

Take the Offensive! Incorporate Nine Principles of War into Your PMO

Abstract

Haphazard, impotent, superficial. When over 50% of PMOs (The Business Driven PMO, 2011) close within three years, our industry needs to declare a state of emergency. As project management consultants, we are often treated as first responders, called to the scene of a project or program management disaster. But these “disasters,” from our perspective, are more like a chaotic battlefield with casualties, desolated resources, and scrambling troops with no reinforcements. There was a general lack of readiness and strategic alignment before the project or program was initiated. The tactics used to combat the onslaught of problems were reactive.

PMOs have a peacetime mindset in a time of war. Yes, war. War requires maximized strategy, advanced training, organization, intelligence (information), and communications. Life and liberty depend upon discipline, urgency, agility, efficiency, and superiority—nothing less—from the top of the ranks down to the boots on the ground.

To help project managers incorporate this mindset into their team, the authors changed the Nine Principles of War for the PMO. We offer application examples and how these principles combat and conquer the offensives of risk, change, and chaos. PMOs that adopt these principles will become more decisive, disciplined, agile, supportive, and directive, thereby bringing greater value to their organizations.

Introduction: The State of Project and Program Management

Alarming Stats: According to a survey of 4,000+ project management practitioners [1]

- 32% of participants said their organization had no Project Management Office.
- 42% of the organizations did not fathom the value of project management.
- 31% did not successfully meet the original project goals and business intent.
- 43% failed to finish within the initial project budget.
- 48% failed to finish within the project's initially scheduled time.
- 48% experienced scope creep
- 32% experienced budget loss from a project's failure
- 15% of projects failed
- 38% considered the digital transformation of the past five years to have a major impact upon their organizations, 39% a moderate, 14% limited, and only 2% felt no impact.



[1] PMI's Pulse of the Profession 10th Project Management Survey: Success in Disruptive Times – Expanding the Value Delivery Landscape to Address the High Cost of Low Performance, © 2018 PMI Project Management Institute

The volatility, uncertainty, and complexity in most aspects of life today result from the rapid pace of change in our world. Project and Program management practices were born over a century ago to deal with the increasing complexity, uncertainty, and volatility of that era, which included World War. Disruptive innovations and new technologies since then have certainly increased exponentially. And the standards and best practices used by 93% of organizations (Pulse of the Profession 2018, 2018), such as PERT, Critical Path Method, and LEAN, have over half a century of maturity. Yet the project management field is increasingly experiencing disruptions from emerging tools, techniques, and frameworks adopted too quickly or too slowly (Cohen, 2019)—often without a thorough plan to assimilate them.

Many organizations only know that those invested in proven project management principles enjoy more success than competitors that are not (PMI's The Pulse of the Profession 2018: Success in Disruptive Times, 2018). At best, department-level PMOs and PPMOs (project portfolio management offices) function tactically. And the program management office and project management office work operationally. They all too frequently fall short strategically (Rathore, 2010).

Organizations and program or project managers need to make changes. General Eric Shinseki, 34th Army Chief of Staff, said, "If you dislike change, you're going to dislike irrelevance even more." While his statement is especially true of the Army, it is no less so for business organizations. How many of them can afford to eat the dust of a competitor's technological or product advancements?

Unfortunately, innovation, while necessary and desirable, is often willy-nilly due to the competitiveness of human nature and the inability to coordinate advancements across cultures and industries. The very nature of innovation circumvents the status quo to force disruption. However, people, in general, are

resistant to change. And often, forward thinkers and old-schoolers have viewed this resistance as harmful to our advancement as a society, corporation, or individual. And, their view is not wrong when fear of change causes stagnation, or worse, a backslide down a slippery slope of accomplishments. Still, skepticism and resistance are healthy when they temper innovation with value, economy, ethics, stability, simplicity, or clarity.

The Enterprise Project Management Office

A growing trend in project management to address the rapid increase of disruption is the enterprise-wide program management office (Rathore, 2010). However, a mere 41% of organizations using an enterprise project management office (EPMO) consider it highly aligned with its strategy (Taylor, 2020). Reasons for this are challenges with traditional PMOs, such as:

- Fifty-nine percent of departmental, program, and project-level PMOs use a bottom-up approach to resolving challenges, which means they operate tactically and operationally. The goal is to do things the right way. But this approach lacks strategic alignment with the organization, so the things done right might not be what is necessary (Rathore, 2010, p. 4).
- PMOs in large or geographically dispersed global organizations can become siloed, leading to poor communications, resource utilization, and operational efficiency. Thus, there is a need for project cross-departmental prioritization and collaboration, elimination of superfluous efforts and expenses, and risk mitigation (Rathore, 2010, p. 4).
- PMOs tend not to be involved in Demand Management at the organizational level, making multi-year pipeline predictions less reliable (Rathore, 2010, p. 4).
- Department, program, and project level PMOs often lack the overall perspective to report effectively to corporate leaders, who need consolidated reports for critical decisions, so as not to waste time lost in too many details (Rathore, 2010, p. 4).
- PMOs may not have a standard way of running projects in departments across the organization (Rathore, 2010, p. 4).
- PMOs may not have executive support because they do not have top-level visibility. An EPMO can provide executive-level information and support for enterprise-wide projects (Rathore, 2010, p. 4).

