

**Will *The standard for project management and a guide to the project management body of knowledge (PMBOK® Guide) - Seventh Edition* recently published by the Project Management Institute (PMI, 2021) lead to more successful delivery of projects? <sup>1</sup>**

**By Martin J Smit, PhD, PMP®**

## BACKGROUND

I retired at the end of 2018 after a working career of some 45 years of which many of these years were spent in the domain of organisational project management. What I enjoy about retirement is that there is more time for me to attend virtual conferences, webinars, and “do research” to continue to learn about the latest advancements in organisational project management.

In previous commentary articles that were published in the PMWJ, I (Smit, 2019, 2020 and 2021) mentioned that I am now in a new phase of my life and that it is an opportune time for me to do some reflection after having had the privilege to gain excellent experience in organisational project management. In this commentary article I would like to express an opinion about *The Standard for Project Management* and the *PMBOK® Guide - Seventh Edition* that were recently published by the Project Management Institute (PMI, 2021) by asking the question: **Will *The Standard for Project Management and the PMBOK® Guide - Seventh Edition* lead to more successful delivery of projects?**

The aim of this opinion article is to:

- Highlight some of the key changes between the *PMBOK® Guide* Sixth and Seventh Editions.
- Respond to the above-mentioned question.

I am writing this opinion article within the following context. While I have done some “reading/research” on the adaptive (agile) and hybrid approaches my experience is predominantly applying the predictive (waterfall) methodologies as well as Critical Chain Project Management (CCPM). I have not actively been practicing as an organizational project management practitioner since my retirement in 2018. Early in 2020 I did comment on the Exposure Draft for *The Standard for Project Management - Seventh Edition* (PMI, 2020). I am not aware if PMI did release a Draft *PMBOK® GUIDE - Seventh Edition* for influence and comments by stakeholders. The contents of the *PMBOK® GUIDE - Seventh Edition* is new to me, so I obviously do not have the insight that the contributors and reviewers have that developed the new standard and the guide.

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## **KEY CHANGES BETWEEN THE PMBOK® GUIDE SIXTH AND SEVENTH EDITIONS**

### **Overview**

Early in 2020 PMI actively engaged with a broad range of stakeholders to participate and comment on the Exposure Draft for *The Standard for Project Management – Seventh Editions*. It is clear to me that *The Standard for Project Management* and the *PMBOK® Guide - Seventh Edition* (PMI, 2021) have involved significant and substantive changes in the nature of the content to address the need for a broad range of approaches to project and product delivery with a stronger focus on outcomes rather than deliverables.

### **Summary of key changes**

PMI (2021) states that with project management evolving more rapidly than before, the process-based orientation of past editions could not be maintained in a manner conducive to reflecting the full value delivery landscape and has therefore shifted to a principle-based standard to support effective project management. According to PMI (2021) the global project management community has embraced the shift towards a set of principle statements that capture and summarize generally accepted objectives for the practice of project management.

PMI (2021) further states that using these principle-statements they can reflect effective management of projects across the full value delivery landscape: predictive and adaptive and everything in between. PMI (2021) also mentions that nothing in the new edition of *The Standard for Project Management* and the *PMBOK® Guide* negates alignment with the process-based approach of past editions as many organizations and practitioners (like me) continue to find that approach useful for guiding their project management capabilities, aligning their methodologies, and evaluating their project management capabilities.

