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The evolution of project management offices toward xMO models: Evidence from project-based organisations in Qatar

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ABSTRACT

The Project Management Office (PMO) has evolved from a function focused on project control, reporting, and compliance into a governance structure supporting strategic execution and organisational performance. This evolution has led to the emergence of extended PMO configurations, commonly referred to as xMOs, which integrate portfolio governance, value management, and transformation leadership. Although xMO has gained increasing attention in both academic and practitioner literature, empirical evidence on its adoption and organisational implications remains limited, particularly in Middle Eastern countries such as Qatar. This study examines the evolution of PMOs toward xMO models within project-based organisations in Qatar. It assesses PMO maturity, explores factors influencing transformation, and evaluates relationships with organisational outcomes, including strategic alignment, governance effectiveness, and agility. The data reflect Qatar-based organisational environments and the perspectives of a diverse professional workforce typical of the sector. A quantitative survey was conducted involving 139 valid respondents, including PMO leaders, project managers, and senior professionals across multiple sectors in Qatar. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha), correlation analysis, and regression analysis to examine PMO maturity, xMO adoption, and their relationships with organisational outcomes. The findings indicate that PMOs are strong in governance and strategic alignment but remain less developed in innovation and digital capabilities. Although organisations are receptive to xMO, the transition remains uncertain, highlighting a gap between PMO maturity and transformation capability.

KEYWORDS

Project Management Office (PMO), xMO, Project Governance, PMO Maturity, Strategic Alignment, Transformation Governance, Organisational Agility, Qatar.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Organisations across both public and private sectors are operating in environments characterised by heightened complexity, accelerated digital transformation, and increasing pressure for accountability, value delivery, and strategic coherence (PMI, 2021). In response, governance mechanisms that were once sufficient for managing discrete projects are being re-evaluated and reconfigured to support enterprise-wide transformation and sustained organisational performance (Aaltonen & Kujala, 2016). Within this evolving context, the Project Management Office (PMO) has emerged as a critical organisational structure whose role has expanded

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significantly beyond traditional project control, reporting, and compliance functions (Hobbs & Aubry, 2010; Aubry & Lavoie-Tremblay, 2018).

Historically, PMOs were established to standardise project management practices, improve schedule and cost control, and provide visibility over project execution (Dai & Wells, 2004; Hobbs & Aubry, 2007). While these functions remain important, they are no longer sufficient in organisations pursuing complex portfolios of strategic initiatives, digital transformation programmes, and large-scale capital investments (Too & Weaver, 2014). As competitive environments become more dynamic and strategy cycles shorten, organisations increasingly rely on projects and programmes as primary vehicles for executing strategy (Morris & Jamieson, 2005; PMI, 2021). Consequently, governance structures responsible for coordinating these initiatives must evolve accordingly.

In response to these pressures, many organisations have transformed their PMOs into more strategically oriented entities capable of integrating strategy formulation, portfolio governance, benefits realisation, and change management (Unger, Gemünden & Aubry, 2012; PMI, 2022). These extended configurations—commonly referred to as xMOs—include Enterprise Management Offices (EPMOs), Strategy Management Offices (SMOs), Value Management Offices, and Transformation Management Offices (TMOs) (PMI, 2013; North Highland, 2024).

In this study, the term xMO refers to an extended, enterprise-level governance function that integrates project, programme, and portfolio management with strategy execution, value governance, and organisational transformation. Rather than focusing solely on delivery efficiency, xMOs are designed to orchestrate enterprise-wide value creation, align investment decisions with strategic priorities, and ensure that transformation initiatives deliver measurable and sustainable outcomes (PM Solutions, 2016; PMI, 2022; PMI, 2023).

Global research and practitioner literature increasingly recognise extended Management Offices (xMOs) as pivotal mechanisms for addressing the persistent disconnect between strategic intent and operational execution in project-based organisations (PMI, 2013; PMI, 2022; North Highland, 2024). By enabling enterprise-level portfolio governance, strategic investment prioritisation, and systematic benefits realisation, xMOs are positioned as integrative governance structures that extend beyond traditional delivery oversight (PM Solutions, 2016; PMI, 2022). Despite this growing consensus, empirical evidence on xMO adoption and performance remains largely confined to Western -and to a lesser extent Asian- organisational settings. Consequently, limited understanding exists of how these governance models operate within Middle Eastern contexts characterised by distinct institutional arrangements, relational governance practices, and state-led development trajectories (PwC Middle East, 2023).

In Qatar, this research gap is particularly significant. The country's rapid socio-economic development—driven by large-scale infrastructure programmes, digital transformation initiatives, and public-sector reforms aligned with Qatar National Vision 2030—has substantially increased reliance on Project Management Offices (PMOs) to oversee complex project portfolios (GSDP, 2008; World Bank, 2020). Although PMOs are now widely implemented across public and private organisations, many remain primarily focused on project control, reporting, and compliance. Their involvement in strategic decision-making, benefits realisation, digital transformation, and enterprise-wide governance remains limited, creating a practical gap between existing PMO capabilities and the broader governance role expected of xMO models (PMI, 2022; PwC Middle East, 2023).

This study addresses this gap by examining the evolution of PMOs toward xMO models within Qatari organisations. It seeks to assess current PMO maturity levels, identify the organisational, leadership, and technological enablers and barriers influencing transformation, and evaluate how xMO practices contribute to improved governance effectiveness, organisational agility, and

strategic alignment. By providing empirical evidence and a contextualised conceptual framework tailored to Qatar's organisational environment, the research contributes to project governance theory while offering practical guidance for organisations seeking to strengthen their strategic execution capabilities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: THE EVOLUTION FROM PMO TO XMO

2.1. Foundations of the Project Management Office (PMO): Roles, Structures, and Governance and PMO Maturity and Contextual Configuration

The Project Management Office (PMO) emerged as a formal organisational response to the increasing complexity, scale, and interdependence of projects within modern organisations. As organisations expanded their project portfolios and relied more heavily on projects as vehicles for implementing strategy, the need for coordination, standardisation, and oversight became increasingly apparent.

