

From PRINCE2 2005 to PRINCE2 2009

In June of 2009 a new edition of the PRINCE2 (PRojects IN a Controlled Environment) was released. Many organisations will already have a substantial investment in the 2005 edition and will be questioning the benefits of moving to 2009. In this paper I identify some of the issues with PRINCE2 2005 and contrast them with the 2009 edition, hopefully demonstrating the improvements and simplifications of 2009 and the benefits which can be expected by early implementers..

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Introduction

I am writing this review both from the points of view of a PRINCE2 trainer as well as a Project Management consultant, primarily in the IT world. Having seen PRINCE2 from both sides of the fence I think it qualifies me to identify various shortcomings in the present (2005) edition and contrast them with the new 2009 product. At this point I should declare an interest in the 2009 edition as I was one of the reviewers of the draft versions.

PRINCE2 2005

All projects and products when viewed in hindsight appear wanting, and PRINCE2 - 2005 is no exception. This is not to say that it is not a good product, just that industry has not stood still since 2005 and that extensive feedback has been received from users, trainers, consultants and managers and which has been taken into account in producing the 2009 edition of PRINCE2.

If it ain't broke well, in applying PRINCE2 2005 there have been a common set of issues which have hindered what should be a smooth transition. Some of these are discussed below:

Principles

I have visited many companies with successful implementations of PRINCE2. However, when asked about this, they would usually respond with "well, it's sort of PRINCE2-based" and continue with lots of excuses as to why it is not "pure" PRINCE2. This demonstrates one of the key misunderstandings about the implementation of PRINCE2. It always was supposed to be tuned and tailored. Perhaps some criticism of the 2005 edition can be made on the basis that it attempted to be over-prescriptive, to the point where PRINCE2 implementers were basically "doing as the book said", rather than what was meant. I have to say that the Foundation exams associated with gaining a PRINCE2 qualification did not exactly help, as they seemed to be largely based on knowing whether a certain quotation actually appeared in the text. What was really wanted was a clear identification of the PRINCE2 Principles, which could then be applied in a sensible and non-dogmatic manner. The principles of PRINCE2 are scattered around in the 2005 book, but not clearly identified and frequently repeated and paraphrased so as to make them quite unclear.

Sub-Processes

It is not unreasonable to expect processes to have sub-processes, but in PRINCE2 2005 the sub-processes were presented with a degree of precision which is not mirrored in real-life. Consequently the sub-processes add confusion to something

which is relatively straightforward. The sub-processes became complicated in PRINCE2 2005 because they were presented as if they were definitive when in fact all they could be were guides to execution of parts of the main processes.

Complexity

The PRINCE2 2005 manual was unnecessarily large and daunting. Much of this was due to repetition and poor description. For example, a very useful and simple technique, Product Based Planning, was harmed by numerous errors in the text and examples. The new manual covers Product Based Planning in around 8 (simple) pages (including an Appendix), as compared to 22 pages in the 2005 edition.

Terminology in the 2005 edition was frequently inconsistent and poorly defined. I have actually heard a group of PRINCE2 consultants taking a vote on whether a particular feature described in the PRINCE2 2005 manual was mandatory or not. When it gets to this sort of level of debate and waste of valuable time, there is clearly urgent work to be done on refining definitions in the manual.

The apparent complexity led to the feeling that a PRINCE2 implementation would be bureaucratic and expensive and this became a major deterrent to many organisations. It also had the obvious consequence of freezing certain organisations into implementing PRINCE2 in a bureaucratic and expensive manner, as they were afraid of opening a can-of-worms discussion of whether a particular PRINCE2 implementation is actually PRINCE2. So, they would implement all of it, by the book, and wondered where their efficiency had gone. I named this particular disease "PRINCE2 Fundamentalism".

Responsibilities

PRINCE2 does an excellent job in identifying Roles and their responsibilities. Of key importance are the roles of all involved with the Project Board. Instead of a Project Manager being left to fend for himself (in many organisation) PRINCE2 makes very clear what support and guidance should be provided by the Project Board to the Project Manager.

However, in the real world, the Project Board was commonly not well implemented. For senior management the PRINCE2 2005 manual was relatively impenetrable and little actual guidance was provided in terms of setting up Project Boards and monitoring their performance. This sometimes resulted in the Project Manager reporting to both a PRINCE2-style Project Board and to his own management, with neither path delivering what PRINCE2 expects. So, unfortunately, one of the key areas of PRINCE2 was usually lacking when it came to real world implementation, probably because insufficient attention was given to the challenge of introducing this mode of operation at senior levels.

And Yet

In spite of the criticisms, PRINCE2 offers real benefits to the majority of organisations ... usually those having the confidence to tailor PRINCE2 to their projects. Standardisation of approach, of methods, of staging, of terminology, of organisation and so on, was a massive benefit. It greatly aided efficiency, reduced the amount of one-off training for people joining projects and aided consistency throughout an organisation.

PRINCE2's focus on Products, with related testable quality criteria and the connections back into Product Based Planning makes it clear that PRINCE2 is all about producing useful and usable products, not documents about them. It is focussed on product delivery not bureaucracy.

The definition of Roles with excellent (basic) descriptions of responsibilities of these roles helps establish high-performance teams, understanding the expectations of their colleagues and their own responsibilities.

The use of Stages, combined with the Management by Exception approach also provides an effective method of dealing with all types of projects (including those cast as being "Agile").

The clear focus on Business Case and protecting it by effective Change Control processes provides a solid basis for a project and emphasises to everyone the significance of a viable Business Case.

The Organisational aspects of PRINCE2 are also crucial. When done properly, the Project Board structure ensures timely management decisions and support and clear identification of responsibilities. The Project Board provides the Project Manager with a much-needed higher-level of direction, guidance and authority than is usually available outside of PRINCE2. However, see the comments under Responsibilities above for some other discussion on this point.