Peacetime Mindset in Wartime Failures

The above issues are a sign that many PMOs and project managers seem to have a business-as-usual mindset in such volatile times, an attitude as fatal as an army having a peacetime strategy during a war. A perfect example of such a deadly failure occurred in 1941 against American forces.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor resulted in 3,435 U.S. casualties and lost or severely damaged military assets: 188 planes, eight battleships, three light cruisers, and four miscellaneous vessels. Japanese losses amounted to under 100 personnel, 29 planes (out of 353), and five midget submarines (Attack on Pearl Harbor, 2022).

The attack caught U.S. forces off guard during a time of world war and the tensions of failing diplomatic talks with Japan. As early as October 16, 1941, intelligence sources warned Admiral Husband Kimmel and Lt. General Walter Short, who shared command at Pearl Harbor, that war with

Japan was possible. On November 27, Kimmel was warned that war with Japan was imminent and to execute an appropriate defensive deployment because hostile actions could occur at any moment (Pearl Harbor Attack, 2022).

Kimmel activated five reconnaissance stations on the island to operate from 4 to 7 AM and located most of his fighter planes at Wheeler Field to protect them from sabotage. Nearly all his ships were in the Harbor. Neither he nor Short, nor the leaders in Washington, anticipated an attack on the island.

Here is the list of failures to act with a wartime mindset (Attack on Pearl Harbor, 2022) (Pearl Harbor Attack, 2022):

1. Only defensive action was encouraged. Why not plan for an offense that would have required a deeper study of the enemy? Kimmel and Short underestimated the Japanese and were clueless about their strategies.

When Japan became hostile to China and allied with Germany and Italy, our leaders should have prepared for offensive actions, especially since Japan had a beef with the U.S. for sending aid to help China fight against them.

2. Kimmel and Short placed almost all their “eggs in one basket,” only deploying a few ships and air fighters. Had he gone on the offensive, he would have used more of his forces, leaving fewer resources behind to be annihilated.

3. The insufficiently trained radar technicians operated the reconnaissance stations. They did not pick up the mass deployment of enemy ships and warplanes. And Kimmel did not expand reconnaissance to the Northwest region, from which the Japanese were most likely to come.

5. Kimmel allowed many troops to go on shore leave, when expecting engagement with Japan’s navy at any moment! His peacetime brain was still in charge of his strategic thinking.

What was the result? Massive casualties and the heavy loss of resources.

Failures that result in costly resource losses and casualties are not exclusive to the military or the battlefield. They occur in the everyday business world, too, often resulting from project failures. For instance, one of the worst and most costly environmental disasters of our time was the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, 52 miles Southeast of Venice, Louisiana, that began with an explosion in the Deep-Water Horizon project in April 2010 (Abbasi, 2013). Eleven workers died; smoke clouds covered an area of 30 miles; petroleum sludge contaminated a five-mile radius around the rig, and the death toll of aquatic life was about 8000 animals. BP made several unsuccessful attempts to cap the well, but finally stopped the oil flow on July 15, 2010, after 4.9 million barrels of oil had poured into the Gulf. Forty percent of the U.S. seafood supply was disrupted. The cleanup involved over 30,000 people working along the coast to collect the oil and save as many animals as possible. The magnitude of the disaster has had long-term effects on the environment. (Abbasi, 2013)

The failures that led up to the explosion and the oil spill were:

- Poor communication
- Lackadaisical safety measures
- Not prepared for emergencies in the face of high risks
- Delayed decision-making during a crisis
- Slow response
- Cost-cutting without proper analysis of the possible risk increase to the project

Why point out these failures? To show that a peacetime mindset (or business-as-usual) during wartime (or modern volatile times) can easily lead to disaster. It is the Nine Principles of War that produce successful wartime strategies, and, when incorporated into operations and actions, prevent such failures. They also become the tools that drive successful initiatives, creating a mindset and foundation for agile, efficient, and mature project management.

Although the purpose of a PMO is not to provide an organization with safety from foreign or domestic threats, as an army does for its country, it is to protect the organization and its stakeholders from losses.

- Losses because of projects that fail
- Losses because of projects that add no value
- Losses because of projects that exceed budgets and deadlines
- Losses because of missed opportunities for innovation that could put the company ahead of the competition

These can have devastating effects on a company's survival, or at the very least, its bottom line. When the return on investment stagnates or declines, budgets and resources shrink. So, the company's finances bleed, and careers can become casualties.

Organizational project management can no longer rely on project delivery through managing the triple constraint of budget, time, and scope. Nor can program management be content with enforcing standard practices, methods, and governance. Admittedly, the triple constraint triangle and other accepted practices, etc., are essential tools. But they equate to a peacetime mindset for delivering day-to-day operations. Therefore, the PMO's focus should shift to strategic thinking: how to use and adapt tools and accepted standards to deliver benefits to the organization, especially during such a time of instability and transformation as exists today—and is unlikely to become less so in the future.

A model of strategy and efficiency in disruptive times.

Where can the project management industry look for a model of strategy and efficiency in increasingly disruptive times? The military, especially during wartime. Despite some failures, the U.S. Army has enjoyed a reputation of supremacy for over a century. When it employs the ages-old principles it has embraced, its performance is noteworthy.

At the time of World War 1, the United States was a relatively neutral country, with the minimal forces necessary to protect its own interests. The military was insufficient to make any significant contribution to help the European allies combat German attacks against them. British and French troops were suffering massive losses and desperately needed our help. They wanted us to send men to fight under their command. However, the U.S. leadership wanted to maintain control of its men and earn the right

to sit at the negotiating table when they helped defeat the enemy (Garamone, 2022) (United States in World War 1, 2022). The U.S. government had to build its forces from a few hundred thousand troops to millions, the bases to house them, the arms to arm them, the staff and supplies, including uniforms, to sustain them, and establish the training to shape strong leaders and warriors. It also had to raise funds to pay for this massive, complex undertaking with a short deadline of months to help our allies' ever-diminishing troops and arms. (Garamone, 2022) (United States in World War 1, 2022).

