

# The PMO: Winning the Talent War and Adapting to the New Normal

*A new challenge for the client facing professional services PMO*

BY PETER TAYLOR



# Statement

*Let's begin by considering what we mean by a "Project Management Office" or PMO—a brilliant, three letter acronym that both consolidates and confuses (project, portfolio, program... what are we talking about?)*

My fast (and simple) definition of a PMO is:

A project is doing it (whatever "it" is) the right way, a program doing it in the right order, and a portfolio is doing the right things (for your business).

A PMO must do all of that with the right team, the right people who are willing to do whatever needs to be done to support the business process that is being undertaken.

- ✓ *Portfolio: Doing The Right Things*
- ✓ *Program: Doing It In The Right Order*
- ✓ *Project: Doing It In The Right Way*
- ✓ *PMO: Doing It All With The Right Team*

Therefore, the purpose of any PMO is to aid the delivery of successful outcomes for stakeholders. And for a client-facing PMO (one that oversees project delivery to external clients), it is very much the same, with perhaps an added focus on client satisfaction (most likely through some form of net promoter score system) and delivery assurance services designed to reduce risk and maximize business benefit.

All of this requires the very best people to be "the PMO"—but there is a problem.

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# Challenge

*Right now, along with all the “normal” challenges your PMO faces, you, your PMO team, and your projects are being hit by a triple whammy.*

1. Adjusting to the new normal, which is now a mix of skills and skill availability with a mix of freelancers/employees and an office/remote work space.
2. Navigating through the talent war that is raging all around us.
3. The internal battle between project managers and resource managers.

In exploring each of these pressure points, let's begin with the “new normal” that we hear about all the time.

A new normal is a state in which an economy and society settles following a crisis that differs from the situation prior to the crisis.

We have certainly experienced (and continue to experience) such a seismic change, which has

led many people to reconsider their working priorities, their approaches to the work/life balance, and where they work from.

Businesses have had to drastically rethink their expectations of employees in this respect.

In the long term, this is generally seen as a very positive outcome. [NASDAQ](#)<sup>1</sup> quoted, “A shift to developing remote, globally available workforces will naturally lead to corporations becoming more inclusive. It is well documented that more diverse workplaces foster better business performance, and the opportunities to share ideas, cultures and promote acceptance, tolerance, and equality have never been greater.”

But right now, there is still a great deal of uncertainty over this progression to a more permanent “new normal.”

1. [Why The 'New Normal' of Remote Working is Good for Everyone](#)





2. [A War For Talent Is Starting – Spoiler Alert: Workers Will Win](#)
3. [Bruce Tuckman](#)

This is made apparent in the current “talent war” raging around the business world. It is encouraging, and quite incredible, to see the economy and job market heating up, when only a few months ago, we all seemed on the edge of a collapse, deep in depression, and presuming the very worst.

*The game has certainly changed and, it seems, that the employee has the upper hand*

[Forbes](#)<sup>2</sup> noted, “It’s hard for corporate executives to wrap their heads around this abrupt change in fortune. They’ve been used to putting on hiring freezes, downsizing staff, and taking advantage of the employees’ fear of losing their jobs by pushing them to work longer hours and weekends while at home. Well, the game has changed.”

The game has certainly changed and it seems that the employee has the upper hand in many cases as these same organizations compete for the best of the available talent in the market.

All of which, in turn, exacerbates the long running tension between the project managers and the resource managers of the business world.

Efficient resource management involves planning, allocation, and optimizing resource utilization to keep everyone busy with no “gaps” in their work week. It is also about making sure your staff aren’t overburdened, nor sitting “on the bench.”

The project manager also plans, of course, but projects are dynamic and changing, and continuity of resources is critical to a project team’s performance. Bring in a new subject matter expert, for example, to pick up some work that was started by another SME and there will be a learning curve (time wasted), a potential disruption to the team dynamics (performance levels falling, as per [Bruce Tuckman](#)<sup>3</sup>) and restriction of opportunity through lack of the “right” resources being immediately accessible (due to other commitments made by the resource manager).

