- Strategic executives, who will want to see the return on investment (ROI) for the organization

A common oversight in benchmarking and improving delivery processes is forgetting the critical role played by the support organizations (project, program and portfolio). Each level of delivery — project, program and portfolio — has its own processes, which are aligned to support organizations that have their own processes.

Therefore, to evolve your maturity levels, you need to improve delivery-type processes and support-type processes that go on at the same time. For example, say you want to improve a process related to procurement. On the delivery side, the project manager will undertake processes for supplier selection, while the support organization (in this case, the PMO) undertakes processes to develop parameters for creating and maintaining supplier lists.

Both of these process improvements would involve changes to staffing or roles, plus the implementation of Project and Portfolio Management (PPM) software to support the processes. This means that the support organization develops rules and guidelines so that project, program and portfolio managers can carry out the delivery processes efficiently and effectively.

Often, when improving the level of maturity in PPM and the associated processes, organizations take a “bottom-up” approach. We often see the different profiles of functionality released as an organization moves up the maturity level from “Active” through “Business-Driven” ([see Part 3 of the series](#)) on groups of processes.

A possible approach with a four-part release implementation may be:

- **Release 1:** Implement basic project management including initiation, planning (plus resource assignments), control, execution (plus time capture) and project closure
- **Release 2:** Add project risk management to the basic project management functionality; basic program management of projects and services (mainly grouping projects and services into programs for progress reporting); and portfolio-management processes and capabilities for both projects and services
- **Release 3:** Add project cost management, project procurement management and project quality management; program risk analysis; and program resource management
- **Release 4:** Add IT services portfolio planning; business relationship management; services finance management; program cost management; program procurements and program quality management

For example, say a large healthcare organization decided to take a bottom-up approach. Its first release involved improving its project, resource and time-management processes through the implementation of industry-standard processes for project management, supported by standards, templates and software.

This first release raised their level of maturity in many project-management-level processes. Their second release involved improving the processes they needed to review resource usage and capacity across programs of projects, plus the management of costs and earned value at both the project and program level.

Their future releases most likely will concentrate on economies of scale through the improvement of program-level processes, plus aligning projects and services to corporate objectives through portfolio management “what if?” processes.

An example of a different approach is of a property-development company that wanted to improve processes, organization and technology at both the project-management and portfolio-management levels in the first release. They introduced standardization around project initiation, scope definition, high-level project planning and tracking, and resource allocations, plus grouping of projects into portfolio scenarios for “what if?” analysis. The next release introduced cost management at both the

project- and portfolio-planning levels. In this case, the focus is on both project and portfolio management, and program management is likely to be addressed in later releases.

Both of the above examples relate to the work of internal IT departments in the delivery of projects, programs and portfolios. While services organizations carry out the same processes, they may differ in the lower-level detail as to how they carry out the processes and staffing, utilize PPM software, and also, in the priorities they place on certain processes or groups of processes.

These processes could include storing of supplier information and selection criteria; the automated application of selection criteria against a project-selection request to identify a match or mismatch; collection and analysis on use of suppliers for projects and programs, and the rates that were negotiated; and analysis of trends in supplier rates.

Tips for a Maturing PMO: Ensuring Success

Once you have determined the processes you want to improve and grouped the recommendations into a release, the following steps are crucial to ensure the success of the process-improvement project:

- **Thought leadership:** Create a roadmap and vision for the implementation of processes, organizational change and PPM software, an explanation of why we’re doing this, who it will benefit, and the desired ROI. Constantly communicate this roadmap, benefits and progress at three levels of the organization (project, program and portfolio).
- **Clearly define the requirements and create an actionable scope:**
 1. Scope should be manageable and achievable within 60 to 90 days
 2. Scope creep will derail your efforts as teams lose sight of the payoff
 3. Frequent successes fuel positive public relations for all internal audiences and maintain sponsorship
- **Staffing - Set up three teams:**
 1. **Implementation Team:** Defines and implements processes and puts supporting standards, material and PPM software into place. This team will carry out each release, then hand off to the stabilization team and on-boarding teams and move to the next release.

2. Stabilization Team: Takes over from the implementation team to ensure that any process, people or technology issues in the release are addressed and have no impact on the implementation team undertaking the next release.
3. On-boarding Team: Trains all end users in the new processes, standards, supporting material and software being deployed within that release. Again, this is undertaken as a separate exercise so that it does not divert the implementation project resources away from the next release. Effective on-boarding will ensure that the process improvements and changes will be used throughout the organization (e.g., will raise the level of maturity in the deployed processes to level 3, the "Responsive" level of maturity). As one release builds on the next, this team helps to ensure that the maturity level is raised across the entire process.

Companies undertaking improvement initiatives often allocate their budget for a mixture of process, people and technology-related improvements. So, why not invest an additional 5 to 10 percent into measurement to ensure these improvement projects are actually creating benefits for the organization?

Coming up in part five of this series, my colleagues Haydn Thomas and Julie Tilke take a look at the first two of the three leading formalized project management methodologies in, "Best Practice Methodologies for the Project Management Office."

Read the previous articles in the series.

- » [Part 1 - How to Get Started with a PMO](#)
- » [Part 2 - How to Implement a PMO](#)
- » [Part 3 - How to Evolve the Maturity of Your PMO](#)

Chris Craig-Jones is Global Solution Manager for CA Clarity PPM. He has more than 30 years of experience in information technology and management, progressing from programming through analysis, project management, data and database administration, strategy planning, program management, business process engineering and consultancy management.

Prior to his current position, he was responsible for the management of CA Clarity™ PPM services projects within the Western United States.

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