Progress—One Step at a Time

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Alex Jordan, a volunteer member of Global Telecommunications' Project Management Community of Interest (PMCOI), just ended a meeting with John Payton, the Senior Vice-President of the Network Business Unit. In the meeting, Alex reported the progress the PMCOI had made with respect to the current year's business plan. He sensed that John was concerned about the lack of progress since the last status review. John challenged Alex to come up with a way to improve the focus on the plan and add a significant value to the company.

GLOBAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS INC.

Global Telecommunications Inc. (GlobalTel) is a business leader in the telecommunications industry. With its global presence firmly entrenched, the company provides a broad range of wireless voice and data services, global backbone networks, broadband, IP, and Wi-Fi to its clients, ranging from individual consumers to global enterprises. In recent years, GlobalTel has had annual revenues of over $100 billion. As a global corporation, GlobalTel is organized by business units (BU). The major BUs are Business, Consumer, Network, Wholesale, and Operations, with support units of Legal, Human Resources, Advertising, Finance, and Executive Operations (see Figure 21.2). In addition, there is a Quality Management office as part of the Network BU that also reports "dotted-line" into the CEO. Each BU has its own independent organizational structure. Even though project management has been established as the standard approach to deliver business results and maximize customer satisfaction, most project managers at GlobalTel operate within their independent entities with no overall cohesion. The consistency in managing projects is lacking at GlobalTel. While some support may exist within the organization, there is no formal, centralized support for the project managers. There is no available source for project management advice, counsel, tools, techniques, processes, metrics, etc.

GlobalTel's largest presence is within the United States, but it has successfully established business within its international territories (Europe, Middle East,

Africa, Latin America, and the Asia-Pacific rim). This has proven to be extremely effective, given its desire to do business with the multinational corporations. This business can originate within the United States, or from within one of the international territories, and can be extended to any or all of the others.

GlobalTel's projects are of varying size, scope, and duration. Its larger projects are typically generated by the Business BU. These projects tend to be significantly complex, with a multitude of its products and services integrated into a total large sale. The Business projects usually focus on a single business customer, but may either be focused on a single site or span multiple domestic U.S. locations and a number of global sites. The Consumer projects, while significant in number, tend to be more limited in scope and breadth of products/ services. The Consumer projects have a shorter duration, often with expedite demands, but require more in the way of customer support and service in order to ensure overall satisfaction. GlobalTel's internal projects, typically generated from within the Network or Operations BUs, are also complex with large amounts of capital and expense dollar funding levels. These projects can vary from several months to many years in duration, with another GlobalTel entity needing to be satisfied. Process improvement, network infrastructure enhancements, or other internal demands are typically the basis for these projects.

FLASHBACK

The history of PMCOI started with the recognition of the prevalent global project management issues existing at GlobalTel. To deal with it, a small group of dedicated project managers banded together. This self-initiated, "grassroots" team of volunteers referred to themselves as the GlobalTel Project Management Community of Interest. All of the PMCOI members shared a passion for the profession and wanted to see things get better for the project managers. They faced the existing issues of constrained resources, the lack of a standard project management process or methodology, little or no training requirements for project managers, and inconsistent project performance measures. They wanted to bring attention to the GlobalTel project managers and the important role they served.

When first formed, the PMCOI was loosely structured. There was no real leader and meetings took on an almost social club feeling. It became increasingly clear to most members that a more formal structure, executive support, and recognition of the PMCOI were needed. The executive support was especially important, since without it the group lacked the legitimacy necessary to implement its plan. In addition, new members were reluctant to join fearing that their contribution of time and effort would go unrecognized, perhaps even be challenged, by their local management.