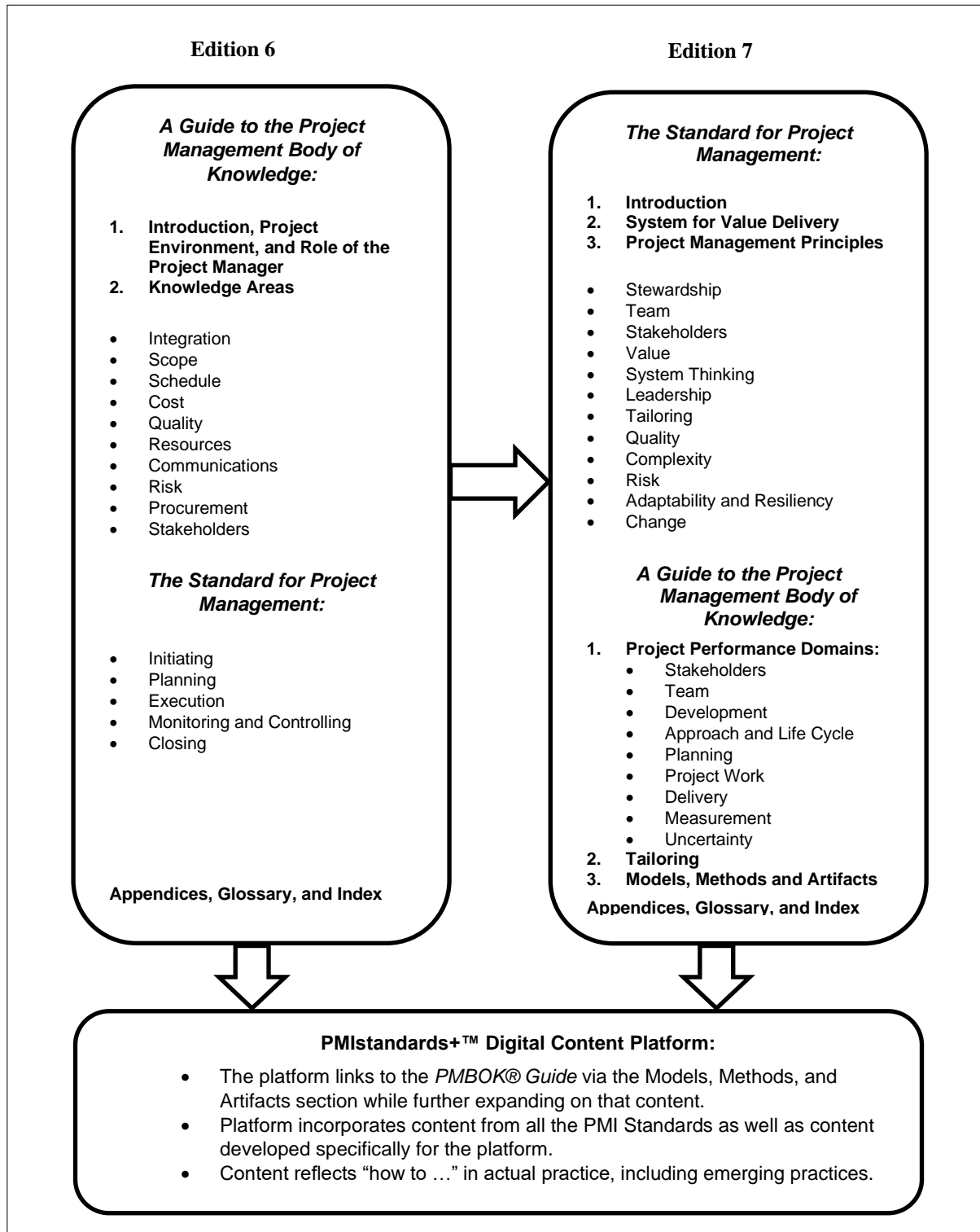
PMI (2021) comments that another significant change is a systems view of project management. This shift begins with a systems view of value delivery as part of *The Standard for Project Management* which continues with the representation of the *PMBOK® Guide* content. The focus is on the value chain that links portfolios, programs, projects, and other business capabilities to advance organizational strategy, value, and business objectives. In this context projects enable outputs to drive outcomes that ultimately deliver value to organizations and its stakeholders. The systems view is a shift from the Knowledge Areas in past editions of the *PMBOK® Guide* to Performance Domains.

