

Driving Business Success Through Project Managers by Evolving Our Processes, Our Tools, and Ourselves

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Abstract:

Building a structured project management community of practice can help engage project managers and support successful project execution. A coordinated approach to stakeholder engagement, professional development, knowledge management, and community building can strengthen relationships, facilitate sharing lessons learned and best practices, support continuous project improvement, and drive project success.

This paper presents a case study of how one company met the challenges project managers faced in a project-driven organization by establishing a virtual, one-hour, recurring project management professional development session. The community of practice sessions provided opportunities for continuous improvement in stakeholder engagement and knowledge management. Lessons learned highlight how servant leadership and community building can drive business success through project management.

Introduction:

Project management office (PMO) responsibilities include creating opportunities for knowledge transfer and professional development. Ideally, a PMO will develop a systematic approach to effectively leverage lessons learned from one project to the next to manage knowledge and adapt to changing project environments. The PMO can play a critical role in standardizing processes, tools, stakeholder engagement, and sharing knowledge and experiences between projects.

A community of practice is one effective example of a structured platform for project management learning. Researchers have found that informal discussions within strong social networks transfer project knowledge more effectively than technological solutions and that “interpersonal relationships are significantly correlated with knowledge transfer and individual performance” (Wiewiora et al., 2010). Building communities of practice may also contribute to a strong culture of accountability—another risk mitigation tool that contributes to project success.

This case study demonstrates how a structured project management community of practice supported by active stakeholder engagement can drive innovations and process improvements and support the strategic goals of your organization.

The Challenge

PMOs are crucial for ensuring project success and connecting organizational strategy to project outcomes as projects face rapidly changing project environments and complex challenges. Many PMOs struggle with overcoming organizational silos and a lack of knowledge management and professional development. In project-driven organizations where project managers are assigned or hired to support projects full-time, their day-to-day work centers on a single project or small set of projects. This structure can limit exposure to other project teams and organizational initiatives, thereby reinforcing silos and reducing awareness of the broader organizational context. The independent nature of project operations can make sharing lessons learned between projects challenging. Project managers may employ risk mitigation strategies on their own projects but may not have the opportunity to share them more broadly with other projects that could also benefit.

When project managers are disconnected from the broader company ecosystem, the organization may miss opportunities for innovation and struggle with fragmented, duplicative processes. Project managers working full-time on one project may not understand how broader organizational strategic goals are connected to their project work. They may not be aware of shifts that functional departments are making to support those goals or how those shifts may affect their projects. The project-based structure may also leave project managers with few avenues to connect with one another.

Dynamic skill building is vital for project management because the environments in which projects operate are changing. In a *Harvard Business Review* article, Ryan Roslansky, the CEO of LinkedIn, shared that “the average LinkedIn member has seen the skills needed for their job change by 25% over the past eight years. That number is expected to reach at least 65% by 2030 due to AI” (Roslansky, 2023). In addition, a 2013 study in the *Journal of Management Development* found that “...‘employee involvement’ [as] measured by empowerment, team orientation, and capacity development...positively influences organizational effectiveness.” (1). Without an established practice of skill building and knowledge sharing for project managers, PMOs miss opportunities to improve employee engagement and organizational effectiveness.

Despite clear benefits of building community and capability among project managers, many PMOs suffer from knowledge silos and stakeholder disengagement and lack a reliable, structured system to engage project managers and expand their skills.

Case Study

The PMO of JBS International, a project-based, mission-driven, and values-driven company that helps clients create sustainable change to improve people’s lives, established a virtual, one-hour, recurring project management professional development session called “Project Management Power Hour” (PM Power Hour).

UMD Project Management Symposium

April 30, 2026

The goals of the PM Power Hour are to enhance project manager knowledge surrounding the use of new and existing tools and resources and to develop a sense of community and collaboration across projects and functional areas, including IT, Human Resources (HR), Finance, etc.

The format of PM Power Hours is flexible based on the topic and the needs of attendees. It may consist of a one-hour demonstration of a new tool or a half-hour presentation with breakout sessions to apply knowledge and connect with fellow project managers. The PM Power Hours also includes polls and surveys to increase engagement of attendees and to assess what project managers understand on the topic. For some topics, presenters include project success stories and highlights.

Before the first PM Power Hour, managers surveyed project managers on the preferred times to hold the PM Power Hours. With this feedback, the PMO was enabled to make informed decisions about scheduling the PM Power Hours on alternating days every other month. The PM Power Hours were also set to automatically record and to be available asynchronously. Attending in person or watching the recording are mandatory for project management staff. PM Power Hour sessions qualify for Project Management Institute (PMI) professional development units (PDUs). The PDUs offered through PM Power Hours align with all three PMI skill categories: Ways of Working, Power Skills, and Business Acumen. This added benefit helps staff certified as Project Management Professionals (PMPs) maintain certification and may incentivize participation.