From April 6, 1917, when the U.S. declared war on Germany, to the summer of 1918, about 2 million American troops fought in France, boosting the allies' morale and strengthening their strategic position. The war ended on November 11, 1918 (Garamone, 2022) (United States in World War 1, 2022).

How was the Army able to carry out such a massive undertaking? It had been using the Nine Principles of War (9PW) at least since the Civil War (Butler, 2022). And what are those nine principles?

1. Objective
2. Offensive
3. Mass
4. Economy of Force
5. Maneuver
6. Unity of Command
7. Security
8. Surprise
9. Simplicity

The previously mentioned U.S. war initiative and the buildup and creation of the military as the agile, innovative, powerful force it has been to this point make the military, especially the Army, a great parent and model of project and program management.

In fact, American Colonel John T. Thompson adopted the new Gantt chart in 1918 to successfully manage the production and distribution of his newly invented Thompson machine gun to our troops in World War 1 (Burger, 2015). And in 1950, Lockheed Martin's Polaris missile project and the Navy's development of the program evaluation and review technique (PERT) shaped project management, laying the foundations for the Critical Path Method of project scheduling.

The Nine Principles of War

What are the commonalities between PMO operations and military operations that make the nine war principles ideal for adaptation by the PMO?

- A mission
- Operations
- Friction/enemies, environment, internal forces, unknown variables
- A need for organized resources to fulfill objectives
- The need for agility

Because of these commonalities, incorporating the 9PW into PMO operations makes sense. Consider the nine and how each applies in the army and the PMO.

Objective

The objective is the purpose. The military definition- Direct every military operation toward a clearly defined, decisive, and attainable objective (Butler, 2022)

The objective of war is to destroy the enemy's will and ability to fight. (Marks, 2017) The battle objective is to destroy enemy combat forces (Butler, 2022). And every operation must align with and support the objective's ultimate end goal.

However, the U. S. military's overall mission, as codified by federal law, is:

- Preserve the peace and security and provide for the defense of the United States, the Commonwealths, and possessions, and any areas occupied by the United States
- Support the national policies
- Implement the national objectives
- Overcome any nation responsible for aggressive acts that imperil the peace and security of the United States

This overall mission is a notable example of a mission statement for the military's intended purpose, which guides the development of one for an enterprise-level PMO.

What are the modifications and uses for the PMO?

The U.S. Army's use of mission statements, as previously mentioned, is essential for conveying the intent of objectives and aligning them with the U.S. Army's corporate mission statement and the U.S. government's mission statement for its armed forces. Just as the army must have an objective, so too must the PMO. One of the vital tools needed to establish and manage a PMO is a mission statement (Satinder Baweja, 2019).

But many PMOs to date have failed to provide or prove their value to their parent organization, which is why a third of PMOs fail within the first three years (Satinder Baweja, 2019). Therefore, the mission statement must denote the value added that supports and aligns with the parent company's or sponsor's mission and goals. To do this requires assessments to determine why the company needs a PMO and where the PMO will deliver value. These assessments will help shape the mission statement (Satinder Baweja, 2019).

The PMO's mission statement must be concise and decisive, articulating an attainable goal. Mission statements answer the question, 'What does success look like?' For example:

The PMO executes business strategy for maximum returns on investment by selecting the right projects, people, and timing to deliver the best value. Provide transparency into project budgets, timelines, and ROI (Satinder Baweja, 2019).

Just as the PMO must define its *objective* through a mission statement, so must every project it works on. This follows the principle of the *commander's intent*. Every project describes its objective in the form of the *commander's intent*, allowing the team to know and understand the intention of a successful project, irrespective of how they achieve those outcomes. At every phase of the project, the entire team should keep the goal in mind.

The idea of an objective aligns well with the scope management knowledge area of the *Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide)*. How is scope defined without a clear objective, and/or how is the objective communicated to a designer, architect, or engineer, allowing them to create a set of documents to be used as scope for the proposed project?

Using an objective or intent statement is as much in play during project portfolio management (PPM). The purpose of PPM is to align projects or project ideas (proposals) against the company's strategic objectives. Achieving the portfolio's objective is more difficult when the project's goal is not specified in the proposal submissions. The project's objective or intent enables PPM managers to align and score projects against the company's strategic goals.

Offensive

The military definition

Seize, retain, and exploit the initiative (Butler, 2022) (Marks, 2017).

In a letter to John Trumbull in 1799, George Washington pointed out that offensive operations are often the surest, if not the only (sometimes) means of defense (Washington, 2022). There were tensions between the U.S. and the new French Republic after the French Revolution. Around 1798-1800, the Quasi-War occurred at sea in the Caribbean and off the East Coast between the two navies. To the French's surprise, the American Navy's attacks ended the French presence in the West Indies. This loss of trade added enough financial distress, along with other growing weaknesses of the French ruling directory, to drive them to the negotiating table. France–United States relations, 2022).

What does this mean for the PMO?

Drive and own the narrative. Do not let others decide what the PMO should do.

