

OPM3[®] CASE STUDY :

OPM3 in Action: Pinellas County IT Turns Around Performance
and Customer Confidence

OPM3[®]

Organizational Project Management Maturity Model



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Project Management Institute’s landmark standard *Organizational Project Management Maturity Model (OPM3®)* provides a dynamic and unique methodology for organizations to assess their maturity in project management and subsequently plan for and implement appropriate improvements. Since its release in late 2003, more than 3,000 organizations have purchased *OPM3* and many have implemented it extensively and achieved measurable results. This article is the first published case study highlighting a major organization’s experience using *OPM3* to address real-life project management issues.

Background:

Frank Florio works in the Project Management Office of the IT department that supports the government of Pinellas County, Florida, USA—one of the most densely populated counties in the state, with 930,000 people and 24 municipalities, including St. Petersburg and Clearwater. Together the agencies of Pinellas County have a combined budget of close to \$1.5 billion (US). The budget for IT alone is about \$27 million (US).

The Challenge:

The situation for IT in 2003, however, was not good. They had lost much credibility within these various agencies, having earned a reputation for failing to deliver projects on time and within budget. Florio said they had fallen into the mindset of, “It’s the government, what’s the urgency?”

While his department is part of the county government, its relationship with the various other government agencies is like that of contractor to customer, with each organization free to use their services or to engage outside agencies. Increasingly, they began to outsource work or even set up their own small in-house IT organizations. “We got a big wake-up call,” Florio said.

Solutions:

Florio’s IT department already had begun to align itself with project management principles: they had adopted *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)*, had established a Project Management Office and they were encouraging staff to earn the Project Management Professional (PMP®) credential. They were still very new in all of this, however, and needed to put tools in place to help them map out a plan for real, systematic performance improvements that would ultimately stop the erosion of customer confidence and restore sound, trusting, working relationships with the county agencies they were positioned to service.

Florio said they considered their alternatives, but, they really liked the complete synergy between the *PMBOK® Guide* and *OPM3*:

“The more we worked on the strategic plan, the more obvious it became that this was precisely what had to be undertaken: a systematic management of projects, programs and portfolios in alignment with strategic goals. *OPM3* guides the organization through that process. It proved to be an excellent fit; like a hand in a glove.”

The *OPM3* model includes three primary elements: Knowledge, Assessment and Improvement. The Knowledge element consists of the written documentation containing the full explanation of *OPM3*, its model, methodology and application in an organization. The Assessment step determines an organization's overall position on the continuum of project management maturity, as well as identifies its strengths and weaknesses within the domains of Project, Program and Portfolio and within the stages of process

Early 2004: The First Assessment/Improvement Cycle.

In preparation for the initial assessment, Florio and his immediate supervisor Gary Cobb familiarized themselves with the *OPM3* model—its content, concepts, purposes and operation—and conducted a comprehensive review of their Project, Program and Portfolio efforts. Then they both completed the *OPM3* Self-Assessment Module and carefully compared results making certain they had a clear understanding of what each question had asked.

in *OPM3*, aggregate to Best Practices) they needed to tackle to improve in these areas. Then, they went forward with an improvement plan to do just that.

Late 2004: Second Assessment.

A second round of assessments followed about eight months later, with the PMO and a subset of the IT department and management team all taking the *OPM3* survey. At this point, they began seeing evidence of change. Florio said, "We could see it start to build and get better. We could chart it." The overall score went

Summing up their experience so far, Florio puts it link between strategic planning & execution will find an *OPM3*. Using this model will bring about organizational

improvement (Standardize, Measure, Control, Continuously Improve, or "SMCI"). Improvement comes as weaknesses, generated by the Assessment in the form of a list of project management Best Practices not currently being executed, are addressed.

Based on these answers, the *OPM3* assessment process produced two lists of Best Practices: those which had been attained by their organization and those which had not. As there were far too many areas indicated in need of improvement, a group of key players, including the Director and selected management, selected five areas of top priority.

- Initiation
- Scheduling
- Resource management
- Project closing
- Project execution

Florio said that *OPM3* helped them to see what specific capabilities (which,

from 42 in the first assessment to 48 in the second.

After the second assessment process, they decided it was critical to get their customers more fully engaged in this initiative. Florio said that they began by taking the story of their new improvement efforts to the IT Board, the governing body, and their client agencies.