SWOT Analysis and Topic Curation

To understand the needs of project managers in the organization, PMO staff conducted a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) analysis and interviewed project managers. Additionally, the PMO staff reviewed the risks, opportunities, and issues (ROI) register to identify where additional training or support for project managers may mitigate risks or avoid problems. This process generated topic ideas for PM Power Hours. Additionally, this approach enabled the PMO to prioritize topic areas for the PM Power Hour and build a log of topics for future meetings. During ongoing planning sessions, the PMO staff refines the log while referencing the SWOT, ROI register, and interview feedback. Current needs of project managers and other stakeholders inform priorities related to the topic log.

Stakeholder Engagement

Prior to the first PM Power Hour, the PMO conducted a stakeholder analysis, which revealed the broad nature of types of employees who would benefit from the PM Power Hours. Stakeholders included staff in functional areas, such as Finance, HR, and IT. The inclusion of those stakeholders in the development of topics may keep stakeholders outside of the PMO engaged with the efforts and outcomes of project managers and potentially reduce silos between functional areas. For example, when presenting how to use a Cost-To-Complete (CTC) template, a leader in the Contracts Office joined the PMO presenter to share how the contract type informed the inputs to the CTC. In another presentation, this time focused on using AI, two staff members

UMD Project Management Symposium

April 30, 2026

who work in communications presented a framework for how to find the best AI tool for their work. This presentation helped attendees expand their knowledge of other projects, thereby reducing silos, and built understanding of how to leverage new technology to benefit their projects.

Depending on the topic and relevance to staff outside of project management, employees on other teams, including aspiring project managers, may be invited to attend and participate. Opening PM Power Hour attendance to aspiring project managers provides further professional development for those on a project management career track and enhances overall project management skills for the organization.

Each PM Power Hour presentation includes a “must know” slide in the presentation where recent organizational announcements, requirements, or requests are shared as a reminder. This lets the presenter highlight the priorities of departments outside the PMO.

Community of Practice

One of the goals of the PM Power Hours is for project managers to connect as a community of practice. To facilitate this, project managers of all levels are invited to present a success story, tool, or lesson learned from their projects during PM Power Hours. Through these presentations, the PMO encourages innovative approaches by spotlighting high-performing project managers, regardless of their tenure with JBS or their career stage.

Every PM Power Hour includes engagement tools: quizzes, surveys, and breakout rooms. Breakout groups are often facilitated by peer project managers. The breakout rooms have a dual purpose of building community as well as enhancing skills. An important goal for the PM Power Hours is creating an environment for project managers to develop inter-project relationships. In the breakout rooms, project managers meet colleagues, learn about their projects, and share approaches to the challenges or skills being discussed. At the end of the PM Power Hour, attendees receive a survey on their perceptions of their skills and their connections with other project managers in the organization.

Results & Lessons Learned:

Stakeholder Engagement and Communities of Practice

In the 9 Power Hours held between May 2024 and February 2026, 74% of the 213 non-unique attendees who responded to the poll reported that they somewhat agree or agree that the PM Power Hour “helped me develop connections with other project managers.”

When presenters engage stakeholders from outside of project management in the selection of topics, project managers better understand the needs of stakeholders across the organization and increase cross-department collaboration. For example, a PM Power Hour on the topic of project launch processes included a guest speaker

UMD Project Management Symposium

April 30, 2026

from the Contracts Office. When surveyed after the meeting, 100% of poll respondents reported that they somewhat agree or agree with the statement “I understand the importance of knowing my contract type.” By including a functional department expert, project managers learned what is needed for a project launch to be successful from the Contracts Office perspective. In *Enhancing Sustainability in Project Management: The Role of Stakeholder Engagement and Knowledge Management in Virtual Team Environments*, the authors write that when stakeholders actively engage in learning, communities of practice emerge that “...create a sense of belonging and enable employees to learn from each other, leading to increased innovation and productivity” (Blak Bernat et al., 2023). Collaborating with stakeholders external to the PMO can strengthen knowledge management practices and support progress toward the organization’s strategic goals.

Value Creation

Establishing reliable and open spaces for learning and sharing can promote a culture of continuous improvement and collaboration. This practice can also serve to demonstrate the value of PMO. In PMI’s PMO Value Ring™ Framework, the authors state, “[At] the core of the PMO Value Ring™ framework lies the critical alignment between projects and...the overarching objectives of the organization” (PMI, 101). An important section of the Value Ring™ Framework is “service operation.” Through effective management of service operations, such as investing in team member development and fostering a learning culture, the PMO can demonstrate value and advance organizational strategies.

By connecting strategic goals of the organization to the learning objectives for the PM Power Hours, project managers may more clearly comprehend the relationship between organizational strategy and their project outcomes. Through maintaining active stakeholder engagement, employees are supported to understand the value the PMO brings to their organization.

