

Making Sense of PRINCE2 Agile

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Abstract

PRINCE2® is a global structured approach to project management. Agile methods are a family of developer-oriented software engineering approaches. In June 2015 AXELOS will combine the two and launch PRINCE2 Agile™. This new guide and qualification aims to combine Best Practice to create an approach that will enable more successful project outcomes. Panagiotis Fiampolis, Research & Development Director of PEOPLECERT, explains what PRINCE2 Agile is trying to achieve, whom it is aimed at and what will be the benefits of the new combined approach.

Making sense of PRINCE2 Agile

PRINCE2® is a formal, structured approach to project management. Agile methods started life as a family of developer-oriented software engineering approaches. They are very different animals. So how can they possibly work together?

In June 2015 the industry will see AXELOS launch PRINCE2 Agile™, combining PRINCE2 with agile. The PRINCE2 Agile Best Practice guide and qualification is aimed at organizations or individual project managers who are already using PRINCE2 and want to understand how to use the agile approach with the PRINCE2 project management method. Many organizations are failing to deliver projects on time or on budget or they are not getting the expected benefits. This new guide and qualification aims to combine Best Practice to create an approach that will enable more successful outcomes.

There is anticipated excitement about the combined approach. As with PRINCE2, PRINCE2 Agile can be applied to any type of project within any industry sector. The combined approach allows organizations and project managers to focus on both management and delivery and breaks down some of the barriers that have appeared to create conflict between using the established PRINCE2 framework at the same time as using agile methods to get projects completed efficiently, effect business transformation and bring products and services to market more quickly.

What's creating this demand? One of the drivers for the development of PRINCE2 Agile is the increasingly mobile and dispersed nature of project teams these days. Many organizations are operating internationally and need a consistent approach to projects and change in all their territories, not least in order to meet governance requirements. Multinationals who have staff who are qualified to the same level in PRINCE2 Agile will be well placed to deploy valuable project management talent across the globe to work on

projects as needed. PRINCE2 combines with agile to help lend controls to complex and dispersed development without stifling agility.

An organization is made up of people, its most important asset, and there is a war for the best project management talent in today's market. A Computerworld survey¹ found that 33% of organizations plan to hire project managers in 2015. In a ranking of 10 IT skills that the 194 IT executives who responded to the survey said will be most in demand heading in 2015, project management skills ranked second – up from 5th in the ranking last year. Demand will be particularly high for project managers who can oversee large projects that span the enterprise, have knowledge of agile and whose competencies span business and technology.

Best of both

Agile first emerged from the world of IT project management but has long been applied as a method of delivering any products and services and even organizational change quickly and efficiently. The PRINCE2 Agile certification aims to meet the needs of those working in a project environment who want to be agile. Agile is an approach rather than a tick box exercise. However this may not work for some larger projects so adding in the structure of the PRINCE2 method can provide the best of both worlds.

Agile and PRINCE2 have gone a long way to professionalizing project management and already shared many elements. For example, both focus on the need for stakeholder buy-in and the need for effective sponsorship. There was already overlap between the two approaches when it came to defining roles and responsibilities and outlining project lifecycle processes. Now PRINCE2 Agile will enable organizations and project managers to scale work to precise requirements while being agile and responsive and limiting escalation of issues and delay. Organizations from any sector can benefit from this combined approach, which has been designed with modern enterprises in mind.

A working group of experts with views of both agile and PRINCE2, from Europe and the US, created two versions of PRINCE2 Agile before widespread consultation and negotiation led to the creation of the third and final version. Keith Richards, PRINCE2 Agile lead author and Director, says, "Make no mistake about it – blending PRINCE2 and agile is a big deal. And as we approach the threshold of a PRINCE2 and agile marriage, it's clear to see that we've come a long way since 2007 when I first questioned how the two could feasibly come together."

