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STUDY REPORT

Assessing the Maturity and Impact of Project Management Offices (PMOs)



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Assessing the Maturity and Impact of Project Management Offices (PMOs)

Authors: Dr Reinhard Wagner (Germany) – Study Lead
Mario Protulipac (Croatia)
Nancy Nouaimeh (UAE)
Muhammad Mohsin Azeem (KSA)
Adam Galgenmüller (Germany)

Technical Editing: Dr Daniel Siter

Break and Graphic Design: Tjaša Pogorevc s. p.

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Project Management Offices (PMOs)**

Maribor, 2026

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CMMI	Capability Maturity Model Integrated (SEI)
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
P3M3	Project, Programme and Portfolio Management Maturity Model (Axelos)
PBO	Project-Based Organization
PMO	Project Management Office
PMO-MI	Project Management Office – Maturity and Impact (AIPMO)
POO	Project-Oriented Organization
PSO	Project-Supported Organization
SLR	Systematic Literature Review

FOREWORD

The increasing reliance on projects as a dominant mode of organizing work has fundamentally reshaped contemporary organizations. Across industries and sectors, projects, programs, and portfolios have become central mechanisms for implementing strategy, managing change, and creating value. This development has elevated the role of Project Management Offices (PMOs) from administrative support units to key organizational actors at the intersection of governance, strategy, and execution. At the same time, it has intensified expectations for PMOs to demonstrate their contribution not only to project efficiency but also to long-term impact.

Against this backdrop, the present study, *Assessing the Maturity and Impact of Project Management Offices (PMOs)*, addresses a question of growing relevance for both research and practice: how can the performance, maturity, and most importantly, the impact of PMOs be meaningfully assessed? While maturity models and capability assessments have significantly advanced the professionalization of project management, their widespread application to PMOs has often occurred without sufficient conceptual reflection. This study makes a timely and important contribution by critically examining these practices and by explicitly distinguishing maturity from impact, two constructs that are frequently conflated in professional discourse. From a research perspective, the value of this work lies in its systematic and theory-informed approach. By employing a Systematic Literature Review, the study provides a transparent synthesis of the existing body of knowledge and reveals structural gaps in current assessment approaches. In doing so, it moves beyond descriptive accounts of PMO roles and maturity levels to open a more nuanced discussion of value creation, benefits realization, and strategic contribution. The findings clearly show that while maturity assessments remain useful diagnostic tools, they are insufficient to explain the actual impact a PMO has.

As Head of the Doctoral Study Program in Project Management at Alma Mater Europaea University, I view this study as an important foundation for future scholarly work. Its conceptual clarifications, critical positioning of maturity models, and articulated research agenda offer multiple entry points for follow-up research. In particular, the call for theory-driven, context-sensitive, and longitudinal studies aligns well with the broader evolution of project management research toward impact, governance, and value-oriented perspectives. Advancing this agenda will require close collaboration between academia and practice, as well as methodological pluralism that combines quantitative rigor with qualitative depth. Universities have a crucial role to play in this endeavor. Beyond educating future project professionals, academic research must challenge established assumptions, refine conceptual frameworks, and develop evidence-based approaches that support informed decision-making in organizations. This study exemplifies such a contribution. It not only advances scholarly understanding of PMOs but also provides a robust platform for subsequent research projects. I am confident that this work will stimulate further academic inquiry, inspire empirical validation, and support practitioners and decision-makers in rethinking how PMOs are evaluated and positioned.

Prof. Dr. Mladen Radujkovic

Head of the Doctoral Study Program in Project Management

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Organizations across industries increasingly rely on projects as primary vehicles for implementing strategy, managing change, and creating value. This growing *projectification* has elevated the role of Project Management Offices (PMOs), which have evolved from administrative support units into central actors in project governance, portfolio coordination, and strategic alignment. As expectations toward PMOs have increased, so has the pressure to demonstrate their contribution to organizational performance and long-term value. Yet many organizations continue to rely on maturity models as the primary means of assessing PMOs, despite persistent uncertainty about what these assessments actually reveal.

This study, *Assessing the Maturity and Impact of Project Management Offices (PMOs)*, addresses this challenge by examining how PMOs are currently assessed and exploring how their impact can be evaluated beyond a maturity-centric perspective. The study is guided by the following three research questions: 1. What is the current state of assessing the impact of PMOs beyond maturity models? 2. Which approaches are suitable for assessing PMO impact? 3. What future research and development needs exist to improve PMO impact assessment? To answer these questions, the study applies a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of peer-reviewed academic literature, complemented by insights from professional discourse. The review was conducted in multiple rounds to ensure both rigor and conceptual refinement.

The results show that PMO assessment remains largely dominated by maturity-based approaches. Models such as the Portfolio, Programme, and Project Management Maturity Model (P3M3) of Axelos and similar frameworks are widely used in research and practice, even though they were not designed to assess PMOs as organizational entities, nor to evaluate their contribution to organizational outcomes. In literature, maturity is often implicitly treated as a proxy for effectiveness or value, despite limited empirical evidence supporting a causal relationship between higher maturity and greater organizational impact. Explicit

assessments of PMO impact, understood as contribution to benefits realization, strategic alignment, decision quality, and long-term organizational performance, are comparatively rare. Where impact is addressed, approaches are fragmented, often exploratory, and highly context dependent. Performance-based assessments provide operational insights but remain inward-looking, while value and governance-oriented approaches, such as AIPMO's Project Management Office Assessment of Maturity and Impact (PMO-MI®), are conceptually closer to impact yet the field lacks methodological consolidation.

