



P30[®]: No Skeletons in the Cupboard at BT Design



Case Study
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Introduction

This case study describes how P30 helped the senior management at BT Design make business-critical decisions.

Designed to enable decision-making and support organizations going through large-scale change, *Portfolio, Programme and Project Offices* (P3O) is the latest best practice guidance from OGC. **Programme Manager Chris Barnes discusses how BT Design used P3O to create a Centre of Excellence.** Utilizing a highly professional group of evangelists for P3O to maximum effect, BT Design established a portfolio management approach which showed senior management how the business was functioning.

In 2008 BT Design – the design and implementation arm of BT – was part-way through a significant transformation: our rapid expansion into new markets and geographies meant we had to rationalize many disparate operational systems and legacy platforms in order to realize significant potential benefits. We initiated Milestone – a programme aimed at coordinating delivery of these rationalization efforts, and paving the way for new ‘twenty-first century’ platforms and technologies that would enhance our customers’ experience.

Milestone’s first objective was to understand the nature of the activity already underway.

Milestone brought together existing programmes focused on network rationalization, where there was a large element of interdependency. It was clear that these programmes were being delivered in different ways and were at different stages in their lifecycles.

We needed to set out consistent approaches to deliver the programmes and follow best practice. We felt that P3O would give us consistency, delivery support and the ability to develop our capability. A programme management approach which underpinned our activities with a proven set of tools was very appealing.

We charted the lifecycle of programme and project management capabilities to underpin how much flexibility we had, so we could assess which programmes were a priority and which were not.

We adopted a portfolio management approach for strategic planning, looking at programmes together and analysing how well board-level decisions were made. Some programmes were very large but we wanted to know what their business case was, what their benefits were and what management information could support their structure. We wanted to be able to provide information that would help senior management make informed decisions.

We also looked at best practice and the use of MSP® and PRINCE2™, as well as BT’s own expertise. We wanted to deliver a tailored approach to programmes and grow capability.

We decided to implement P3O from the top down and to set requirements that way. We showed the senior management team improved ways to report on costs and on what benefits their programmes brought the organization. We demonstrated how important that kind of information is and how it filters down into projects.

Because we wanted to maximize resources, we had to make some tough, high-level decisions. Having the correct information and being able to plan strategically was key. The reporting structure of P3O allowed the flow of information to be traced back to its source.

The Centre of Excellence

We started a Centre of Excellence in Programme Management and Execution. This was initially part of Milestone and then went BT Design-wide. We undertook a skills assessment of BT Design project managers and found we had pockets of people who had strong capabilities and could use best practice approaches well. In other areas, skills were poorer and programmes were not doing as well as they should.

It made sense to move the skilled people onto programmes that were top priority or not performing as well. So we set up our own internal Best Practice Team which moved proactively between challenging programmes, raising the overall maturity of the programme management approach and not just doing this when things went wrong.

We trialled the approach on a billing project to solve invoicing issues. This went very well. Milestone projects began to develop a reputation for good delivery and programmes improved once they were incorporated into the Milestone portfolio. It went so well that BT Design took on board the approach on a business-wide basis.

The Best Practice Team was selectively deployed to the most challenging areas. We found the top 20 business-critical programmes and looked at the resources allocated to them. We analysed where the pinch points were, who the programme leaders were, who the potential future programme leaders (Senior Responsible Owners) were and what coaching they needed. We looked at what was important, what was expensive, what benefits the programmes brought and who was accountable for them.

Skills and qualifications

Having done a high-level programme and project management assessment on successful projects we wanted people to improve as a community of leading-edge programme practitioners. We felt we had unacceptably low skills in some areas so it was important to use best practice pockets well to get more consistency throughout the organization. We used one set of competencies, standards and processes in order to get consistency.

Tailoring

We tailored P30 to align with our corporate management information. We didn't want different formats because they would have hindered us from using the information effectively. From a capability perspective we had to simplify the guidance; if different terms were being used, that would cause confusion. We had to make it more streamlined and basic. People's fear of bureaucratic and overly detailed information was clear, so we had to prove that the information P30 provided was useful by using straightforward, everyday language and avoiding jargon.

Challenges

We faced some challenges during our implementation of P30. It's difficult trying to build a plane when it is already in flight and this was the situation we faced. We had several programmes underway – some of which were at critical stages in their lifecycles – and it was hard to introduce new ways of working.

We had to rely on the maturity of our people to recognize that the new method would help their programme although it may not help them immediately. Luckily the attitude of our staff was very good and they were able to see and understand the longer-term benefits. I think people recognized that if we had been using P30 from the beginning we wouldn't have had the problems associated with bad information, or the lack of it. Good visibility is comforting and reassuring – a valuable thing for programme managers.

When you do something new, there is always a risk involved because people already have proven ways of doing things. To get people to go the extra yard they needed to see that senior management owned P30 and that they wanted it to be used.

Our senior management realized they needed sound project management control so they embraced P30 wholeheartedly!

Achievements

Implementing the skills assessment and tailoring the approach to the community's capability was ambitious but useful and increased the value of the output.

Developing a consistent approach, visibility and balance in the portfolio was hugely valuable. Suddenly we could see with great clarity which decisions could and couldn't be made.

Senior management played a crucial role in the reputational success we enjoyed with Milestone and across BT Design. They came to own P30 and its processes. New methods of doing things are usually greeted with scepticism, and when new 'brands' are introduced they tend to fade away in a year or two having not been taken seriously. With P30 the ownership by senior management meant that everyone took it seriously.

Chris Barnes' top tips for P30 success

Be prepared for skeletons in the cupboard

Focus your efforts on what you think is a reasonable challenge and don't set your expectations too high. P30 is an easy sell but try and be careful about what you commit to. P30 exposes you to every issue and obstacle because of the breadth of the framework. Focus on building contingency. This type of approach will find the 'skeletons in the cupboard' so you need to be prepared for that. Once you've stirred things up you can't go back to your previous state of blissful ignorance.

Keep it simple

Use familiar language, translate it into your organization's own terminology and keep it super-simple if you want maximum impact and minimum resistance.

Set expectations at the right level

You need to set your expectations at the right level. We had a top-down portfolio approach and thought we couldn't get anywhere unless we understood the roots of our problems.

The resource and effort required shouldn't be underestimated – it requires many people to play their part. If one or two of those people don't value the initiative, the value as a whole is diminished.

Work together

It also needs organizational energy and everyone pulling together so it can work. There is a choice to be made in whether you will roll out the approach to everyone or be more targeted. It is important that the most able and influential people are on board. We should have picked out 20 high-performers and given them the task of rolling out P30 as a key role. This would have increased the credibility of P30. If you pick out best practice people to go with the best practice guidance you'll get easier wins. With Milestone we got senior management on board and this was an early win.

Keep stages short

It took longer than expected to adopt P30 but when it was used it was a momentum shift. If we did it again we would have shorter stages so we could introduce several projects at a time.

What BT Design liked about P3O

Portfolio elements

We liked the portfolio elements of P3O. Being able to link programmes and projects at a portfolio level to maximize control is a big selling point to programme directors. Lots of people start at the bottom with projects but for BT it was focusing on the big picture and the ability to link programmes and projects that was attractive.

The programme management office as a service

We liked the view of the programme management office as a service provider with the ability to access tools and templates.

A subtle but consistent approach

Our programme managers did not realize P3O was a new way of working. This was because they already understood the landscape and how to tailor it. It was consistent with other best practice methods we are using so we could pick out what we needed.

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