

## Methodologies

Methodologies define a step-by-step series of processes for delivering projects or any other business outcome. Each methodology includes a defined series of steps or processes and describes each step in adequate depth so that the project team understands what has to be done to deliver their project. This is quite different to a standardised knowledge framework such as the *PMBOK® Guide*<sup>1</sup> or a proper standard such as ISO 21500 *Guidance on project management*.

The difference between a standard and a methodology is:

- Methodologies describe *who, what, how* and *when* things should be done with prescribed forms, committee structures and procedures.
- Standards simply specify *what* should be done and *why*, and consequently have a much wider application. Each organisation deploying the ‘standard’ develops its own methodologies to achieve the objectives defined in the standard.

Good methodologies, supported by appropriate ‘standard operating procedures’ can be very beneficial. Using the same steps for every project the organisation undertakes minimises risks and uncertainty and there is likely to be an overall saving of time and effort on projects. Bad methodologies become a self fulfilling, bureaucratic system that consumes resources for no benefit. Many organisations using PRINCE2 are best described as PINO’s (Prince In Name Only) they have adopted the PRINCE2 bureaucracy and formats without allocating appropriate authority and responsibility to the designated bodies such as the Control Board (backed up where necessary with effective training)<sup>2</sup>.

### Defining ‘your’ methodology

The key steps to follow are:

- Define what it is that you want from your methodology, the type of content it should contain and the way in which it will be used.
- Create a set of specific requirements. Some options to consider include defining:
  - How much of the project lifecycle needs to be incorporated
  - How much detail should be included? What practical templates and examples are needed to help to complete the step quickly and easily?
  - Should it follow one of the worldwide project standards such as the *PMBOK® Guide*?
  - Can/should the system be easily customised suit all project types and sizes?
- Determine the best methodology to use:
  - Review the methodologies currently used by your organisation and compare them to your requirements to see if there is a good fit.
  - Review the commercially available methodologies to see if there is a good fit.
  - Select the option with the best fit to your requirements
- The best methodology is still only likely to have a 90% fit (or less), this is normal. Make sure you can customise the remaining elements to meet your specific requirements.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the difference between **methodologies and standards** see: <http://mosaicprojects.wordpress.com/2009/04/11/pmbok-v-methodology/>

<sup>2</sup> For more on the **differences (and similarities) between PRINCE2, the PMBOK® Guide and ISO 21500** see the AXELOS white paper: [http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/PDF/PRINCE2\\_PMBOK\\_ISO.pdf](http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/PDF/PRINCE2_PMBOK_ISO.pdf)



- Ensure adequate flexibility for the range of projects in your organisation. Do not let software tools and ‘fads’ dictate your methodology or capabilities by limiting the work you can manage. Methodologies need to be able to accommodate innovation and continuous improvement whilst maintaining standards and quality. One size does not ‘fit all’.

## Building ‘your’ methodology

The basics of what is required to define a business process within a methodology include:

- Knowing precisely what is to be done. Standards and guides such as the PMBOK only provide general guidance.
- Defining precisely the inputs, outputs and performance criteria. One example: Qualitative risk analysis (*PMBOK® Guide* 5<sup>th</sup> Ed., 11.3.2.2) identifies relative impacts – but what represents a 0.80 impact (extreme), \$5000, \$50,000, \$500,000 – the methodology has to make these definitions. The ‘impact’ can apply to quality, safety, time, cost – which ones matter and need including in the methodology, which can be left out??
- Develop ‘Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)<sup>3</sup>’ that define the people responsible for performing the processes by roles, responsibilities and authority levels. Including creating or adapting templates<sup>4</sup> and guidance documents to implement the processes consistently.
- Define the work flows. The *PMBOK® Guide* is well laid out in this respect but only deals with a single pass – methodologies need to deal with iterative builds.
- Define the project control systems<sup>5</sup> and standard KPIs<sup>6</sup>.
- Then you get to the questions of how often the processes are used, how intensely they are applied, who oversees the processes, how performance is measured, how the processes are improved and what happens if there is an identified problem or issue.