For practice, the findings highlight the limitations of relying solely on maturity assessments to justify PMO investments or strategic relevance. While maturity models remain useful for diagnosing capabilities and supporting internal development, they do not answer the core executive question: *What difference does the PMO make for the organization?* Organizations are therefore encouraged to complement maturity and performance assessments with impact-oriented evaluations that explicitly link PMO activities to strategic objectives and benefits.

For research, the study identifies a clear need to move beyond normative maturity assumptions toward theory-driven, context-sensitive impact models. Future research should explicitly distinguish among performance, maturity, and impact; integrate theories of governance, value creation, and benefits realization; and employ longitudinal and mixed-methods designs capable of capturing indirect and long-term effects. Strengthening collaboration between academia and practice is essential to close the gap between conceptual advances and actionable assessment approaches.

This study demonstrates that assessing PMOs solely through maturity models is insufficient given contemporary expectations for value and impact. By clarifying key concepts, critically positioning maturity models, and outlining a future research agenda, the study provides a robust foundation for advancing both scholarly understanding and practical evaluation of PMOs. Ultimately, it calls for a shift from capability-centric to impact-oriented assessment perspectives, one that better reflects the strategic role PMOs play in today's project-based organizations.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, organizations across sectors have experienced a substantial growth in the number, scale, and complexity of projects. Projects have become a primary vehicle for implementing strategic change, driving innovation, and delivering organizational value. As a consequence, the professionalization of project management has gained increasing importance, leading to the widespread establishment of individual or multiple Project Management Offices (PMOs) as organizational entities intended to coordinate, support, and govern project-related activities.

Despite their proliferation, PMOs continue to face significant challenges in practice. Among these, one of the most persistent and demanding questions concerns the demonstration of their organizational impact. While there is extensive practitioner-oriented and academic literature describing what a PMO is, which services it should offer, and how it may mature through its lifecycle, evidence-based approaches for assessing the actual impact of PMOs remain scarce. Numerous “cookbook” models and maturity frameworks provide prescriptive guidance on PMO design and development; however, they often implicitly assume that higher maturity equates to higher value, without empirically validating this relationship.

In practice, maturity assessment approaches such as P3M3 are frequently applied to PMOs. Yet, P3M3 was neither designed to assess PMO maturity specifically nor to evaluate the impact of PMOs on organizational performance. As a result, organizations often rely on indirect or proxy measures that fail to capture the multifaceted, context-dependent contributions of PMOs. This gap between prescriptive guidance and rigorous impact evaluation represents a critical shortcoming for both practitioners seeking justification for PMO investments and researchers aiming to advance theory in this domain.

Against this background, this study addresses the need to move beyond maturity-focused perspectives and to examine how the impact of PMOs can be assessed

more systematically and meaningfully. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. *What is the current state of assessing the impact of PMOs beyond maturity models?*
2. *Which approaches are suitable for the purpose of assessing the impact of a PMO?*
3. *What future needs for research and development exist in order to improve the assessment of PMO impact?*

To answer these research questions, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was conducted, complemented by an analysis of professional and practitioner-oriented literature. This combined approach allows for the capture of both academic rigor and practical relevance. Following this introduction, the paper outlines the conceptual underpinnings of PMO impact assessment, describes the applied research methodology, presents the results of the literature analysis, and concludes with a discussion of findings and implications for research and practice.

2. CLARIFICATION OF TERMS, CONCEPTS, AND THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Projectification and the rise of project-oriented organizations

Over the past decades, organizations across sectors have experienced a substantial increase in the number, scope, and strategic relevance of projects. This phenomenon has been conceptualized in academic research as *projectification*, referring to the growing reliance on projects as a dominant mode of organizing work and implementing change (Midler, 1995; Martinez Montes & Moreno Escobar, 2023; Jacobsson & Jalocha, 2021). Projectification reflects a structural transformation in organizations, in which projects evolve from exceptional undertakings to a central mechanism for value creation, innovation, and strategy execution. Simultaneously, the multitude of projects necessitates an institutional framework that provides governance, management, and operational support (Munck af Rosenschöld, 2023).

As projectification intensifies, organizations face increasing demands to professionalize their project delivery (Wagner & Radujkovic, 2025). This professionalization primarily affects the project-oriented part of the organization (POO), which encompasses governance structures, competences, processes, and support mechanisms related to project delivery. Initially, many organizations established project-supported organizations (PSOs) with focus on administrative assistance, documentation, and reporting (Lundin et al., 2015). However, as project complexity and interdependencies increased, these support functions proved insufficient. Davies and Hobday (2005) describe the subsequent organizational evolution toward the *project-based organization* (PBO), in which projects and programs constitute the dominant form of organizing work. In PBOs, traditional functional hierarchies are supplemented or partially replaced by project-based structures, requiring new forms of coordination, governance, and integration across projects, programs, and portfolios (Müller, Drouin & Sankaran, 2019). This organizational shift creates the structural and managerial conditions under which Project Management Offices (PMOs) emerge as a critical organizational response.