The PMO becomes the general marshaling of project management forces to meet their assigned objectives. Risk management, change management, and transition management create opportunities to anticipate and prepare for challenges before they occur, turning potential catastrophic chaos into well-organized chaos.

Winston Churchill said, "One ought never to turn one's back on a threatened danger and try to run away from it. If you do that, you will double the danger. But if you meet it promptly and without flinching, you will reduce the danger by half. Never run away from anything. Never!" (Winston Churchill Quotes (n.d.), 2022)

For decades now, the project management industry has tried to take the offensive to prove its value, whether through Agile in software development or Lean in Construction. Even without these methodologies, the basic principle in the PMBOK prepares program and project management practitioners to take the offensive. The concept of planning and schedule management is to take control of the project narrative during execution. Therefore, PMOs ought to take the offensive.

Similarly, in portfolio management, the concept of the offensive is at the forefront. Manage your portfolio proactively to extract maximum value. Killing projects after they fail is not PPM. Learning to be on the offensive and not letting them see the light of day if there is no good alignment with the company objectives is what PPM is about. It is what adds most value to the company.

Mass

The military definition

Concentrate the effects of overwhelming combat power at the decisive place and time (Butler, 2022).

Reflecting on the failure of Pearl Harbor, one can deduce that Admiral Kimmel miscalculated in his use or lack of this principle. Where was his combat power positioned? Mostly at Pearl Harbor, awaiting deployment to a battle location at sea to combat the Japanese fleet. Yet, it was not combat-ready. Therefore, his forces were sitting ducks.

If he had used the principle to take the offensive, he would have sent a large part of his fleet toward the most likely direction from which the Japanese fleet would come, while widening the search for enemy ships. He would also have ordered the fighter squadrons airborne for his own airstrikes.

What does this mean for the PMO?

Staff right. The PMBOK, in its knowledge area of project resource management, discusses the concept of being able to plan, estimate, acquire, and develop the right team (A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge: PMBOK Guide 6th Edition, 2017). The idea of mass is to align project planning with resource planning to apply the right mass of resources during each phase of the project. Most organizations run projects in a matrixed form, which means the resources do not always belong only to a project. In such cases, it is even more critical that the concept of mass be communicated to the resource managers to make them aware of potential impacts to interdependent projects or the project portfolio when required resources do not become available in the right quantities at the right time. Being able to plan for, communicate, and accomplish it effectively is the value that program or project managers bring to the projects and organizations they work for.

Applying the concept of mass to PPM relies heavily on understanding your portfolio and which PM tools and subject matter experts (SMEs) will best help deliver each project in it. Determine when you will need your SMEs and have them ready and available. The ability to plan and manage the team with the right mix and level of effort at the various phases of specific projects and portfolio staffing is the mass principle in action. The outcomes of applying the principles of mass to PPM will ensure that your individual projects achieve their objectives and that the PMO's portfolio supports the company's mission. One battalion winning a battle is not enough to secure a win in a war. Victory requires

coordinated efforts on various fronts. Applying mass to just the projects will never be enough. Applying those principles at the PMO level for PPM is just as critical.

Economy of Force

The military definition

Employ all combat power available in the most effective way possible; allocate minimum essential combat power to secondary efforts. Prioritize all operations or strategic initiatives to prevent spreading valuable resources too thin (Butler, 2022).

What does this mean for the PMO?

This is probably the most important lesson the PMO can learn. Focus on the PMO's mission and the success of projects. Allocate all your resources to achieving those goals. Minimize the distraction of the key resources on non-mission-critical tasks.

By now, everyone involved in developing or delivering projects is familiar with the *magic* triangle mentioned earlier in the paper. This familiar statement is based on it: "You can have it good, fast, or cheap. Pick two" (Felty, 2021). Unfortunately, it is not so magical, since managing the three interdependent constraints of time, cost, and scope (sometimes referred to as outcome) is more elusive and seldom so simple to do. The more complex the projects are, the greater the odds that one or more of the constraints will run amok. Project, program, and portfolio managers ought to be aware that they must define, monitor, and manage all three to deliver a project as agreed. So, no manager would deny that time management, for instance, is important for achieving project success.

Nearly all program and project leaders spend an average of 36% of their budgeted time on tasks related to communication (Mackay, 2018). A 2019 Adobe survey of 1000 consumers showed they spend over three hours a day checking work emails and over two hours on personal emails (Abramovich, 2018).

Reporting by McKinsey showed that an inordinate amount of time (almost 26% on average for the average worker) was spent checking emails 11 times per hour, and took about 64 seconds to focus on work. However, it also revealed that employees are distracted from work every 10 minutes (56 times a day) and do not return to full concentration on the interrupted task for 25 minutes (HOW MUCH TIME YOUR EMPLOYEES SPEND ON CHECKING EMAILS?, 2022). And how many of those emails are essential to the most urgent project or program management needs? These stats only cover checking emails. How much time is spent writing and editing emails, or worse, not doing so correctly? That is a question each executive, PM, and team member must determine.

The purpose of the economy of force is to dedicate most of the effort (for the PMO functions and project managers) to those activities that will affect the outcome of the PMO mission or the project outcomes. Therefore, minimize the time spent on activities that do not directly contribute to the mission's success, whether in the PMO or on the project.

Maneuver

The military definition

Place the enemy in a position of disadvantage through the flexible application of combat power (Butler, 2022).