As they worked to identify potential executives, one of the members recommended her senior manager since he had a strong belief in project management. When approached, John Payton, a senior vice-president in the Network business

Figure 21.2   GlobalTel, Inc. Organizational Structure
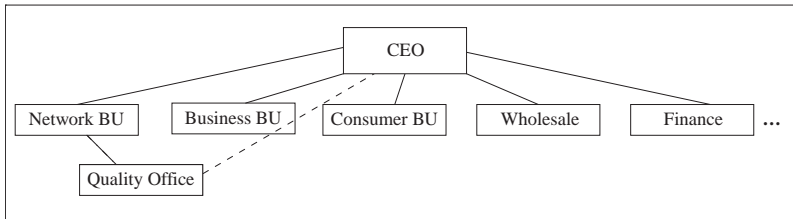
unit, willingly accepted their invitation to become Executive Champion of the PMCOI. This marked a significant turning point, for the PMCOI was able to now accelerate its progress, become a more formalized entity, and attract additional volunteer members. With John Payton's support, the PMCOI planned and successfully implemented GlobalTel's first-ever project management symposium which brought together the project managers, their leaders and executives, and external experts in a forum aimed at spotlighting the importance of project management. John Payton arranged for the CEO to make opening remarks. The event was a sold-out success.

HOW TO MOVE FORWARD

Alex realized that even though the PMCOI had accomplished a lot, it had never operated to its full potential. Although it had an excellent Champion and more recognition, the members were still participating on a voluntary basis. Not being a formal corporate entity, the PMCOI was not funded through the company budgeting process. The members were called upon to use whatever was available to them through their organizations. Alex stops by Sally's office to update her about his meeting with John. Sally is a senior project manager, working under John, and a PMCOI member.

Alex: Knock. Knock.

Sally: Alex, come on in. How was the meeting? Sorry that I could not make it. I had a conference call with one of our clients. Do you remember the order access project I told you about? Now Cortel, the client, wants us to change the web-based application.

Alex: Really. That's going to be a challenge.

Sally: Yes. Anyhow, tell me about the meeting.

Alex: The meeting went fine. I just reported our progress to John. You know what we were expecting to hear, right? We have not done much lately. Everybody

has been very busy with work. And with the downsizing, everybody is being asked to do even more. It seems that we are losing the members' interest in the PMCOI little by little.

Sally: You're right. It is unfortunate but what can we do? Our formal responsibility should come first. So, what did John say about it?

Alex: He did not say much. But I could see that he was not very pleased. He asked if we can do something to revitalize the PMCOI. I think that's going to be tough. We can't do much given the downsizing that's going on. People just don't have a lot of time to volunteer.

Sally: Okay. Do you want to talk about this now, Alex? I mean, I am free now and we can also continue over lunch. How is your schedule today?

Alex: I can talk. Let's talk. Now, what can we do so we don't lose the focus on project management that we've been able to create?

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Sally: Let's step back a little. I think first we should think about what should be the future roles and responsibilities of the PMCOI.

Alex: Our vision and mission statements are good. John liked them a lot when we shared them and asked him to be our Executive Champion. So if we still want to provide leadership and direction for the advancement of project management here at GlobalTel and we want to advocate and support the implementation of project management practices, processes, and principles across GlobalTel, what should we do? Even though we agree that project management is important to our company, each BU has its own way of doing things. Project managers also do things their own way. We don't have a standard methodology, so we all don't speak the same language when it comes to our project management. Also, our global clients have noted this as well. They want consistency irrespective of the region of the company that they are dealing with.

Sally: We have done some things in that area but I guess it's not enough, right? Project managers in my BU would say that they follow the same methodology. I think it is a good start.

Alex: Right. Things go well in your BU since you have support from John. It is a different story in other BUs. Even though John helps to convince other executives to support us, they still do not take us seriously. They think that their project management approach works well for them or they just don't care. They do not see why they have to put more effort into project management.

Sally: I agree. Besides creating a standard methodology, we also want to continue our project management symposium, right?