They told them about their renewed focus on adopting the principles of project management to improve project delivery and customer confidence. Their communications covered the basics of project management, the purpose of the Project Management

Office, the importance of the *PMBOK® Guide* and, finally, *OPM3* itself and the positive results they anticipated from implementing it in their operations. They invited customers to participate in the *OPM3* assessment process and provide their input on IT's performance.

As Florio put it, "We used the fact that we were working to improve our project management capabilities and performance as a selling point with customers. After working on cycles of assessment and improvement, we were re-marketing ourselves as an increasingly effective IT organization. *OPM3* was the vehicle by which we did this."

Early 2005: Third Assessment, The Customers Appear.

A third assessment was conducted in early 2005. This time, IT was represented by a substantial group of 22

people, and fully a third of all participants were now from customer departments. This experience proved highly valuable from two perspectives: first, it provided them with a picture of how these customers viewed the effectiveness of IT's project management practices; and second, customer involvement helped to reinforce the message that IT was taking its process improvement initiative seriously. Previous negative perceptions of their department were transforming into positive ones and their reputation was turning around.

The actual results of the survey were edifying. While the second assessment had yielded a score of 48 on the organizational project management maturity continuum, this third assessment yielded a 46. At first, Florio and his colleagues attributed this shift solely to the presence of

simply: "Any organization that seeks to improve the accommodating and effective maturity model in change."



customers in the mix, until they discovered that some of the IT people had actually adjusted their own responses downward slightly. They were establishing higher goals for themselves, scrutinizing each question more thoroughly and demanding more consistent performance in each area before being willing to mark it as successfully implemented.

Gary Cobb, manager of the PMO, carried out a fourth assessment in the spring of 2006 and determined that the organization had moved to 49 percent on the continuum. To make significant gains beyond this level, Florio said, will require establishing additional metrics and increasing the precision of some others they currently use.

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Outcomes of Implementing *OPM3*

Even keeping in mind that this application of *OPM3* in the Pinellas County IT function is still a work in progress, the outcomes seen two years into the initiative are impressive.

First, in terms of actual process improvements, they have:

- Gained and secured strong top management support for project management, continuous improvement and the *OPM3* initiative;
- Instituted many new project management best practices, processes and checkpoints;
- Developed the ability to predict project outcomes accurately.
- Small in-house IT organizations are being integrated back under Florio's group. The Board of County Commissioners had employed its own IS shop. Now—as this goes to print—a significant group of people from this shop are being incorporated into the county IT group, which will now manage the functions previously preformed in the BCC shop.

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At the organizational level, two key outcomes have been significant:

- Florio said the intelligence that can be extracted from the *OPM3* assessment data goes far beyond the obvious and expected. By being able to associate specific assessment data with defined subsets of participants, they could identify critical deficiencies or accomplishments and respond to these in the most appropriate manner, providing additional value to the organization.
- A secondary benefit of going through the *OPM3* process was that it gave significant, renewed motivation for individuals who toil at the project level, energizing the organization from the ground up. Tying project to business imperatives provided individuals with a clear view and an understanding of why their individual efforts are so important to organizational success.

Finally, are the business outcomes:

- Customer perceptions have changed. Backed by measurable service improvements and a rapidly growing list of completed projects, the Pinellas County IT department is now associated with good performance and predictable results.
- County agencies are now more willing to engage the IT department for their technology projects than they were three years ago. It can be said that some form of IT department work now touches all agencies to some degree.

Some Lessons Learned:

Passing along some of the lessons they have learned in their two years of work on this initiative, Florio offers the following:

- Get senior management support. This will set the stage for your whole organization to be positive about the initiative, and customers will feel more confident knowing that the whole organization is behind it.
- Take time to communicate. After getting management support, go to your organization and lay the whole thing out for them; make time to sit down and explain, and let them digest it before trying to move them to action.
- Don't try a hard sell. It won't work. Florio said, “Our best decision was not to try to ram this down anyone's throat.”
- Don't try to tackle too much too soon. Be selective, focus on priorities, or you won't do anything justice. Florio said, “If you lose early in the game, you've got a problem. Your credibility would be very difficult to regain.”
- Pick realistic goals and make them work. When they succeed, the organization will be on your side and will help you even more the next time around.
- Be mindful of those not in project management. Pre-assessment education, followed by some good old-fashioned hand holding may be necessary for those unfamiliar with project management terms and processes.