

# Providing Clarity on PMBOK<sup>®</sup> and PRINCE2<sup>®</sup>

## A Short Perspective on Popular Choices

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### Introduction:

Around the world it seems that businesses, governments, NGO's and others are somewhat confused by the debates around the merits of popular project management approaches. In particular the Project Management Institutes (PMI) 'Project Management Body of Knowledge' (PMBOK<sup>®</sup>) and Office of Government Commerce (OGC) 'Projects in Controlled Environments' (PRINCE2<sup>®</sup>) seem to cause the most debate and therefore giving rise to the most confusion. This short article offers an overview of the differences and similarities of each approach. It also provides a case for collaboration between both.

### What is PMBOK<sup>®</sup>?

PMBOK<sup>®</sup> is the ANSI standard for project management and is recognised as the de facto standard of project management knowledge globally. Initially developed in 1987 it is periodically updated by a large team representing all facets of the project management profession. Consisting of five process areas and nine knowledge areas it offers a very comprehensive and very generic view on modern best practice project management. It is supported by a number of accreditation offerings administered by PMI with the most recognized being the Project Management Professional (PMP) a globally recognised accreditation. Key points are:

- American National and de facto International standard for project management.
- PMBOK<sup>®</sup> refers to "A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge", which contains the actual ANSI standard in the front section.
- Identifies and describes subsets of project management which are generally accepted as 'best practice'.
- Is NOT a methodology.
- Is a collection of considered "best practices" from the global market that are suitable for all sectors.

### What is PRINCE2<sup>®</sup>?

In the UK and parts of Europe, PRINCE2<sup>®</sup> is the project management methodology of choice. It is mandated by the UK (Westminster) government for most if not all projects it commissions and therefore has become the de facto methodology in the UK. It was initially developed for IT projects funded by the UK government, however is also now widely used in the private sector and increasingly internationally.

PRINCE2® is a process-based, structured methodology that highlights how eight particular components, when understood and effectively addressed, can additionally reduce risks in all types of projects. While PRINCE2® is somewhat based on the PMBOK®, it does offer some areas of difference to PMBOK®, and answers the question “how do I apply these concepts in my projects?”.

PRINCE2® is supported by an accreditation process, including accreditation of training organisations, trainers, practitioners and consultants. Different from PMI, the accrediting body is the APM Group Ltd a private company that controls examinations, training organisations, consultants and practitioners. Key points are:

- A project management methodology that is tailorable for use on all types of projects.
- Owned by Office of Government Commerce (OGC) in the UK and in the public domain.
- Described in the book “Managing Successful Projects with PRINCE2®”.
- Is considered by some to be cumbersome and overly prescriptive.
- Despite being a methodology it does not provide templates.

### **Comparative Overview:**

Fundamentally it is considered that PMBOK® provides a knowledge base and roadmap for effective project management while PRINCE2® provides a more pragmatic ‘How To’ approach.

Both approaches are customisable which is beneficial as it allows for better integration into the level of project management maturity the organisation is currently at and aspires to be at in the future.

The recipe for success therefore is to adopt both by creating a framework based on the PMBOK® standard and the ‘How to’ guide based on the PRINCE2® methodology. These will need to be supplemented by appropriate templates for use within the organisation. It is recommended that a Programme/Project Management Office (PMO) have ownership and responsibility for all developments so that consistency is achieved across all projects being conducted.

The following tables intend to provide a more detailed and visual comparison of the key areas of both products.

## Process Cycle Comparison:

<b>PMBOK®</b>	<b>PRINCE2®</b>
Initiating	Starting up a project Directing a project Managing Stage Boundaries
Planning	Initiating a Project Managing Stage Boundaries Managing Product Delivery Planning
Executing	Controlling a Stage Managing Product Delivery Directing a Project
Monitoring and Control	Controlling a Stage
Closing	Managing Stage Boundaries Closing a Project

Diagram adapted from PM Partners

## Knowledge Area Comparison:

<b>PMBOK® Knowledge Area</b>	<b>PRINCE2® Element</b>
Integration	Plans, Planning, Change Control
Scope	Business Case, Plans, Product Based Planning, Change Control
Time	Plans, Planning, Product Based Planning, Change Control
Cost	Plans, Planning, Change Control
Quality	Quality/Quality Review, Configuration Management
Risk	Management of Risk
Communications	Controls, Controlling a Stage, Closing a Project
Human Resources	Only Roles & Responsibilities Covered
Procurement	Not covered by PRINCE2®

Diagram adapted from PM Partners

## Conclusions:

As mentioned earlier many people seem confused and consider PMBOK® and PRINCE2® to be competitors. While this may be true if an organisation is seeking to adopt just one singular approach it does however raise the question of which one? The answer lies in the assessed level of project management maturity the organisation has. As a 'rule of thumb' it is suggested that the higher the level of maturity the organization has then the adoption of PMBOK® makes logical sense as it empowers the individual programme or project manager by providing greater flexibility for interpretation. Conversely, if the level of project management maturity is low then the less empowered a programme or project manager is likely to be, thus

suggesting that the PRINCE2<sup>®</sup> approach is more relevant due to the need for more prescriptive approaches.

Alternatively, by using the PMBOK<sup>®</sup> and PRINCE2<sup>®</sup> as a base for creating an integrated solution, organisations can take advantage of the best of the two most respected project management approaches in the world today. This should allow those organisations to achieve better performance on all project outputs and business outcomes.

## References:

1. “How PRINCE2<sup>®</sup> can complement PMBOK<sup>®</sup> and Your PMP” by Jay Siegelaub.
2. “PMI’s PMBOK<sup>®</sup> vs. PRINCE2<sup>®</sup>” by Tracey Copland.
3. PMI website at [www.pmi.org](http://www.pmi.org)
4. OGC website at [www.ogc.gov.uk](http://www.ogc.gov.uk)

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