PMOs as organizational support and governance mechanisms

Project Management Offices are commonly defined as organizational entities that centralize, coordinate, and support project management practices across an organization (Hobbs & Aubry, 2007). From an organizational design perspective, PMOs can be understood as structural mechanisms that enable coordination between temporary (projects and programs) and permanent (functional or line) organizational elements (Müller, Glückler, & Aubry, 2013).

The evolution of PMOs mirrors the broader trajectory of projectification. Early PMOs were primarily established at the project level as *Project Offices*, focusing on administrative support and methodological consistency. With the rise of program management, *Program Offices* emerged to manage interdependencies, coordinate benefits realization, and provide oversight across related projects. At the enterprise level, *Corporate* or *Strategic PMOs* were introduced to align project portfolios with organizational strategy, support executive decision-making, and contribute to corporate governance (Unger, Gemünden, & Aubry, 2012). In addition, organizations with large or diversified project portfolios frequently establish *Operational PMOs* embedded within business units or divisions. These PMOs focus on execution excellence, resource coordination, and local portfolio optimization. The coexistence of these PMO variants highlights that PMOs are not standardized organizational units, but context-specific configurations shaped by organizational strategy, governance needs, and environmental complexity (Aubry & Hobbs, 2011).

From a governance perspective, PMOs act as intermediaries between strategic intent and operational execution. They contribute to portfolio governance by supporting prioritization, transparency, and decision-making, while also shaping behavioral norms and management practices within the project community. Consequently, PMOs can be interpreted as hybrid governance structures operating at the intersection of control, support, and value creation (Aubry, 2024).

Expansion of PMO Services and the Shift in Expectations

As PMOs have evolved, their service portfolios have expanded significantly. Early service catalogues focused on standardization, reporting, and administrative efficiency. Contemporary PMOs, however, increasingly provide services related to capability development, knowledge management, resource optimization, benefits management, and strategic alignment (Hobbs & Aubry, 2010; Müller & Lecoeuvrre, 2014; Dixon, 2021).

This expansion has led to a corresponding increase in expectations from organizational leadership (Taylor, 2024). While efficiency and compliance remain relevant, PMOs are now expected to demonstrate their contribution to organizational value and long-term strategic objectives (Kaul & Joslin, 2018). This shift reflects broader developments in management research, where value creation, benefits realization, and strategic alignment are emphasized over purely operational metrics (Young & Grant, 2015).

As a result, organizational leaders seek systematic approaches to assure, assess, and evaluate PMOs. These discussions typically invoke three interrelated but conceptually distinct constructs: performance, maturity, and impact. Clarifying these concepts is essential to avoid conceptual ambiguity and inappropriate measurement practices.

Defining Performance, Maturity, and Impact of PMOs

PMO performance refers to the extent to which a PMO delivers its defined services effectively and efficiently in accordance with agreed objectives. Performance is typically assessed using operational indicators such as service quality, timeliness, cost efficiency, utilization rates, and stakeholder satisfaction (Neely, Gregory, & Platts, 2005; Aubry & Hobbs, 2011; Dow, 2017). Performance assessments are primarily inward-looking and focus on how well the PMO executes its mandate.

PMO maturity describes the degree of formalization, standardization, and institutionalization of PMO processes, structures, and capabilities. Maturity models assume evolutionary development stages through which PMOs progress over time, often ranging from ad hoc or reactive arrangements to fully integrated and strategically embedded entities (Crawford, 2006; Kerzner, 2019). Maturity assessments emphasize capability development and process robustness but frequently imply, without empirical validation, that higher maturity leads to superior organizational outcomes.

PMO impact extends beyond performance and maturity by examining how PMO activities affect organizational outcomes. Impact concerns the PMO's contribution to benefits realization, strategic alignment, improved decision-making, organizational learning, and sustained performance. Unlike performance and maturity, impact is inherently multidimensional, context-dependent, and often indirect, unfolding over longer time horizons (Aubry, Müller, & Glückler, 2011; Husser, 2017; Young, 2018; Joslin, 2022).

Critical Positioning of Maturity Models in the Assessment of PMOs

Maturity models are among the most frequently applied instruments for assessing project-related capabilities. Prominent examples include CMMI-derived models and portfolio, program, and project management maturity models such as P3M3. These models conceptualize maturity as a staged progression from inconsistent and informal practices toward standardized, optimized, and continuously improving processes.

Despite their popularity, the application of maturity models to PMOs raises fundamental conceptual concerns. Most notably, maturity models, including P3M3, were not designed to assess PMOs as organizational entities. P3M3 focuses on the maturity of portfolio, program, and project management capabilities, not on the mandate, positioning, services, or organizational role of

a PMO. Consequently, PMOs are assessed only indirectly, assuming that improvements in management maturity can be attributed to the existence or effectiveness of a PMO. This assumption is problematic for several reasons. First, maturity models are capability-oriented rather than value-oriented. They assess the presence and sophistication of processes and practices, but do not examine whether these capabilities translate into meaningful organizational outcomes. Second, maturity models promote a normative and rather linear view of development, implicitly assuming that higher maturity is universally desirable. Empirical research on PMOs, however, demonstrates that PMOs are highly context-dependent and may be intentionally designed to be temporary, lightweight, or selectively scoped (Hobbs & Aubry, 2010; Aubry & Hobbs, 2011). Third, maturity models conflate means with ends. Formalization and standardization are treated as outcomes rather than as potential enablers of value creation. This reinforces the largely untested assumption that higher maturity leads to greater impact. Finally, maturity assessments provide limited insight into causality. They describe the state of capabilities but do not explain how or why PMOs influence organizational outcomes, nor do they account for contextual moderators such as governance arrangements, institutional logics, organizational culture, or strategic priorities.

