

## On the Subject of the PMBOK Guide, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition<sup>1</sup>

### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

30 January 2022

*Ref: The Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition (2021),  
Project Management Institute (PMI®)*

Dear Editor,

In 2021, the **Project Management Institute (PMI)** -- the self-proclaimed leading international association setting standards for the project management profession for the past 52 years – embarked on a new ‘**holistic systems approach**’ to project management. The substance and bounds of the ‘**project management system**’ outlined by PMI in their 7<sup>th</sup> edition Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) described desirable personality traits for project managers, defined a PM-specific lexicon, and introduced a new cast of ‘**Principles**’ & ‘**Domains**’ with – *IMO* -- inordinate waffling over conditions and circumstances for their applicability.

Gone are the systematic ‘*what, when and how-to*’ steps and specifics of project management processes, tools & techniques (T&T). Saying on page xi that nothing in the 7<sup>th</sup> Edition “*negates alignment with the process-based approach of past editions*” is simply a cop-out! When looking for guidance, standards, or prepping for an exam, almost no one – *except perhaps a few anally-retentive researchers* -- refers to *previous editions* of a purported guide or standard. They go to the latest edition for answers. The 49 Processes of prior PMBOKs sequentially-elucidated ‘Input, Tools & Techniques, and Outputs’ (ITTOS) may have been difficult to digest; but there is nothing systematic about PMI’s ‘holistic’ approach. ITTOS have been supplanted by a mish-mash of management-oriented musings!

Even more disturbing; rather than merely delivering project **Outputs** as heretofore, PMI’s new holistic approach broadens the Project Management Team’s scope of responsibilities to encompass *effective delivery of Outcomes*. **I applaud PMI’s belated recognition of the need for project managers and teams to be cognizant of post-project delivery Outcomes.** However -- *from my perspective as a management systems specialist, manager and evaluator of numerous projects in diverse sector environments since the 1960’s* -- **encumbering project managers and teams with additional responsibility for Outcome achievement is not only misdirected, but completely unrealistic; as Outcome attainment is totally beyond their control.**

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Although still only a “Guide” rather than an absolute edict, my concern is that PMBOK’s assignment of that responsibility to project managers and their teams is not simply professional ‘scope creep;’ **it’s a major paradigm shift**.

Is anyone else concerned?

Sincerely,

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