# Pressure

*In a recent poll, undertaken as part of a webinar “A Look at the Current Impact of the Talent War on PMOs,” attendees were asked to identify the pressure points that their organizations were facing with regards to “people”:*

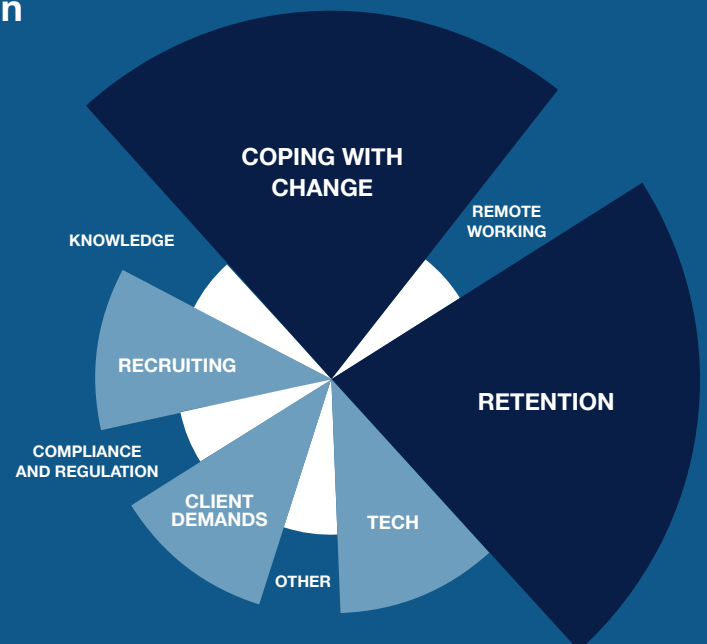
## #1 Pressure point in your organization with regards to “people”

LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
REMOTE WORKING	RECRUITING	RETENTION
COMPLIANCE AND REGULATION	CLIENT DEMANDS	COPING WITH CHANGE
KNOWLEDGE	TECHNOLOGY	
OTHER		

Clearly, attracting new talent, retaining existing talent, and dealing with the state of constant change is challenging to most organizations.

These are the symptoms of the talent war.

But what can your PMO do to meet this challenge, and both adjust to and thrive in the “new normal?”



*These are the symptoms of the talent war.*



The following pages offer some inspiration as you engage in this war.

## Thinking Resource First

*Michelle James, Senior Director Business Operations at Kantata, observed, “People—their knowledge and expertise, their experience, the synergies they create when they’re teamed up with their perfect counterparts; the momentum experienced by the entire team when they’re collaborating and working in lockstep—this is the outcome we can achieve when we approach resource management to support and develop our people.”*

Resource management is so much more than just filling a staffing request.

In a past whitepaper by Kantata and Enterprise Times, [The 5 Pillars of Great Resource Management](#)<sup>4</sup> were discussed, looking at how people, process, data, technology, and culture align “to enable great, interconnected resource management processes.”

When we add a resource-first approach to these 5 pillars, we align our company’s objectives and the individual goals and aspirations of our people.

