PRINCE2® or APM BoK based training – how do I choose?

Provek is a programme and project management specialist with accredited training organisation (ATO) status. We have extensive experience in providing standard and bespoke PRINCE2 and APM Body of Knowledge (BoK) based training for all levels of programme or project staff across a wide range of business areas. In addition, our consultants have supported clients in the selection, design and implementation of a project management methodology and framework most appropriate to their business needs.

Introduction

Projects rely on teams of individuals to deliver change. These teams need a combination of both the skills to do the work and a structured method or framework within which the work can be done. Without both of these in place a project is likely to fail to achieve its objectives. Collectively, APM and PRINCE2 provide both of these essential elements. This document explains how they do this and provides guidance to those deciding which path to go down. It is important to stress that the APM BoK and PRINCE2 approaches are complimentary and not competitive.

What is PRINCE2?

PRINCE2 (PRojects IN Controlled Environments) is a process-based method for effective project management. It is a de facto standard used extensively by the UK Government and is also widely recognised and used in the private sector, both in the UK and internationally.

The PRINCE2 method provides its users with a structured project lifecycle and appropriate management 'gates' to facilitate control which support good governance. The processes detail what activities need to be done at each stage of the lifecycle together with the roles and responsibilities of the team. The method focuses on the project having a continuous business justification, a defined organisation structure for the project management team and a product-based planning approach. Knowledge of the PRINCE2 method is tested by examination at two different levels.

It is important to understand that the PRINCE2 method is not a 'one size fits all'. Success in implementing it is highly dependent on how it is tailored for different size projects and the nature of the organisation.

What is APM BoK?

The Association for Project Management (APM) does not provide or advocate a particular method, but rather it is a framework within which projects should be run. The *APM Body of Knowledge* identifies the key areas of knowledge that those working in projects need to know and apply. The *APM Body of Knowledge* is promoted through qualifications, accredited training, research, publications and events. These key areas of knowledge are tested by examination at four levels.

Factors to consider in deciding which is most appropriate for my organisation

- *Do you have the essential knowledge and skills to undertake projects?* Look to objectively assess or benchmark your project managers to determine their project management overall competence. If this shows that knowledge and skills are in need of development, then consider APM first.

- *Are you introducing a new project management method or a major overhaul of your existing method?* If so, consider PRINCE2, but look to apply PRINCE2 in a tailored and appropriate way to suit your organisation. Also do think about PRINCE2 method education for project staff levels above and below project managers in order to maximise your success in implementing the method.

- *Do you have a project management method, but wish to improve the project management understanding of your people and perhaps refine and improve the method in places*? Because APM BoK provides both the key principles and a broad understanding of project management, it can help

cement the importance of applying a project management method, and is not limited to deployment of a specific method. Hence, APM BoK should be considered as the first approach for such a situation.

- *Do you lack the skills and the project management method?* If so, then consider a combination of APM BoK to embed an overall framework and project management principles, followed by a tailored and appropriately sized application of PRINCE2 to provide the detailed method for project teams to follow.

How does APM differ from PRINCE2?

APM and PRINCE2 are not competing methods of project management. APM training and qualifications are designed to ensure that individuals and teams have the appropriate generic knowledge and understanding in the key areas and principles of project management. APM training is appropriate for anyone involved in project management. It provides the foundation for using project management methods such as PRINCE2.

PRINCE2 provides users with a structured process driven methodology suitable for any organisation undertaking projects. PRINCE2 related training is most suitable to those either using (or about to use) the PRINCE2 method or one that is based on PRINCE2. It will also benefit those who do not work in a PRINCE2 environment as its general principles and emphasis on structure and deliverables will facilitate best practice.

Advantages and disadvantages

The advantages and disadvantages of deploying APM's framework or PRINCE2 as a method will depend on the specific situation within each individual organisation. However, there are some general advantages and disadvantages that an organisation should be aware of before selecting their own approach.

PRINCE2 – Advantages: It is an internationally recognised best practice method. It is free to use and is supported by the APM Group Ltd. The training is accredited and provides qualifications to individuals at two levels. It supports governance. It can be used in any organisation for any size of project. As a standard method it can be rolled out across an organisation to provide a common language and support consistency.

PRINCE2 – Disadvantages: It is often seen as bureaucratic if not understood and applied appropriately. In addition, like any method, it can take time and effort to roll it out across an entire organisation. The language can be off putting for those unfamiliar with project management methods. The 'soft skills' of project management such as stakeholder management and conflict management are not covered within PRINCE2.

APM BoK – Advantages: It is internationally recognised through its alignment to IPMA and provides accredited qualifications. It is generic and does not rely on one particular method. It provides knowledge and understanding in a wide range of topics for anyone working in a project environment. APM also recognises important 'soft skills' and covers topics such as stakeholder and communications management, negotiation, conflict management and teamwork. APM framework and principles can be applied to organisations with an existing project management method.

APM – Disadvantages: The APM BoK and the exam syllabuses cover a wide range of topics. The emphasis is on breadth rather than on depth. APM does not provide a specific method with ready to use templates.

Qualifications

There are two levels of PRINCE2 accreditation available for individuals: foundation and practitioner. The foundation qualification is the first of two qualifications required to become a PRINCE2 Practitioner. The foundation exam aims to measure whether a candidate can act as an informed member of a project management team using the PRINCE2 methodology within a project environment supporting PRINCE2.

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The Practitioner is the second of the two PRINCE2 examinations you are required to pass to become a PRINCE2 Practitioner. This PRINCE2 examination is aiming to measure whether a candidate would be able to apply PRINCE2 to the running and managing of a project within an environment supporting PRINCE2. To this end they need to exhibit the competence required for the Foundation qualification, and show that they can apply and tune PRINCE2 to address the needs and problems of a specific project scenario.

APM Introductory Certificate – is for anyone looking to understand the basic principles of project management.

APMP Certificate - is a knowledge based qualification. Successful candidates are able to participate in projects from individual assignments through to large capital projects. APMP is a qualification recognised both nationally and internationally that successful candidates can carry from one job to another or from one industry to another. APMP Certificate is aligned to the IPMA (International Project Management Association) as a level D qualification. APMP does not require candidates to have first taken the Introductory Certificate.

APM Practitioner Qualification – is an assessment based event not a course, and is designed to test the ability of a practising project manager to manage a project against thirty criteria. It is the only qualification based project management assessment of its kind available in the UK. APM PQ is also an IPMA level C qualification. It is preferable, but not a pre-requisite, for candidates to have first taken the APMP certificate.

For senior project managers, there is also APM Certificated Project Manager (IPMA level B) which is a prestigious qualification with an extensive demonstrable track record of project success being required.

The Association for Project Management (APM) is the largest independent professional body of its kind in Europe with over 16,500 individual and 500 corporate members throughout the UK and abroad. Their aim is to develop and promote project management across all sectors of industry. At the heart of APM is the *APM Body of Knowledge*; fifty-two knowledge areas required to manage any successful project. The APM is currently seeking a Royal Charter to have project management recognised as a profession (2009).

Please contact Provek should you require further assistance.