These limitations highlight a fundamental misalignment between the purpose of maturity models and contemporary expectations toward PMOs. While maturity models may serve as useful diagnostic tools for capability development in a wider scope of the organization, they are insufficient for assessing PMO impact. This study, therefore, explicitly separates maturity from impact and adopts a critical stance toward maturity-centric assessment approaches. To further clarify the conceptual distinctions, Table 1 contrasts the performance, maturity, and impact assessments along key analytical dimensions.

Table 1: Comparison of Performance, Maturity, and Impact Assessments of PMOs

Dimension	Performance Assessment	Maturity Assessment	Impact Assessment
Primary focus	Service delivery and operational execution	Capability development and process formalization	Organizational outcomes and value contribution
Unit of analysis	PMO services and activities	PMO structures, processes, and practices	Organization, portfolio, and strategic outcomes
Time horizon	Short to medium term	Medium to long term	Medium to long term
Orientation	Inward-looking	Inward-looking	Outward-looking
Typical measures	KPIs, service levels, efficiency metrics	Maturity levels, capability stages	Benefits realization, strategic alignment, decision quality
Assumed logic	Better execution leads to better service	Higher maturity implies better capability	PMO contributes to organizational value
Sensitivity to context	Limited	Limited	High
Ability to explain causality	Low	Low	Medium (theory-dependent)
Suitability for assessing PMO value	Low to medium	Low	High

From an organizational leadership perspective, the central concern is not whether a PMO is mature or operationally efficient, but whether it makes a meaningful difference to organizational outcomes. Typical leadership questions, therefore, include: What value does the PMO create? How does it support strategic objectives? And how can its contribution be demonstrated credibly?

These questions cannot be answered solely through maturity assessments. By clarifying key concepts, critically positioning maturity models, and contrasting alternative assessment perspectives, this chapter establishes the conceptual foundation for assessing PMO impact beyond maturity. This foundation directly informs the subsequent sections of this study.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Rationale

To investigate the state of research on assessing the impact of Project Management Offices beyond maturity models, this study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). An SLR is a structured, transparent, and reproducible methodology for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing existing research relevant to specific research questions (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007; Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003). Given the fragmented nature of PMO research and the conceptual ambiguity surrounding maturity and impact, an SLR was deemed appropriate to ensure methodological rigor and comprehensive coverage of the existing body of knowledge.

The review process followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to enhance transparency and replicability (Page et al., 2021; Moher et al., 2009). PRISMA provides a structured approach for documenting search strategies, screening decisions, and inclusion and exclusion criteria. The SLR was conducted in multiple iterative rounds, allowing for progressive refinement of search terms, screening criteria, and analytical focus as conceptual clarity evolved.

Review Protocol and Research Questions

The SLR was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the state of assessing the impact of PMOs beyond maturity models?
2. Which approaches are suitable for assessing the impact of PMOs?
3. What future research and development needs exist to assess PMO impact?

A review protocol was defined prior to the search process, specifying databases, keywords, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and screening procedures. The protocol was iteratively refined after the first review round to improve relevance and coverage, a practice recommended for emerging and interdisciplinary research fields (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009).

Search Strategy and Data Sources

The primary literature search was conducted using Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and Emerald Insight, all selected for their comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals in project management, management studies, and organizational research.

The initial search was conducted in August and September 2025, with an updated search conducted in November 2025 to ensure the currency and completeness of the reviewed literature. The following keyword combinations were used, applied to titles, abstracts, and keywords:

- “Project Management Office” OR “PMO,”
- AND “maturity” OR “maturity model” OR “capability assessment,”
- AND “impact” OR “value” OR “benefits” OR “organizational performance.”

Search strings were adapted to the specific syntax of the database used. The initial search returned 287 records.

In addition to database searches, backward and forward snowballing were applied to identify relevant studies not captured through keyword searches (Webster & Watson, 2002). Furthermore, professional and practitioner-oriented literature was reviewed separately to complement academic findings, although only peer-reviewed sources were included in the SLR dataset.

Screening and Eligibility Criteria

The screening process followed PRISMA recommendations and was conducted in multiple rounds. Studies were included if they:

- addressed PMOs explicitly as an organizational entity,
- discussed maturity, performance, value, or impact in relation to PMOs,
- were published in peer-reviewed journals or conference proceedings,
- were written in English, and
- were published between 2006 and 2025.

Studies were excluded if they:

- focused solely on project, program, or portfolio maturity without reference to PMOs,
- addressed PMOs only descriptively without analytical or evaluative content,
- were editorials, book reviews, or non-peer-reviewed opinion pieces, and
- focused exclusively on tools or software without organizational implications.

Review Rounds and Screening Process

Round 1: Title and Abstract Screening

In the first round, titles and abstracts of all identified records (n = 287) were screened for relevance. This resulted in the exclusion of 247 records that did not meet the inclusion criteria.

