

BEYOND THE REBRAND

Renaming the PMO Does Not Change the Game

A Practitioner's Perspective on Whether Changing the Name Changes the Game



Renaming the PMO Does Not Change the Game

Programme · No. 37

Originally written December 2005 | Re-edited and re-rendered for the WhereBeyond Edition, 2025

“Renaming the PMO does not change what it does — it changes what the organisation expects it to do, and that gap between expectation and capability is where the trouble starts.”

1. The Rebrand

Something is happening to programme management offices. They are being renamed. Across sectors — financial services, government, utilities, telecommunications — PMOs are becoming TMOs: Transformation Management Offices, or simply Transformation Offices. The change is not universal, but it is widespread enough to constitute a trend, and it raises a question that practitioners should take seriously: does the new name reflect a genuinely different function, or is it the same team doing the same work under a more fashionable label?

The answer, in my observation, is usually the latter — but the distinction matters, because the name change creates expectations that the unchanged function cannot meet.

2. What the Name Change Signals

The shift from PMO to TMO signals something real about how organisations are thinking about change. The word programme implies a bounded, temporary initiative with a defined scope and an end date. The word transformation implies something larger, more fundamental, and more permanent — a change in how the organisation operates, not just what it delivers. An organisation that renames its PMO as a TMO is making a statement about the scale and ambition of its change agenda.

The statement is often genuine. Many organisations are undertaking change that is qualitatively different from the programme-based change of the last decade. They are not delivering a new system or restructuring a division — they are attempting to change the way they operate across multiple functions simultaneously. Regulatory pressure, competitive dynamics, and customer expectations are driving changes that cut across traditional programme boundaries. The PMO label feels inadequate for this scope of change. The TMO label feels more appropriate.

The problem is that renaming the office does not, by itself, change what it can do.

3. The Capability Gap

A PMO is typically equipped for programme-level governance: tracking delivery against plans, managing risks and issues, coordinating stage gates, consolidating status reports, and supporting programme boards. These are useful capabilities, and they remain useful in a transformation context. But transformation demands additional capabilities that most

PMOs have never developed.

Benefits realisation management. Programmes deliver outputs. Transformations deliver outcomes. The gap between the two is where benefits realisation sits, and most PMOs have no operational capability in this area. They may track benefits in a register, but they do not own the operational changes required to realise them. A TMO that claims to manage transformation but has no benefits realisation capability is a PMO with a new nameplate.

Cross-functional change management. Programmes typically operate within a defined scope boundary. Transformations deliberately cross those boundaries — the point of transformation is to change how functions interact, not just how they operate individually. A TMO must be able to see and manage the interdependencies between changes happening across different parts of the organisation simultaneously. Most PMOs can manage dependencies within a programme. Managing dependencies across an entire transformation portfolio is a different order of complexity.

Strategic alignment. A PMO checks whether programmes are delivering what they promised. A TMO must check whether what was promised is still what the organisation needs. Strategic context changes during long-running transformations — regulatory requirements shift, market conditions evolve, leadership priorities change. The TMO needs the analytical capability and the organisational standing to challenge whether the transformation is still aimed at the right target. This is not a role that most PMOs have been asked to play or are equipped to play.

Cultural change. Transformations fail or succeed based on whether people change how they work, not on whether projects deliver their outputs. A TMO that does not engage with the cultural dimension of change — the behaviours, mindsets, and working practices that must shift for the transformation to take hold — is managing the mechanics of change but not the change itself.

4. The Honest Conversation

The question an organisation should ask before renaming its PMO is not should we call it a TMO? but are we willing to invest in the capabilities that a TMO requires? If the answer is yes — if the organisation is prepared to recruit or develop benefits realisation specialists, cross-functional change managers, strategic analysts, and cultural change practitioners — then the rename is the beginning of a genuine evolution. The TMO will be a different function from the PMO it replaces, with a different mandate, different skills, and a different relationship with the executive team.

If the answer is no — if the organisation intends to rename the PMO, keep the same team, maintain the same capabilities, and expect the new label to somehow produce different results — then the rename is a mistake. It creates expectations the function cannot meet, sets the team up for failure, and discredits the transformation agenda it was meant to support.

Renaming the PMO does not change what it does — it changes what the organisation expects it to do, and that gap between expectation and capability is where the trouble starts.

In my experience, most TMOs currently sit closer to the rebrand end of the spectrum than the evolution end. They are PMOs with new names, doing programme-level work in a transformation context, and struggling with the expectations that the new name creates. This is not a criticism of the people involved – they are typically doing excellent work within the boundaries of their capability. It is a criticism of organisations that mistake nomenclature for strategy.

The transformation office is a genuinely useful concept. An organisation undertaking large-scale change needs a function that can see across the entire change portfolio, manage the interdependencies, track the benefits, challenge the strategic alignment, and support the cultural shift. But building that function requires investment in people, skills, authority, and governance structures that go well beyond what a programme management office has ever been asked to provide. Until organisations are willing to make that investment, the TMO will remain what it currently is in most cases: a PMO with a more ambitious title and an impossible mandate.