

Information Technology and the Use of PRINCE2 in UK Public and Private Organizations

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ABSTRACT

The protracted failure record of Projects has been a source of financial loss and concern to many organizations around the world. PRINCE 2 was developed by the UK government as one of the means of enhancing project management performance. Its success and acceptance has been encouraging even outside the boundaries of the United Kingdom. However, many concerns about the methodology and its implementation process threaten to overshadow the very essence for which it was created.

This paper investigates how UK organizations implement PRINCE2 with the aim of identifying process gaps. Key benefits and concerns in the implementation process, including successes and failures associated with the methodology were also identified. This sets the stage to establish why the application of information technology enhances the appreciation and success of Implementing PRINCE2.

Introduction

Technological advancement and a demanding competitive environment has progressively caused organisations to apply greater significance to business functions with more flexible and effective approach. This has stirred increasing organisations to give greater consideration to change, especially the need to achieve more with less - Pm4success (2004). In turn, the need for an ideal platform to enhance the success of change becomes inevitable.

Project Management has over the years become an instrument for effectively introducing change in organisations – (OGC, 2002, Pm4success, 2004) OGC^b (2002), Pm4success (2004). This is because it enhances faster and consistent delivery of better products at a lower cost. Verzuh, E (2003). Furthermore, project management touches virtually all aspects of industry and commerce.

Project Management does not happen in isolation, its success or failure depends on how well its tools, techniques, methodology and methods are applied -White & Fortune (2001).

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1:

What practices do UK organizations follow in implementing PRINCE2?

Comparing the secondary and primary data reveals Training of key staff to be the common first step in adopting a PRINCE2 methodology. Other recurring steps includes: Piloting the process on a project before launching, developing relevant procedures and policies, integrating PRINCE2 documentation with company management system and benchmarking for effectiveness. While these steps are essential to the success of the process, one disturbing finding is that supporting the process generally appears to be given the lowest consideration. Apart from this, the interviewees agree that excess emphasis on training to pass the exam with little support and practical input appears to cloud off other relevant steps. The case study analysis in the literature review also supports this. The implication of this is the consistent negative perception about PRINCE2. BPUG (No Date) warned that: *‘getting everyone to consistently use the same method, processes and documentation on project is not easy. Even after you’ve trained them... unless the environment is in place to support them, change will not happen’*. Furthermore, the prevailing practices and gaps in adopting PRINCE2 have generated a lot of inconsistencies which portend that there is much to be desired. For instance in ****Question 18, Table 4.22a,c,d,and e,f;** on one hand, majority (71%)(30) of respondents appear to be happy with the use of PRINCE2 and no one seem to be considering an alternative method – at least for now. On the other hand majority (52%)(22) of respondent agree that its use has been minimal since implementation because it is too difficult to follow – not all trained staff are comfortable with it. This agrees with the assertion of Charvat (2003) in stating that *‘methodologies could be hard to implement because they are difficult to understand’*. This also confirms that gaps do exist even with the benefits that come with implementing the methodology. Hypothesis 1 is therefore justified in stating that: *‘Adopting PRINCE 2 methodology does not guarantee its successful implementation’*. The next question further explores these gaps.

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Research Question 2:

Are there gaps in the process of adopting the PRINCE2 methodology?

There appears to be gaps in the implementation process of PRINCE2 as most sections of this chapter revealed. For instance, majority of organizations (**section 4.2.3**) (48.1%) used PRINCE2 alone against the backdrop consequences of such action. Charvat (2003) warned that: *no methodology is a silver bullet*. The case study in the literature also shows that: *‘It is unlikely that one methodology will on its own provide all the solutions to project management issues’*. One of the interviewees (**consultant**) also concurs with this in stating that PRINCE2 does not adequately cover communication and procurement and therefore it had to be complemented with others. However, despite this, organisations still use the alone, as also confirmed by the **user** interviewee. Apart from revealing the existence of gaps in the process of implementing PRINCE 2, **hypothesis 3** is also justified in stating that: *Failure to complement PRINCE2 with other methodologies decreases the appreciation and success of its implementation*

Other gaps include:

- the wrong application of PRINCE2 – *‘used as a sledge hammer to crack a walnut.....’* leading to feeling of frustration and bureaucracy -interviewee,
- Low awareness of availability and essence of software to support PRINCE2 implementation process.
- Too much emphasis on training without adequate practical consideration –
- Use of non standard means of measuring Project Management Methodology – use of Internal and External audits far outweigh standard ones like PRINCE2 Maturity Model, ISO Standard, Capability Maturity Model (CMM)

Research Question 3:

Does Information Technology enhance the implementation process of PRINCE2?

