

On the importance of project management process groups¹

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

24 October 2022

Dear Editor,

I believe that most of us put into practice project management via its process groups; in general, initiating, planning, executing, controlling and closing process groups may be considered of fundamental importance in the project management discipline from different perspectives.

In fact, process groups are present in the project management literature from the beginning, since they were already included in the PMBOK® Guide first edition, and they continued to be present for another 25 years in the PMBOK® Guides with continuous evolutions of the processes that make them up. Consequently, more than one million (!) project managers were trained, studied and got their certifications having the process groups as a primary reference, and even a greater number (!) of project management experts and practitioners commonly used them for decades and still use them.

Moreover, the process groups are universally applicable to projects of each sector, and can be “tailored” to projects of each size and complexity. Furthermore, the process groups, in each project and/or project phase, correspond to the basic way of structuring the work of both the project managers and the project team, and the perception of what they are and represent – due to the simplicity and the clarity of their graphing – is always immediate, also in the cases of people that deal with them for the first time.

In addition, the process groups are a basic example of the commonalities between predictive and adaptive/agile approaches, since in the latter case the only difference in their practice is the possibility of including additional “structural” iterations, in the project phases, from the closing to the initiating process groups. Ultimately, for all above reasons, process groups may be considered one of the pillars of a common project management language, with consequent benefits in terms of efficacy and efficiency also in the cases of multidisciplinary project teams and/or project teams that are composed of professionals in diverse organizations.

Almost one year ago, in my article “[The Everlasting Importance of a Common Project Management Language](#)” (by the way, I am happy and proud for the several positive comments that I received, and I specifically would like to thank Kik Piney, Alan Stretton and Oliver Lehmann for their sharing), I tried to voice the concerns of part of our project

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management community because both PMI and ISO decided in few months (was it a coincidence?) to update their International Standards in a direction that was substantially divergent from a common project management language, so introducing a strong break in an “idyllic” scenario of declared mutual coherency among ISO 21500, PMBOK® Guide 5th (and substantially also 6th) Edition, and IPMA® ICB 4.0. Specifically, ISO 21502 “replaced” the processes with the new concept of practices (i.e. both integrated project management practices and practices for project management), making reference to the process groups only in a mapping of the practices to the process groups contained in an informative Annex. For its part, PMBOK® Guide 7th Edition replaced (in this case without quotation marks) process groups with principles, and relegated them in less than one page as a secondary project team development model (?). These are the facts.

Today, what’s new? Very significantly, few days ago PMI published “Process groups: a practice guide” which is a document of almost 400 pages that “provides supplementary information to the principles-based Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide) – Seventh Edition”. An initial examination of it seems to point out that the structure is quite similar to an extract of the PMBOK® Guide) – Sixth Edition, and that both the process groups and the 49 processes are almost identical. Perhaps we can agree that, for International Standards, this is a significant step to give back to the process groups the dignity they deserve.

All’s well that ends well.

All the best

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