PMI (2021) clarifies that a Performance Domain is a group of related activities that are critical for the effective delivery of project outcomes. These Performance Domains represent a project management system of interactive, interrelated, and interdependent management capabilities to achieve desired project outcomes. Project teams need to continuously evaluate effective performance in each Performance Domain through outcomes-focused measures, rather than through adherence to processes or the production of artifacts, plans, etc.

While the previous editions of the *PMBOK® Guide* emphasized the importance of tailoring, PMI (2021) states that the new edition further expands upon that work with a dedicated section on Tailoring. PMI (2021) has also included a new section on Models, Methods, and Artifacts that provides a high-level grouping of models, methods, and artifacts that support project management. This section maintains linkages to tools, techniques, and outputs from previous editions that support project management without prescribing when, how, and which tools should be used.

According to PMI (2021) the most significant advancement in the *PMBOK® Guide* is the creation of PMIStandards+™, an interactive digital platform that incorporates current, emerging, and future practices, methods, artifacts, and other useful information which better reflects the dynamic nature of a body of knowledge. PMI (2021) says that PMIStandards+™ will supplement the information in *The Standard for Project Management* and the *PMBOK® Guide* and will continue to incorporate new resources that support continued evolution in project management.

Figure 1 (on next page) illustrates the revision to *The Standard for Project Management* and the migration from the Sixth to Seventh Edition of the *PMBOK® Guide*, along with the connection to the PMIStandards+™ Digital Content Platform.



**Figure 1: Revision to *The Standard for Project Management* and the migration from the Sixth Edition to Seventh Edition of the PMBOK® Guide and the PMStandards+™ Digital Content Platform (Source: PMI, 2021)**

## **WILL THE STANDARD FOR PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND THE PMBOK® GUIDE - SEVENTH EDITION LEAD TO MORE SUCCESSFUL DELIVERY OF PROJECTS?**

PMI has actively engaged with a broad range of stakeholders on their experiences with using *The Standard for Project Management*. Early in 2020, I was also fortunate to comment on the Exposure Draft for *The Standard for Project Management - Seventh Edition* (PMI, 2020). I am however not sure if PMI released the *PMBOK® Guide - Seventh Edition* for influence by stakeholders. As the changes made to the content of *The Standard for Project Management* and the *PMBOK® Guide - Seventh Edition* are significant and substantive compared to previous editions, I have some doubts if these changes will be adopted immediately by most of the project management practitioners and if it will lead to more successful delivery of projects in the short term.

### **Positive changes that will lead to more successful delivery of projects**

#### ***Stronger focus on outcomes rather than deliverables (i.e., value delivery)***

I am very excited that the focus of project management in the new standard and guide is on value delivery (i.e., outcomes rather than deliverables). In a commentary article by myself (Smit, 2019) published in the PMWJ in October 2019, I expressed an opinion that consideration should be given for the inclusion of additional Project Management Knowledge Areas during the development and review of the *PMBOK® Guide - Seventh Edition* as these Knowledge Areas are commonly used on most of the projects most of the time. One of these Knowledge Areas proposed was Project Benefits Realization Management. In another commentary article on the topic of “*the higher purpose of project management*”, I (Smit, 2021) stated that I believe that we as organizational project management practitioners are in the business of “*value creation*” and that this should be our key calling/purpose.

During my career in an organization with more than 40,000 employees, where many types of projects ranging from mega, major, medium, to small projects were executed, I have witnessed projects being completed within time, budget and scope but not realizing the benefits as outlined in the business cases. Where projects in different Divisions in an organization compete for the limited capital available, I have seen a tendency that benefits are over-stated and estimated costs understated in business cases to get projects approved. I have also witnessed projects that were delivered late, over budget with changes in scope that did deliver value for the organization.

#### ***Addressing the need for a broad range of approaches to project and product delivery (i.e., predictive, agile and hybrid)***

I have read several articles over the last few years where the advantages of adaptive (agile) approaches versus predictive (waterfall) methodologies were discussed/debated which did not always make sense to me. The selection of the most suitable approach/methodology depends on the type of project to be delivered. A predictive methodology is more suitable for a technical mega project while adaptive approaches are more suitable for product and software development projects.

