Discussion Paper

How to manage your work effectively by leveraging your Microsoft investments

TABLE OF CONTENT

New and existing features from Microsoft enhance the power and potential to manage work effectively

Let's talk about getting work done. Every business undertakes "work" in basically 1 of 3 forms; unstructured work, unmanaged projects or managed projects.

The Project Management Office (PMO) of today really only spends time looking after one of these types of work; managed projects. And when Project Management is applied as a skilled discipline to these projects, the benefits are clear and obvious.

But what about the other types of work; unstructured work and unmanaged projects? How can the PMO and technology improve the outcomes and efficiency of these types of initiatives?

Over the past 12 months, Microsoft has brought to life some innovative new capabilities in its Office 365 productivity suite, including tools such as PowerApps, Flow and Power BI (collectively known as "The Power Platform").

As a result, users of Project Online, SharePoint and Dynamics 365 are poised to gain new advantages particularly in the ability to automate manual tasks quickly and effectively.

Combine this with tools such as Planner and Teams and you can have your team working the way they want, with tools appropriate for their tasks, yet powerful enough to ensure accurate and trustworthy data across Projects, Portfolio's and Work Management. All in all, it's Better Together!

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These disruptive technologies are requiring project leaders to evolve and act and think more strategically. In fact, 92% of executives surveyed by Forbes Insights[1] view the project management office (PMO) as a driving force as they transform their organisations using disruptive technology. And nearly 90% of respondents believe the PMO will play an increasingly critical part in digitally transforming organisations in the future.

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> *92% of executives view PMO as a driving force for disruptive technology.*

So while the PMO plays a pivotal role in supporting the successful execution of managed projects targeted at driving out inefficiencies associated with legacy business models and digitally transforming their organisation, imagine the possibilities if this was extended to other 'work' the PMO has to deliver or support.

The full report is available for download from Forbes (see footnote 1).

This discussion paper explores the value of the Project Management Office (PMO) and how technology can extend its reach. Introduces Sensei's solutions and shows how your business can get more from your existing Microsoft investments, potentially without any additional licence costs.

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Background: The indispensable PMO

In this section:

Quantifying the value of the PMO

For any organisation of moderate complexity, effective project management is synonymous with effective business. It's not difficult to understand why: the PMO is defined as the department which defines and maintains standards for project management, and it seeks to provide governance, standardisation, and introduce economies of repetition in project execution. This is extending to managing the digital transformation of organisations and according to Forbes[1], executives believe that involving the project management function in this to formally link strategy design to delivery is key to its success in this area.

A Forrester study[2] commissioned by Microsoft provides a clear indication of the value added by a well-configured and trusted Project Management Office. Titled 'The Total Economic Impact™ Of Microsoft Project Online[2], high-level findings include:

- Reporting efficiencies resulted in a 60% - time savings for project managers. Utilising Project Online increased project managers' ability to build and generate worthwhile reporting on project performance, resource utilisation, and project materials needed. Previously, this reporting would have taken two dedicated resources to generate, but now it can be done with less than one fully dedicated resource.

- Increased project visibility improved resource utilisation and led to an 83% reduction in overtime costs. Project Online increased visibility into project performance allowing PMs to gain a better understanding of their resource needs and predict with greater accuracy when they might require differing resource levels.

- Integration into ERP solutions improved procurement's ability to negotiate, saving 2.5% on average for parts and materials.

- Integrating Project Online with an ERP system provided greater visibility to the parts and materials needed for manufacturing goods. This information equipped procurement teams and allowed them to be more effective in their negotiations.

The full study is available for download from Microsoft (see footnote 2).

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Footnote 2: https://info.microsoft.com/ww-landing-Forrester-TEI-of-Project-Online-WhitePaper.html?lcid=en-GB

SECTION 2

In this section:

Get more from what you already have. What is Flow? What is PowerApps?

Understanding the challenges.

What is Flow?

What is PowerApps?