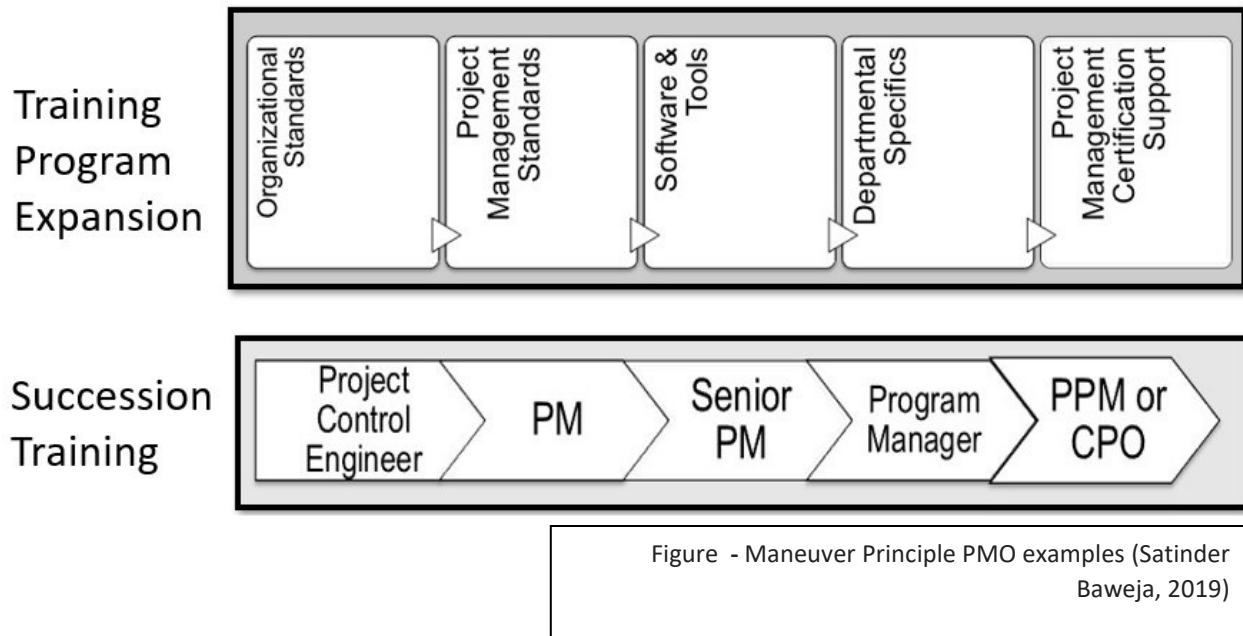
What does this mean for the PMO?

Stay agile. At any time, a disruption could occur. In 2020, COVID-19 unexpectedly brought the world to a near standstill as it struck most of the globe. Lockdowns, quarantines, social distancing, and masking ended business as usual.

Digital technology then became the means of survival for many companies and individuals. Virtual meetings, online shopping, personal deliveries, and streaming services went from nice conveniences to essentials for work and entertainment.

The organizations that thrived already understood the potential of digital services and had resources in place capable of accelerating the delivery of an enlarged scope to meet new demands. Others made enough transitions to survive. Then, some could not and sadly went out of business. The substantial difference was the wartime mindset of the organizations, the readiness and agility of their project management teams, and their culture of innovative thinking.

Another application of the maneuver principle is that PMO leaders cannot afford to become complacent even in the successful operation of their PMO, because half of PMOs close within three years (Satinder Baweja, 2019). Sometimes they close for failing to deliver their promised value, sometimes for succeeding. With success, there is less stress on executive leadership. They can take the peace the PMO helped achieve for granted. Therefore, the program manager or chief projects officer (the commanding general of the PMO) should create a plan to take more ground within the organization to continue adding value, as previously shown under offensive. And also, through ongoing evaluation, training, and succession planning of the PMO and project management staff. The following graphic illustrates such maneuvers.



Unity of Command

The military definition

For every objective, ensure unity of effort under one responsible commander

The United States Military has a clear, absolute chain of command. This chain of command is crucial for decision-making, clarity of responsibilities, and line of communications.

In times of peace, training, assignments, and procedures strengthen the chain of command. In wartime, the chain of command is vital for quick, decisive decisions and actions instead of reactions.

What does this mean for the PMO?

For the PMO to be successful, ensure that executive leadership assigns the head (the commander) of the PMO the responsibility for achieving the mission and the authority to do so. Likewise, the PMO leader allows the PMs autonomy to achieve their goals, since they are the commanders of their project's mission.

The Unity of Command principle falls under organizational governance frameworks. According to the PMBOK guide, governance refers to the administrative and managerial structure of an organization that determines and influences team members' behavior. This concept is multidimensional and (A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge: PMBOK Guide 6th Edition, 2017):

