PrinceLite
An Agile Project Delivery Framework

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What is so good about Governance?

No project is going to be delivered successfully because it is well governed. You might say that governance is necessary but it is not sufficient. Governance is the view of what is going on inside a project from the outside looking in. The view you get may not be entirely accurate. Think about other people's marriages; you cannot know what it is really like unless you are in it.

What is Prince2 if not a framework for governance? The mistake people make is in thinking that Prince2 is a delivery framework, when it is not. This opens up an interesting debate, because if Prince2 is good for governance what should be used as a delivery framework? In the field of software development or configuration, there are a number of choices. There is the waterfall method, the Rational unified method, DSDM, or Agile to name a few. Some of these delivery frameworks are more formalised than others. For instance it is difficult to imagine Prince2 and Agile working together, because one is highly structured and the other is highly loosely structured. This is not to say that it could not work, simply that it would be combining chalk and cheese.

One way of rationalising this dilemma is to consider who is served by the various frameworks. A project can be thought of as containing two communities; the business community and the delivery (technical) community. The business is interested in describing how things are built, and the techies are interested in doing the building. The techies care most about bricks and mortar (code), and see the paperwork side as time taken away from construction. The business care about both the paperwork and the product.

Governance and construction are not equal; rather governance must follow construction. It stands to reason that if the construction framework is not in place, robust and mature then overlaying it with a heavyweight governance framework is not going to speed progress.

Is governance really necessary? It depends on the organisation. In many organisations the need for governance is a fact of life. Governance is the vehicle by which management ensure the project maps onto the strategic objectives, the basis of funding decisions, and the basis of resource allocation. Senior managers cannot do without artefacts that serve these requirements. They are the currency of senior management. Project managers and project teams need to make sure their project continues to be funded and so, in such an organisation, the team must respond to the whip hand of governance.

It is difficult to justify a system that considers governance and engineering in isolation. Clearly it would be preferable if the two were joined up. What is required is a hybrid framework that combines governance and engineering; this we might term a project delivery framework.

By this analysis, criticism of Prince2 is unjustified. The method has momentum, it has name recognition, and if you are a project manager, the chances are you cannot afford not to be Prince2 accredited – because that is what the job demands. However it is not sufficient in itself because the effective project manager realises that the Prince2

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governance model is simply a mirror on the engineering taking place under the bonnet. The challenge of the project manager is to represent technical realities in artefacts that cloak the engineering complexity. In business analysis we might term this the abstraction of detail. For instance, the delivery community might be fully conversant with the Unified Modelling Language (UML), whereas this represents far too much information to an audience of senior managers. Here is where the great opportunity arises for our hybrid project delivery framework to present complex concepts in non-threatening, yet still rigorous, form.

From this perspective then, it is perhaps easier to understand the PINO (Prince in name only) phenomena. Prince2 as it stands does not offer enough to delivery. Perhaps more can be understood by analysing the artefacts that would ideally populate our hybrid delivery framework. Every project artefact should demonstrate a contribution to delivery; there must be a stakeholder who really needs it to perform their role. If no one needs the artefact – do not produce it. By way of example, does anyone actually require the 'quality plan'? What would go in such a document that is anything other than trivial? Artefacts need to be short otherwise no one will read them. Artefacts require an author, a peer reviewer and an owner. Ask yourself whether the artefact needs to be maintained throughout the lifecycle of the project. It could be that an artefact that does require to be maintained is still important, however lack of maintenance is an indication of redundancy. The artefact plan should be available from the outset as a default collection of the most important 'must have' documents, for instance the project brief and the PID; the quality plan is much less important in the greater scheme of things.

The single most effective means of combining a governance model with an engineering model is through the business requirements representation. Business requirements are normally ambiguous and this is often cited as a major factor in project failure. High level and middle level business requirements belong in the domain of the business (governance domain) whereas low level business requirements belong in the domain of engineering. So long as the business requirements, high, medium and low, are strictly related as further elaborations, we can imagine our emerging project delivery framework as using them to glue the two communities together.

It is undeserved to criticise Prince2 as a framework that does not offer delivery when it has always been promoted as a tool of governance. Governance and delivery are related but they are not the same. We can look forward to the fusion of governance and engineering in project management over the coming years and it cannot happen too soon in my view.

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