PM Power Hours serve to create a culture of accountability and the structure to enforce it through pairing clear expectations with comprehensive support. The PMO can reinforce accountability by standardizing practices via a mechanism like the PM Power Hour. Because of the training provided in the Power Hours, leaders who supervise project managers can expect a consistent baseline level of skill and process adherence from all project managers as part of quarterly performance assessments. At the same time, by creating a community of practice, the PM Power Hour can foster social accountability, creating a “collaborative environment where team members hold each other responsible for achieving shared goals” (Ahmad et al., 2023). The PMO can add value to the organization by building competency and community.

Continuous Quality Improvement & Change Management

The PMO can continuously improve the Power Hours by reviewing poll results and adjusting topics, format, and/or delivery. With further review of the poll responses, PM Power Hours without breakout rooms, case studies from active projects, or facilitation by different project managers received lower levels of “somewhat agree”

UMD Project Management Symposium

April 30, 2026

or “agree” ratings, as compared to PM Power Hours with these engaging elements. The PMO team responded by incorporating more of these components to provide additional opportunities for project managers to develop community.

A key component to the successful establishment of a culture of continuous improvement and stakeholder engagement is servant leadership. A servant leader “...serves to build the competencies of followers, remove hindrances, encourage innovation, and [empower] creative problem-solving and organizational dynamics” (Nauman et al., 2022, 17) Servant leadership also emphasizes a strong relationship with all stakeholders, facilitating a collaborative culture.

Servant leaders create space for successful change management. In a Power Hour on the topic of using automations in project management information systems (PMIS), one attendee shared their feedback regarding the announcement of an upcoming migration to a new enterprise-wide PMIS with “[kudos] to the PMO team for communicating this upcoming change well in advance of the platform transition and for providing some context and sharing the plan/timeframe for this transition” (JBS, 2026) A model like the PM Power Hour creates a recurring point of contact for project managers to engage in a structured process for organizational change, as reinforced in the Prosci 3-Phase Process. This process has three parts: Phase 1– Prepare Approach, Phase 2 – Manage Change, and Phase 3 – Sustain Outcomes. Each phase can be addressed during a successive, or recurring, PM Power Hour session.

Structure

The predictable and recurring nature of the PM Power Hours is fundamental to achieving PMO and organizational strategic goals. The CEO of RAIDLOG.com and co-host of the *Project Management Happy Hour* podcast, Kim Essendrup shares the idea of “trust bricks”:

Trust...is like a brick wall. If I want to build a strong wall, I need to demonstrate that I'm trustworthy many times. Each time I do that, I add another brick. Over time, this builds trust that's like a strong, brick wall (Essendrup, n.d.).

Each time a PM Power Hour is scheduled as part of a predictable cadence and successfully held, stakeholders’ confidence in the reliability of the learning space may increase. Reliability encourages trust. Operating within a set routine lowers the barriers for stakeholders to engage because they know when the PM Power Hours will be held, how to access the material shared, and what standard tools project managers are being trained to use. Providing frequent response points before, during, and after a session may also build trust and engagement (see Table 1, below).

Table 1. Engagement and Feedback Opportunities.

Time	Response Point
Before Virtual Session	1. Requesting support for breakout room moderation 2. Soliciting speakers for a “Project Spotlight,” where project managers share lessons learned or new tool/technology

UMD Project Management Symposium

April 30, 2026

	3. Sharing agenda in advance and inviting feedback
During Virtual Session	1. Deploying surveys, polls, and quizzes 2. Holding breakout rooms with prepared questions and discussion talking points 3. Developing simulations for breakout rooms so participants can practice the skills discussed
After Virtual Session	1. Surveying participants routinely before and/or after the end of a session 2. Follow up with recording via email and posting in virtual shared space 3. Requesting feedback by email or in shared virtual spaces 4. Conducting one-on-one interviews with participants

To create high-quality virtual sessions, include key stakeholders in the slide development, review process, and scheduled practice sessions in advance of the actual event. This systematic preparation will ensure that the training is well structured, is appropriate for the audience, and uses technology effectively.

Conclusions

This case study highlights how a PMO can expand knowledge of processes, tools, and resources among project managers to drive organizational success. Key lessons learned include keeping stakeholders engaged through structured stakeholder analysis and ongoing communication, and how servant leadership and community building can create value through successful projects. Ask project managers what they need and what they can offer others. Collaborate with counterparts in other business areas to understand how the PMO and project managers can address their needs and how project management skills contribute to their departmental goals. Build systems that inspire trust through reliability. Foster continuous innovation and practical knowledge management by routinely connecting with stakeholders and creating space to share lessons learned, new tools, best practices, and project success outcomes.

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UMD Project Management Symposium

April 30, 2026

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