Early conceptualisations framed the PMO as a structural mechanism designed to impose order, consistency, and visibility across fragmented project environments. Hobbs and Aubry (2007) identify the PMO's foundational roles as supportive, controlling, or directive, reflecting varying degrees of authority over project execution. Within this early paradigm, PMOs were primarily tasked with methodological standardisation, reporting consolidation, performance monitoring, and compliance with organisational procedures. Their primary value proposition lay in improving delivery discipline and reducing variability in project outcomes.

As organisations became more project-oriented, scholars began to question the adequacy of viewing the PMO as a neutral administrative unit. Aubry, Müller, and Glückler (2012) reconceptualised the PMO as an organisational actor embedded within enterprise governance systems, capable of shaping decision rights, authority structures, and strategic priorities. This shift marked a critical theoretical development, positioning the PMO not merely as a technical support function but as a governance mechanism mediating between executive strategy and operational delivery.

Pellegrinelli et al. (2015) extend this argument by suggesting that PMOs can assume a transformative role when empowered to influence portfolio design, resource allocation, and strategic prioritisation. Under such conditions, the PMO becomes a locus of strategic governance rather than an administrative overlay. Importantly, the literature emphasises that PMOs are inherently dynamic and transient. Aubry et al. (2010) describe PMOs as evolving structures subject to cycles of creation, transformation, and dissolution in response to organisational change, leadership turnover, and shifting strategic agendas.

This dynamic perspective challenges static interpretations of PMO effectiveness and underscores the importance of examining PMO evolution as a process rather than a fixed organisational state. PMO maturity theory provides a structured lens for understanding how PMOs develop capabilities over time. Maturity models generally propose that PMOs evolve from basic coordination and reporting functions toward higher-order roles encompassing portfolio governance, strategic alignment, and value creation.

Early-stage PMOs focus on establishing common methodologies, templates, and reporting standards, whereas advanced PMOs engage in investment prioritisation, benefits realisation, and enterprise-level governance. However, linear interpretations of PMO maturity have been increasingly challenged. Spelta and Albertin (2012) argue that PMO configuration should be treated as a contextual choice, shaped by organisational uncertainty, complexity, technological intensity, and industry characteristics. Their context–discriminant model demonstrates that

different organisational environments require distinct PMO designs to achieve effectiveness, rejecting the notion of a universal "best practice" PMO.

This argument is particularly relevant to construction and infrastructure sectors, where regulatory oversight, contractual complexity, multi-stakeholder coordination, and long project lifecycles are pronounced. In such environments, PMO effectiveness depends not only on internal maturity but also on alignment with institutional and sectoral constraints. Empirical research provides strong support for the maturity–performance relationship.

Alvarenga et al. (2019) propose a multidimensional PMO success framework comprising strategic, structural, and relational dimensions. Their findings demonstrate that mature PMOs contribute directly to value realisation, executive alignment, and organisational performance. Monteiro's (2024) comprehensive review of PMO typologies further confirms that PMO roles and configurations vary widely across contexts, reinforcing the need for contextualised maturity frameworks rather than prescriptive models.

2.2. Strategic Alignment, Change Management, and the Limitations of Traditional PMOs

Strategic alignment is widely recognised as the central mechanism through which Project Management Offices (PMOs) contribute to organisational performance. Henderson and Venkatraman's (1993) Strategic Alignment Model argues that sustainable organisational success depends on the alignment between business strategy, organisational infrastructure, and supporting systems. Within this perspective, PMOs serve as governance mechanisms that translate strategic objectives into coordinated portfolios, programmes, and projects. However, as organisations increasingly depend on project based execution to realise strategic objectives, maintaining alignment between strategic planning and operational delivery has become increasingly challenging.

According to PMI (2021), many organisations continue to experience fragmented governance structures in which strategic decision making is disconnected from project execution, resulting in inefficiencies, scope expansion, delayed delivery, and reduced value creation. To overcome these challenges, enterprise level PMOs and xMO configurations integrate portfolio governance, benefits realisation, and performance management within a unified governance framework, thereby strengthening the connection between strategic intent and execution.

Empirical evidence provided by Alvarenga et al. (2019) demonstrates that higher levels of PMO maturity significantly improve strategic alignment by reducing governance inefficiencies and enhancing organisational value delivery. Nevertheless, achieving strategic alignment alone is insufficient to ensure successful organisational transformation.

The organisational change literature emphasises that transformation also requires strong leadership, stakeholder commitment, effective communication, organisational learning, and an adaptive culture capable of sustaining change over time (Kotter, 2012; Burnes, 2017). These organisational capabilities extend beyond the traditional responsibilities of PMOs, which have historically focused on project control, administrative support, and delivery performance.

Consequently, conventional PMOs often lack the authority, strategic influence, and cross functional coordination necessary to manage enterprise wide transformation initiatives. This limitation is reflected in evidence reported by McKinsey (2016) and BCG (2024), which consistently indicates that large scale transformation programmes are more likely to fail because of fragmented governance, weak strategic integration, and insufficient change leadership rather than technical shortcomings.

These findings reinforce the need for a more comprehensive governance model that extends beyond traditional PMO functions and provides the strategic capabilities required to lead organisational transformation effectively.

2.3. The Evolution of PMOs into xMOs: Governance Models, Capability Domains, and Taxonomy

The evolution from traditional PMOs to Enterprise PMOs (EPMOs) and ultimately to xMO configurations represents a significant shift in organisational governance. EPMOs extend the PMO mandate to encompass portfolio-level oversight and strategic alignment, while xMOs integrate transformation leadership, value governance, and digital enablement. Practitioner and advisory literature reflect a growing convergence around enterprise-level governance offices oriented toward value creation and transformation.

