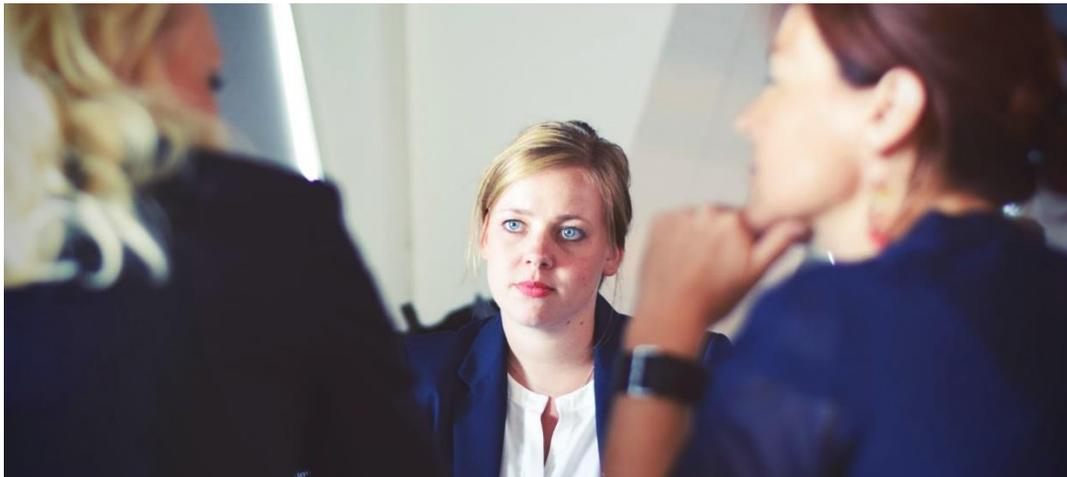


How PMOs Can Manage **Business and IT Clashes**



About the Author: **Randy Tupaz**



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Randy has over 15 years of experience helping companies translate their strategic technology initiatives into solutions that grow revenue and improve operational efficiencies. He specializes in building multidisciplinary teams to convert business vision into pragmatic technology solutions.

Prior to joining 1Rivet, Randy served as director of client services and delivery at SapientNitro, a top-tier digital marketing agency. Collectively, he spent seven years leading technology and digital marketing initiatives for clients across North America in the consumer retail, telecom, and energy services industries.

Prior to SapientNitro, he spent four years in executive leadership roles in sales, finance & operations at TELUS, Canada's second-largest telecom company. Randy started his career as a software engineer working for various startups in San Francisco.

Randy holds an honors bachelor of mathematics degree in computer science from the University of Waterloo, in Ontario, and an MBA from the Ivey Business School, London, Ontario.

One of the most frustrating and unique struggles of running a program management office (PMO) is balancing the needs and wants of business units and the IT department.

When business and IT aren't succinctly transparent about a mission, the PMO often ends up refereeing disputes. The PMO's ability to proactively and effectively address those clashes will be the difference between a successful implementation or a splintered project.

But how do you ensure business goals stay at the forefront of all discussions with IT? And how do you explain IT's tech challenges to the business?

Based on my experience, here's what's required to successfully navigate these challenges plus some signs it's time to call in a mediator:

Confront PMO Alignment

On an operational level, sometimes IT doesn't completely understand the business vision, what the business actually wants to implement or the business' detailed processes. Those types of issues often arise when a PMO is aligned with the IT department and lead to preventable setbacks and frustrations.

There are three solutions to tackle this organizational issue:

1. Move the PMO out of IT.
2. Make the PMO independent and not aligned with the business unit or IT.
3. Skew the PMO toward the business side.

At the end of the day, the business will absorb and operate the new IT solution. For this reason, moving the PMO away from IT often has minimal impact, while shifting it toward independence or the business-side will facilitate long-term positive change. Of course, this means that your PMO will require that unicorn skillset of being both business-oriented and technologically savvy.

You May Need a Referee

PMOs who reside in IT may tend to drive their ideas and technology without completely understanding how the business works or where the technology fits in day-to-day operations. Re-centering your PMO can be a clarifying step that eliminates confusion. Another option is to bring in a tech consultant as a referee.

I saw this process firsthand during 1Rivet's assistance of a merger between two regional companies in the same industry. The combative relationship between the business side and IT side of the organization led to snowballing mistrust and misunderstanding by each group during very large and costly transformational initiatives.

Their PMOs had always been run by IT. Teams were resistant to change and stuck handling the transition independently within their respective departments.

Bringing in 1Rivet as a neutral third party facilitated actionable, alternative solutions that bridged the divide.

We aligned ourselves with the business unit leaders, ensured we had a partner in IT who came to all our meetings, and provided the unbiased, fact-based translation of business needs to tech feasible solutions.

Communication is Key

Clear communication across teams drove our client's successful PMO shift. We used side conversations to obtain buy-in from key stakeholders, Consistent people management and personalized, open, direct discussions facilitated the bank's success.

The same approach can directly translate to your PMO, business and IT issues.

Try these tips to ease this process:

- Create a 'war room' so the team has a dedicated place to discuss ideas, strategy and most importantly, focus on translating the business vision into pragmatic technology solutions.
- Employ hypothesis-based solutions via quick sprints and/or POCs to help your team reimagine the possible when it feels like you've hit a wall.
- Simplify your chain of command by having two levels of reporting. The key is to be able to quickly and easily streamline detailed status reports into executive dashboards. This saves time spent producing reports that no one will read and allows for open, real-time feedback.

Put Relationships at the Forefront

Realigning the PMO and facilitating efficient communication won't happen unless the person driving the effort is seen as a trusted adviser.

Work hard at building your relationships up and down the organizational chart. At the end of the day, people want to work with people they get along with professionally and, ideally, personally.

Your reputation will precede you so be consistent with your approach. Act with integrity and honesty. Don't sugar coat setbacks. Talk about what went wrong, what you learned and how you're going to fix issues.

Lastly, be selfless: The best PMO players take the hits when things are not going well and give kudos to team members and clients when things go right.

Ultimately, strong leaders recognize when it's time to try a new strategy to bridge the IT and business unit divide. A fresh perspective, coupled with the tips above, may be exactly what your company needs to resolve tensions and get both departments on the same page for good.

About 1Rivet

Working from offices in Washington, D.C., New York, Toronto and Valsad, India, the company's three core divisions offer:

STRATEGIC TECHNOLOGY

IT mergers and acquisitions, systems integration, data integration, data visualization and analytics, delivery management and customer experience.

OUTSOURCING SERVICES

Development and testing, project management, customer service, IT help desks, mailroom shipping and receiving, administrative assistants and reception, concierge, facilities, MFD management and key ops, conference room management, imaging and records management, audio visual and graphic design.

TALENT ACQUISITION

Strategic hires, contract-to-hires and scalable workforce hires.