

A horizontal bar with segments of blue, green, orange, black, blue, green, and blue.

# Raising project standards

How standardized processes can drive improved project performance



It's a classic case of the cobbler's children, the holes in their poorly-fitting soles blistering their feet with every step.

Professional services organizations (PSOs) routinely recommend their clients standardize their operating processes, reducing risk and increasing efficiency. Yet according to the 2012 Professional Services Maturity™ Benchmark Report, over half of large PSOs (700 employees +) don't have a standardized delivery methodology themselves – an omission that could have a significant impact on project performance.

The Professional Services Maturity™ Benchmark Report, an annual study of over 800 PSOs by SPI Research Ltd, provides substantial evidence that “KPIs including sales pipeline, billable utilization and meeting margin targets increase with greater use of a standardized methodology.”

Of course, this will come as no surprise to most: these are exactly the kind of benefits that consultants will cite when they make the case for process improvement. So given this knowledge, why are so many professional services businesses still so resistant to standardisation?

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“ A critical first step in ensuring project quality is to be able to view and track true project cost and planned to actual levels of effort by task or milestone. ”

SPI Research Ltd - 2012  
Professional Services Maturity™  
Benchmark Report

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## Standardize, don't straitjacket

One reason, perhaps, is cultural: professional services revolve around creative thinking and problem-solving, tasks that don't fit easily into standard processes. While established methodologies do exist, many consultants like to pick from them, to fit specific requirements. And arguably, the bigger the organization, the more such methodologies will be available, as opposed to smaller businesses that may specialise in one or two approaches.

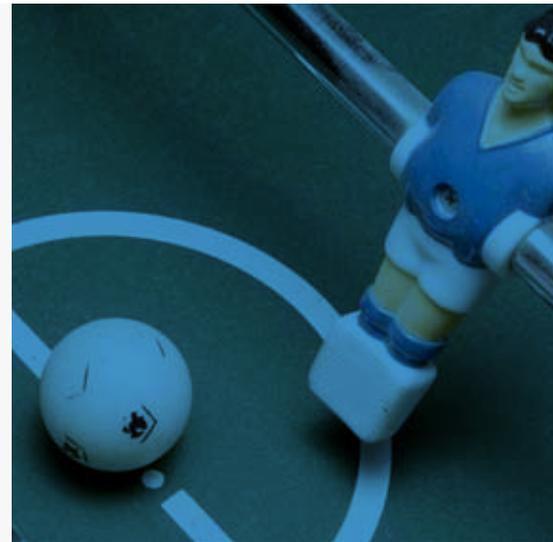
But to assume standardisation is about straitjacketing the approach your project teams take misses the point. In reality, the areas that will benefit include the way projects are managed and delivered: how they are planned and costed, how they are monitored during delivery and evaluated after completion.

### Reviews as standard

For example, strange as it may seem, not all PSOs have standardized processes for regular project reviews or weekly monitoring – even though such processes are widely if not universally recognized as being best practice. Such reviews bring potential issues to light before they affect the projects performance, and allow remedial action to be taken, to facilitate on-time, on-budget delivery.

But to anyone nodding in satisfaction about their own review process, remember that your weekly reports have limited value unless they are based on accurate information, such as an up-to-date record of actual project time. Mundane as it sounds, if your team haven't completed their timesheets correctly, your figures *could* be way off track.

That's why standardizing everyday admin tasks such as time and expense reporting can be invaluable – not only standardizing the forms themselves, but also setting clear expectations around process, such as submission deadlines. With the right information collated on time, project managers can see instantly – even before they submit a report – where actual costs differ from estimates, and where milestones may be missed.



### At a glance

- Most professional services companies do not have standardized processes
- That's despite strong evidence showing the benefits of standardization
- Best practice involves standardizing not just reporting but also everyday project admin
- To do that, you may need to invest in user-friendly technology that reduces the admin effort

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## The role of technology

But again, it's not as simple as it sounds – and brings us to a second reason why some PSOs have not fully standardized their approach. In many companies, the processes are theoretically in place, but they are not enforced. After all, no organization is going to fire top talent for filing expenses late.

To overcome this, what's needed is a solution that makes it simple for everyone to comply. In other words, process standardization must be backed by technology – empowering, user-friendly technology that reduces the admin burden, rather than increasing it.

The right technology not only makes submitting information straightforward, whether it's time and expenses, task updates or any other important project data. It also provides a means of centralising project knowledge, giving project managers comprehensive visibility of every aspect of the project. That not only means that project managers stay in control of the overall project performance, but also simplifies their admin too: those all-important reports can be generated in a couple of clicks, rather than becoming a task in themselves.

