

## **Optimizing project management with a combination of PRINCE2 and PMBOK**

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### **Abstract**

The PMBOK® Guide and PRINCE2® have very different perspectives on project management but the combination of the two provides a powerful tool for organizations to achieve successful project outcomes. In this article we outline the differences and similarities between the two most recognized global project management approaches and discuss the benefits to be gained from using a combination of the two complementary approaches to project management.

### **Introduction**

The PMBOK® Guide and PRINCE2® have very different perspectives on project management but the combination of the two provides a powerful tool for organizations to achieve successful project outcomes<sup>1</sup>. PMBOK takes the viewpoint of the project manager, providing everything the project manager needs to know and understand. PRINCE2, in contrast, takes the organizational viewpoint and is intended to meet the objectives of the organization, defining the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders in the project delivery process.

Organizations may well be asking themselves whether they should be using PMBOK or PRINCE2 and which approach would be best for them. If so, they are asking themselves the wrong question. PMBOK and PRINCE2 have varying attributes; depending on the issues the organization needs to address they may work effectively together or in tandem with other approaches to project management, such as Agile or standards-based approaches. A PRINCE2 project manager needs a body of knowledge to call upon in order to be competent – PMBOK fits the bill. Meanwhile, the PMBOK Guide requires a method that the project management team can adopt – this can be PRINCE2.

### **Key differences in approach**

PMBOK, with a heritage dating back to 1987, provides a knowledge base for the project manager, whereas PRINCE2 provides the end-to-end process to manage a project in an organization. PMBOK is a guide to the Project Management Institute's Project Management Body Of Knowledge (PMBOK). It provides guidance as to what a project manager should be doing, as well as some specific tools and techniques for doing so. It does not include defined roles and responsibilities, product descriptions and the order of activities in processes – this is where PRINCE2 comes in. PRINCE2 is a clearly defined framework with roles, responsibilities, principles and processes. In some countries it is, in effect, mandatory for a

project manager to be certified in PRINCE2.

PRINCE2 has a strong emphasis on the pre-project, start-up stage of the project. It provides a focus on all the projects products, and looks to ensure there is an ongoing business justification throughout the project. If the project fails the business case test at any point, the project will end. On the other hand, while PMBOK phases do have an element of monitoring and control, the emphasis is less on the initial business justification.

In planning, PRINCE2 takes the product breakdown approach whereas PMBOK takes a work breakdown approach. One ensures that all the necessary products are planned for and the other ensures that all the necessary work is planned for.

As a result of its central government heritage, PRINCE2 does not handle procurement whereas PMBOK does. PRINCE2's approach is that when specialist knowledge such as procurement knowledge is needed, that is not the domain of the project manager. The skill lies in the project manager knowing when to bring in specialist support from other departments such as procurement. PRINCE2 says who needs to be involved, when they need to be involved, what they should do and why they need to do it. It assumes that the project manager has the necessary skills to run the project. PMBOK focuses on those skills and provides the understanding and knowledge to underpin them.

PMBOK is a guide rather than a methodology and it is possible to use different methodologies and tools with it. PMBOK is very broad and covers far more project management knowledge areas than PRINCE2 does. PRINCE2 provides a set of underpinning principles, breaks them down into some of the themes that explain why it is important how you go about doing this then links that to the processes. But it does not go right into all the tools and techniques that a project manager would bring to bear. PRINCE2 is narrower in its focus but also deeper whereas PMBOK covers 47 processes, each having inputs, tools and techniques and outputs. The processes are divided into ten knowledge areas: integration, scope, time, cost, quality, human resources, risk, communication, procurement and stakeholder.

PMBOK and PRINCE2 have some important differences of terminology and it useful to have an overview of these. For example, the terms 'quality assurance' and 'quality control' have very different definitions in each approach. While PMBOK and PRINCE2 both consider that reviewing the results, such as deliverables, internally within the project is always part of quality control, and reviewing processes from someone external to the project is always quality assurance, key differences arise on the internal review of processes and the external review of the results. PMBOK has 'project sponsors' while PRINCE2 has 'executives'. PMBOK talks about 'phases' while PRINCE2 defines 'stages'. PMBOK has a 'Project Scope Statement', while PRINCE2's equivalent, 'Project Product Description', gives away its product focus.

### **Synergy for successful outcomes**

PMBOK does state that it is a guide rather than a methodology. One can use different methodologies to implement it, not just PRINCE2. However, although PMBOK and PRINCE2 approach managing projects from two different perspectives they actually fit well together. They are the two most recognized global project management methods and combining the two covers all an organization's bases.