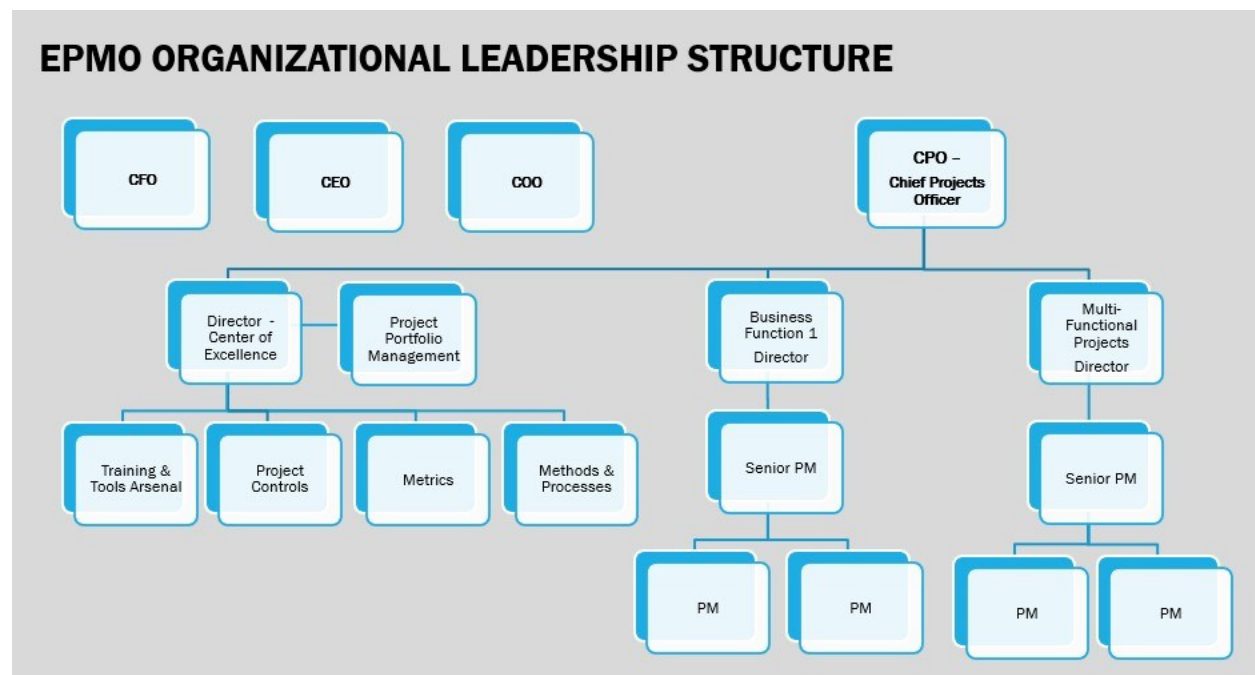
- Considers people, roles, structures, and policies
- Involves direction and oversight through data and feedback

Governance is the framework of an organization's exercised authority and influences how it sets and achieves objectives, monitors and assesses risk, and optimizes performance. One of the managerial elements specified in the governance framework is the Unity of Command. The PMBOK Guide defines

the Unity of Command as the principle that only one person gives orders for any action or activity to an individual (A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge: PMBOK Guide 6th Edition, 2017).

Another element is Clear Communications Channels. There should be a communications plan that specifies who, when, what, where, and how to communicate program and project management concerns internally and externally.

Although there is no one-size-fits-all program or project management leadership structure, one enterprise-level PMO example is below.



Security

The military definition

Never permit the enemy to gain an unexpected advantage

What does this mean for the PMO?

Risk management, change management, and transition management are all opportunities to anticipate and prepare for challenges before they occur, turning potential catastrophic chaos into well-organized chaos.

Look at the following quote.

“Confront them with annihilation, and they will then survive; plunge them into a deadly situation, and they will then live. When people fall into danger, they are then able to strive for victory.”

[Sun Tzu](#) (Sun Tzu Quotes (n.d.) , 2022)

How does this principle and this quote apply to a PMO? Risk analysis, when done right, identifies worst-case scenarios for projects, programs, and portfolios so that project management leaders and teams can confront them and examine how they would be addressed,

ensuring that, if they occur, the project will survive. If the risk happens, they already have solutions and can strive to perform better than planned.

Once again, while the PMO and projects do not have enemies, the factors that contribute to PMO or project failures should be considered. Do not let these factors gain an unexpected advantage. The following examples will help clarify this principle better.

- Stakeholder Management—Never let the lack of stakeholder communication allow biases to appear against the PMO or the project that may lead to a lack of commitment from leadership.
- Schedule Management—Never let schedule impacts lead to project delays with a mitigation plan. Develop a schedule mitigation plan as the schedule is impacted to prevent delays from becoming a reason the project team feels no urgency to deliver the project in a timely manner.
- Scope Management—Never let unmanaged scope creep become the reason your original project goals are not met.

Surprise

The military definition

Strike the enemy at a time, at a place, or in a manner for which he is unprepared

What does this mean for the PMO?

For executive leadership and stakeholders who tend to under-value, cannot appreciate, or do not understand the purpose or nature of program and project management, especially the PMO, take the initiative to understand them and their viewpoints. Supply them with what they need before they realize they need it. Build it into the PMO.

For the internal and external forces that throw a monkey wrench into projects, programs, or portfolios, encourage innovation within the project management team to develop solutions to recurring issues, whether through tools, new processes, or training.

One principle within resource management is the Development Team. It is the undertaking of improving the competencies, interactions, and environment of the project management team to enhance project performance. A prime responsibility of program and project managers is to facilitate teamwork, provide challenges and opportunities for team members, and also to provide timely feedback and support (A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge: PMBOK Guide 6th Edition, 2017).

Employ these behaviors to build and maintain a high-performing team:

- Use clear communication
- Create team-building opportunities
- Develop trust among the team
- Manage conflict constructively
- Encourage collaborative problem-solving and decision-making

A cohesive team is an agile team. An agile team of problem-solvers is a powerful weapon for the program or project manager to wield against the many challenges and disruptions that will occur.

Simplicity

The military definition

Prepare clear, uncomplicated plans and clear, concise orders to ensure thorough understanding

What does this mean for the PMO?

All communications should be clear and concise, whether the mission statement, reports, documented processes and procedures, or portfolio, program, and project plans.