The four steps outlined in the Section 3 on Tailoring in *PMBOK® Guide – Seventh Edition* certainly provides good direction on the adaption of the right project management approach,

governance, and processes to make them more suitable for the given environment and work at hand.

### ***The shift from Knowledge Areas to Project Performance Domains***

As mentioned above, I (Smit, 2019) expressed an opinion in an article published in the PMWJ that consideration should be given for the inclusion of additional Project Management Knowledge Areas in the *PMBOK® Guide* - Seventh Edition (e.g., Project Benefits Realization Management and Project Organizational Change Management, etc.). I am happy that the shift to Project Performance Domains now adequately includes the required knowledge that are critical for the effective delivery of project outcomes.

### **Some matters that might affect the effective delivery of projects**

Due to the significant and substantive changes, I am concerned if the new *The Standard for Project Management* and the *PMBOK® Guide* - Seventh Edition will be quickly adopted. Some concerns and questions arose when I read the new standard and guide.

### ***What is the impact of changing from a process-based to a principle-based orientation?***

As a retired project manager practitioner this is the most significant change for me. In my early career in the late 1970s and early 1980s I was fortunate to be involved in the management of mega projects in South Africa (petrochemical and power stations construction). In the late 1980s I became an outage (shutdown) and project manager for a six-unit (593 MW each) coal-fired power station. During that time, we made use of the early editions of Harold Kerner's book *Project Management: A Systems Approach to Planning, Scheduling, and Controlling* as well as early versions of what today is known as PMI's *PMBOK® Guide* to enhance and apply our knowledge of project management. As an outage and project manager at that time the key focus was to achieve the scope, time, cost, and quality objectives of outages and projects as outlined in the Project Management Triangle. As my career progressed, since the early 2000s, I was involved in the development and maintenance of various Project Life Cycle Models (PLCMs) (e.g., Power Generation Division projects, outage projects, new build programs/projects, etc.) and detailed Process Control Manuals (PCMs) for portfolio, program, and project management. The detailed processes as outlined in the PCMs of all the various functions involved in projects (e.g., project management, engineering, operations, finance, procurement, contracts, environmental, governance, strategic planning, etc.) were used as the basis for the development of the PLCMs. New editions of the *PMBOK® Guide* also resulted in the review and necessary revisions of the PCMs and the PLCMs. The processes as outlined in the PCMs and PLCMs were integrated in the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software system.

The above highlights the importance of a process-based orientation to successfully deliver projects.

In an email issued on 24 August 2021 by Metod123, a company with more than 1.5 million customers worldwide, who has developed the MMPM™ Project Management Methodology, they responded to questions from some customers enquiring if they were going to incorporate any of the *PMBOK® Guide* – Seventh Edition into MMPM™. Interesting, they responded that since the



new edition focusses more on ‘Principles’ than ‘Process’ (and methodology), it’s not likely that there will be any integration.

***Will the Principles of Project Management be internalized and effectively applied by most of the project management practitioners?***

PMI (2021) mentions that the work in the eight Project Performance Domains is guided by the 12 Principles of Project Management. PMI (2021) states that “*a principle is a fundamental norm, truth, or value*” that provides guidance for the behavior of people involved in projects as these principles influence and shape the Performance Domains to produce the intended outcomes. As a PMP® it has always been important for me to behave ethically and respectfully. Personally, I think that it will be very difficult to establish if organizational project management practitioners are adhering to the Project Management Principles. In the organization where I worked I many times questioned myself if the values of the organization are reflected in the behavior of the employees. I sometimes got a feeling that the organization’s values are only nice words on posters on office walls that many times did not reflect in the behavior of the employees.