Round 2: Full-Text Screening

The remaining 40 articles were subjected to full-text review. At this stage, studies lacking conceptual relevance to PMO assessment, maturity, or impact were excluded (n = 25).

Optional Round 3: Conceptual Refinement and Quality Check

In a third round, the remaining 15 studies were assessed for conceptual depth and methodological rigor. This step ensured that the included studies contributed meaningfully to answering the research questions and avoided redundancy.

The final SLR corpus comprised 14 studies.

Data Extraction and Synthesis

For each included study, relevant data were extracted using a standardized extraction template, capturing:

- publication details (authors, year, outlet),
- research objectives and theoretical framing,
- conceptualization of PMO maturity, performance, or impact,

- assessment approaches and methods used,
- key findings related to PMO value or organizational outcomes.

Data synthesis followed a qualitative, thematic approach, suitable for conceptually heterogeneous research fields (Booth, Sutton, & Papaioannou, 2026). Studies were coded iteratively to identify recurring themes, dominant assessment approaches, theoretical gaps, and emerging perspectives on PMO impact.

Methodological Limitations

While the SLR followed established guidelines, certain limitations apply. The review was limited to English-language publications and to the selected databases, which may have excluded relevant regional or non-English research. Additionally, given the conceptual diversity of PMO research, terminological inconsistencies may have affected search sensitivity. These limitations were mitigated through iterative search rounds and snowballing techniques.

However, by applying a PRISMA-guided SLR in multiple iterative rounds, this study provides a transparent and replicable overview of existing research on PMO maturity and impact. The methodological rigor of the SLR underpins the validity of the findings and supports the study's aim to move beyond maturity-centric perspectives toward a more nuanced understanding of PMO impact.

4. RESULTS

This section presents general results from the systematic literature review and those structured around the three research questions guiding this study. The synthesis is based on the final set of reviewed peer-reviewed publications identified through the PRISMA-guided selection process.

General Findings

Of the analyzed publications, approximately half were published within the last three years, specifically during 2023, 2024, and 2025, indicating a strong representation of recent scientific contributions. The majority of the selected works were published in indexed academic journals, except for three papers published as conference papers and one publication categorized as an editorial or conceptual paper. However, a closer examination of content relevance reveals that recency does not necessarily equate to conceptual novelty. A substantial proportion of the analyzed studies primarily build upon, refine, or repackage existing practitioner-oriented maturity models, standards, and tools, such as CMMI-inspired frameworks, P3M3, or similar well-established approaches. While these approaches remain highly relevant for benchmarking and organisational diagnostics, they often reinforce prevailing paradigms rather than introducing fundamentally new assessment logics, dimensions, or evaluative mechanisms.

In contrast, only a limited number of recent publications offer genuinely novel perspectives or extensions of PMO maturity assessment, such as value-oriented maturity concepts, benefit realization-driven PMO models, or adaptive, context-sensitive frameworks that move beyond linear, stage-based maturity progression. These emerging contributions remain underrepresented in the literature and, in most cases, are still at a conceptual or early empirical stage. This imbalance suggests that the scientific discourse on PMO maturity is currently characterized by a strong dependence on established practitioner methodologies, with relatively fewer studies advancing new theoretical constructs or empirically validated

alternatives. As a result, while the literature is current in terms of publication dates, it is less progressive in terms of conceptual innovation, highlighting a clear opportunity for future research to bridge the gap between established practice-based models and emerging academic insights.

An analysis of citation counts indicates a clear correlation between publication year and citation count. The most highly cited papers in the sample are predominantly older foundational studies published between 2006 and 2016. More recent publications, while still exhibiting lower citation counts due to their recency, are increasingly referenced and reflect emerging research directions, suggesting a shift in focus rather than a decline in academic relevance. However, despite the dominant citation impact of the most cited paper, an important methodological caveat must be noted. The work primarily addresses organizational project management maturity, rather than PMO maturity assessment as a distinct analytical domain. The PMO is not treated as a primary unit of analysis, nor are PMO-specific roles, services, or governance mechanisms explicitly assessed. Consequently, while the paper serves as a key foundational reference within the broader maturity literature, its direct relevance to PMO maturity assessment remains limited.

This distinction is essential to avoid conceptual overlap between project management and PMO maturity, and it underscores the need for more PMO-specific, empirically validated maturity frameworks. Interestingly, only one of the papers explicitly points to PMOs that add value or are impactful, making it of particular interest to our study. It highlights the importance of diagnosing existing PMO maturity as a foundation for a 'Value Management Office (VMO)' and discusses challenges, including cultural resistance, strategic alignment, and performance measurement. This paper concludes by positioning the VMO as a promising research domain and a strategic mechanism for enhancing organizational sustainability and long-term value delivery.