Multinational organizations undergoing merger and acquisition can benefit from a combination of PMBOK and PRINCE2. In practice, large organizations often have some

piecemeal experience and practice of both PMBOK and PRINCE2 but bringing the two together and creating a coherent approach to developing common, consistent processes across the new combined organization is a most effective application of the PMBOK and PRINCE2 combination.

## **The Agile factor**

As organizations consider how to use PMBOK and PRINCE2, many are also assessing how these methodologies/frameworks fit alongside the increasingly popular Agile approach. In June 2015 AXELOS, the owner of PRINCE2, launched PRINCE2 Agile™ to provide organizations with the best of both worlds. In fact, many of the Agile techniques fit very well with PRINCE2 as there has never been any stipulation that there is only way to deliver a product.

Agile started life as a specific approach to software development, but organizations also use the term Agile to communicate that they are looking for agility and the ability to change mid-stream in any project. Indeed many organizations used Agile techniques before the Agile manifesto formalized them. For example, lots of organizations were using rapid prototyping and testing as a means of developing products in the 80's and 90's before the agile manifesto was published.

Organizations just getting to grips with the question of PRINCE2 versus Agile or PRINCE2 Agile may balk at the challenge of including PMBOK into the mix but it does play a useful part. Agile is a product delivery approach and as such is a specialist plug-in for the 'managing product delivery' stage in PRINCE2, in the same way that specialist approaches used in other industry segments can also plug in their specific product development approach. PRINCE2 does not specify the product delivery approach as it deals with the generic needs of managing the project rather than trying to cover every industry's specific requirement. Meanwhile PMBOK provides a knowledge base for either approach.

## **The dream team**

PMBOK and PRINCE2 may be usefully combined in many situations to benefit organizations:

1. The description of what to do and the detailed tools and techniques from the PMBOK Guide together with PRINCE2's principles, governance arrangements, methods and product descriptions can improve the way that projects are managed.
2. When organizations are looking to develop their project managers' skill sets they can turn to PMBOK for support. The combination of the two approaches, PMBOK and PRINCE2, provides the advantages of a clearly defined, recognized, established process that is constantly being developed while also encompassing the development of staff.
3. The two approaches work hand to hand for effective technology development
4. The adoption of PRINCE2 and the PMBOK Guide goes a long way to help organizations meet international standards, especially ISO 21500. In the UK PRINCE2 is explicitly mentioned in BS 6079 as a means to embody the national standard.
5. The different approaches to managing the scope of a project, providing multiple

views on the project scope intended for different stakeholders, address the benefits and risks of the project more comprehensively.

All organizations need a process for doing things and they also need skilled people to use the processes appropriately. As organizations become increasingly global in operations – and mergers and acquisitions result in a growing number of multinationals – this creates pressure to combine project management approaches and frameworks. US firms more focused on PMBOK are looking to align it with PRINCE2, while UK firms more familiar with PRINCE2 are seeking to understand how it can work with PMBOK.

Across the world organizations are evaluating how to implement complementary globally recognized approaches to derive the maximum benefits from reducing costs, identifying the right skilled resources, improving internal communication, simplifying consistent processes and delivering products and services to grow the business.

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## About the Authors



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PEOPLECERT partners with multi-national organizations and government bodies for the development & management of globally recognized certification schemes and the delivery of their related standardized exams in over 150 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. Panagiotis can be contacted at [Panagiotis.fiampolis@peoplecert.org](mailto:Panagiotis.fiampolis@peoplecert.org) ; Website: [www.peoplecert.org](http://www.peoplecert.org)



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**Mike Acaster** looks after the maintenance and development of PRINCE2, MSP, MoP, MoR, MoV, P3O and P3M3. Mike joined AXELOS from its inception having transferred from the Cabinet Office following its decision to establish a joint venture company with Capita plc. Mike led the development of

PRINCE2 Agile™ from inception through to product launch of the first new products in the PPM portfolio since the formation of AXELOS. Website: <https://www.axelos.com/>. Mike can be contacted at [michael.acaster@AXELOS.com](mailto:michael.acaster@AXELOS.com)

#### References

<sup>1</sup>Klas Skogmar. 'PRINCE2®, the PMBOK® Guide and ISO 21500:2012'.

<https://www.axelos.com/case-studies-and-white-papers/prince2-the-pmbok-guide-and-iso-21500-2012>

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For further reading AXELOS recently [commissioned a White Paper](#) authored by Klas Skogmar to give further clarity on the synergies between PRINCE2, the PMBOK Guide and ISO21500.