He adds, "Back then, when compared, they were commonly viewed as "chalk and cheese", but I held the pioneering opinion that what we were really looking at was two things that I couldn't see as being so inherently distinct; and while there are certain controls and techniques necessary for the two worlds to work together cohesively, they are complementary, just like salt and pepper."

Organizations looking at whether the new framework could boost the benefits their programme and projects deliver, could usefully start by asking themselves a number of questions including ‘what is the actual success rate of our change programmes and projects?’ This is not just to do with how many are being delivered on time and within budget but how many of them are meeting the strategic objectives of the organization and delivering the expected measurable benefits.

Tailored approach

Senior management embrace tools and techniques for the delivery of change as these can provide a clear process to follow to realise change, yet a key element of the new PRINCE2 Agile Best Practice guide and qualification is the ability to tailor the approach taken to each project to achieve the best result. PRINCE2 describes how to tailor the method taken, while PRINCE2 Agile sets out the need to determine the appropriate use of agile techniques.

PRINCE2 Agile will form part of the AXELOS Global Best Practice Portfolio alongside the project and programme management (PPM) suite of products and the ITIL® service management standard. It will be assessed by exam, leading to a recognised qualification. Accredited training suppliers will support its use. People who already hold the PRINCE2 Practitioner qualification can take PRINCE2 Agile as an extension. As of March 2015, over 1.2 million PRINCE2 exams had been taken around the world.

The new qualification will also be of interest for programme managers who have qualified in Managing Successful Programmes (MSP®), who will need to understand not only how their programme relates to projects, but also how projects relate to delivery mechanisms. MSP focuses on the higher level of programme management for transformational change, while PRINCE2 Agile will provide useful context at the project level.

AXELOS has form in combining PRINCE2 with agile successfully. In the past it merged PRINCE2 with Dynamic Systems Development Method (DSDM) – a product and service development approach that combines agile and PRINCE2. The majority of the guidance and course material for PRINCE2 Agile, however, will be new to those project managers who hold the PRINCE2 qualification. They will find that most of the PRINCE2 Agile material will be different from what they have seen before and it will give them a fresh insight as to the interactions between the two approaches and how each needs to be adapted to the other.

Competition becomes collaboration

In the past it was not unheard of for PRINCE2 and Agile practitioners to be in competition, if not outright conflict, as to the best approach. Critics of PRINCE2 accused it of focusing on a tick box approach and claimed that there was too much focus on escalation of issues to higher levels, leaving project managers with little autonomy. Agile on the other hand focuses on keeping decision making embedded within a team and constant informal communications to iron out problems and keep the project moving, possibly, its critics would argue, at the risk of lack of senior oversight. That debate is now consigned to history

as the combined approach of these well-known best practices meets modern organizational needs.

What can organisations expect? PRINCE2 Agile will benefit any project where PRINCE2 would normally be used to plan and control it but where the team wants to introduce agile methods, or where an agile approach needs greater control. Organizations will be more reassured that ahead of even starting a project they have a clear view of the financial controls on it and also of the benefits to the bottom line from the iterative approach of agile and its focus on fast delivery. PRINCE2 can underpin the business case for an agile project – surely a marriage made in heaven.

References

¹ <http://www.computerworld.com/article/2844020/10-hottest-it-skills-for-2015.html>

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About the Author



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Panagiotis Fiampolis is Research & Development Director of PEOPLECERT. PEOPLECERT partners with multi-national organizations and government bodies for the development & management of globally recognised certification schemes and the delivery of their related standardized exams in over 140 countries. PEOPLECERT maintains certification programmes on behalf of a wide range of organizations, including the ECDL Foundation, City & Guilds, AXELOS (joint venture between the UK Cabinet Office and Capita plc.) for the Global Best Practice portfolio (including ITIL® and PRINCE2®).

PEOPLECERT has been selected as an Examination Institute to deliver the new AXELOS PRINCE2® Agile certification. For more information about PEOPLECERT visit www.peoplecert.org