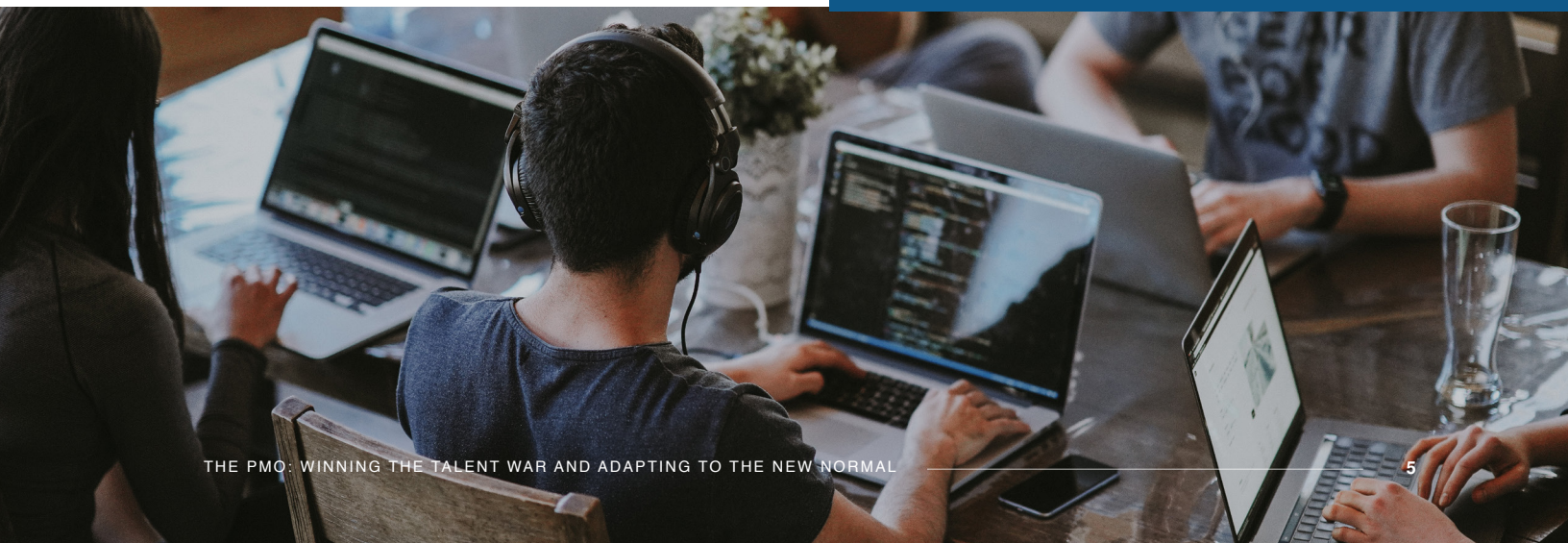
And when we’re all aligned and working toward common goals, our people feel supported. They stay motivated and engaged knowing that the work they are performing is adding to their own personal development, as well as providing value to their clients.

Therefore, we need to shift our mindset and approach resource management in a way to support and develop our people. We must align their development and well-being with our company strategies and the goals of our clients.

Once such a strategy is in place, then it far better aligns to the demands from the project leaders through having inspired and energized resources that are flexible in their attitude and focused both on their own career growth and the success of their clients.

Let’s explore two key areas that you can apply your focus and energies to aid that mindset shift and change your approach.

4. [5 Pillars of Great Resource Management](#)



# Increase the Maturity of Your Team

*Professional services resources today expect interesting work aligned with their knowledge and expertise. They expect assignments that support their ongoing development, and they have a desire to add value and deliver creative solutions.*

The environment in which we all work today requires our professional services resources to have a greater level of maturity. They need to be able to shift between multiple projects and client teams, and they're expected to constantly prioritize and re-prioritize their assignments to adjust to the ever-changing timelines and expectations of our clients. They need to be able to do all of this while working with a blend of office-based teams, remote teams, and offshore resource pools.

This typically requires both a change of process (certainly) and tools (most probably) and mindset (absolutely) to achieve the necessary "escape velocity" into this new normal.

It is also usually linked to a movement to a more "consultative" workforce along with the offering of value add services, as opposed to just a time/resource approach.

*The pandemic has provided many employees with greater flexibility over where, when, and how they work*

## Inspiration

A flexible workforce begins with a community of collaborating individuals who feel valued and heard—with a free and open opportunity to voice their ideas, concerns, and imagination without fear.

Once people feel they are engaged in such a community of equals, they will align behind a clear vision of purpose and offer themselves up in a manner that allows for a flexible, changing work pattern. All of this needs to pivot on a foundation of support and growth, as well as opportunity.

Technology must enable and not hinder.

We have all journeyed through a transformational period and "we," the global workforce, know that things can be different, and better.

[Gartner<sup>5</sup>](#) writes:

"The pandemic has provided many employees with greater flexibility over where, when, and how they work—and a Gartner survey of more than 10,000 digital workers from the U.S., Europe, and APAC shows that workers in that segment are likely to feel that flexibility is key to their productivity. Now it's up to digital workplace leaders to establish new guidelines to enable employees to work effectively in a hybrid workplace."