Deloitte (2022) highlights the evolution of traditional PMOs into transformation-focused governance entities designed to deliver strategic impact and enterprise-wide value, while Gartner (2023) conceptualises the Digital Business Execution Office as a coordinating mechanism for digital strategy execution across portfolios and functions. Consolidating these parallel developments, the PMI (2023) positions extended Management Offices (xMOs) as enterprise-level entities that orchestrate value delivery, transformation initiatives, and strategic execution across the organisation.

Synthesising insights from both academic and practitioner literature, xMOs can be understood as integrating four interrelated capability domains comprising strategic orchestration, value governance, digital and innovation enablement, and change leadership.

Together, these capability domains illustrate the transition from traditional compliance focused PMOs to strategic governance entities that align portfolios with organisational strategy, optimise enterprise value, leverage digital capabilities, and lead sustainable organisational transformation (PMI, 2023; Moghaddasi et al., 2025; Monteiro, 2024; Chen, 2025)

2.4. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is designed to explain the evolutionary pathway through which Project Management Offices (PMOs) transform into extended strategic entities known as xMOs within Qatari organisations.

The framework draws upon PMO maturity theory, strategic alignment models, and organisational transformation frameworks (Aubry & Lavoie-Tremblay, 2018; PMI, 2021; Alvarenga et al., 2019), while being contextualised to the unique governance and development environment of Qatar. It is grounded in three interrelated theoretical perspectives.

1. First, PMO Maturity Theory explains that PMOs evolve through successive stages of capability development, progressing from a primary emphasis on control and standardisation to strategic integration and value creation (Spelta & Albertin, 2012).
2. Second, Strategic Alignment Theory emphasises that organisational processes, structures, and capabilities must be aligned with long term strategic objectives to achieve sustained organisational performance (Henderson & Venkatraman, 1993).
3. Third, Change and Transformation Theory highlights leadership, organisational culture, and agility as fundamental drivers of successful organisational evolution and the ability to respond effectively to changing internal and external environments (Burnes, 2017; Kotter, 2012).

Collectively, these theoretical perspectives explain how PMOs evolve into xMOs, which function as strategic organisational entities that extend beyond traditional project management by governing enterprise wide transformation, digitalisation, and innovation while ensuring that project execution remains aligned with long term organisational strategy.

The key components of the proposed conceptual framework are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Conceptual Framework for the Evolution from PMO to xMO in Qatari Organisations

Framework Layer	Similarity
Stage of Evolution	Traditional PMO → Enterprise PMO (EPMO) → Strategic PMO (SPMO) → xMO (Transformation/Enterprise/Strategy Management Office)
Key Enablers	- Executive leadership and sponsorship - Digital transformation and integrated systems - Organisational culture and change readiness - Competence development and governance capability - Stakeholder engagement and cross-functional collaboration
Transformational Processes	- Governance integration across portfolios - Strategic alignment of programmes and initiatives - Adoption of agile and innovation-based practices - Performance measurement and benefits realisation
Expected Outcomes	- Enhanced organisational agility and adaptability - Improved strategic execution and value delivery - Strengthened governance maturity and institutional performance - Alignment with Qatar National Vision 2030 and sustainability goals

Sources: Author's synthesis, based on PMO maturity theory, strategic alignment theory, and organisational transformation literature (Henderson & Venkatraman, 1993; Spelta & Albertin, 2012; Kotter, 2012; Burnes, 2017; Aubry & Lavoie-Tremblay, 2018; Alvarenga et al., 2019; PMI, 2021).

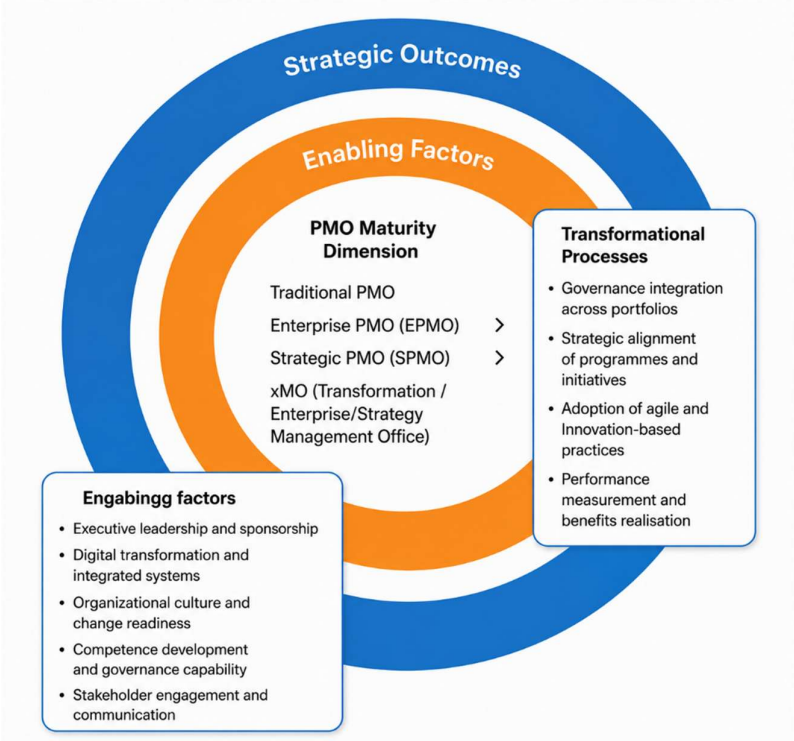

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for the Evolution of the PMO to xMO in Qatar

The proposed framework (fig. 1) conceptualises PMO evolution as a progressive maturity pathway that extends from Traditional PMO to Enterprise PMO (EPMO), Strategic PMO (SPMO), and ultimately to extended Management Offices (xMOs).

