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PRINCE2 versus the PMI PMBOK Guide

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PRINCE2 doesn't exist in a vacuum. It's a framework that works with the tools and techniques in the project manager's toolbox. Joseph Czarnecki looks at the fit with the Project Management Institute's PMBOK.

The growth of the project management profession in recent years has seen its accompanying guidelines expanding to keep pace with industry demands. Both PRINCE2 and *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (the PMBOK Guide)* are designed to facilitate the management of successful projects. Despite their differences, many project managers may be surprised to find that like a *Wainwright Guide* and a map, these methods complement each other quite well.

Both have a long history. PRINCE2, was developed as a UK government-sponsored method initially developed in 1989 for IT projects. It is a very prescriptive approach to managing projects. The *PMBOK Guide*, first published in 1987 by the Project Management Institute (PMI), offers a more descriptive approach, providing recommendations for any projects.

PRINCE2 versus PMBOK

There are other very fundamental differences between the two. PRINCE2:

- Is a process-based approach.
- Covers all of the activities on a project from start up to close out.
- Is a distinct methodology – it tells you what to do and when to do it.
- Identifies who should be involved on which level and their responsibility.
- Provides a set of processes to execute.
- Identifies what information a project manager should be gathering.
- Provides a strong emphasis on project governance.
- Requires strong organisational support.

The *PMBOK Guide* is a deliverables-based approach for project management. It is not a methodology. The publication itself reveals that it is a scout of sorts to the larger universe of current project management knowledge. While PRINCE2 offers a step-by-step process, the *PMBOK Guide* considers numerous variables and offers best practices to address each scenario.

The *PMBOK Guide* is a compendium of what is known about project management. Like PRINCE2, it is a collection of processes. However, unlike PRINCE2, the *PMBOK Guide* suggests to the user that the processes are iterative; therefore, they are not listed in a definitive sequence. In other words, the *PMBOK Guide* gives you tools and techniques, best practices and recommendations without telling you exactly what to do and when to do it.

PRINCE2 can be symbolised by a straight line with clear starting and ending points while the *PMBOK Guide* might better be represented by a network of lines with markers pointing to various tools and techniques, depending on the industry, organizational maturity and scope of the project.

Let's look at an example to illustrate the differences further. Let's say you want to build new software that allows you to talk over the Internet. Using the PRINCE2 product-driven approach, you define the product in the beginning, 'I want to build a software tool that enables voice over Internet Protocol.' Through the templates and process that PRINCE2 provides, it tells you exactly which steps to take, as well as which templates to complete. As the project rolls out, you move



from one template to the next, each getting appropriate approval with the project board before moving into the next phase. This continues until the project is complete and you are actually talking on the Internet.

With the *PMBOK Guide*, there are no set templates or pre-determined steps. It does suggest, however, that you first try to define the scope of the project, identifying what it is and what it is not. The Guide recommends using a project scope statement, but it doesn't give you a template for it. You are obliged to use your own.

Thereafter, you create the requirements by which the product is defined. Then you define the activities to get the job done. All through the project, the *PMBOK Guide* provides suggestions and recommendations on what you need to do and techniques that you can use to get it done. The *PMBOK Guide* does not give you the template to fill in. In short, you are developing your own approach to match the specific product you wish to create. This is the key as to why they can work well together. With the *PMBOK Guide* you get the

framework within which you can manoeuvre and the awareness of what is happening outside the project that could impact your project. With PRINCE2 you get the methodology to actually complete it. PRINCE2 can be tailored to your various project types and, due to its strong governance approach, can certainly help with scope creep. The *PMBOK Guide* ensures you have the tools and techniques you need to lead the project. In other words, the *PMBOK Guide* provides the full larder while PRINCE2 offers up the actual recipe.

Why not use both?

A blended approach allows for known templates and guidance that PRINCE2 offers when the project type is familiar to the organisation, while the *PMBOK Guide* offers the techniques used to efficiently obtain the information that is used to complete the templates. In addition, it provides the guidance for those projects that are truly unique and one-of-a-kind, thereby saving the expense of customising the PRINCE2 methodology unnecessarily.

The vocabulary of the two approaches is slightly different, but when you look beneath the names and into the descriptions and definitions, the differences disappear and the alignment becomes clearer.

There is one caveat about the techniques mentioned in the *PMBOK Guide* – soft skills. The *PMBOK Guide* mentions soft skills such as negotiation, leadership, management, communications, motivation and influence – to name a few – that are needed by project managers to facilitate successful project as well as drive successful careers. PRINCE2 does not discuss these.

A blend of both methods allows for both control and flexibility. Depending on the environment, one method might actually be preferred over the other due more to the organisation's project management culture than anything else. For instance, in the UK government PRINCE2 is predominate. So a firm working with the UK government would need to know PRINCE2. It is also common in Australia and some parts of Western Europe. The *PMBOK Guide* is predominately applied to projects in North America, Asia and other parts of Europe. Currently China appears to be fertile ground for an attempt to meld the two methods.