Microsoft has brought a wave of innovation and new capabilities to the Office 365 suite over the past 12 months. With particular relevance to what could be useful for the PMO to support its extended remit, it's worth diving deeper on PowerApps, Flow and PowerBI, collectively known within Microsoft as "The Power Platform".

Microsoft PowerApps lets you build intuitive custom business applications for use across devices and integrated anywhere within Office 365 – all this without the knowledge of app development or custom coding. In fact, a recent Total Economic Impact study[3] conducted by Forrester, cites a 70% reduction in application development cost and effort. Types of Apps range greatly from basic data collection forms (such as Add new project risk) through to fully developed solutions such as a Contract and Variation Management system.

Microsoft Flow can be used to design logic for your PowerApps. It lets you create and automate workflows and tasks across multiple applications and services, again without help from traditional "software developers". It extends the possibilities for automated processes and notifications to enable collaboration and productivity for your business.
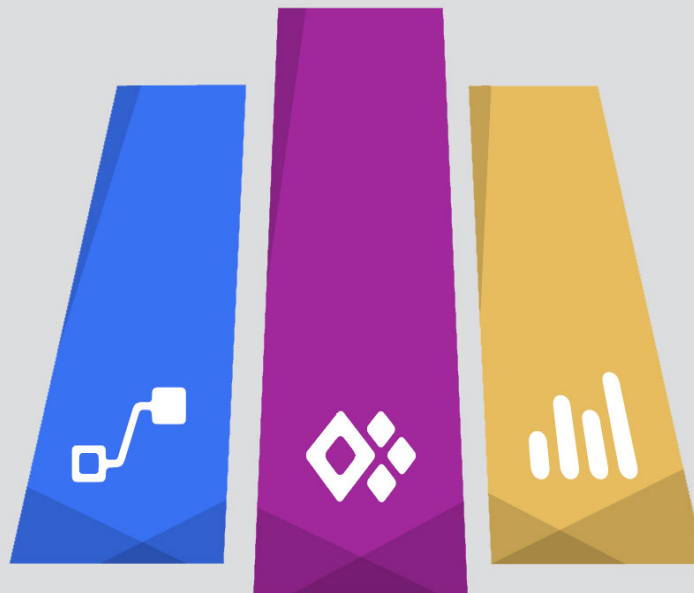
Taking inputs from almost anywhere, a flow takes data, passes it back and forth to other applications and delivers it to a destination. An example is an approval request: the flow will email the approver with all details, then passing the approval or rejection back to the source. Flow replaces cumbersome manual processes.

Both PowerApps and Flow are included in most organisation's Office 365 subscriptions and can be up and running and delivering value relatively quickly. Key challenges that have been overcome include automating manual processes, and supporting IT initiatives with a cost-effective, quick to deploy solution – imagine the impact if PMO can support broader business strategy by providing key data between systems and people.

The full report is available for download from Microsoft (see footnote 3).

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The Power Platform

PowerBI is Microsoft's business analytics service which is becoming the industry-standard reporting platform and is included in Office 365 (potentially at an extra licencing cost). It delivers real time reporting and analysis for executive teams and all stakeholder groups which can consume information wherever and whenever they like.

These capabilities in the Power Platform open a world of possibilities for Projects and Project Management solutions for those using Project Online. In effect, integrations can be made using PowerApps and Flow, tying together SharePoint, Word, Excel, Outlook and Azure – all supporting users at every level to do 'work' more effectively.

For the PMO specifically, it can boost the functionality of Project Online, delivering improved convenience and a streamlined user experience.

By leveraging Planner and Teams with the Power Platform, the PMO can ensure individuals can achieve their goals, using tools relevant to them; teams can collaborate effectively and the organisation see's the results they are expecting.

For Sensei customers using Sensei Jumpstart or Empower PPM, functionality is extended even further.

Empower PPM is leveraging PowerApps and Flow currently and is a springboard for future evolutions in the Microsoft PPM space.

