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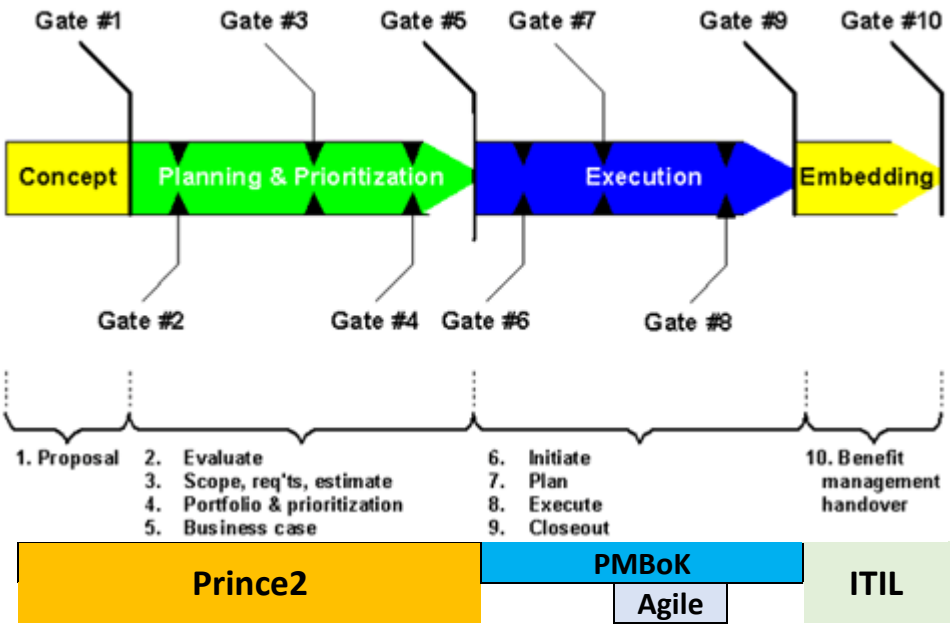
All organizations have experienced projects that went well, and projects that were disappointing, so perhaps it should not be a surprise that people look for a "magic bullet" to make their projects deliver on-time, within budget, and with all the functionality stakeholders could hope for. Each time you grab another "magic bullet" you put another project at risk: what makes a project more successful is to make sure the fundamentals are applied, and different constraints are balanced.

Project Management is an Art *and* a Science

Do not fall into the trap of arguing about the merits of project management methodologies. Instead of bending your project to fit a specific methodology, focus on how different aspects of the different methodologies can be applied to support your project.

I employ a custom project management methodology.

With over 30 years of project management experience in managing projects I can attest to what works and what will not work. I have run IT infrastructure projects, application development projects, business transformation projects, and construction projects, contrary to what may be promised there are no shortcuts when you want to deliver quality results. This illustrates the 10 Prince2™ life-cycle stages that a typical software development project requires to implement a concept until it is embedded in production. The strength of Prince2 is that it ensures there is sufficient detail to execute a project. As shown, execution is better managed using PMBoK™ as a guide. To optimize coding, Agile™ is more effective as the team management process. To securely deploy software, the ITIL™ standards are employed.



Before you skip any of these "gates" between life-cycle stages, you must be adroit at managing the impact on subsequent stages. For example, it is tempting to limit the project scope to Agile, but "backlog" seldom materializes out of thin air. While it is proper to focus on Agile if you have solid requirements (or stories), you can easily invite perpetual change and scope creep as these requirements emerge while the project is in full swing. It is essential that the selection of backlog includes a solid change management process, so you can all the "good" from Agile and avoid all the potential "bad" from scope creep. The challenge is to know where to begin the process.

