

New York Comptroller Extends Business Analysis Best Practices

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The New York State Office of the State Comptroller (NYSOSC) in Albany maintains a broad scope of responsibility unmatched by similar offices in the United States. As the state's chief fiscal and accounting officer, the comptroller is a separately elected statewide official whose primary duties include managing and investing the state's cash assets, auditing government operations, paying all state employees, reviewing state contracts, overseeing the fiscal affairs of local governments -- including New York City -- and operating two of the state's retirement systems.

As an agency charged with monitoring the effective financial operation of numerous other agencies and entities, the NYSOSC understands the need to carefully maintain its own project management (PM) and business analysis (BA) capabilities. Therefore, the office engages in regular self-assessment and performance improvement in these areas.

NYSOSC has built a reputation for continually advancing project management best practices through its PM Center of Excellence (CoE). However, realizing that enhanced business analysis practices can also increase project success and user support, and heighten customer satisfaction, the agency has sought, since 2006, to improve its business analysis practices by instituting a Business Analysis Center of Excellence (BACoE).

NYSOSC performance improvement programs had primarily benefited PM teams prior, and support had not been available for the advancement of BA teams. By promoting BA competencies, knowledge management, enterprise analysis skills and practices similarly to the PM program, NYSOSC sought to achieve comparable, positive results.

Strategic Planning

The agency's cross-division Business Analysis Work Group completed a strategic report in 2006 presenting the benefits of advancing NYSOSC's use of business analysis and making next-step recommendations, including the launch of a BACoE. In 2007, the second phase of the project was launched to begin to develop and support business analysis as an organizational resource. Kevin Belden, deputy comptroller and CIO, and Kirk Schanzenbach, director of the Program Management Office (PgMO), were executive sponsors; and Barbara Ash, assistant director for BA in the PgMO, was the project manager. The project team consisted of numerous representatives from BA units across the agency.

To provide counsel on industry best practices, and to resolve issues that were impeding progress, the project team enlisted the help of ESI International. "Having worked with ESI in the past to build our project management and business skills capabilities," said Schanzenbach, "we were confident that they were the best partner in achieving our BA goals."

ESI began by working with NYSOSC leadership and the project team to outline unifying objectives for BA and PM skills areas, including the need to:

- provide a clear vision for the future of business analysis that aligns with other management initiatives;
- promote a common understanding of BA process and related terminology;
- define and implement a centralized BA unit and structure to promote a more supportive environment; and
- ensure the opportunity for input by interested groups across the organization.

The Solution

In cooperation with ESI, NYSOSC determined the key strategies to ensure a successful program. Foremost among these were to:

- enhance methodologies, consistency and alignment between PM and BA;
- develop a common vocabulary;
- improve knowledge management;
- promote development of BA and enterprise analysis skills;
- create a virtual BA community to include a repository of best practices, templates, instructions, glossaries, checklists, tools and other resources; and to
- develop coaching and mentoring programs complemented by skills assessments.

To support the program launch, ESI designed and delivered a two-day, project kickoff workshop that centered on the program's four-part learning framework and targeted development of knowledge, skills, ability and attitude.

Day one introduced the program to senior management and focused on developing best practices in alignment with BACoE operating standards. Executive activities included competitive, interactive group exercises that helped to define and prioritize goals around developing the BACoE.

Day two introduced the program to front-line business analysts and ensured a common understanding of BA concepts and executive directives. Following the kickoff, the team worked in subcommittees on project deliverables, received best practice advice, and exercised skills and competencies through coaching exercises.

Special attention was also given to evaluating and treating such problematic areas as standards and methodologies topics for the BA group. "This intensive learning experience was very well received as a serious enhancement to the traditional instructor-led effort." said Ash. "Participants also felt that it accelerated the program launch significantly compared to previous programs."

Toward Change

In the early months of the program, ESI participated in regular group meetings and calls in order to provide coaching and to reinforce goals and specific training targets. While ESI continues to deliver essential counsel, the NYSOSC has quickly achieved the competency to offer coaching and mentoring using internal resources.

Other significant program accomplishments and benefits to date include:

- increased sharing of BA tools, methods, techniques and language;
- enhanced understanding of the roles and shared aspects of the BA and the PM;
- development of content for and current development under way for an internal BA knowledge management intranet portal;
- establishment of the BACoE and a BA Community of Practice within NYSOSC;
- increased awareness of Business Analysis Body of Knowledge principles;
- development of a NYSOSC-proposed Civil Service Standard for a BA title series;
- creation of a self-assessment tool for BA competency that assists individual training and development planning; and
- establishment of valuable mentor/protégé relationships.

Championed by executive sponsors Belden and Schanzenbach and project manager Ash, the internal team continues to recommend and oversee BA learning programs and progress, as well as support the advancement of BA maturity.

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