Alex: Definitely. It was such a great idea to organize a project management symposium. I think people are more positive about it than the standard methodology. Our first symposium was a great one-day event. The internal and external presentations helped to share knowledge and experiences in project management. John provided great support for the symposium. Personally inviting other executives to attend was a great idea! He attended for the whole day. . . I don't know how he was able to do that with his schedule! We could expand the symposium to be an annual two-, or even three-day event. I have heard from many GlobalTel people that they are interested in presenting next year. The external speakers are interested as well. Even our global regions said they enjoyed it. It has been a big success. I believe we have established a tradition that will last well into the future.

Sally: Definitely. Besides sharing our internal knowledge and experiences, I like the fact that we got to hear so many perspectives in panel discussions led by outside industry leaders. Having outside guest speakers was also great.

Alex: So, we agree that creating a project management standard and organizing the symposium are the major responsibilities for the future.

Sally: Yes. I think that training should be one of our responsibilities as well. There is really no project management curriculum and no consistency with respect to the training that project managers should have. We have a good partnership with the HR department. We can give them a list of the subject areas and then they can organize the training.

Alex: You mean. . . you want the PMCOI to organize the training, too?

Sally: I don't know. I think we have to think more about that. I think it depends on the structure of the future PMCOI. If we are still on a voluntary basis, we will not have time to organize the training. In that case, using the partnership with HR is the best way.

Alex: In the future, besides sharing knowledge and experience through the symposium, I think the PMCOI can play the role of a consulting unit. You know. For example, we can create a review process. Within it, there are sub-processes for data collection, providing consultation and corrective advice, and suggesting additional areas of opportunity. The PMCOI can participate in project audits, too. This review process can provide a linkage between us and the Auditing department. We can work through Kathy for this, since she is from Internal Auditing.

Sally: Wow. This will require a lot of work and people. With the way the PMCOI is structured now, I don't think we can do all of this.

Alex: I know. I'm concerned as well. One more thing, I learned from other companies that they have an organizational entity that helps monitor some

major projects. We may be able to do that, too. We can get some information about our project management from those key projects. We can help establish the current baseline and track the progress of deployment. I know Sally, this is huge. The structure of PMCOI must be changed to accommodate these new roles and responsibilities.

STRUCTURE AND STAFFING

Sally: Sure. So, what are our options on the future structure of the PMCOI?

Alex: With all the major responsibilities we just discussed, we may not be able to do everything, but at least I think the PMCOI should increase its visibility here. One way to do that is to have more executive engagement. Maybe we can create something like an Executive Steering Committee. Then, as we interact with them, we keep them in the loop. This way, we may get buy-in from project managers working under them.

Sally: When we get their support, the implementation of the standard methodology should go smoother and we may get more people to be volunteers in PMCOI, too.

Alex: Right. But we can't guarantee that more people will volunteer. In fact, the Executive Steering Committee may be a long shot. It may generate some initial excitement, but in the long run, what will happen if the executives lose their interest? What kind of signal will that send? Executives come and go, too. Would the new executives accept our invitation to join? We can't control that. We can't even control our PMCOI members now.

Sally: Right. Another option is making PMCOI a permanent part of the organization.

Alex: You mean having full-time staff and all of that? But we're in a down-sizing mode. What will executives think about this? They are reducing their headcounts and we are proposing a new organization.

Sally: I know. I also have some concerns about that as well. But we will never know what will happen if we don't try. And if PMCOI is not a permanent entity, you can forget about all of those consulting and monitoring responsibilities, Alex.

Alex: You're right. Let's assume that the possibility exists. How will this new entity be staffed? Where should it report?

Sally: Good questions. Assume that we will call it a PMO for now. Based on its future responsibilities, the PMO should be staffed with experienced project managers. Probably PMPs.

Alex: How many?

Sally: Eight to ten.

Alex: It is downsizing time, Sally. Who will give up their experienced project managers to this new PMO? Eight to ten seems to be too large.

