



PMO¹ - applied

The a-connect approach to project management: a case study

Challenging the incomplete market perception of PMO work, a-connect has developed the PMO framework, which aims to help our clients better understand and assess their PMO needs, define the necessary capabilities, and identify the correct number and level of resources required to successfully manage a given project – beyond just providing the right structure (click [here](#) to learn more). The following case study will give an example of how **PMO²** supports our clients in a complex program or project environment.

A challenging environment

Since the financial crisis, the financial services industry has gone through continual change. The challenges that the industry was, and still is, facing are enormous. Some institutions have acted quickly and realised the massive potential out there by adapting 'Front Office Excellence' to the fast-changing environment.

a-connect was asked by an international financial services institution to provide professional support in order to establish and drive the strategic program office for a fundamental change initiative. The overall objective was to adapt the way in which the organisation manages its clients in the new environment. The program consisted of more than 15 related projects, covering all aspects of Front Office Excellence, including the target operating model, the human resource selection process, talent management, the onboarding concept, development and education, compensation, incentives, KPIs, and retention. Given the political and personal dynamics that such a change management program can potentially have, the composition and the set-up of the program office had to be considered very carefully.

Our unique approach

The client stressed the importance of having a healthy balance between understanding the insights and driving the processes so as to achieve the successful and sustainable implementation of the change initiative. In order to staff the program office appropriately, the client chose to combine an a-connect senior professional (program manager), providing deep industry and management expertise, with an a-connect junior consultant (associate), ensuring structure and analytical rigor.

The program manager was responsible for the overall program management and supported the client as a 'Manager of Change'; he provided content and reinforced the senior management and workstream leaders in the decision-making and prioritisation process. In summary, the program manager covered the following:

- **Change management:** It was imperative to focus on the critical initiatives to start with, involve key people at the right time in the process, and include the relevant employees to accelerate the change process.
- **Strategic decision support:** A deep understanding of the industry allowed the program manager to act as a reliable sparring partner to senior decision makers and workstream leaders. Furthermore, strategic decision support was valuable in coordinating the prioritisation of relevant activities and understanding the associated risks.
- **Stakeholder management:** The management of the stakeholders and their agendas was essential to the success of the change program. Stakeholders on all levels needed to be addressed and adequately involved.
- **Communication:** To manage the complexity of the project, the program manager defined and executed a structured communication plan. Several stakeholder groups needed to be addressed at the right time and with the right content (program updates, success stories, issues, obstacles, etc.). A transparent and open line of communication ensured that there were no unnecessary rumours spread within the company.

Due to his experience, the program manager understood all aspects of the business and acted as a trustworthy and accepted partner to the participants.

The associate worked hand in hand with the program manager and was responsible for the management of the operative agenda of the program. He primarily focused on the following four areas:

- **Governance:** The responsibility of coordinating detailed project planning and overseeing the progress of all the workstreams.
- **Project execution:** The implementation of the change program required rigorous project planning, tight overall coordination, and the use of standardised templates and processes.
- **Performance monitoring:** It was essential to permanently monitor all activities, deliverables, and milestones, as well as ensure structured reporting. This involved the effective and efficient planning and allocation of the required resources.
- **Administrative support:** Finally, the project consisted of many administrative tasks, such as meeting preparation, minute writing, agenda planning, document handling, etc. The efficient handling of all these administrative tasks was important to the overall success of the project.

Boosting value for the client

A deep understanding of the financial services industry allowed the program manager to provide effective strategic decision support, trustworthy stakeholder management, and reliable communication. Understanding the business and its unwritten rules fostered trust among all the parties involved in the program.

Additionally, the combination of industry and management expertise – as well as structure and analytical rigor – ensured that the change program was implemented in an efficient and effective way. The highly coordinated split between content and process matters in the program office ensured a smooth transition in the handover of the program to internal professionals.



The organisation and staffing of such an important program should cover both roles and all eight capabilities, either with separate resources or, ideally, with someone who can switch between both roles, as required. Applying the **PMO**² framework therefore helps our clients to understand what capabilities are necessary in order to ensure a successful project outcome.



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