If your team is open-minded to the different options illustrated above, they can assess if there is sufficient clarity around the requirements to run an Agile project. However, if you require more accountability and documentation, you may use Agile methods within a PMBoK™ methodology that starts with a project charter. If there is not sufficient clarity around the requirements, then you should consider going through the Prince2™ methodology up to the point of completing the business case to charter a project. Working backwards gives you the answers on what the safe scope for projects would involve, which summarizes my custom project management consulting process. In larger organizations, the last stage of embedding software is usually governed by an ITIL™ change management process that ensures there is no adverse impact of the new software on already existing operations. The following descriptions summarize the 10 process stages:

Stage 1: Prince2™ Concept or Proposal

Most projects are initiated because a stakeholder (group) identifies a business need. Sometimes we need to refine that concept to make it clear why the project should be considered. The GDPR legislation is an example of a clear, imposed, requirement that does not require much debate, while for some "nice to have" functionality we need to carefully assess the merits.

Stage 2: Prince2™ Concept Evaluation

Apart from the merits we need a high-level estimate of the potential costs to implement software or to acquire infrastructure or to engage in a construction project. We typically want to see the approximate costs because (unlike mandated projects) the organization only puts aside funding for so much discretionary development. For mandated projects we evaluate the impact so that the Financial Executive can decide where that funding will come from, while development must determine what resources will be tied up to meet that demand (which can bump discretionary work in progress). Depending on the nature of the project more details may be required.

Stage 3: Prince2™ Scope, Requirements, Estimates

The effort involved in establishing the project scope, and eliciting all the detailed requirements, is often underestimated. The problem is that "scope" may not be a one-size-fits-all definition, so we may need to establish a "Product" plan with successive "Project Scope" definitions so that the overall scope can be delivered in phases. Sometimes delivery projects can overlap, and the scope breakdown simply makes each project more manageable, but more often the breakdown recognizes that budget constraints dictate what should be priority deliverables and what can be subsequent enhancements. Requirements elicitation would fill-in the details by project, and we can generate initial estimates to make sure that the scope does not exceed budget constraints. It is not necessary for the entire product scope to be finalized before a project scope can trigger the prioritization of that project.

Stage 4: Prince2™ Portfolio & Prioritization

Any project may be one of several pending initiation, which is what the portfolio is about. Just because a project reaches this stage does not mean it bumps everything else: we make sure that there is a controlled process by which successive projects are considered for initiation.

Stage 5: Prince2™ Business Case

To obtain the funding for implementing a project we usually need a business case (updated from the estimates produced earlier) to get those funds allocated. This is somewhat of a formality to make sure there is an audit trail of due diligence with respect to using that funding to start new projects. Depending on the scope of the project we can propose a full PMBoK™ process or only the Agile execution stage (assuming the preparatory requirements are fully developed).

Stage 6: PMBoK™ Initiate - Charter

The project charter is the output from the initiation steps outlined in PMBoK™ that formally sets out the purpose, scope, and objectives for the project, the management structure, and standards of reporting, and so on (we usually have a series of templates and decide which ones will apply to the current project). The project sponsor(s) must formally approve the charter for the project to be initiated and the resources to be allocated and approved.

Stage 7: PMBoK™ Plan, Requirements, Resources

Next, we revisit the requirements for the project and create a detailed project plan that identifies the resources required to implement the project. This includes creating a RACI chart to define who does what, and a CAIRO table to track change, assumptions, issues, risks, and other items.

Stage 8: PMBoK™ Execution → Agile/Scrum

By all accounts the execution stage is where most of the costs are incurred. When possible, this stage can benefit from Agile/Scrum team management, based on "Total Quality Management" principles. Each project is unique – therefore, there is not one right way that governs all possible projects, but instead you must adapt the project management process to the needs of a project.

Stage 9: PMBoK™ Closeout

The concepts of continuous improvement require that lessons learned from each project should be acknowledged and, where appropriate, be incorporated in the project management guide for the organization. All project-related contracts must be closed-out, and (as required) handed to the procurement organization for final payments according to the established terms.

Stage 10: ITIL™ Embedding

Delivering software into a production environment requires a controlled deployment that usually involves the operations team to make sure there is no adverse impact on existing production.

- This methodology is based on a consulting seminar I offer on project management.

Respectfully,

Frits J. Bos, PMP