At the core of the framework, the PMO maturity dimension represents the organisational transition from operational project control towards enterprise wide governance and strategic value creation. This progression is supported by a set of enabling factors, including executive leadership and sponsorship, digital transformation and integrated systems, organisational culture and change readiness, governance capability development, and stakeholder engagement.

As PMOs mature, these enablers facilitate a series of transformational processes comprising governance integration across portfolios, strategic alignment of programmes and initiatives, adoption of agile and innovation based practices, and performance measurement with benefits realisation.

Collectively, these interactions enable organisations to achieve broader strategic outcomes characterised by stronger organisational performance, enhanced governance capability, enterprise agility, and closer alignment with national development objectives.

2.5. Governance Mechanisms, Contextual Factors, and Challenges in xMO Implementation

Extended Management Offices (xMOs) differ fundamentally from traditional Project Management Offices (PMOs) through the adoption of governance mechanisms that support enterprise wide transformation rather than project level control. These governance mechanisms include benefits based portfolio gates, integrated transformation backlogs, enterprise cadence meetings, and strategy aligned performance dashboards, enabling organisations to balance governance discipline with organisational agility while supporting adaptive decision making and accountability (Morgan, 2018; BCG, 2021).

Unlike conventional PMOs, which primarily monitor project performance and compliance, xMOs integrate strategic governance with transformation execution, allowing organisations to coordinate portfolios, programmes, and organisational initiatives within a unified governance framework. The effectiveness of these governance mechanisms, however, is influenced by a range of contextual factors, including national culture, regulatory environments, and sector specific characteristics (Spelta & Albertin, 2012).

Organisational governance practices cannot be universally applied because institutional settings shape leadership styles, decision making structures, and stakeholder interactions. Within Middle Eastern countries, hierarchical decision making, strong public sector involvement, and relationship based governance significantly influence the evolution of PMOs into enterprise wide governance offices. In Qatar, these contextual characteristics are further reinforced by the strategic importance of national infrastructure programmes and the long term development agenda established under Qatar National Vision 2030, creating an environment in which governance integration and strategic coordination become essential organisational capabilities. Despite the growing recognition of xMOs as strategic governance entities, the literature also identifies several challenges associated with their implementation.

Scholars have cautioned that expanding the mandate of governance offices may result in excessive organisational complexity, bureaucratisation, mandate overload, and reduced organisational agility if governance structures become overly centralised (Aubry et al., 2010; McKinsey, 2024).

Consequently, the successful implementation of xMOs depends on achieving an appropriate balance between governance oversight and organisational flexibility. Rather than increasing administrative control, governance mechanisms should strengthen strategic responsiveness, enable continuous organisational adaptation, and facilitate value creation while preserving the agility required to respond effectively to dynamic organisational environments.

2.6. Discussion of the Literature, Research Gaps, and Theoretical Implications

The literature reviewed in this chapter demonstrates a clear evolution in the understanding of the Project Management Office (PMO). Earlier studies conceptualised the PMO as an organisational structure primarily responsible for control, standardisation, reporting, and delivery efficiency. More recent research, however, positions the PMO as a governance mechanism that links strategic intent with project execution, reflecting the growing reliance of organisations on projects and programmes as vehicles for implementing strategy. Despite this evolution, an important tension remains within the literature.

Traditional PMO maturity models generally assume that increasing levels of formalisation, governance, and process standardisation naturally lead to greater organisational value. However, several studies suggest that beyond a certain point, additional control may not improve organisational performance and can even reduce flexibility and responsiveness. Consequently, high PMO maturity does not necessarily translate into stronger innovation capability, organisational transformation, or value creation. Likewise, although previous studies consistently report positive relationships between PMO maturity and organisational performance, many continue to conceptualise maturity primarily in terms of governance, reporting, and process control, while giving comparatively less attention to digital enablement, organisational agility, and transformation capability that characterise xMO models.

The concept of the extended Management Office (xMO) has emerged as a response to these limitations by extending the PMO's traditional governance role toward value governance, enterprise-wide transformation, and strategic orchestration. Nevertheless, the current xMO literature remains fragmented and is largely driven by practitioner publications. While concepts such as value delivery, enterprise orchestration, and transformation governance are increasingly discussed, they are not always consistently defined or empirically validated. Another important limitation concerns research context.

Existing empirical studies have predominantly been conducted in Western organisational environments, whereas relatively little evidence exists from project-based organisations operating in the Middle East. Differences in governance structures, public-sector influence, organisational culture, and large-scale national development programmes may significantly affect how PMOs evolve and operate. In Qatar, where infrastructure development and Qatar National Vision 2030 continue to drive organisational transformation, these contextual factors create conditions in which traditional PMOs may remain effective for governance and control but insufficient to support broader strategic transformation and value delivery. Taken together, the literature suggests that the evolution from PMO to xMO represents more than a progressive increase in organisational maturity. Rather, it reflects a fundamental shift from managing projects toward enabling enterprise-wide governance, strategic alignment, and organisational transformation. However, important research gaps remain.

Existing studies have largely examined PMO maturity, strategic alignment, and governance effectiveness as independent constructs, while empirical evidence explaining how PMOs evolve into xMO models remains limited, particularly in non-Western contexts. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to the combined influence of leadership, digital capability, and organisational context in supporting this transition. Accordingly, this study addresses these gaps by examining the relationships between PMO maturity, xMO adoption, strategic alignment, governance effectiveness, leadership sponsorship, digital capability, and organisational outcomes within Qatari organisations. These relationships provide the theoretical foundation for the hypotheses developed in the following section.

2.7. Hypotheses Development and Construct Operationalisation

Building upon the preceding theoretical discussion, this study develops a set of hypotheses explaining the relationships between PMO maturity, xMO adoption, leadership sponsorship, digital enablement, and organisational outcomes. To ensure consistency between the conceptual framework and empirical analysis, each theoretical construct was operationalised into measurable survey variables.

