PMO and Organizational Maturity
By: Collin Quiring

The Center for Business Practices (CPB) recent research report "*The State of the PMO 2007-2008"* has me thinking about the Project Management Office in general. I have worked with a number of clients, some large and some small, that have a PMO in place. While organizational structure and reasons for the PMO differ, I have experienced that the more productive the PMO is for the organization depends upon the perception of the PMO by the rest of the company. In my mind, the organization that realizes that the PMO is there to help and support the effort of project management within the company is usually the organization that performs better overall. Contrasting that, the organization that feels the PMO is there to overrule them or to force processes on them usually perform worse overall. This isn't to say that the PMO is the be-all and end-all for a company – but for companies with a PMO, the viewpoint of the organization as a whole about the role of the PMO in a strong indicator of their overall project success.

In the survey, CPB finds that the PMO maturity and overall organizational performance are strongly linked. More projects are achieved by companies with a more mature PMO. Particularly, a more mature PMO has fewer challenges with "stakeholder acceptance, appropriate funding, demonstration of value, role clarification, conflicting authority and consistent application of processes". (quoted from CPB's "The State of the Project Management Office PMO", summary findings).

While I have seen the challenges listed above in varying levels of development in companies, I think that role clarity and conflicting authority are two areas in particular that can cause a lot of frustration and difficulty. When a PMO is set up, senior management must explain to the organization the lines of authority and the roles being performed by individuals within, and external to, the PMO. An individual that doesn't understand their role or their level of authority within a project, a program or in the PMO, can't be expected to do their job well – because it isn't define. And, how can a PMO mature if decisions about its authority and overall role in the organization are not distributed to everybody? Without explaining the role, purpose and authority level of a PMO to all interested parties, the PMO will only be perceived by individuals throughout the company as another department that does some stuff that doesn't affect them. And, the individuals within the PMO will only become frustrated as they see their sphere of influence erode.

The maturity of the PMO is found in the study to be a key factor in overall organizational effectiveness. But, without the proper foundation and continuing support, the PMO can never become mature! Therefore, it is important that the PMO is properly "marketed" to all affected individuals as a part of the organization that exists to help others do their work better – and that requires some clarity.