The literature review of **chapter 2** extolled the virtues of Information Technology as a discipline that touches every aspect of modern existence because it improves productivity and effectiveness, and facilitates change, Kanungo (1999). All the interviewees, except the *user*, concurred that information technology enhanced the implementation process of PRINCE2. Also in agreement with this assertion is the analysis of **Section 4.2.4** by extrapolating **Question 9**. This gave an empirical justification of why IT enhanced the implementation process of PRINCE2. The comparison in **table 4.21** represents a summary of the differences between use and non-use of IT to support the implementation process of PRINCE2 in organizations:

Software supported PRINCE2 Implementation process	%	Manual method of PRINCE 2 implementation	%
Good staff appreciation of implementation process	81%	Poor staff appreciate of implementation process	63%
Higher rate of compliance with PRINCE2 procedures.	63%	Higher rate of non-compliance with PRINCE2 procedures.	70%
Higher maturity rating	69%	Lower maturity rating	48%
Lower perception of bureaucracy and complexity	25%	Higher perception of bureaucracy and complexity	52%
Higher success rate of project	63%	Lower success rate of project	27%
Higher use of PRINCE2 by staff after implementation	69%	Lower use of PRINCE2 by staff after implementation	41%

Table 4.21 - Comparing Manual and Software PRINCE2 Support

All these facts work together to show that organizational success in implementing PRINCE2 is greatly enhanced by the support of Information Technology. This also justifies the hypothesis which states that:

Supporting the implementation process of PRINCE2 with a web-enabled software tool increases the process success chances.

However, one interesting observation about this section is that **question 10** of the questionnaire recorded the lowest response rate - only 36% of respondents attempted the question. This further suggests a lack of awareness of the availability or importance of PRINCE2 software tools among respondents, which was confirmed by some of the interviewees. Furthermore, ***figure 4.4.2 b& f** shows that majority of organisations (43%) experience frustration in using the method, which has caused some (21%) to avoid using it even after implementation. This explains some of the latent reasons why project management failures still occur. Murch (2005) agrees with this in stating that *“the protracted poor performance of software project could be blamed on organisations ignoring or at best paying lip service to the use of methodology”*.

Therefore, in light of the obvious advantages associated with the use of Information Technology identified, the low awareness and use of software tools also represents a major gap in the implementation process of PRINCE2 and the consequences might escalate if not addressed or taken with levity.

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Research Question 4:

What factors affect the choice of adopting the PRINCE2 methodology?

The literature chapters highlight a number of factors that influence the decision to adopt the methodology. Most of these correlate and agree with the responses from the interview and questionnaire in varying degree.

PRINCE2 was developed in response to user requirement for improved guidance on project management. Turner (1999); OGC (2005). This agrees with the responses of **section 4.2.7** where majority (79%)(33) of respondents reported *‘improved Project Management performance’* as a key factor in the decision to adopt the methodology. Another factor is that it represents a common structured language for managing projects - kippenberger, OGC (2005). This agrees with two of the respondents (***user & consultant***) who stated that it represents a clear framework and a common language for project management.

Furthermore, *Improved Efficiency*, and *Improved Productivity*, returned 64% (27) and 57% (24) respectively – representing the next two highest responses from the questionnaire. Charvat (2003) agrees with this by asserting that the advantages

associated with most methodologies include greater productivity, reduced cost and successful delivery in projects. Another interesting, though milder correlation is the influence of the government through various initiatives. In line with this, *Regulatory Requirement* and *Requirement for Government Contracts* represented 35.7% (15) and 33%(14) of responses respectively. This agrees with the *owner* response who stated that the government champions the use of PRINCE2 through various initiatives and the OGC. The correlation also agrees with the assertion of the literature review which stated that: '*PRINCE2 enjoys a full support by the UK government and its certification is a pre-requisite for many government projects in the UK*'. Turner, et al (2000).

Conclusions and Recommendations

This research has provided a critical review of PRINCE2 implementation process by considering its success and failure factor while identifying the organisational benefits and issues associated with its use. Training of staff has been identified as a general practice in the implementation process of PRINCE2. This is accompanied by integrating other key steps in the process. However, support for users especially after training has been generally neglected. Other gaps such as: wrong application of the methodology, and a theory based method of administering PRINCE2 training – with little consideration for application, were also identified as key issues.

The poor awareness of the essence of applying information technology, and the effects of applying PRINCE2 alone were also shown to be latent sources of the negative perception toward the methodology. Furthermore, Improvement in Project Management performance, increased effectiveness and productivity represents major factors influencing the adoption of the methodology in UK organizations.

Government initiatives appear to be a factor; however, this seems to be too negligible for any meaningful impact.

The use of software tools in the PRINCE2 implementation process has been established as a means of

- Enhancing staff appreciation of the implementation process.
- Enhancing the rate of compliance with PRINCE2 procedures.
- Improving maturity rating of organisations
- Reducing the perception of bureaucracy and complexity among staff.
- Increasing project successes.

It therefore leaves much to be desired in realizing that majority of organisations appears to be poorly informed on the availability and essence of IT support in their implementation process. Again, the consequences of this is evident in the general negative (misinformed perhaps) perceptions of PRINCE2 users.

The fact has been established, which leaves no doubt that Information Technology can be used to improve the appreciation and use of PRINCE2 in UK organisations. The resultant effect is the much desired improvement in Project Management performance. Therefore, as OGC plans to review the PRINCE2 guideline and look into its direct relevance to Information Technology by 2007, a number of recommendations have been put forward, which could serve as improvement measures for consideration:

- Structure training program to emphasis practical application of PRINCE2 processes in the real world.
- Increase government support and encouragement.
- Emphasis the essence of using web-enabled means to support staff and organizations during implementation process, especially users with little project management experience.
- Encourage collaboration between training institution, universities and organisation to enhance process support and improvement.
- Increase emphasis on understanding how and when to tailor PRINCE2 for different organizational needs - PRINCE2 could be bureaucratic if it is not properly tailored.
- Develop a lighter version of PRINCE2 and encourage training programs to emphasis practical translation to the real world for organisational benefits.