Dispersing the Qualifications fog

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While working on the development of TPG Academy, Adrian Dooley of The Projects Group took a deep look at the current qualification processes for project management.

The silence was deafening when, as the then technical editor, I wrote an article some years ago about the variety of terminology used in project management software. I thought we would all be better served if software authors could agree on a standard terminology to enable us all to speak the same project management language.

I am now older and wiser. It is quite clear that the project management profession is never going to achieve the sort of international agreement on terminology that the older professions have. We live in a world of intellectual property, copyright lawyers and the ubiquitous © and ® symbols. So, everyone has a different mousetrap. Not necessarily better, just different.

But the diversity of terminology doesn't apply just to pm software, but also to qualifications and standards. In fact, it goes deeper than simple terminology. If you understand project management, you can cope with the different terms. They are often self-explanatory when seen in context. The problem is the constant re-packaging of project management and the confusion it creates.

I have spent the last couple of years looking at documents such as the Association for Project Management's Body of Knowledge (APM BoK), the Project Management Institute's Guide to the Body of Knowledge (PMI® PMBoK®), PRINCE2 and BS 6079. The first three of these all have qualifications based upon them. The APMP is based on the APM BoK (with BS6079 as a major input); the PMP is based on PMI PMBoK and the PRINCE2 Practitioner qualification is obviously based on PRINCE2. So, what's the difference between them all? I will attempt to explain.

Publications

When looking at documents that attempt to set standards it is useful to consider project management as comprising two aspects: techniques and processes. Techniques are things like critical path, earned value, teamwork and leadership i.e. both hard and soft techniques. Processes are the management procedures that we follow whilst making use of the techniques, e.g. initiation, execution, direction etc.

The APM BoK is very much based on the description of the techniques that make up the discipline of project management whereas PRINCE focuses almost exclusively on the processes.

The APM BoK doesn't provide detail about individual techniques; it simply defines categories with the intention of establishing the boundaries of project management. For example: it states that *Investment Appraisal* is a component of project management but doesn't go on to explain the details of *Discounted Cash Flow* or *Internal Rate of Return.* Why should it? There are books a plenty on the subject.

PRINCE2 on the other hand focuses on the organisational roles and processes that you need to have in place in order to utilise the techniques. For example: it will explain that you must have a viable *Business Case* for the project. Therefore, during the Initiating a Project stage you will need to do
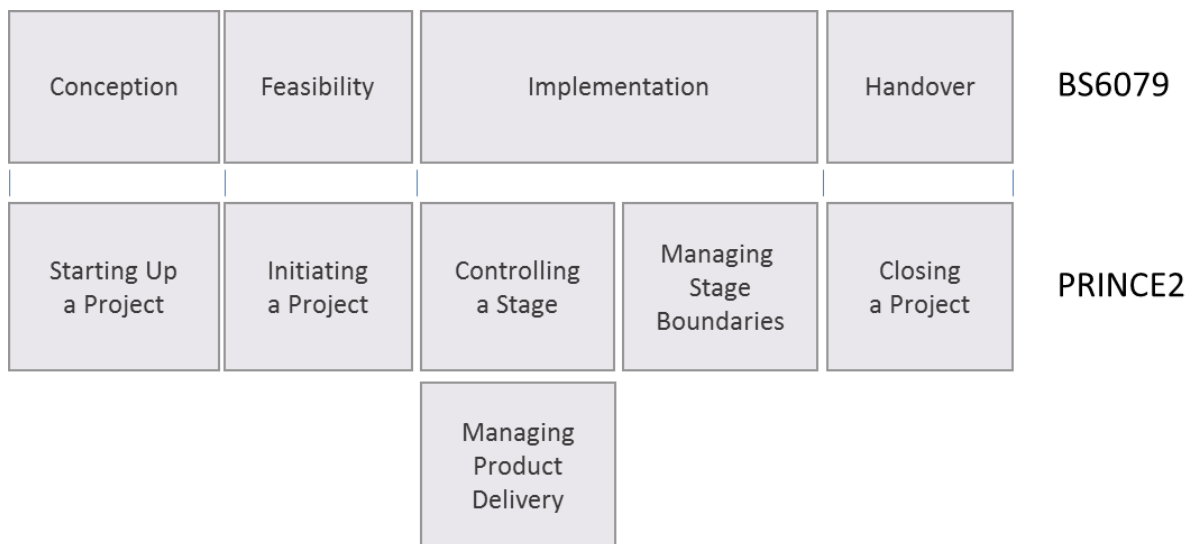
some *Investment Appraisal.* It makes it clear that this information must be included in the *Project Initiation Document* before the project can be approved.

