

JANUARY 2018 VOLUME 32, NUMBER 1

PMNetwork®

FITNESS CLUBS
GO **DIGITAL**

PAGE 54

PMOS: TIME
FOR **AGILE?**

PAGE 22

INDIA ON
THE UPSWING

PAGE 14

JOB REPORT

PAGE 28



ILLUSTRATION BY JOEL KIMMEL

INSIDE TRACK

Scaling Up

RASHAD ISSA, PMP

TITLE: Director of project management

ORGANIZATION: Workplace Options

LOCATION: London, England

At Workplace Options, the journey toward standardized project management started with just one employee offering a few hours of training. Two years later, that employee, Rashad Issa, became the organization's first director of project management.

Workplace Options provides employee support services—such as counseling and wellness coaching—to 53 million people in 78,000 organizations around the world. Headquartered in Raleigh, North Carolina, USA, Workplace Options has been expanding globally in recent years. Since February 2016, Mr. Issa has been implementing an enterprise-wide project management office (PMO) and introducing project management standards to the 35-year-old organization.

What does your role entail?

I've been setting up a PMO across nine countries, including India, Portugal and Ireland, as well as training and supporting our project managers. I establish governance, which involves a review committee that tracks our projects and addresses any risks before they occur. And as the lead auditor for our European offices, I'm also involved in quality management.

What led to the creation of your role?

In 2014, I developed a three-hour internal training program to introduce Workplace Options employees to the concepts of project management. It received a lot of positive feedback—people wanted to know more. The organization understood that if it applies project management best practices

in a standardized way across the globe, it has a higher chance of success. So in 2015, I developed a 20-hour training program that employees can voluntarily take to learn project management skills. Because of the training programs' success, I proposed that we set up the PMO.

Did Workplace Options' global expansion also point to the need for the PMO?

Yes. The faster you grow, the more you need a project management framework—especially now that we have a mixed business model of providing back-end services in the United States and business-to-business employee support services in the rest of the world.

What have the improved processes involved?

Before the PMO, our 12 operational departments each addressed their own progress toward meeting the organization's five-year strategy, so they had some silos in their work. We've been moving away from silos to build collaboration.

Now, the review committee, which consists of me and two other management colleagues, goes through the business objectives to determine if they're ongoing operations or strategic projects. For projects, we start with the desired outcomes. We then help our departments set up their benefits realization measures. And the PMO makes sure that, for example, we define scope statements or stakeholder analyses early in a project and across all departments, so there's greater efficiency and transparency.

What types of projects do you and your team execute?

Our projects introduce a new employee well-being product, enhance an existing product or process, or implement the technology through which our customers can access our services. The budgets range from US\$500,000 to US\$1 million. The projects I specifically manage are executive-level projects involving our global operations and technology infrastructure. For example, in April, we acquired ICAS France and ICAS Belgium. I managed the integration of those two offices.

How did your improved processes help the acquisition project?

When you bring two organizations together, they have different mindsets and cultures. So we had to identify requirements and expected

outcomes upfront to ensure success. Our PMO first gathered all the requirements not only from Workplace Options but also from ICAS. We then conducted a gap analysis to make sure there were no inefficiencies or repetitiveness. We identified all the stakeholders, and we did resource planning. We made sure everyone understood what they needed to do.

How does the PMO approach project delivery?

It depends on the scope and the final product we are delivering. For example, when we are developing a new software-driven service enabling customers to interact with us, we take an agile approach. It's highly driven by features and customers' requirements. On the other hand, when we are rolling out, say, an internal process enhancement, we go with waterfall.

What is the biggest challenge you face?

As a global organization, we generally interact virtually—across different locations, time zones and cultures. With different cultures come different communication approaches. So it's always challenging to make sure everybody is on the same page. During the project management training I deliver, I help the project managers understand their own preferred communication style so they can better communicate with others.

How do you track the benefits of enhanced project management?

We don't leave the metrics until a project's close. The review committee discusses metrics and reports on both an ad hoc basis and a quarterly basis. That then informs the following year's strategic plan. As a result, the strategy has moved away from a box-ticking exercise for each department to a living, breathing plan. The executives can see the benefits.

You rose to this senior-level position a decade into your career. How did you develop the skills you needed?

I started in the customer care department of the National Bank of Kuwait, and most recently, I was the service quality manager at Boubyan Bank in Kuwait. The more I worked on projects, the more I realized how PMI's standards and framework helped me. And with each position, I've been able to take my previous experience and translate it to a different context. **PM**



Small Talk

What's the one skill every project manager should have?

Interpersonal skills—because what we do is all about people working together as a team.

What's the best professional advice you ever received?

"Say the truth, but sweetly." That has helped me a lot when reporting unpleasant project data.

What's a book that has special meaning for you?

How to Win Friends and Influence People by Dale Carnegie. It's about getting what you need from people by being on their side.