5. [Digital Workers Say Flexibility Is Key to Their Productivity](#)

# PMO Responses to Demands and Pressures

If we return to the question of “what does a PMO mean?” then I favour a new definition, something that breaks the mold of PMO concepts and escapes the world of confusion that exists. Think of PMO in this new way, and I believe that it will allow you to adjust your approach and mindset.



## PMO: Projects – Methods – Outcomes

*Build your PMO to support the delivery of all scales of projects, empower project managers through guidance and support, create an amazing community of collaborative change leaders, and be the place that project managers want to work.*

Build your PMO to support the delivery of all scales of projects, empower project managers through guidance and support, create an amazing community of collaborative change leaders, and be the place that project managers want to work.

Create the perfect framework of how to deliver these projects through deep guidance of those that need it, but with a freedom of approach for those that have the experience, nurturing creativity rather than burying it in assurance demands, and flexing it to adjust to all project types.

And finally, be outcome-focused, which means re-orienting your PMO community to not concentrate solely on the “how” but also, primarily, on the “what,” as well as being open to always improving through better information about what is working and what is not. Have the client’s business benefits at the forefront of all thoughts and conversations.



# Inspiration

*All of this builds on the previous point of increasing the maturity of your team.*

Again, enable rather than hinder, become open and flexible in your approach, and offer guidance without constraint.

Always begin with the people who deliver the projects, support them with the minimum viable methodology that offers creative freedom, and always focus on the outcome for your clients.



Here are just a few ideas from the ‘A Look at the Current Impact of the Talent War on PMOs’ webinar attendees about engaging with your PMO team:

- ✓ Create a flexi-time environment
- ✓ Always build the trust
- ✓ Operate with capacity-based lead times so as not to overwhelm
- ✓ Offer clear career progression planning
- ✓ Plan and act with an employee engagement focus
- ✓ Be opportunity and training heavy
- ✓ Schedule regular “one to one” sessions for learning and feedback

*Again, enable rather than hinder, become open and flexible in your approach, and offer guidance without constraint.*

# People

*Winning through the talent war and adapting to the new normal is fundamentally about people.*

I have spoken and written many times that projects, change, success, is all about people.

We exist in a world of change but there is a constant—it is (always will be and always has been) about the people, the human resources—their skills, their time, their focus, and their passion for success.

And I am not alone in this thought. According to Frederick Brooks<sup>6</sup>, author of “The Mythical Man Month,” “the quality of the people on a project, and their organization and management, are much more important factors in the success than are the tools they use or the technical approaches they take.”

Projects are about people!

Your PMO is about people.

To support these people, modern resource management solutions must move past outdated ways of simply seeing team members as a collection of time and project output and instead work to both fully support them and make the most of their unique skills to find new levels of success.

6. *The Mythical Man-Month: Essays on Software Engineering* is a book on software engineering and project management by Fred Brooks first published in 1975

## Action

*It is imperative for organizations to not delay—  
otherwise, you will end up on the losing side in the talent  
war (and your competitors may not).*

## About Kantata

The Kantata Industry Cloud for Professional Services™ is purpose-built for the next generation professional services organization.

Kantata takes professional services automation to a new level, giving people-powered businesses the clarity, control, and confidence they need to optimize resource planning and elevate operational performance. Our purpose-built cloud software is helping over 2,500 professional services organizations in more than 100 countries focus and optimize their most important asset: their people. By leveraging the Kantata Industry Cloud for Professional Services™, professionals gain access to the information and tools they need to win more business, ensure the right people are always available at the right time, and delight clients with project delivery and outcomes.

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## About Peter Taylor



International keynote speaker Peter Taylor is the author of the number 1 bestselling project management book “The Lazy Project Manager,” along with many other books on Project Management, PMO development, Executive Sponsorship, Transformation Leadership, and Speaking Skills.

He has built and led some of the largest PMOs in the world with organizations such as Siemens, IBM, and UKG, and in 2020 he was awarded the PMO Global Alliance PMO Influencer of the Year Award.

He has also delivered over 450 lectures around the world in over 25 countries and has been described as “perhaps the most entertaining and inspiring speaker in the project management world today.”

[www.thelazyprojectmanager.com](http://www.thelazyprojectmanager.com)