The proposed hypotheses and the corresponding operationalised constructs are summarised in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. Construct–Variable–Hypothesis Mapping

Construct	Key Variables (Measured in Survey)	Related Hypotheses
PMO maturity	Process standardisation; portfolio integration; strategic involvement; governance role	H1, H5
xMO adoption	Enterprise governance scope; value management practices; transformation coordination role	H2, H5
Leadership sponsorship	Executive support; decision authority; leadership involvement	H3
Digital enablement	Integrated systems; data analytics capability; use of agile/hybrid delivery approaches	H4
Organisational outcomes	Strategic alignment; governance effectiveness; organisational agility; performance	H1, H2, H5

Table 2 demonstrates how the theoretical constructs identified in the literature were translated into measurable survey variables and linked to the corresponding hypotheses. This operationalisation ensures that each construct can be empirically examined using the survey instrument.

Table 3. Summary of Hypotheses and Relationships

Hypothesis	Relationship tested	Expected direction
H1	PMO maturity → strategic alignment	Positive
H2	xMO adoption → governance effectiveness	Positive
H3	Leadership sponsorship moderates PMO maturity → xMO adoption	Strengthening effect
H4	Digital enablement → xMO governance effectiveness	Positive
H5	xMO capability → organisational agility and performance	Positive

Table 3 summarises the theoretical relationships examined in this study. Together, these hypotheses provide the analytical basis for investigating how PMO maturity, xMO adoption, leadership sponsorship, and digital capability influence governance effectiveness, strategic alignment, and organisational outcomes. The construct–variable mapping and hypothesis summary collectively establish a clear linkage between the conceptual framework, survey instrument, and empirical analysis. This alignment ensures that the statistical results presented in the following chapter are directly grounded in the theoretical foundations developed throughout the literature review.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Philosophy, Design, and Approach

This study adopts a post-positivist research philosophy, which assumes that an objective organisational reality exists but can only be approximated through empirical observation and structured analysis (Phillips & Burbules, 2000; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Within this perspective,

findings are interpreted as probabilistic rather than definitive, acknowledging the influence of contextual and measurement limitations. A quantitative research approach was employed to examine the relationships between PMO maturity, xMO adoption, leadership sponsorship, digital enablement, and organisational outcomes within Qatari organisations. The study follows a primarily deductive logic, whereby hypotheses derived from the literature are empirically tested using survey data. During the interpretation of the findings, abductive reasoning was applied to relate the empirical evidence to the broader theoretical understanding of PMO–xMO evolution (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

The research adopts an explanatory, cross-sectional survey design, collecting data at a single point in time from professionals working in project-based organisations across Qatar. This design is appropriate for examining relationships among organisational constructs and testing theoretically derived hypotheses where longitudinal observation is impractical due to organisational restructuring, leadership turnover, and access constraints (de Vaus, 2001; Spector, 2019). Survey-based methods were selected because they enable the systematic measurement of organisational constructs and the application of statistical techniques to examine relationships among variables, consistent with established practices in governance and management research (Bryman, 2016; Saunders et al., 2019).

3.2. Population, Sampling Strategy, and Respondent Profile

The target population comprised professionals directly involved in project, programme, portfolio, and transformation governance within organisations operating in Qatar. This included PMO directors, project and programme managers, portfolio managers, transformation managers, and senior executives responsible for strategic delivery and governance decision-making. Particular emphasis was placed on construction, infrastructure, and public-sector organisations, reflecting their central role in delivering initiatives aligned with Qatar National Vision 2030 and their reliance on complex governance and portfolio structures.

A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to ensure that respondents possessed relevant knowledge and practical experience related to PMO or xMO functions. This approach is appropriate for management research where informed professional judgement is required rather than statistical representativeness of the general population (Etikan et al., 2016). To broaden access to qualified respondents, purposive sampling was complemented by snowball sampling, whereby initial participants were invited to distribute the survey to professionals holding comparable governance responsibilities. This approach is particularly suitable for specialised professional populations where comprehensive sampling frames are not readily available (Noy, 2008).

3.3. Survey Instrument Development and Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed through an extensive review of PMO maturity literature, strategic alignment theory, and transformation governance frameworks. Survey design followed established principles for construct operationalisation and questionnaire development in organisational research (Krosnick & Presser, 2010).

The questionnaire comprised five construct groups: (1) PMO maturity, including process standardisation, portfolio integration, strategic involvement, and governance authority; (2) xMO adoption, covering enterprise governance, value management, and transformation coordination; (3) leadership sponsorship, measured through executive support, decision authority, and leadership involvement; (4) digital enablement, including integrated systems, analytics capability, and agile or hybrid delivery practices; and (5) organisational outcomes, represented by strategic alignment, governance effectiveness, organisational agility, and organisational performance. All questionnaire items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, which is widely applied in

organisational and management research to measure respondents' perceptions and levels of agreement (Likert, 1932; Saunders et al., 2019).

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each statement using the response categories presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Likert Scale Used in the Survey

Scale	Interpretation
1	Strongly disagree
2	Disagree
3	Neutral
4	Agree
5	Strongly agree

The five-point Likert scale provides an appropriate balance between measurement sensitivity and response simplicity, allowing respondents to express varying levels of agreement while supporting subsequent statistical analysis. Consistent with established methodological guidance, the resulting data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques after confirming the reliability of the measurement scales (Hair et al., 2019).

The survey was administered electronically to facilitate access to geographically dispersed professionals and accommodate the time constraints of senior practitioners. Electronic questionnaires are widely adopted in organisational research because they provide efficient, anonymous, and scalable data collection (Bryman, 2016). An introductory section explained the purpose of the study, assured respondents of confidentiality, and stated that participation was voluntary. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before they proceeded with the questionnaire, in accordance with accepted ethical standards for social research (Bell et al., 2019). Following data collection, all returned questionnaires were screened for completeness and internal consistency. Responses with substantial missing data or incomplete submissions were excluded from further analysis to ensure the quality and reliability of the final dataset.