Streamlined admin, more accurate reporting and greater agility to avoid delay and overspend: that's three more reasons why professional services should standardize their project management processes. But then again, you already knew all of that – so are you just waiting for the right technology to come along?





## Product focus: Five ways KeyedIn™ Projects helps you drive project performance through standardization

KeyedIn Projects is a fully integrated suite of business applications designed to support professional services organizations at every stage of project and program management. Delivered via SaaS, it provides you with the tools you need to standardize vital project management and administrative processes – which in turn leads to improved project performance.

KeyedIn Projects makes it simple to:

### 1. Standardize project planning

Raise the standards from the start with project templates that ensure a standard set of tasks are created for each project, giving you the confidence that all the important issues and details are covered. You can customize KeyedIn Projects' built-in templates or add your own: either way, this saves time for project managers, makes planning more consistent and faster, and means that teams are briefed consistently – so they understand exactly what's required of them from day one. What's more, it leads to more accurate and consistent cost estimation too – again, following standard processes – which naturally increases your likelihood of delivering on budget.

### 2. Standardize time and expense logging

KeyedIn Projects allows you to put in place the exact timesheet entry process required to meet your needs. The system can easily be configured to allow the logging of time in hours and minutes, hours decimal, days or in percentages. It also lets users import timesheet data from previous weeks, meaning repeated tasks are recorded in a single click, and even offers different views for different users – making it incredibly intuitive. That ensures teams have no excuse not to use it – and so ensures project managers get the up-to-date visibility they need of project progress.

### 3. Standardize risk management

One simple way to mitigate risk is to have a tried and tested process for identifying and managing them. KeyedIn Projects facilitates this – allowing you to register specific risks within project templates, so whenever that type of project comes in, those risks are already highlighted and can be managed from the initial engagement.

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“ Only firms who have a good handle on both the sales and delivery process are able to consistently produce and deliver against, accurate estimates. ”

SPI Research Limited – 2012  
Professional Services Maturity™  
Benchmark Report

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#### 4. Standardize contract management and billing

It sounds counter-intuitive, but when the pressure is on to deliver, billing can easily be overlooked. KeyedIn™ Projects helps make sure you invoice correctly and on-time. Billing alerts can be built into the project plan from the start – for retainers and repeat contracts as well as individual project deliverables – and the system allows you to use multiple contract lines so you can track every detail transparently. The result: significantly reduced billing errors and timely invoicing – which in turn improve cash-flow and drive profitability.

#### 5. Standardize project status reporting

With KeyedIn Projects, every aspect of status reporting can be standardized. Project managers are required to submit reports on a regular schedule and in a clear and consistent manner – and as they become familiar with the process, this becomes a straightforward task. Project boards/executive teams are able to compare project progress, and so make vital decisions about reallocating resource across the portfolio. KeyedIn Projects also builds a comprehensive reporting history for each project, supporting post-project evaluation.



#### Discover how

Ready to raise the standards in your project management? Talk to KeyedIn today: because of our SaaS delivery model, you could be up and running with KeyedIn Projects in just 2 weeks. Contact us on 888-960-5472 to find out more.



Put us to the test: visit [www.keyedinpso.com](http://www.keyedinpso.com) to sign up for a free, no-obligation 15-day trial.



## About KeyedIn™ Solutions

KeyedIn Solutions is focused on helping organizations simplify processes, improve performance and drive results. The company's Cloud-based software systems not only offer greater flexibility, but effectively scale as business needs dictate and can be implemented quickly, delivering a measurable ROI months, or even years ahead of on-premise systems. And KeyedIn offers a true SaaS model, making its solutions affordable for every budget.

KeyedIn Manufacturing is an ERP system that helps custom manufacturers work smarter so they can increase productivity and bring new products to market quickly, for a distinct competitive advantage. KeyedIn Projects, the company's project management suite, helps businesses and professional services organizations improve everything from project initiation to execution by managing programs based on top-line strategy and delivering profitable projects to the bottom line. And when new solutions need to be developed quickly, KeyedIn clients turn to KeyedIn Flex, the company's rapid application development (RAD) platform for affordable applications designed just for them.

When businesses need results fast, they look to the Cloud – and turn to KeyedIn Solutions. You should too. Keep up with us at [www.keyedin.com](http://www.keyedin.com)



Part of the KeyedIn Solutions Business Portfolio



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