

Defining Methodologies for PM In the UK and the US

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“It is common sense to take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something.”

— Franklin D. Roosevelt

The Trouble with Projects

Projects can be in trouble due to any of the following causes:

They cost more money than budgeted.

They do not run to schedule.

They fail to deliver promised benefits.

They produce unusable products.

The instigator or higher management lacks commitment.

There is a lack of communication between interested parties.

The business or external factors change.

If you are familiar with any of the above, you may have come across common failures of projects carried out without a methodology. By using a recognised methodology, a project can be guided through a controlled, well-managed, visible set of activities in order to achieve the required results.

What's in a Methodology?

A methodology is a body of practices, procedures and rules used by those who work in a discipline. Project management has its own methodologies that can be categorised into the following:

Open methods

Proprietary methods

Home-grown methods

Subject “experts”

None at all

From a UK perspective, and focusing only on open methods, I will be discussing the main project methodologies promoted by

organisations specialising in the project management field.

Open standard methodologies are important in providing an approach to project management that is repeatable, easily taught, built on experience and proactive. They are also important to ensure that everyone involved in the project knows what to expect and when. The “open” concept benefits both the organisation and its employees.

Open standard methodologies enable organisations to:

Satisfy clients that you are complying, in part, with best practice corporate governance requirements. In the United Kingdom, this means compliance with the Combined Code, British Standard (BS) 7799 (adopted in ISO standard 17799), and in the United States, with the Sarbanes-Oxley Act. It is reassuring to clients that you put into practice what you preach.

Use a variety of accredited training organisations in different geographical regions.

Recruit candidates who have certifications or experience with the methodology.

Use external consultants who are familiar with a widely-known and respected methodology making integration easier.

Retain knowledge within the organisation when employees relocate.

Utilise pre-built tools to help implementation.

Work independently without being tied to an outside consultancy.

By the same token, employees gain by:

Having recognisable certification or experience in a widely-used methodology.

Being quickly integrated into the working practices of the organisation.

Being able to easily expand their knowledge on the particular methodology.

Mandatory Methodologies

Project management methodologies are now starting to become mandatory in the government sector both in the United States and in the United Kingdom. A good example in the United States is the state of South Carolina, which has developed a standard project management methodology, with parameters as noted below:

“This project management methodology is intended to provide a common point of reference regarding the practices to be used in managing IT projects within South Carolina State government. The methodology describes a standard framework to be used in initiating, planning managing (controlling and executing), and closing IT projects. All state agencies must adopt a methodology for managing IT projects by July 1, 2005. If an agency decides to adopt a methodology other than the State’s project management methodology, it must request and receive an exemption from the Division of the State CIO.”

In the United Kingdom, the Office of Government Commerce (an independent Office of the Treasury) is recommending that all UK government agencies use an established methodology. The office is actively helping to set up project management Centres of Excellence (COE) with the overall aim of achieving significant improvements to central government capability to deliver successful projects. The office also provides a special certification in project management, which is available for all government employees.

Looking beyond government, in both countries more corporations also are

adopting project methodologies. This is due to many factors, including the corporate governance requirements already mentioned. Financial mismanagement of projects could leave senior management legally exposed.

US: Project Management Institute

The Project Management Institute (PMI) publishes “A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge,” which is currently in its third edition. Most people refer to it as the “PMBOK Guide,” and it is now an American National Standard (ANSI/PMI 99-001-2004). Canada follows the US process and is part of the PMI.

This guide provides “the sum of knowledge within the profession of project management together with practices that are widely applied, as well as innovative practices that are emerging in the profession.” The knowledge is constantly evolving and being updated. The PMI has affiliated chapters throughout the world, as well as specific interest groups, including one on information systems.

Various levels of certifications are available through the PMI with the main qualification being the Project Management Professional (PMP). To be eligible for the PMP certification, you must first meet specific education and experience requirements and agree to adhere to a code of professional conduct. The final step in becoming a PMP is passing a four-hour, 200-question multiple choice examination designed to objectively assess and measure your project management knowledge. The examination is available globally, and more than 75,000 professionals have achieved PMP certification.

UK: Association for Project Management

In the United Kingdom, the Association for Project Management (APM) has over 13,500 individual and 240 corporate members. The mission of the APM is to develop the art and science of project management. The organisation

publishes the “APM Body of Knowledge” (BoK), currently in its fourth edition, which contains 42 areas of knowledge required to manage any successful project. External reference materials are indicated throughout the BoK to provide further guidance. References include several British Standards and ISO Series — for example, BS6079-1:2000, Guide to Project Management, HMSO, 1996. Branches are available in the United Kingdom, Hong Kong and Singapore.

Research to form the Body of Knowledge is conducted by the Centre for Research in the Management of Projects at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology on behalf of industry and the APM.

Various levels of certifications are available through the APM, starting with the introductory Certificate in Project Management, (the exam consists of 60 multiple choice questions) and ending with the Certified Project Manager. The latter is an internationally recognised qualification for senior project management professionals and is earned after successful completion of a three-stage assessment. In stage one you are expected to submit a CV detailing your experience in managing complex projects, along with a self-assessment form and a description of a project you have managed that demonstrates your capabilities as a project manager. In stage two you submit a 5,000-word project report based on the précis submitted in stage one. Stage three entails an interview with a panel of assessors who examine your technical and management skills in project management.

PRINCE2 Is Government Standard

In the United Kingdom, the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) now controls a structured method called Projects in Controlled Environments. The method is commonly referred to as PRINCE, and is now the UK government standard for IT project

management. The current version is PRINCE2 and is described in the publication “Managing Successful Projects with PRINCE2.” The publication is in its third edition, but a new fourth edition is due out this year. PRINCE2 is now the *de facto* standard used extensively by the UK government. In addition, it is now widely used in the private sector. PRINCE2 is a process-based approach for project management, providing an easily tailored and scaleable method for the management of all types of projects. Projects managed by PRINCE2 are always focused on the delivery of specific products to meet the business case.

There are currently two official certifications in PRINCE2. The foundation examination consists of 75 multiple choice questions. The practitioner examination is a three-hour written examination based on a scenario with three main questions split into subquestions. The APM Group Limited on behalf of The Office of Government Commerce manages the certifications. Training through accredited organisations is widely available in the UK and Europe.

Tailor the Method

In summary, various methodologies are available, and both governments and corporations are increasingly requiring that projects meet specified standards. If you decide to use a particular methodology, the most important factor in implementation is to tailor the method to suit the environment and circumstance of your project.

About our author . . .

Bruce Nicholls is located in London and has 20 years' experience in IT service delivery with a special interest in project/programme management and business alignment. He is a member of the British Computer Society Project Management Specialist Group and is a qualified Prince2 Practitioner.