The real skill is to make sure the methodology is as simple, quick and easy to use as possible whilst applying sufficient rigour to optimise project outcomes. Creating a ‘good’ methodology from scratch using a standard such as the *PMBOK® Guide*, or adapting an existing methodology such as PRINCE2, involves some serious work and the research and development work needs to be properly resourced to ensure the methodology is developed properly and is useful and usable.

## Implementing the methodology

The key steps to make sure the ‘useful’ methodology is used are:

- Create an Implementation Plan supported by a change management plan. Implementing a methodology is a significant organisational change.
- Run the implementation as a change management program, including customising the methodology for your environment. Stakeholder engagement is vital to the overall success of the initiative<sup>7</sup>.
- Train the users and support staff in the methodology and ensure ongoing support.

<sup>3</sup> For more on **Standard Operating Procedures** see: : [http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1086\\_Standard\\_Operating\\_Procedures.pdf](http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1086_Standard_Operating_Procedures.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> PMI members have unlimited access to a wide range of templates to collect and manage project information which can be downloaded from the PMI tools and templates library at [www.pmi.org](http://www.pmi.org). Method 123 offer a low cost commercial range: [www.method123.com](http://www.method123.com)

<sup>5</sup> For more on **project controls** see: [http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1093\\_Project\\_Controls.pdf](http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1093_Project_Controls.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> For more on **designing KPIs** see: <http://mosaicprojects.wordpress.com/2014/08/05/designing-effective-kpis/>

<sup>7</sup> For more on **stakeholder management** see: [http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/Stakeholder\\_Circle.html](http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/Stakeholder_Circle.html)



- Ensure the methodology is followed.
- Start improving the methodology<sup>8</sup>.

## Continuous Improvement

Ensuring the methodology is rapidly perceived as 'productive' is essential for it to be generally accepted and supported by your stakeholders. This factor linked to the fact it is usually easier to add more detail to a system than it is to remove established processes suggests starting with 'too little' process in a methodology and adding extra features later if they can be justified is better than going for a 'big bang' system with every bell and whistle.

The first rounds of improvement are based incrementally adding processes and procedures in a designed 'roll out' until the full methodology is used by everyone. The second phase of improvement is to focus on 'process improvements'<sup>9</sup> by continually questioning the value of each step and process to minimise the amount of effort directed to running the methodology whilst maximising its effectiveness.

## The Benefits of Using a PM Methodology

The key reasons for implementing a methodology are that an effective methodology will:

### Increase the chance of project success

A 'good' methodology is a tried and true way of getting your projects done by ensuring that all the necessary steps are taken, no shortcuts are introduced, and the work is done to the highest standard that the organisation can perform. This increases the chance of your project making it successfully to completion.

### Increases the amount of time available to spend on work

Having one clear, consistent project management methodology in place throughout the entire organisation will reduce the need for training people in different methodologies, avoid wasting time 'reinventing the wheel', and increase the time that they can spend doing the actual work.

### Eliminates choices where none are required

There's an interesting phenomenon that occurs when decisions need to be made: there is usually less input given into large, complicated decisions than there is for decisions that are routine and simple<sup>10</sup>. A project management methodology eliminates this phenomenon because most of the small decisions that needed to have been made have been made ahead of time and the results included in the methodology

### Allow for consistent reporting and analysis

Reporting and Analysis on project progress and results require the terminology that is used in the reports to be consistent. An effective methodology includes definitions and reporting standards.

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<sup>8</sup> for more on measuring and improving the organisations project management maturity see Mosaic's OPM3 home page: <http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/OPM3.html>

<sup>9</sup> For more on **process improvements** see WP1046: [http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1046\\_Process\\_Improvement.pdf](http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1046_Process_Improvement.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> For more on **decision making** see: [http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1053\\_Decision\\_Making.pdf](http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1053_Decision_Making.pdf)

## Summary

No methodology works 'out of the box' they all need customisation and tailoring. However, the effort is worthwhile. OPM3 has demonstrated standardised processes that incorporate best practices can provide significant benefits to an organisation<sup>11</sup>.

The challenge is balancing systemised processes with the need for adequate flexibility to deal with the circumstances of each unique project. An effective project management methodology needs core components, scalable components and optional components designed to meet the needs of your organisation.

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<sup>11</sup> See more on **OPM3** at: <http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/OPM3.html>

