

## **Program Director or Program Management Office (PMO) – What’s the difference?**

*Debby Mulheran, Pandanus Consulting*

Each organisation has a different scope of projects and programs to manage in their portfolio, and therefore different structural requirements for management and support. Methodologies and publications provide great guidance and definitions to support organisation and role considerations. The more programs and projects you have running, the more relevant you will find the organisational arrangements recommended in methodologies. When there is only one program or few projects and programs, in practice it can be a little confusing.

### **Program Director**

The Managing Successful Programs methodology describes the role of the program manager as being “responsible for leading and managing the setting up of the program through to delivery of the new capabilities and realisation of benefits. They have primary responsibility for successful delivery of the new capabilities and establishing governance.” Taking an integrated and holistic view across all projects is critical for strategic alignment and to mitigate duplication and gaps. It mitigates the risk of impacted stakeholders being inefficiently and haphazardly bombarded by each project.

### **Program Management Office (PMO)**

The Managing Successful Programs methodology describes the key roles of the PMO as being “to support the programs and to provide assurance and governance across the programs”. It is therefore important that the PMO is independent of the programs to effectively undertake the assurance and governance role. The PMO sets the standards to which the programs and projects adhere. This enables consistency and effective consolidation of information and analysis across the full portfolio of projects and programs. A PMO provides support in areas such as consolidated reporting, financial management, and creation and maintenance of templates for consistent documentation.

### **So what is the real difference?**

The key word is “delivery”. The Program Director is accountable for delivering the outcomes – the content of the change happens through their leadership and direction across all the projects in the program and upwards management and enablement of governance. The PMO is not accountable for delivering any change outcomes or any solutions implementation. The PMO is independent of the program(s), and sets the standards and monitors compliance by programs and projects. It also consolidates information across projects and programs for central access and communication.

### **What do you need?**

If you have multiple programs, then separate functions for program management and PMO are cost effective. When there is only one program, then separation is more difficult. Prioritise obtaining the skilled and experienced resources to effectively deliver outcomes in a structured and traceable manner with the right support. PMO staff usually understand the theories and templates, but *some* don’t have a lot of experience with leading timely implementation of outcomes. Program Directors have the delivery expertise, but some may not have the financial management knowledge of your organisation for example. Work out where you can get additional skills and support (eg finance team liaison) to complement the primary resources you engage with the skillsets you need most.