It also points to the Association of International Project Management Officers (AIPMO) newest assessment approach, called *Project Management Office - Matu-*

PMO-MI[®], a structured maturity assessment tool and a key enabler for the transition from a traditional PMO to a Value Management Office (VMO). *PMO-MI*[®] applies a tiered assessment approach that enables organizations to progressively evaluate the PMO's maturity and its organizational impact. Tier 1 and 2 focuses on diagnosing the current maturity level of the PMO relative to recognized best practices, analyzing processes, tools, and governance structures, without assessing value or organisational outcomes. Tier 3 to 6 extends the assessment by incorporating both quantitative and qualitative indicators of organizational impact, such as portfolio efficiency, return on investment, strategic alignment, and stakeholder engagement. The assessment relies on interviews, audits, performance analysis, and benchmarking, resulting in a strategic report that includes improvement recommendations and a maturity roadmap. Through this progression, *PMO-MI*[®] enables organizations to move beyond maturity measurement toward evidence-based evaluation of the value generated by the PMO.

RQ1: State of Assessing the Impact of PMOs Beyond Maturity Models

The literature review reveals that the assessment of PMOs is predominantly maturity-centric, with a strong emphasis on capability development, process formalization, and methodological standardization. A substantial share of the reviewed studies focuses on the design, comparison, or application of maturity models derived from established frameworks such as CMMI and P3M3, often adapted to the context of project, program, or portfolio management. Across the reviewed literature, PMOs are frequently assessed indirectly through organizational project management maturity rather than as organizational entities in their own right. Several studies explicitly examine the relationship between PMO support functions and project or organizational performance, yet these analyses typically rely on maturity levels or capability indicators as proxies for effectiveness. As a result, maturity is often implicitly equated with value or success, despite limited empirical validation of this assumption.

Only a small subset of the reviewed studies explicitly addresses impact-related constructs, such as organizational value, benefits realization, or strategic contribution (see the aforementioned PMO-MI[®] Assessment). Where impact is mentioned, it is commonly conceptualized in abstract terms or inferred from improved project outcomes, such as schedule adherence or methodological consistency, rather than being operationalized as a distinct construct. Empirical approaches that isolate the causal contribution of PMOs to organizational outcomes remain rare.

Overall, the state of research indicates that assessing PMO impact beyond maturity remains underdeveloped, fragmented, and conceptually ambiguous. The dominance of maturity models has shaped both research designs and measurement practices, constraining the development of alternative assessment perspectives.

RQ2: Approaches Suitable for Assessing the Impact of PMOs

The reviewed literature identifies several assessment approaches that can potentially support the evaluation of PMO impact, although they are unevenly developed and rarely integrated.

First, performance-oriented approaches are frequently applied. These focus on service delivery, operational efficiency, and stakeholder satisfaction, often measured through key performance indicators (KPIs) or service-level metrics. While such approaches provide insight into how well a PMO executes its mandate, they remain largely inward-looking and do not directly capture organizational outcomes.

Second, capability- and maturity-based approaches dominate the field. These approaches assess the formalization, consistency, and integration of project management practices, often assuming a linear progression toward higher maturity. Although maturity assessments are useful for benchmarking and diagnosing organizational capabilities, the literature provides limited evidence that they are suitable for assessing PMO impact, particularly in strategic or long-term terms.

Third, a smaller but growing body of literature explores value- and benefit-oriented approaches. These studies examine PMO contributions to benefits realization, decision quality, strategic alignment, and organizational learning. Approaches in this category often draw on governance theory, value management, or benefits management frameworks. However, they tend to rely on qualitative methods, conceptual models, or exploratory case studies, limiting generalizability.

Fourth, context-sensitive and contingency-based approaches emerge in several studies. These emphasize that PMO impact depends on organizational context, including the degree of projectification, governance structures, and strategic priorities. Such approaches challenge the universality implied by maturity models and suggest that PMO impact must be assessed relative to organizational intent and design choices.

Altogether, the results show that only one approach in the literature provides a solid description of the impact of PMOs beyond performance and maturity levels, whereas others are insufficient to comprehensively evaluate the PMO impact. Performance and maturity assessments capture important but partial dimensions. While value- and context-oriented approaches promise to offer greater conceptual alignment with impact, they still lack methodological consolidation.

RQ3: Future Research and Development Needs for Assessing PMO Impact

The literature consistently points to several gaps and development needs that must be addressed to advance the assessment of PMO impact. First, there is a clear need for conceptual clarification. Many studies conflate performance, maturity, success, value, and impact, leading to inconsistent measurement and interpretation. Future research should explicitly distinguish these constructs and articulate their theoretical relationships.

Second, the reviewed studies highlight the lack of theory-driven impact models. Most maturity frameworks are prescriptive and normative, offering limited expla-

natory power. There is a need to integrate theories from organizational governance, value creation, benefits realization, and organizational design to explain how PMOs influence outcomes.

Third, methodological limitations are evident. Empirical research on PMO impact relies heavily on cross-sectional surveys and self-reported measures. Longitudinal studies, mixed-method designs, and comparative case studies are largely absent but necessary to capture indirect and long-term effects.

Fourth, the literature suggests the need for context-sensitive assessment frameworks. PMOs vary significantly in mandate, scope, and positioning, yet most assessment approaches assume homogeneity. Future research should account for organizational context, PMO type, and strategic intent when evaluating impact.

Finally, there is a notable gap between academic research and professional practice. While practitioner literature increasingly emphasizes the value and impact of PMOs, academic models lag in providing actionable, evidence-based assessment approaches. Bridging this gap represents a key area for future research and development.