3.4. Data Analysis, Validity, and Reliability

Data analysis was conducted using statistical software following a structured post-positivist analytical sequence. Descriptive statistics were first employed to profile respondents and examine the distribution of PMO maturity, xMO adoption, leadership sponsorship, digital enablement, and organisational outcomes.

Before hypothesis testing, the quality of the measurement instrument was evaluated through validity and reliability assessment. Content validity was established by developing the questionnaire based on established academic literature and recognised practitioner frameworks, while construct validity was supported through the alignment between the theoretical constructs and the operationalised survey variables presented in the construct–variable mapping (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951), with accepted reliability thresholds applied in accordance with established psychometric standards (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Where necessary, item–total correlations were examined to identify weak indicators before proceeding to further analysis.

Following confirmation of the measurement quality, inferential statistical analysis was performed to test the proposed hypotheses. Correlation analysis was first used to examine associations among the principal constructs, followed by regression analysis to evaluate predictive relationships and moderating effects. Particular attention was given to examining the moderating role of leadership sponsorship and the enabling role of digital capability in supporting the evolution from PMO to xMO, consistent with established quantitative approaches in governance and management research (Hair et al., 2019). Consistent with the post-positivist research

philosophy, the statistical findings are interpreted as probabilistic rather than deterministic relationships, acknowledging the potential influence of contextual and measurement limitations (Phillips & Burbules, 2000).

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were addressed throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured that their identities and organisational affiliations would remain confidential. No personally identifiable information was collected. Data were stored securely and used solely for academic research purposes. The study complied with institutional ethical requirements and adhered to accepted principles of responsible research conduct (Israel & Hay, 2006; Bell et al., 2019).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Overview of the Dataset

This study is based on survey data collected from professionals working in project-based organisations across Qatar, with representation from construction, infrastructure, and public-sector organisations. Following data screening and quality assessment, the dataset was considered suitable for subsequent statistical analysis.

The survey instrument measured five principal constructs: PMO maturity, xMO adoption, leadership sponsorship, digital enablement, and organisational outcomes. All variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale, providing a consistent basis for examining respondents' perceptions of PMO capabilities and their evolution toward xMO models. The dataset was subsequently analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to examine the relationships proposed in the conceptual framework.

4.2. Descriptive Results and Reliability Analysis

The descriptive analysis indicates an overall positive perception of PMO performance across the surveyed organisations (Fig.2). The composite score of the 23 questionnaire items produced a mean value of **3.99** with a standard deviation of **0.36**, suggesting that respondents generally perceived PMOs as performing effectively while demonstrating a relatively high level of consistency in their responses.

At the individual item level, the highest mean score **(M = 4.46)** was observed for the alignment between corporate strategy and PMO objectives, indicating that PMOs are widely recognised for supporting strategic coordination within Qatari organisations. In contrast, the lowest mean score **(M = 3.41)** related to the PMO's contribution to innovation and digital initiatives, suggesting that these responsibilities remain less developed than traditional governance functions.

Overall, the descriptive findings indicate that PMOs in Qatar have established strong capabilities in governance, strategic alignment, and project oversight. However, comparatively lower ratings for innovation and digital support suggest that the transition from conventional PMO functions toward broader transformation-oriented xMO capabilities is still evolving. This pattern is consistent with the organisational context in Qatar, where governance and delivery assurance have traditionally received greater emphasis than enterprise-wide innovation and digital transformation.

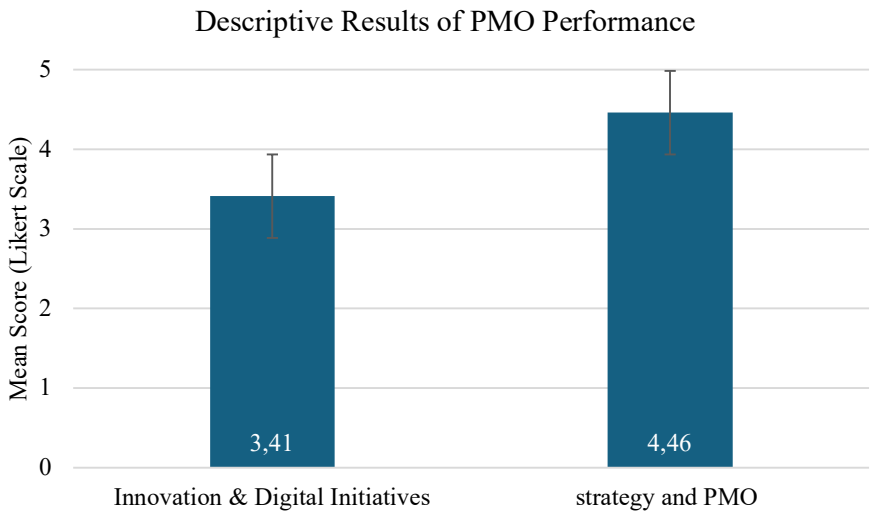

Figure 2. The High and Low PMO Performance in Qatar

4.3. Reliability Assessment and PMO Evolution toward xMO

The reliability of the measurement instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The analysis produced a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of **0.914**, indicating a high level of internal consistency and confirming that the survey items reliably measured the underlying constructs included in this study.