Reporting Hub and Report Content Packs can be extended to solve previously restricted business problems by minimising administrative task, increasing accuracy through validation, and accelerating reporting maturity.

Understanding the challenges

The challenges commonly faced by every PMO include inefficient approvals which consume time and cause frustration.

Data validity is crucial, given the 'Garbage in Garbage Out' principle – reporting cannot be accurate unless the base information is valid.

And informed project managers are more effective, making real time reporting and data interrogation capabilities highly desirable.

However, to date limitations in the technology available have restricted the ability to meet these challenges.

Despite the introduction of third-party solutions including Sensei's own Empower PPM, workarounds have still been necessary, resulting in less-than-optimal user experiences.

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The new world:
The challenges now have a solution

In this section:

The problems solved by PowerApps and Flow (and PowerBI)

The availability of new capabilities within Office 365 are of considerable interest because they provide the ability to address many common issues encountered by a PMO without lengthy development time.

PowerApps (such as the ones utilised in Empower PPM) can provide:

- Easy system navigation when making updates for the weekly status report and providing all updates in one page.

- Insight on requirements to pass through to the next governance gate (more instruction from the workflow, with all approvals and other information logged over time).

- Replication of Excel tracking sheets.

- Tracking of additional items which fall outside standard Project Management practices (e.g. vendor contracts and variations).

- Automation of the processes to send out correspondence documents

In addition to providing ready solutions for these commonly encountered requests, Flow and PowerApps deliver flexibility to handle a multitude of other scenarios relating to the PMO. This flexibility is seen in the following features:

- **Dynamic fields:** Allow one field to impact the behaviour of another. Example: The selection of Execution Phase in one field can limit the milestone options of then following drop-down to only milestones which occur it the execution phase.

- **Dynamic forms:** update or change the whole form as selections are made. Example: A checkbox for "Does the business case require IT input?" can show the IT specific fields in the project request form.

- **In-line calculations:** As users make selections and add data, in-line calculations update in real-time. Example: Submitting a budget request requires forecast amount in each month of the year. The "Total budget" field updates as amounts are added across month fields.

- **Email Notifications:** Example: Creating a high priority issue in the project issue register automatically emails the PMO for review and response.

- **In-email approvals:** No need to leave the email body, saving time and effort.

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For those seeking further insights into the performance of Projects, Project Managers and the PMO, PowerBI provides the ability to create a Portfolio Dashboard, complete with trend reporting and the display of data from multiple sources, including all Office 365 applications as well as Line of Business and other applications.

This delivers real-time Portfolio Analysis rather than Point-in-Time reviews, along with the capability to create custom reports as required, for proactive governance across all projects.

When a business case document or gate documents are set to "ready for review" the PMO can prepare for gate review and approval meetings.

Furthermore, PowerBI supports 'plain English' querying for basic reports. Users can use regular language to query data and display the requested information, eliminating the need for technical SQL coding skills.

Underneath the hood, this leverages powerful AI (Artificial Intelligence) capabilities built into the Power Platform.

MICROSOFT POWER PLATFORM

Power BI
Business Analytics

PowerApps
Application Development

Flow
Workflow Automation

AI Builder

More power to you

The introduction of advanced functionality within Office 365 makes an already-powerful suite even more capable.

This functionality delivers considerable advantages to those companies which have recognised the power and value of extending their use of Microsoft technology across their PMO.

It also sets the scene for rapid value creation from your existing investments in Project Online and the solutions delivered by Sensei, which provides a springboard to broadening the use of this technology across the organisation.

Sensei continuously invests time and expertise to fully understand the capabilities now available in Office 365. Working with you, we can rapidly introduce these new advantages and accelerate the performance and capability of your PMO, while ensuring you are future-ready.

We would love to hear from you and discuss how these innovative tools from Microsoft may benefit your PMO and organisation. Let's chat!

Get in touch

We would love to hear from you

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