***How will project management practitioners obtain access to the “how to ...” knowledge (i.e., inputs, processes, outputs, tools/techniques, templates, etc.) in the PMIstandards+™ Digital Content Platform if they are not members of PMI?***

The *PMBOK® Guide* – Sixth Edition is process-orientated. The *PMBOK® Guide* – Seventh Edition is principle-orientated and no longer contains details of the inputs, processes, outputs, tools/techniques, etc. While Section 4 Models, Methods, and Artifacts in the *PMBOK® Guide* – Seventh Edition presents a brief description of commonly used models, methods, and artifacts, it does not contain the detail of the “*how to...*”. The “*how to...*” is contained in the PMIstandards+™ Digital Content Platform.

I worked in an organization with more than 40,000 employees. Many thousands of these employees were involved in the management of various types of projects varying from mega, major, medium, to small projects. While some of the project management practitioners had international and national project management certifications, most of the practitioners were not certified or members of PMI. As an organization that has mainly adopted the *PMBOK® Guide* and *ISO 21500* processes, I know that a number of these practitioners that were not members of PMI did procure a copy of the *PMBOK® Guide* to obtain access to the knowledge and processes, etc. in the guide.

When I attended the 2021 Africa PMI Virtual Conference, I read the Bio of PMI’s Chief Operating Officer (COO), Michael DePrisio. According to his Bio, PMI has more than 1,2 million active certification holders and 650,000 active members. If one assumes that not all active members have PMI certifications, it implies that about half of the certification holders do not have access to the best practices, processes, tools/techniques, templates, etc. in the PMIstandards+™ Digital Platform.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In this commentary article the key changes between the *PMBOK® Guide* Sixth and Seventh Editions were highlighted. The changes to *The Standard for Project Management* and the *PMBOK® Guide* Seventh Edition are significant and substantive. I have also discussed which changes I believe will positively contribute to the successful delivery of projects as well as matters of concern that might affect the successful delivery of projects. Only time will tell if *The Standard for Project Management* and the *PMBOK® Guide* - Seventh Edition will be properly adopted and lead to more successful delivery of projects.

As I am retired and not practicing any more it will be interesting to hear the opinions of other organisational project management practitioners that are still actively practicing.

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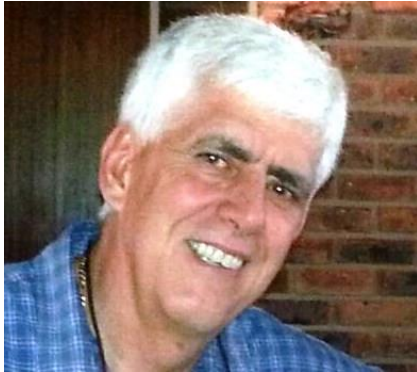
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## About the Author



**Martin J Smit, PhD, PMP®**

Johannesburg, South Africa



**Martin Smit** is retired and continues to learn to keep abreast of the latest advancements in organizational project management. His career spanned some 45 years. He worked for Eskom, the electricity utility in South Africa, for 39 years where he held various management positions in construction-, outage-, maintenance-, and project/program-management. During the latter years Martin worked in the Eskom Project Management Office (EPMO) as an Organizational Project Management Specialist. He has extensive experience in the development and application of project, program and portfolio management methodologies, processes, and best practices.

Martin is certified as a facilitator to conduct project definition readiness assessments. He is also certified to facilitate learning, conduct outcomes-based assessments and moderation. Martin has developed and presented various project and outage management training courses.

Martin holds a MSc (Management of Technology and Innovation) from the Da Vinci Institute in the domain of Project Management and a PhD in Engineering from the North-West University in the field of Development and Management Engineering. The title of his thesis was: *“Development of a project portfolio management model for execution organizational strategies: A normative case study.”* He also has qualifications in civil and mechanical engineering, information management, management, and maintenance practice. Martin has been a Project Management Professional (PMP®) since 1992 (No. 1071).

During his career Martin has presented various papers at national and international conferences and he has also published some articles in international journals.

Martin can be contacted at [martin.smit@vodamail.co.za](mailto:martin.smit@vodamail.co.za).