The *PMBOK Guide*, like a map, provides a general view of the surroundings for successful project management – as long as you know your bearings. PRINCE2, like a Wainwright guide, helps the project manager by providing detailed descriptions of the journey ahead so the right plans and preparations can be made.

In my experience, with a little effort, the two work well together: the *PMBOK Guide* for its framework and PRINCE2 for its tools and timing. As projects continue their march toward greater complexity, project managers will continue to see increased benefit from the blending of both methods.

About the Author

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	PMI's <i>PMBOK Guide</i>	OGC's PRINCE2 Manual
Availability	Worldwide	Worldwide
Website	www.pmi.org	www.apmgroupp.co.uk
Predominant Use	North America, Asia, India, some Europe	UK, Australasia, some Europe
Reference Manual	<i>The Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge</i>	The PRINCE2 Manual
Description	<i>PMBOK Guide</i> is a <i>descriptive</i> compilation of best practices and techniques in project management that are available to all project types. It is fully scalable and customisable.	PRINCE2 is a <i>prescriptive step-by-step</i> approach to project management that is available to all project types (PRINCE2 started with IT projects). It is fully scalable and customisable.
Focus	Activity and product-based – Focuses on activities to get the work done that will create the product – establishes the 'scope' of the product before you decompose the work necessary to identify the activities needed to build the product	Product-based – Focuses on the completion of deliverables and the product – defining what you are producing before you define the activities needed)
Components	<p>Context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Projects, programmes, portfolios and their relationship - Project life cycle - Project organisation <p>Five Process Groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Initiation - Planning - Executing - Monitoring and Controlling - Closing <p>Nine Knowledge Areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integration - Scope - Time - Cost - Quality - Human Resources - Communications - Risk - Procurement <p>44 processes (with inputs, Tools and Techniques, and Outputs for each process)</p>	<p>Seven Principles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business Justification - Learning lessons - Roles and responsibilities - Managing by stages - Managing by exception - Product focused - Tailoring <p>Seven Processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Starting up a project - Directing a project - Initiating a project - Controlling a stage - Managing stage boundaries - Closing a project <p>Seven Themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business case - Organisation - Quality - Plans - Risks - Changes - Progress <p>Guidance on tailoring Templates Roles and Responsibilities</p>
Role descriptions	The project manager is the person assigned by the organisation to achieve the project objectives. The project manager works closely with the programme and portfolio managers to maintain alignment of projects. The project manager is appointed by a project charter and has their level of authority and responsibility clearly spelled out. Other roles are mentioned: - Sponsor, Change Control Boards, etc.	The PRINCE2 premise is that the project manager reports to a project board. It is the project board that owns the project and the business case that cause the project to exist in the first place. The project manager works within the tolerances set by the board for scope, time and budget. PRINCE2 defines the roles for entire project team, executive, assurance, team managers, project manager, supplier, user, support, etc.
Tools, tips and techniques provided	Yes – provides guidance on what techniques to use at particular points in the project for particular results	No – left to user to decide. Templates are the exception; these are prescribed.
Leading and Managing (and other 'soft' skills)	Yes – guidance is provided	No – left to the user (APM Group is looking at the feasibility of developing a course that bridges the PRINCE2 Practitioner level with IPMA certification)
Procurement and contracts	Yes – guidance is provided	No – left to the user
Guidance for sponsors/management	Some guidance is provided in the <i>PMBOK Guide</i> . Significant guidance now available in the <i>Standard for Program Management and Standard for Portfolio Management</i>	One entire process is dedicated to the Direction and AdHoc guidance and approvals (directing a project)
Project governance	No – mentions the role of the Change Control Board, change control and change management. Significant guidance now available in the <i>Standard for Program Management and Standard for Portfolio Management</i>	Yes – the premise is that the project manager reports to a project board. It is the project board that owns the project and the business case that cause the project to exist in the first place.
Organisational environment and support	<i>PMBOK Guide</i> information is very transportable between organizations and industries. Organizational buy-in/support is minimal – obviously the more support, the better it works – but it can work without full organizational support.	PRINCE2 is very transportable between organisations that use PRINCE2. Organizational support/buy-in is essential to make PRINCE2 projects run successfully. The premise is that the PM reports to a Project Board.
Use by the project manager (PM) in isolation	It is relatively simple for single PM to run project in isolation using the <i>PMBOK Guide</i> as their guidance.	It is very hard for a single PM to run a PRINCE2 project in isolation.
Project selection (before project starts)	Provides project selection techniques	Describes how to start a project in a prescribed 'controlled' way before committing resources to it.
Benefits management (post-project)	No guidance in the <i>PMBOK Guide</i> , but significant guidance on 'benefits management' are now available in the <i>Standard for Program Management and Standard for Portfolio Management</i> (this area is deemed the responsibility of the programme manager, not the project manager).	Creates the Benefits Review Plan