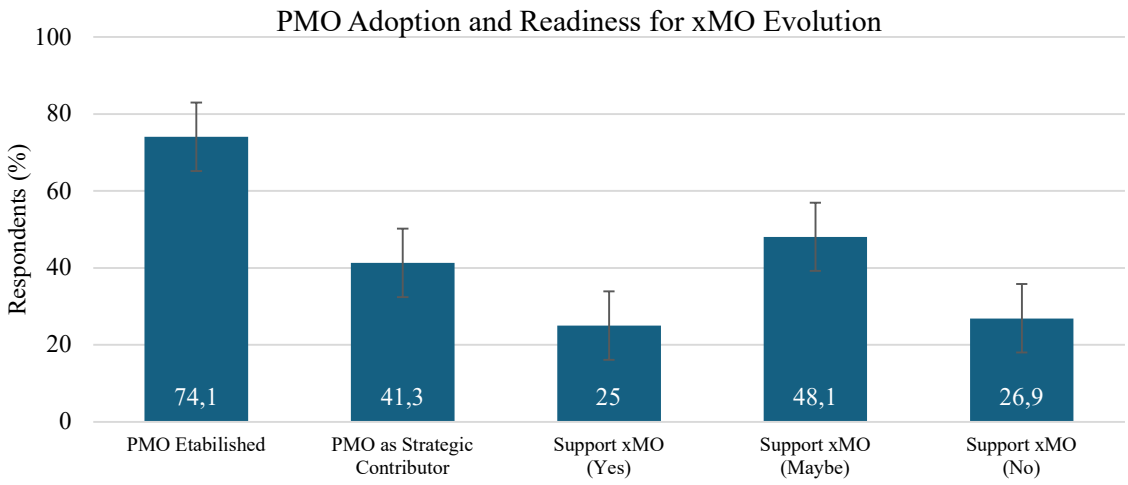

Figure 3. PMO Adoption and Readiness for xMO Evolution

Figure 3 show the descriptive findings further indicate that PMOs are widely established within organisations operating in Qatar. Overall, 74.1% of respondents reported the presence of a formal PMO within their organisations, demonstrating that project governance structures have become a common organisational practice. Regarding organisational roles, 41.3% of respondents identified the PMO as a strategic contributor, while the remaining responses suggest that many organisations continue to position the PMO primarily as an administrative or compliance-oriented function.

These findings indicate that although the strategic role of PMOs is becoming increasingly recognised, the transition from operational support toward enterprise-level governance has not yet been fully realised. Respondents were also asked whether PMOs should evolve into xMO

models. The results show that 25.0% supported this transition, 48.1% responded "Maybe", and 26.9% did not support the idea.

The predominance of neutral responses suggests that organisations generally recognise the potential of xMO concepts but remain uncertain about their practical implementation and organisational implications. Within the Qatari context, these findings indicate that while PMOs have achieved a relatively mature level in traditional governance functions, organisational readiness for broader transformation toward xMO models is still developing.

4.4. PMO Capability Comparison and Implications for xMO Evolution

The comparison of PMO capability dimensions reveals a clear distinction between traditional governance functions and transformation-oriented capabilities within Qatari organisations. Overall, the findings indicate that PMOs have developed stronger capabilities in governance-related functions than in areas associated with enterprise transformation and value creation. Among the strongest capability areas, strategic alignment demonstrates that PMOs are widely recognised for ensuring that projects and programmes remain aligned with organisational objectives.

This finding suggests that PMOs have become an important governance mechanism for translating strategic priorities into project execution, particularly within organisations managing complex infrastructure and public-sector initiatives in Qatar. Similarly, reporting and performance monitoring emerged as a key strength, indicating that PMOs play an important role in monitoring project progress, supporting management decision-making, and maintaining organisational accountability. Together with process standardisation and project governance, these capabilities reflect the traditional strengths of PMOs in establishing consistent project management practices, improving control mechanisms, and ensuring compliance with organisational governance requirements. In contrast, the survey findings indicate comparatively weaker capabilities in innovation support, digital integration, and cross-functional value creation. These attributes extend beyond conventional project control and represent core characteristics of xMO models, where governance functions are expected to facilitate organisational transformation, digital innovation, and enterprise-wide collaboration.

The comparatively lower emphasis on these capabilities suggests that PMOs in Qatar remain primarily focused on delivery assurance and governance rather than acting as enterprise transformation offices. These findings are consistent with the organisational environment in Qatar, where governance effectiveness, accountability, and successful delivery of strategic infrastructure programmes have traditionally been prioritised. Consequently, PMOs have evolved into mature governance structures, while broader responsibilities related to innovation, digital transformation, and cross-functional value integration are still emerging.

Overall, the capability comparison suggests that the evolution from PMO to xMO is not merely an extension of existing governance responsibilities. Rather, it represents a transition from project-focused coordination toward enterprise-level transformation, requiring organisations to strengthen capabilities in innovation, digital enablement, and value-oriented governance alongside their established strengths in project control and strategic alignment.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. PMO Capability and the Transition toward xMO in Qatar

The findings suggest that the evolution of PMOs within Qatari organisations is characterised not by a lack of governance maturity, but by an imbalance between governance capability and transformation capability. While traditional PMO functions have become institutionalised within organisational governance, capabilities associated with innovation, digital integration, and

enterprise-wide value creation remain comparatively less developed. This indicates that further strengthening existing governance processes alone is unlikely to produce substantial improvements in organisational performance. This imbalance reflects the different organisational purposes served by PMO and xMO models.

Traditional PMOs primarily focus on ensuring that projects are delivered in accordance with established standards, governance requirements, and organisational controls. In contrast, xMO models require governance structures capable of integrating strategic priorities, coordinating transformation initiatives across organisational functions, and facilitating continuous value creation. Consequently, the transition from PMO to xMO represents a qualitative shift in organisational capability rather than a gradual extension of existing administrative responsibilities. The uncertainty expressed by many respondents regarding xMO adoption further supports this interpretation. Rather than indicating resistance to organisational change, the findings suggest that many organisations have yet to establish a clear operational model for implementing xMO principles.

This uncertainty is understandable because governance processes associated with PMOs are generally well established, whereas enterprise transformation offices require broader organisational authority, cross-functional collaboration, and decision-making mechanisms that extend beyond conventional project governance. The organisational context of Qatar also provides an important explanation for these findings. Project-based organisations, particularly those involved in infrastructure and public-sector development, operate within environments where governance, compliance, accountability, and risk management are critical success factors. Under such conditions, PMOs naturally evolve into strong governance mechanisms. However, capabilities such as innovation management, digital integration, and cross-functional value orchestration often require organisational structures that extend beyond the traditional boundaries of project management offices. The composition of the respondent population should also be considered when interpreting the findings. Although the study examines organisations operating in Qatar, the majority of respondents were expatriate professionals working within these organisations.