In the same manner, the PMO should adopt a minimalist approach to directing and managing portfolios, programs, and projects. Too much control, too much bureaucracy will make the project management process sluggish. Find the balance between just enough and enough to drive the project management machine to appreciable progress.

“That’s been one of my mantras — focus and simplicity. Simple can be harder than complex. You have to work hard to get your thinking clean to make it simple. But it’s worth it in the end, because once you get there, you can move mountains.”

Steve Jobs (Marks L. G., 2017)

The Nine Principles of War Do Not Just Happen

Discussing these 9PW is useless unless the means to use them are in place. So, since the U.S. Army is the select example of incorporating and effectively wielding them, it is the model presented here after which to build a better project management organization, specifically a better enterprise-level program management office.

Besides a well-established chain of command, the Army invests heavily in training soldiers, officers, and civilians for battle-readiness and for smooth day-to-day operations. In 1973, the U.S. Army created the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) to shape the Army through four primary functions: (About, 2022)

1. Recruiting and Training Soldiers, Supporting Unit Training
2. Developing Soldiers and Civilians into Adaptive Leaders
3. Guiding the Army through Doctrine
4. Building and Integrating Formations, Capabilities, and Materials to shape the Army

TRADOC oversees 32 Army schools organized under 12 Centers of Excellence (About, 2022). One of these centers of excellence, the U.S. Army Maneuver Center of Excellence (MCoE) formed in 1918 at Fort Benning, Georgia. Its mission in coordination with Fort Benning is (Command Overview: Maneuver Center of Excellence, 2022):

To provide trained and combat-ready soldiers and leaders; develop doctrine and capabilities for the maneuver force and provide a first-class quality of life for our service members, civilians, and families to ensure our Army’s maneuver force is ready now and in the future.

What key points present themselves from the previous paragraphs that can and should be adapted for project management?

1) A clear chain of command and line of communications

In a PMO, this would include executive leadership, the Chief Project Director, program managers, project portfolio managers, senior project managers, project managers, assistant project managers, project control engineers, and so on. Having this structure does no good if these roles are not well-defined and understood. Also, a communications structure must be established that defines who, what, when, where, and how information is to be shared.

2) Intelligence

Recall the failure at Pearl Harbor. The commanders did not obtain sufficient intelligence on the Japanese commanders, forces, and strategies. They failed to take seriously what intelligence they received.

Build strategies upon intelligence and the capability to understand it and formulate strategic maneuvers. Monitor the real-time progress of actions on and off the battlefield, too.

Information on assessments, such as for risk, organizational maturity, project and program management capabilities, stakeholder and executive engagement, industry trends, and more, is vital to a healthy project portfolio. This is akin to the observational and clandestine information sought by Army commanders.

Monitoring and reporting provide the information needed for agile decision-making during the life of the portfolio, program, or project.

3) A mission statement

The PMO, the portfolio, and the project need a mission statement that clarifies intent in an easy-to-remember, understandable way, using as few words as possible.

4) A training program under the direction of a Center of Excellence

Training includes project management, leadership, and technical skills tailored to the company's specific needs. Clarify the expected skills, capabilities, and experience requirements that distinguish each role within the program and project management chain of command.

Prioritize training, focusing the bulk on the essential skills needed to carry out the mission.

Other training may be valuable for improving an organization's program and project management performance, but it should not compete for resources or become a distraction.

5) Innovation of processes, tools, and strategies

The Army is always working on new designs for weapons, jets, tanks, ships, software, uniforms, and anything that will give them an advantage over enemy forces.

The PMO should foster a culture of creativity to develop new processes, tools, and strategies that continue to add value to the company and align projects with the organization's endgame. There is always room for improvement.

Some examples of project management advancements are incorporating BIM, drones, and more user-friendly project management software. Another trend is the creation of PMOs to better manage project interdependencies and resources. The concept is right, though the implementation is still wanting in many areas. But this needs to improve the PMO gave rise to this paper.

Wartime Operations

In the military, times of war require maximized strategy, advanced training, organization, intelligence, and communications. Life and liberty depend upon discipline, urgency, agility, efficiency, and superiority, from the top of the ranks down to the boots on the ground. Is there any more volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous period than war? Our rapidly changing times are already volatile, uncertain, and complex. Thus, agility is even more important to any army to stay ahead of changing war strategies.

For instance, since World War 1, warfare has involved “blitzkrieg,” or lightning war. It is a military tactic intended to psychologically shock, disorient, and disorganize enemy forces using surprise, speed, and superiority of armament (Limbach, 2020). However, modern military theorists recognize the emergence of a new fourth generation of warfare. Because sovereign states are losing their monopoly on war, future conflicts will more likely be cultural than over sovereignty. Therefore, the new challenges of fourth-generation warfare will be understanding and using societies’ supply chains and dependencies (Marshall, 2018) and outpacing the enemy in technological innovations.

Referring to wartime conditions, General Bruce C. Clarke said, “Do essential things first. There is not enough time for the commander to do everything. Each commander will have to wisely determine what is essential and assign responsibilities for accomplishing it. He should spend the remaining time on the near essentials. This is especially true of training. Nonessentials should not take up the time required for essentials (Chapter 2-Mission Essential Task List, 2022)”

Whether a military organization or a corporation, proficiency in every area of training is neither achievable nor sustainable during volatile periods like war. Thus, training and tasks must be triaged and prioritized for only the essentials needed to accomplish the objective or deliver the project. For example, the Army uses two fundamental inputs to build the Mission Essential Task List (METL):

1. War Plans: These are the organization’s operations and contingency plans and are the most important to the METL. Mission and other related information are the keys to determining crucial training tasks (Chapter 2-Mission Essential Task List, 2022).
2. External Directive: Such are other sources of training tasks related to the wartime mission (Chapter 2-Mission Essential Task List, 2022).