The PMBoK lies somewhere between the two. It is process based, but is much looser than PRINCE2. It also doesn't go into roles and responsibilities like PRINCE2 does.

Within its description of the processes it mentions various techniques and goes into high level text book detail on some of the hard skills but not the soft ones.

None of these documents are better or worse than the others. They are simply different, although the basic common sense of managing projects they describe, is common to all three.

The figure below shows the correlation between the BS6079 Project Life Cycle (used in the APM approach) and the PRINCE process model. As you can see, the names are very different but they describe the same thing.

| Conception	Feasibility	Implementation		Handover	**BS6079**
Starting Up a Project	Initiating a Project	Controlling a Stage	Managing Stage Boundaries	Closing a Project	**PRINCE2**
		Managing Product Delivery			

Another way of demonstrating the overlaps between the various publications is to look at the training requirements of their corresponding qualifications. The Venn diagram shows how training modules are distributed across the APMP, PMP and PRINCE2 Practitioner qualifications. There is an enormous overlap between the APMP and PMP and a reasonable overlap between these and PRINCE2. In fact, if you were to train separately for the three qualifications you would be wasting around 60% of your money and time (and that's before we consider other qualifications that overlap with these, such as Programme Management, Project Support Office or the knowledge element of NVQ').

Qualifications

As with the publications, it is convenient to explain qualifications in terms of two parameters. In this case, knowledge and competency. These two are related in that:

Competency = (Knowledge + Experience) x Application
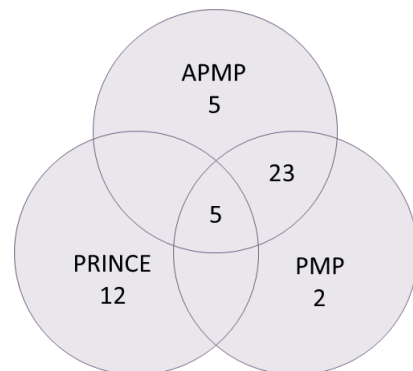
Before the academics amongst you pick up the 'phone to the editor, I know there is much debate in various Ivory Towers around the Kingdom about the relationship between *Knowledge and Competency*. I'm just using this one to demonstrate a point! The point is that: first you gain *Knowledge* then you get *Experience* (which inevitably teaches you that life isn't as simple as the knowledge bit implied). Next, you effectively apply your *Knowledge* and *Experience* in a way that shows you are good at the job, i.e. *Competent.*

The issue facing all those who then set examinations is: 'What are we testing?' *Knowledge, Knowledge + Experience or Competency.*

The APMP is mainly about knowledge. It is intended to establish a base understanding of pm techniques broadly equivalent to the first year of a Bachelor Degree. The APM are in the process of developing further qualifications that move into the *Knowledge + Experience* field and already have the Certificated Project Manager (CPM) designation that demonstrates a very high degree of *Competency.*

The PRINCE Practitioner is mainly about knowledge of PRINCE but the exam does contain scenario based questions that require an ability to apply the knowledge.

The PMP takes a different approach. You are not allowed to take the exam until you have achieved a degree plus 4,500 hours of project experience or 7,500 hours without a degree. Once this has been accepted, you can sit the multiple choice exam. So this one is very definitely *Knowledge + Experience.* I have limited my explanation to qualifications that are tied to a publication of some sort. That leaves a gap - *Competency.*

Competency is not about Bodies of Knowledge, methodologies or degrees. It's about whether you can actually do the job. The main UK qualifications in this area are PRINCE2 the level 4 and 5 National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ's).

So what have we learned?

Project management as a discipline has its boundaries. Within those boundaries, there seems to be scant room for all the different 'standards' and qualifications. The reason there is room for them all is because they overlap. None of them deal with their own unique area, they just come at basic common sense project management from different angles.

Life would be so much easier if there were a single, globally recognised qualification for project managers. But there isn't. So, if you are an APMP who is wondering how you relate to a PRINCE Practitioner or a PMP, don't worry, we are all just project managers doing the same basic job.