PMO Community of Practice February 2021 Meeting Summary

Header (Required)

Title: PMO tools for fact-based behaviors

Brief description: Separating facts from false narratives to make effective decisions

Learning objectives: Learn how to use PM skills to separate facts from false narratives in making decisions about projects

PDU Amount 1   1 PDU

PDU Allocation 1   Technical: Business Analysis, Scheduling, Agile

Member Discussion Topic 2/9/2021: PMO tools for fact-based behaviors

1) Brief Intro
   a) Starting with famous quotes that weren't:
      i) Sherlock Holmes never said, "Elementary, my dear Watson" in any of the tales written by Arthur Conan Doyle. After the phrase was already popular, it was used in a film.
      ii) Joe Friday from TV's Dragnet never said, "Just the facts Ma'am." He said, "all we want are the facts, Ma'am." (BTW: Dan Akroyd, playing his nephew, did say it decades later)
   b) What are Narratives
      • Stories asked during interviews
      • Long term at company, represent oneself through stories
      • People get bored easily
      • Find out about others, and form a connection via a story
         o Eliminate the feeling that the person may be competition
      i) Agile understands the use of stories. Marketing Journeys and Use Cases help us understand our customers.
      ii) When we interview, we give anecdotes demonstrating our abilities
      iii) We understand history through movies and TV, books, statues, museums, and word of mouth
         (1) Think about how you know about WW2, the Civil War, the founding of the US.
         (2) Abstractions, such as political corruption, are less compelling than a specific story, such as getting a cocker spaniel as a gift. (see link to "Checkers" speech – the under 1 minute part about the dog is what is remembered about this 30 min speech)
      iv) What other narratives might be meaningful: Bible, George Washington and the Cherry Tree, your own family history
      v) Work narratives and what they tell us: Company founding stories, Great wins for your company, department, or leadership, effectiveness of various approaches, such as scrum and Kanban
   c) What is a fact
      i) A thing that is known or proved to be true.(Oxford Dictionaries)
         (1) Known – how is it known: (The earth is flat, Large rocks fall faster, I just know it)
      ii) Proof of large numbers
         (1) Everyone in my organization/family/Facebook group agrees
         (2) "Survey says" aka Vox Populi
      iii) Proof - Expert advice
         (1) Using SMEs (Subject Matter Experts) – who are they?
            (a) Usually have a record
         (2) People who have done this work before (but are they any good at it? how do you know?)
         (3) A sports star / movie star / politician / good looking celebrity said so (why they are hired to do ads? – "I am not a doctor, but I play one on TV")
         (4) The boss says so, the Big Boss says so (emperor's new clothes), or "It says so on TV"
            (a) Maybe take them aside, if you have a good relationship – do not embarrass them

          (b) Ethical issues with project scheduling that is not politically acceptable –
              (i)   Publish the truth and let things fall as they may
              (ii) Add conditions and have change requests
              (iii) Marketing project wanted a result, schedule did not agree – Marketing got fired
        (5) Big Management Consulting companies (read House of Lies ([link](#)) by Marty Kihn for more on this) – BTW, Marty lives in Katonah and might be a great guest speaker
- Hard to know what is known.
- What is an expert.
- Video can assist in proving a point
    - See "Deepfake" video to see how even this can be manipulated
   d) Proof – Scientific, repeatable, verifiable from multiple independent sources
       i)   Proof – scientific
          (1) Repeatability and Uncertainty
          (2) Reliable curation
          (3) Check for experimenter bias and unconscious preconceptions
       ii) How large a data set is needed vs law of small numbers
          (1) Personal experience vs industry experience / large numbers – where do you find them?
          (2) AKA – I tried agile twice and it didn't work, so agile is not so great
              (a) Start fresh – not rely on the past
              (b) We tried it before and it didn't work
          (3) It takes convincing – you need evidence
              (a) Direct authority can help – not SME, but you are driving schedule, budget, scope
              (b) Decision on where we are going – taking command
              (c) Must have people at the right level supporting you if matrixed
              (d) Person who owns the resources on team
- "Scientific process" to verify, using sources.
- Sometimes published too early, impact is that the story is remembered, but the retract happens on the backburner.
- Proving things is a must
- PMs need to act with authority, not SME, but driving everything
- PM must implement what is known
- PM responsibility without authority, needs resources on their team
    - PM must own critical resources
- A sponsor may not be authoritative

2) Why we do not always use facts - Cost of learning and sharing facts
   a) Losing a client
       i)   Clients sometimes give false narratives around business needs to drive unrealistic deadlines – "this project is due in two weeks; if you can't do it, I'll find someone else"
       ii) We expect everyone to give 110% (see [link](#))
   b) Personal Loyalty – might cause arguments with a friend who disagrees
   c) Political Loyalty – loyalty to a person who wants a specific narrative, and suppresses facts (and people) that do not agree
   d) Effort and time to learn the facts
       i)   We are very busy and need to make timely decisions / avoid analysis paralysis vs diminishing returns for delivering the project?
       ii) Facts vs unknowns – if we cannot know all the facts, how many and what is the priority of the facts to be gathered
       iii) Effort needed for course corrections
   e) Humility – you might be wrong
   f) Risk of being disrespected for being different
       i)   Management wants experts, not people who are unsure of themselves

3) How do we reconcile facts when they do not agree with the narrative?
   a) Some quotes:

i) Albert Einstein: "Don't listen to the person who has the answers; listen to the person who has the questions."
ii) Upton Sinclair: "It is difficult to get a man to understand something, when his salary depends on his not understanding it."
iii) Abraham Lincoln: "I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crisis. The great point is to bring them the real facts."
iv) Stephen Covey: Listen first to understand

b) Check your own false narratives (Dan Ariely, "The Honest Truth About Dishonesty: How We Lie to Everyone--Especially Ourselves")
c) Responsibility for false narratives – jail
    i) Should people have known
    ii) When you build a schedule – critical path shows clearly what is there. Pressure to shrink tasks
    iii) Keep a record of the discussions
    iv) All schedule changes with a reason
d) Get confirmation of shared understanding (in writing, meeting notes, etc.)
    i) Baseline every status update, with changes and impacts – forensic record of changes and reasons
e) How can agile approaches help?
    i) Past velocity
f) Identify risks – what have we experienced in prior projects, how did we remedy them, what can we do in the future?
    i) Is there a shared experience with risks?
g) Ask questions related to the facts, ex: "how do you know this?"
h) Start collecting / measuring benchmarks and use prior benchmarks – do not game the system: Benchmarks from similar projects – your own and others in the organization, Benchmarks from industry guidelines
    i) Project Size (ex: Story Points)
    ii) Actual Project Duration
    iii) Resources and Effort (team makeup and hours for each member)
    iv) Quality (Mean time to defect, mean time to repair)
    • What happens under one's watch – those facts used how?
    • Agile and unrealistic schedules…those requesting are not in the "Hot seat".
        o Critical path manipulations.
        o Argue with facts, you need how long to do something, do it quicker.
            ▪ Usually higher management thinks things will take less time than reality

    • Benchmarks can take on similar planning against other projects.
    • Agile and unrealistic schedules…those requesting are not in the "Hot seat".
    • Confirmation of shared understandings. Gather info, document, share, acceptance mechanism – work is done according to plan, record changes (scope, time, budget).
    • Establishes a baseline. Baseline the status updates, see variances.

Next Meeting
Next meeting is Tuesday, March 9, 2021

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