Consequently, the results reflect organisational practices shaped by both Qatar's governance environment and the international project management experience of a multicultural workforce. This characteristic is representative of Qatar's project-based sectors and provides a broader organisational perspective on the evolving role of PMOs. Taken together, the findings indicate that the principal challenge is not whether PMOs should become xMOs, but how organisations can redesign governance structures to integrate strategic execution, digital capability, and value creation without weakening the governance disciplines that have traditionally underpinned successful project delivery. This suggests that the evolution toward xMO should be understood as an organisational transformation in governance philosophy rather than simply a redefinition of the PMO function.

5.2. From Governance Maturity to Transformation Capability

The findings indicate that the principal challenge facing PMOs in Qatar is no longer the establishment of governance mechanisms, but their ability to support organisational transformation. The capability comparison demonstrates that governance-related functions have become institutionalised, whereas capabilities associated with innovation, digital integration, and enterprise-wide value creation remain comparatively underdeveloped.

This suggests that organisational maturity in project governance should not be interpreted as equivalent to transformation capability. One explanation lies in the different objectives of PMO and xMO models. Traditional PMOs are designed to improve governance consistency, project control, reporting, and compliance, whereas xMOs are expected to integrate strategic execution, transformation initiatives, and value realisation across organisational functions. Consequently,

organisations that continue to evaluate PMO performance primarily through governance indicators may find it difficult to expand their role toward enterprise transformation. Progress therefore depends less on strengthening existing control mechanisms than on redefining how organisational value is created and governed.

The uncertainty surrounding xMO adoption further reflects this transition. Rather than indicating resistance to change, the findings suggest that many organisations have not yet established a shared understanding of how xMO principles should be translated into governance structures and operational practices. Unlike PMOs, whose functions are relatively standardised, xMO models require broader organisational integration, stronger executive sponsorship, and greater collaboration across functional boundaries. The absence of a clearly defined implementation model helps explain why organisations acknowledge the potential benefits of xMO while remaining cautious about its practical adoption. These findings should also be interpreted within the industrial characteristics of Qatar.

Project-based organisations, particularly within construction and infrastructure sectors, operate in environments where governance, compliance, and risk management remain fundamental organisational priorities. Such conditions naturally reinforce PMO capabilities related to project control and governance. By comparison, capabilities such as digital transformation, innovation management, and cross-functional value integration require organisational changes that extend beyond conventional project governance, including new approaches to performance measurement, decision-making, and strategic coordination.

The composition of the respondent population provides additional context for interpreting these findings. Although the study examines organisations operating in Qatar, most respondents were expatriate professionals working within these organisations. Consequently, the findings reflect governance practices shaped by both Qatar's institutional environment and the international experience of a multicultural workforce. This characteristic is representative of the country's project-based sectors and reinforces the interpretation that the evolution toward xMO depends not only on organisational maturity but also on the broader governance context in which PMOs operate

5.3. Practical Implications and Research Contributions

The findings have important implications for organisations seeking to strengthen project governance while preparing for broader organisational transformation. Rather than further reinforcing traditional PMO functions centred on reporting, compliance, and project control, organisations should progressively expand governance capabilities toward enterprise-wide strategic coordination, digital enablement, and value realisation. This requires governance structures that support cross-functional collaboration, integrate transformation initiatives, and align project portfolios more closely with long-term organisational objectives.

The results also suggest that the transition toward xMO should be approached as an organisational governance transformation rather than simply a restructuring of the PMO. Strengthening existing governance mechanisms alone is unlikely to achieve this objective unless accompanied by changes in leadership involvement, digital capability, and enterprise-wide decision-making processes. Consequently, organisations should establish clearer governance frameworks that define the strategic responsibilities, authority, and value creation role of xMO functions. From a research perspective, the study contributes empirical evidence on the evolution of PMOs toward xMO models within organisations operating in Qatar, where such evidence has remained limited.

The findings demonstrate that although PMOs have achieved considerable maturity in governance and strategic alignment, their transformation toward enterprise-level management offices is still evolving. Accordingly, the study addresses its research objective by showing that the

principal challenge is not organisational resistance to xMO, but the absence of a clearly defined pathway through which mature PMOs can transition into broader transformation-oriented governance structures.

6. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the evolution of Project Management Offices (PMOs) toward extended Management Office (xMO) models within organisations operating in Qatar. By examining PMO maturity, governance capabilities, and organisational readiness for xMO adoption, the study provides empirical evidence on the current state of PMO evolution and its implications for organisational governance. Based on the findings, the principal conclusions of this study are as follows:

1. PMOs in organisations operating in Qatar have evolved beyond their traditional administrative role, demonstrating mature capabilities in governance, strategic alignment, reporting, and project control that support organisational performance.
2. The evolution toward xMO models remains incomplete, as capabilities related to innovation, digital enablement, transformation governance, and enterprise-wide value creation are comparatively less developed than traditional governance functions.
3. The transition from PMO to xMO represents a shift in organisational governance rather than a simple expansion of PMO responsibilities. Successful implementation requires stronger integration of strategic execution, digital capability, leadership support, and cross-functional collaboration.
4. The findings indicate that organisations are generally receptive to xMO concepts but require clearer governance frameworks and implementation approaches to support the transition from project-focused governance toward enterprise-wide transformation

This study is based on a cross-sectional survey of organisations operating in Qatar and therefore reflects organisational practices at a single point in time. Future research should employ longitudinal and comparative approaches to examine how PMOs evolve into xMO models across different industries and national contexts.

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