In summary, our study reveals that research on PMO assessment remains dominated by maturity-based perspectives, despite growing recognition that maturity alone is insufficient to explain PMO value and impact. While alternative approaches exist, they are fragmented and under-theorized. Addressing these limitations requires conceptual refinement, theoretical integration, methodological advancement, and greater sensitivity to organizational context. These findings provide the empirical and conceptual foundation for the discussion and conclusions presented in the subsequent sections of this study.

5. DISCUSSION

This study set out to examine how the impact of Project Management Offices is assessed beyond maturity models. The findings of the Systematic Literature Review reveal a field that remains conceptually and methodologically dominated by maturity-centric perspectives, despite increasing practical expectations for PMOs to demonstrate organizational value and strategic impact. This discussion interprets the findings in light of the research questions, reflects on the implications for research and practice, and outlines limitations and directions for future research.

Reinterpreting PMO Assessment Beyond Maturity

The SLR confirms that maturity models remain the primary assessment mechanism for PMOs in both research and practice. However, the widespread application of models such as P3M3 to PMOs represents a misalignment between assessment instruments and assessment objectives. Maturity models were originally designed to evaluate the institutionalization of project management capabilities, not the contribution of organizational entities such as PMOs to strategic outcomes. The persistence of maturity-based assessments, therefore, reflects path dependency in research and practice rather than conceptual adequacy.

The findings also highlight that maturity is frequently treated as a proxy for impact, despite limited empirical evidence supporting a causal relationship. This conflation obscures the distinction between means (capabilities and processes) and ends (organizational value and benefits). As a result, organizations may invest in increasing PMO maturity without a clear understanding of whether such investments translate into meaningful outcomes. From a theoretical perspective, this reinforces the need to separate descriptive capability assessments from evaluative impact assessments.

Fragmentation of Impact-Oriented Approaches

While the SLR identifies emerging approaches that address PMO value, benefits, and strategic contribution, these remain fragmented and underdeveloped. Performance-based approaches provide operational insights but lack strategic reach. Value- and benefit-oriented approaches are conceptually closer to impact but are often exploratory, qualitative, and context-specific. This fragmentation suggests that the field has not yet converged on a shared understanding of what constitutes PMO impact or how it should be assessed.

Notably, the reviewed studies emphasize the importance of organizational context, yet most assessment approaches apply universal criteria. This tension reflects a broader challenge in project management research: balancing the desire for generalizable models with the reality of organizational heterogeneity. PMOs differ widely in their mandates, authorities, and lifespans, suggesting that impact assessment must be contingent rather than normative.

One explanation for the limited convergence of impact-oriented approaches is the insufficient consideration of contextual moderators that shape how PMOs operate and are perceived within organizations. While several studies acknowledge the role of organizational context, assessment approaches continue to rely predominantly on formalized structures, documented processes, and explicitly defined roles. Such indicators may capture the visible configuration of a PMO but fail to reflect informal governance arrangements, leadership behaviors, collective mindsets, and decision-making norms that shape PMO effectiveness in practice. These less formalized elements can help explain why structurally similar PMOs may exhibit markedly different levels of organizational impact, suggesting that assessing the impact of a PMO requires sensitivity to organizational dynamics that extend beyond codified maturity indicators.

Implications for Practice

For practitioners, the findings underscore the risks of relying solely on maturity assessments to justify the existence or investment in a PMO. While maturity models can support internal capability development, they provide limited evidence for strategic decision-making. Organizational leaders seeking to understand the value of their PMO require assessment approaches that link PMO activities to benefits realization, strategic alignment, and long-term organizational performance.

The findings also suggest that PMOs should not be evaluated in isolation. Their impact emerges through interactions with governance structures, leadership practices, and organizational strategy. Consequently, PMO assessment should be embedded in broader governance and value management frameworks rather than treated as a standalone exercise. Furthermore, PMO assessments become more complex in organizations operating multiple PMOs. In such settings, the contribution of a single PMO cannot be fully understood without considering its interactions with other PMOs and overarching governance structures. For example, PMOs may support one another through shared standards, escalation pathways, or capability development, while simultaneously serving distinct stakeholder groups. Evaluating PMOs in isolation therefore risks overlooking system-level effects, including coordination benefits, duplication, and misalignment. From a practical perspective, this implies that assessments should account for interdependencies among PMOs and their collective influence on portfolio-level outcomes rather than focusing exclusively on individual units.

Study Limitations

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the SLR was limited to peer-reviewed English-language literature indexed in selected databases. Relevant insights from practitioner literature were reviewed separately but not included in the systematic synthesis. Second, the heterogeneity of PMO

concepts and terminologies posed challenges for search sensitivity and classification, despite iterative refinement of search strings. Third, the SLR focused on qualitative synthesis rather than quantitative meta-analysis, reflecting the field's conceptual diversity but limiting statistical generalizability. These limitations do not undermine the validity of the findings but indicate the exploratory and integrative nature of this study.

Future Research Agenda

Building on RQ3, the findings point to several directions for future research and development.

First, future studies should develop theory-driven models of PMO impact that integrate perspectives from organizational governance, value creation, and benefits realization. Such models should explicate causal mechanisms linking PMO activities to organizational outcomes.

Second, there is a need for methodological diversification. Longitudinal studies are required to capture the delayed and indirect effects of PMOs. Mixed-method designs combining quantitative performance data with qualitative insights can provide richer explanations of impact. Comparative studies across different PMO types and organizational contexts would further enhance understanding.

