

# TRANSFORMATION SPOTLIGHT

## Part Two: FINDING A PURPOSE

**“B**irds of a feather.” What a dazzling spectrum of life is encapsulated in those four short words.

One of the six main animal groups, “birds” range from 400-pound African ostriches, which can kill with a single kick, to Cuba’s bee hummingbirds, weighing-in at a little under two grams. From the vibrantly coloured scarlet macaw, to the almost monochrome grey catbird. Adorned with beaks that protrude like warrior swords, as proudly displayed by Australian pelicans, or with ones compressed against the face, as with Papua’s pygmy parrots.

Behaviourally as well as physically, the avian world is spectacularly diverse. African queleas swarm in the millions, while solitary sandpipers prefer shady creeks where they can forage alone. Artic terns migrate vast distances in the pursuit of endless summertime, clocking up a million miles in a lifetime, whereas wren-like rushbirds rarely venture the length of a sportsfield from the pond where they hatched. The gila woodpecker thrives in hot, bleak deserts, using the inside of a cactus as a home, and is literally a world apart from amphibious birds such as puffins which can dive to a depth of 200 ft in search of herring and eel. Crows and ravens have excelled in scientific tests of ingenuity and creativity, defying the lazily dismissive soubriquet “bird-brained”.

The remarkable diversity evident within the feathered community is, in similar vein, a hallmark of the Programme Management Office. The first edition of ‘Transformation Spotlight’ described the types of strategic, economic, technological and competitive environments which can prompt organisations to establish a PMO. Now it’s time to explore the gamut of roles the PMO can perform – and it’s a bona fide kaleidoscope.

There is no boilerplate terms of reference to cut-and-paste from text book to real world. The PMO’s mandate should be determined by factors such as the scope of the strategy, the pace of the change,

and the culture of the organisation. That’s why the purposes and practices of PMOs are as wondrously varied as is the bird population. They can be obstinate like an ostrich or nimble like a hummingbird, conspicuous like a macaw or obscure like a catbird, generously-staffed like a quelea flock or solitary like a sandpiper.

The following checklist highlights ten activities which could sensibly fall within the remit of a newly-established Programme Management Office. Executive sponsors might find this a useful point of reference when setting a mandate that’s fit for purpose:

- **Owning the plan:** The PMO can guard the ‘single version of the truth’, acting as the authority on “what’s meant to happen, when and how”, as well as arbitrating on different interpretations
- **Embedding project management disciplines:** In the words of the Association for Project Management, the PMO can help bring about “a world in which all projects succeed” – resolving issues, coordinating activities, implementing robust governance
- **Enlisting talent:** Transformation programmes frequently present opportunities for ambitious staff to acquire new skills and demonstrate their potential; the PMO can be the habitat in which they flourish
- **Providing technical support:** Rapid change often creates a temporary requirement for specific expertise, for example in M&A or new product development; the PMO can become the hub for such resourcing
- **Triggering decisions:** The PMO will be aware of the time criticality of key decisions, and can be the catalyst for tough choices being made - highlighting when they fall due and assembling the required evidence base
- **Coaching and mentoring:** Operational leaders touched by change programmes often require confidential, objective counsel; the PMO can act as a sounding-board or as devils’ advocate as scenarios are mullied
- **Maintaining momentum:** Like a movie producer or boxing coach, whenever it

detects that energy may be sagging, a streetwise PMO can reach into its toolkit and deploy adrenaline boosts to rejuvenate star performers

- **Championing transformation:** From time to time, radical changes may face setbacks and sceptics; the PMO can act as ever-enthusiastic cheerleaders, waving metaphorical pom-poms should adversity threaten
- **Raising awareness:** A Transformation Programme hidden in the shadows will struggle to enthuse or achieve anything noteworthy; PMOs need to understand their internal and external audiences, generating a flow of communications across multiple channels
- **Tracking benefits:** Without demonstrable benefits, Transformation Programmes are an abject exercise in futility. Anticipated benefits – not all financial – need upfront endorsement from executive sponsors, whereupon they become part of an organisation’s DNA. The PMO can be tasked to ensure they aren’t then consigned to limbo, like a forlorn starling confused by the mid-Atlantic jet stream.

In many instances, the themes summarised in this 10-point checklist converge in a simple directive for a nascent Programme Management Office:- to act as the bloody-minded custodian of the strategic vision that existed at its genesis. Without prodding, organisations can succumb to the insidious temptations of the comfortably familiar – and avoid the overbearing demands of a journey to an uncertain future.

In the third part of this series, ‘Transformation Spotlight’ will investigate how that original strategic vision – far from being cast aside – can endure, prominent and proud, the irredeemable heart of the change programme.

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