These are just some of the issues of PRINCE2-2005, and clearly in looking at a refresh of PRINCE2 2005 we do not want to throw the baby out with the bath water. We want to keep what is good, adapt what is not, remove unnecessary pedantry and produce a PRINCE2 methodology suitable for 2009 and onwards.

The refresh project for PRINCE2 2005 started late in 2006 beginning with a six month consultation of over 170 organisations. This led to a four stage project plan, starting in October 2007 and ending in first quarter of 2009. The planned publication date is mid-2009 for the "Managing Successful Projects with PRINCE2". There is a second manual planned ("Directing Successful Projects with PRINCE2") which is aimed at Senior Management who expect to participate in Project Board. This goes some way in mitigating my point about needing to emphasise more the importance of the Project Board and its members. In PRINCE2-2009 there is now an Appendix B, Governance, which describes how far PRINCE2 2009 addresses the governance of project management principles as published by the Association for Project Management

PRINCE2 2009

Overview

There are many ways we can look at PRINCE2 2009, but for me the clarity and consistency of the new manual is key. The core of the PRINCE2 method is virtually unchanged but the descriptions are now appropriate to modern development techniques where adaptability is vital. There is a new and dedicated chapter Tailoring PRINCE2 , bringing together the previous rag-bag approach of describing tailoring into one meaningful chapter. Moreover the new PRINCE2 no longer tries to pedantically cover all possible project options, but presents the principles of the method clearly so that you can understand how to apply it as opposed to memorise it.

The new manual is just 342 pages, against 456 pages in the old. Most of this saving comes from removing repetition and adding some simplicity (easily said but quite hard to do).

Principles

My earlier complaint about the difficulty of identifying essential principles of PRINCE2 in the 2005 edition is completely answered by the provision of a section "Principles" (of which there are just seven). This provides a consistent guidance throughout any implementation of PRINCE2

Themes

The previous "Components" of PRINCE2 are now renamed "Themes", again having just seven (Configuration Management is now merged with Change, so reducing the previous eight Components). The Themes are described ahead of the Processes which use them, unlike previously, where the Components were described after the processes.

Processes

The number of Processes has reduced to seven (the seven is a pure coincidence), achieved by merging Planning Process into the Plans theme.

Sub-processes have vanished, so no more CP1, SB2 etc! Instead we have sensible descriptions of the tasks of process, with the details of the order of the steps to perform these tasks left to the PM (as ever). This removes a lot of unnecessary detail and puts control back into the hands of the Project Manager. The readability of the manual is impressively enhanced by this simple change. The reader is now able to focus on what needs to be done rather than into which box it should fit.

Context

PRINCE2 no longer operates in a vacuum... it is now in line with other OGC and TSO publications and also references techniques such as Critical Chain, Earned Value Analysis , but without going into detail. It correctly avoids competing with other well-known publications on such topics. The set of documents referenced from PRINCE2-2009 is:

| From OGC: | From TSO: |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management of Risk: Guidance for Practitioners (M_o_R) • Managing Successful Programmes(MSP) • Portfolio Management Guide • Portfolio, Programme and Project Offices (P3O® 2) • Portfolio, Programme and Project Management Maturity Model (P3M3) • PRINCE2 Maturity Model (P2MM) • OGC Gateway Review Process • Achieving Excellence in Construction • ITIL Service Management Practices | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • APMP for PRINCE2 Practitioners • Focus on Skills Series Suite: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership Skills • Team Management Skills • Communication Skills • Agile Project Management: Running PRINCE2 Projects with DSDM Atern • Improving Project Performance using the PRINCE2 Maturity Model |

- BS6079 -1:2002 A Guide to Project Management
- APM Body of Knowledge 5th Edition
- PMI A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge

From this you can see that adopting PRINCE2 will not bring you into conflict with other methods or technologies with which PRINCE2 must interface.

Customer Expectations

Here is not the place to perform a detailed examination of the new PRINCE2 2009 vs. PRINCE2 2005. Readers familiar with the 2005 edition will recognise much and appreciate the improved style and consistency when they see the 2009 version.

Readers new to PRINCE2 will find the structure and presentation easy to grasp and they will definitely appreciate PRINCE2 adaptability firmly built into the 2009 edition.

In both cases, users of PRINCE2 2009 will find a superior, more consistent, testable and flexible system able to accommodate any of the various specialist management techniques and yet still provide sensible levels of control and governance to senior management.

The clarity of the new PRINCE2 manual and the attention to tailoring and principles makes it clear that ANY type project can be run under the auspices of PRINCE2. For senior management this means a uniform governance of ALL projects, regardless of type, and hence improved efficiency. No more "special cases", no more odd-ball reporting. For team members it means increased efficiencies... all projects are run from the same PRINCE2 template. They can contribute faster and need less guidance in the day-to-day methodology requirements.

In a recent discussion some wag suggested that the combination of Agile procedures used together with good governance procedures, as you might get from using PRINCE with XP, should be christened "Agilefall", given that the Water-fall method was good on governance and poor on development, whilst Agile is often the opposite. The combination is a win-win solution for us all.

Summary

Jaundiced management may not be keen to take on PRINCE2-2009. However, if they don't they will be missing the improvements, refinements and efficiencies which 4 years of extensive use of the 2005 edition has brought. The 2009 edition is a vast improvement over the 2005 and will form a solid and broad basis for Project Management for all types of project, bringing with it more efficient projects and project control. Personally, I recommend that the 2005 manual be withdrawn from all PRINCE organisations, to be replaced by the 2009 edition, and all new projects based on 2009 as soon as possible. I guess I should draw up a Business Case of such a suggestion first ☺

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