Sometimes, directives identify component tasks of the wartime mission, like mission training plans, and are War Plans directives. Other times, they refer to additional tasks related to the mission, such as mobilization plans, which are external (Chapter 2-Mission Essential Task List, 2022).

Successful project portfolio management uses similar processes to approve and triage programs and projects. A PMO lists its value-adding objectives based on its growth plan and assessments of the organization’s objectives and project management maturity. Project management uses a work breakdown structure to create a schedule for each project. The essential task list used by the Army relates to the critical path in the Critical Path Method of scheduling.

2.2 Peacetime Operations

or military operations other than war (MOOTW).

Just as the military developed doctrine using the 9PW to guide warfare, it created similar guiding principles in military operations other than war (MOOTW) (Military Operations Other Than War, 2022). They are:

- Objective
- Unity of Effort
- Legitimacy
- Perseverance
- Restraint
- Security

How can a PMO apply these?

- Objective - Use the mission statement that provides a purpose that is valuable to the company's ability to carry out its mission. All the PMO's day-to-day operations, or support operations, should be designed to implement and maintain the mission, especially during disruptions. The PMO should do risk management well.
- Unity of Effort - The PMO smooths integration between interdependent projects by establishing practical resource and cost management of its project portfolio, requiring a gateway for project approval and a prioritization process.
- Legitimacy - The PMO needs to have the authority necessary to direct or influence project management and project managers.
- Perseverance - Once the PMO is established, it continues to self-evaluate to ensure it delivers its promised value, expands its scope of service, and provides continued training to the project management team to improve or add skills and career advancement within the "chain of command."
- Restraint-Portfolio management within the PMO helps lessen the number of projects that add no value to the company. Kill projects or programs that no longer align. Limit project and program scopes to what is necessary to meet the purpose.
- Security - Training produces skilled teams and career paths within the organization for team members. Also, training provides the security of better retention and a leadership pool.

3 Simultaneous Interdependence of war and peace

The expression "Duh" might come to mind in the statement that an army performs concurrent wartime and peacetime operations. Often, the obvious is presumed with little thought. However, a better understanding of the Army's interdependence between war and peace requires a bit of deep thought. Start with the proverbial question, "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?"

How does it apply to war and peace? Rephrase the question. Which came first, the Army's 9PW or the MOOTW guidelines? Why does it matter? The Army's MOOTW is foundational to how the Army carries out the 9PW. But the 9PW dictates the foundation's purpose and guidelines. Thus, the 9PW establishes the strategies for which foundational operating principles enable the achievement of those strategies.

How does this apply to project management? The PMO, PPM, and PM leaders develop day-to-day best practices, methods, and processes that excel during the most chaotic situations. If their teams can master the storms, they can easily manage the day-to-day. Keep them on their toes, so they are always ready.

Summary

In these disruptive and unstable times, business as usual results in mediocrity, if not disaster. The project management industry is no exception. The established best practices are not enough to defend against the onslaught of disruptions or the chaos resulting from increasingly complex projects and initiatives. Perhaps only war is more so.

The project management industry can look to the United States Armed Forces, specifically the Army, as a model for achieving success during two world wars. It has adapted the Nine Principles of War into its operations and strategies.

The 9PW have sprung from the strategist's writings throughout history, such as *The Art of War* attributed to Sun Tzu. They are:

1. Objective
2. Offensive
3. Mass
4. Economy of Force
5. Maneuver
6. Unity of Command
7. Security
8. Surprise
9. Simplicity

How could these basics be integrated into organizational project management? Optimally, an Enterprise-Level Program Management Office, especially an enterprise-level one, should be the means. It is strategic and operational, an organization within an organization, just as the military is within the United States government.

What does the practice of these principles by a PMO look like? The PMO framework, standards, and tools are designed for capable use. The PMO framework will have an established leadership structure with well-defined roles, authority, responsibilities, and training requirements. A Center of Excellence within or partnered with the PMO provides training or training incentives

for leadership advancement and for applicable subject-matter skills. Project portfolio management is a primary function of project and program management strategy, whether directed by the PMO or partnered with a project portfolio management office. Communications are standardized, accessible, and easily understood. Only the information essential for tracking portfolio, program, and project progress status and decision-making is monitored and reported. Risk management is proactive, not reactive.

Project management is agile because of clear, concise objectives, a clear line of authority, communication, and defined responsibilities, without micromanaging minutiae. Proactive risk management and a culture of innovation allow quick adaptation to disruptions.

PMO leaders and teams can define long and short-term objectives for the PMO and projects by using these principles. They can use their strengths at the right time, with the greatest impact, to achieve program and project goals and reduce the risk of chaos. They master resource efficiency and the reinforcement of weaknesses. The PMO team will demonstrate decisiveness, discipline, agility, support, and direction, delivering greater value to the organization.

“In the Army, we are taught to manage expectations. It’s important to understand what you are capable of, both as an individual and as a group, and to plan accordingly. Overextending because of unrealistic objectives can be deadly, for both a commander and his troops.”

Luis Carlos Montalvan (Montalvan, 2011)