Sally: I know. We have to think more about this. Maybe we should start small. Four to five maybe? It all depends on the responsibilities of the new PMO. It definitely should not limit its responsibilities to what the PMCOI currently does. It should do more. For example, it should definitely keep a partnership with HR, but it should organize its own PM training. It should be sure to keep the symposium running, and implement a standard methodology across all of the BUs. Also, it should consider all of those consulting and monitoring items that you suggested. Don't you think that it needs that many experienced staff?

Alex: I share your view, Sally. I know that during this crunch time, if this new PMO is established, it has to prove to people that it adds value. I know that we need that kind of staff. But I am not sure it will be possible. BUs may not want to give up their best project managers.

Sally: It has to come from the top anyway Alex. We should just try to come up with the options to present to John, right? We are not making an implementation plan here. Now, if it is possible, where do you think it should be placed within the company?

Alex: Since John is our champion, should the new PMO be placed under him? Should it report to him?

Sally: That is possible. The plus side is that John already knows what it's all about. The negative side is this may not help with the implementation of the standard methodology across BUs. People will view the new PMO as just focused on John's organization instead of the full, global focus. You know, focus and support all of the BUs. . . the entire enterprise.

Alex: True. It can be a staff organization, reporting to a senior executive, perhaps even the CEO.

Sally: I have seen that in other companies.

Alex: Or it can work under the Quality Office. The implementation of standard PM methodology after all should be similar to the implementation of the standard processes and methods under TQM and Six Sigma initiatives. Maybe this is a good place for PMO.

Sally: Maybe. In that case then, the new PMO will be funded under the VP of Quality. I wonder what John will think about that.

Alex: Whatever structure it will be, can we have both PMO and an Executive Steering Committee? Oh, can we keep the PMCOI, too?

PARTNERSHIPS

Alex: How about the partnerships we have already formed?

Sally: You mean like the partnership with HR.

Alex: Right. I think we still can keep our partnership with HR. You know what, the new PMO may not need to organize the training itself. It may just need to consult and provide feedback on the content of project management training courses. HR knows what the career path for a project manager is.

Sally: You're right. Now if we go ahead with the auditing responsibilities, we have to have a strong partnership with the Internal Auditing department. When you mentioned about the review process, I think the Internal Auditing department can significantly help us with it.

Alex: You're right. In fact, when we propose the standard methodology, the project review approach should adhere to it. Auditing could help us review that process for some real projects. And you know what, they can provide us with additional areas of focus after they have done each project audit.

Sally: Right. Now, in your dream, Alex, of having a full-time PMO, the PMCOI, and an Executive Steering Committee, what is the relationship between the PMO and the other two entities then?

Alex: I don't know. The PMO will need support and even direction from the Executive Steering Committee no matter what. And for PMCOI, maybe it can structure itself into a set of Steering Committees with some focus on different operational areas. Maybe they can help the PMO review some Education and Training programs. Other parts could be Awards and Recognition, since John mentioned that in our first meeting with him. A Standards and Tools committee could work on the methodology. And we certainly would want a symposium planning committee!

NEXT STEPS . . .

Sally: Alex, let's stop here. I think we have enough ideas. We discussed the future roles and responsibilities, the possible structure and staffing, and the partnerships. I think we can start the dialogs with the other members of the PMCOI. Then, we can present the ideas to John.

Alex: All right. I feel a lot better now after having this conversation with you. The next PMCOI meeting is next Tuesday at noon. It is a lunch brownbag this time. I will send an email reminder to everyone.

Discussion items

1. With the current company's situation, what recommendation should Alex and Sally present to John?
2. If the establishment of the PMO is the way to go, what will be its initial set of responsibilities? What will be the short-term and long-term responsibilities?

3. How will it be staffed: initially, short term, and long term?
4. To where should the PMO report?
5. How should the new PMO be presented so that it will be accepted and embraced quickly?
6. How should the new PMO operate so that it will always have a strong connection with the project management community within GlobalTel, Inc.?