Third, future research should focus on context-sensitive assessment frameworks. Rather than assuming that higher maturity or broader service portfolios are universally beneficial, researchers should examine how PMO design choices align with organizational strategy and degree of projectification.

Fourth, closer integration between academic research and professional practice is needed. Practitioner discourse increasingly emphasizes the value of PMOs, yet academic research has not kept pace with empirically validated assessment approaches. Collaborative research designs and design science approaches may help bridge this gap.

Finally, future research should explicitly address the distinction between performance, maturity, and impact. Clarifying these constructs and their relationships is a prerequisite for developing robust assessment approaches and avoiding conceptual ambiguity.

This discussion reinforces the study's central finding: while maturity models have contributed significantly to understanding project management capabilities, they are insufficient for assessing PMO impact. Advancing the field requires a shift from capability-centric to value- and impact-oriented perspectives, supported by stronger theoretical foundations and more diverse research methods. The future research agenda outlined above provides a pathway toward achieving this shift.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to examine how the impact of Project Management Offices (PMOs) is assessed beyond maturity models. Driven by increasing expectations for PMOs to demonstrate organizational value, the study addressed three research questions through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). This concluding chapter synthesizes the key findings, outlines the theoretical and practical contributions, and summarizes implications for future research.

Summary of Findings in Relation to the Research Questions

RQ1: What is the state of assessing the impact of PMOs beyond maturity models?

The findings demonstrate that the assessment of PMOs remains largely dominated by maturity-based perspectives. Maturity models are widely used in both research and practice, often as proxies for effectiveness or value, even though they are not designed to assess PMOs as organizational entities. Explicit assessments of PMO impact—understood as contribution to organizational outcomes, benefits realization, and strategic objectives—are comparatively rare, fragmented, and conceptually underdeveloped. As a result, the state of research reflects a misalignment between contemporary expectations of PMOs and the predominantly applied assessment approaches.

RQ2: Which approaches are suitable for assessing the impact of PMOs?

The SLR indicates that no single assessment approach is sufficient to comprehensively capture PMO impact. Performance-based approaches provide insights into operational execution but remain inward-looking. Maturity-based approaches support capability development but fail to explain organizational outcomes. Value-, benefit-, and governance-oriented approaches offer greater conceptual alignment with impact assessment, particularly when combined with context-sensitive perspectives. Suitable approaches, therefore, require integration across multiple dimensions, explicitly distinguishing

between performance, maturity, and impact while accounting for organizational context.

RQ3: What future research and development needs exist to assess PMO impact?

The findings highlight the need for conceptual clarity, stronger theoretical grounding, and methodological advancement. Future research must move beyond normative maturity assumptions and develop theory-driven, context-sensitive models that explain how PMOs contribute to organizational value. Methodologically, longitudinal, mixed-method, and comparative designs are required to capture indirect and long-term effects. Bridging the gap between academic research and professional practice remains a critical development need.

Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it clarifies key concepts by explicitly distinguishing between PMO performance, maturity, and impact, three constructs that are frequently conflated in prior research. Second, it provides a critical positioning of maturity models, highlighting their limitations when applied to PMOs and challenging the implicit assumption that higher maturity equates to greater value. Third, the study advances the conceptual discourse by positioning PMO impact within broader theories of projectification, governance, and value creation, thereby providing a foundation for future theory development.

Practical Implications for Organizations and PMO Leaders

For practitioners, the findings underscore that maturity assessments alone are insufficient for evaluating the value of a PMO. While maturity models can support internal capability development, they do not provide adequate evidence for strategic decision-making regarding PMO continuation, transformation, or investment. Organizational leaders should therefore complement maturity and performance assessments with impact-oriented evaluations that explicitly address benefits realization, strategic alignment, and decision quality.

PMO leaders are encouraged to articulate their mandate in value-oriented terms and to align services explicitly with organizational strategy and governance needs. Impact assessment should be embedded within broader organizational performance and governance frameworks rather than treated as a standalone exercise. This shift supports more informed dialogue between PMOs and senior management regarding expectations, contribution, and accountability.

Implications for a Future Research Framework

Based on the findings, a future research framework for assessing PMO impact can be outlined conceptually. Such a framework would position projectification and organizational context as antecedents shaping PMO design and mandate. PMO activities and services would be evaluated through distinct but interrelated lenses of performance and maturity. Impact, as the focal construct, would be conceptualized as the PMO's contribution to organizational outcomes, mediated by governance structures and strategic alignment. This framework emphasizes causality, context sensitivity, and temporal dynamics, providing a coherent basis for future empirical research.

Limitations and Final Remarks

As with any SLR, this study is subject to limitations related to database selection, language restrictions, and the heterogeneity of the reviewed literature. Nevertheless, the systematic and transparent approach adopted provides a robust synthesis of the current state of knowledge.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that while maturity models have played a significant role in advancing project management capability, they are insufficient for assessing the impact of PMOs. Addressing this gap requires a fundamental shift toward impact-oriented, theory-driven, and context-sensitive assessment approaches. By articulating conceptual distinctions, critically positioning existing models, and outlining a future research agenda, this study advances both scholarly understanding and practical application in the assessment of PMOs beyond maturity.

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