

Praxis, PRINCE2 and MSP

Introduction

Anyone familiar with either PRINCE2®¹ or Managing Successful Programmes®² (MSP) will immediately recognise much of the method section of Praxis. This is because, like most methods, all three are based on a common life cycle where each life cycle phase is implemented through a corresponding process.

However, Praxis is not just a process model. It also contains sections describing functions, competence and capability maturity, and is designed to be adaptable to a wider range of contexts. PRINCE2 and MSP both promote the idea that they should be tailored to suit different contexts but they are sufficiently prescriptive that they can be used 'out of the box' and this inevitably leads to some limitations.

The creation of a more flexible and adaptable method comes at a price. Using Praxis requires greater knowledge of the underlying principles in order to tailor it to any given situation.

This article explains the key differences of principle between Praxis, PRINCE2 and MSP. Either PRINCE2 or MSP could be adapted to use the Praxis terminology so that they effectively become tailored project and programme methods within the overall Praxis framework.

Key differences

Project or programme?

PRINCE2 is a project management method and MSP is a programme management method. The two are seen as distinct approaches.

Praxis takes the view that projects and programmes are less easily distinguished. The decision whether to manage a piece of work as a project or a programme is dependent upon its context and complexity. The two approaches are very similar and simply represent points on a scale of complexity. Many pieces of work may be managed using a combination of both.

Benefits management

There is an assumption in PRINCE2 and MSP that projects only deliver outputs and any benefits will be delivered by a programme.

Praxis takes the view that projects can include benefits realisation. The distinction between projects and programmes in Praxis is one of complexity. Therefore where a piece of work delivers one output and one benefit it is probably a 'project that includes benefits realisation'. Where a piece of work delivers multiple outputs that have complex relationships with multiple benefits it should be managed as a programme. There are many scenarios in between where the choice of 'complex project' vs. 'non-complex programme' is a matter of choice.

Function or theme?

Subjects such as risk management or leadership etc. are the functions that make up the discipline of P3 management. Praxis calls these 'functions' because they are normally identified for any discipline

through a mechanism called ‘functional analysis’. In PRINCE2 and MSP these are referred to as ‘themes’ or ‘governance themes’ respectively.

The Praxis functions are based on the Association for Project Management’s Body of Knowledge³ and represent the full range of functions that make up the discipline of P3 management. There are many functions that are not represented as themes in PRINCE2 or governance themes in MSP; for example procurement. The Praxis method incorporates all functions in a way that will be familiar to PRINCE2 and MSP users.

Product-based planning

Product-based planning is an approach that is central to the scope management in a PRINCE2 project. To some degree this is a legacy of PRINCE2’s heritage and is not applicable, in its entirety, to all contexts.

Praxis treats product-based planning as just one of the many ways in which scope may be managed and doesn’t give it such a central role in the process model. This also enables processes to be common to projects and programmes.

Processes

The following table provides a high level comparison of the process models of Praxis, PRINCE2 and MSP.

Praxis	PRINCE2	MSP	Comparison
Identification process	Starting up a project	Identifying a programme	The first phase of the life cycle is common to all approaches. The key principle in Praxis is that the process is independent of whether the work is managed as a project or a programme.
Sponsorship process	Directing a project	No equivalent	Sponsoring a project is so named because it enacts the sponsorship function as applicable to projects and programmes. In MSP sponsorship is distributed around the other life cycle processes.
Definition process	Initiating a project	Defining a programme	The second phase of the life cycle is common to all three methods. The key principle in Praxis is that the process is independent of whether the work is managed as a project or a programme.

Praxis	PRINCE2	MSP	Comparison
Delivery process	Controlling a stage	Managing the tranches	Praxis adopts an approach that enables the process to be relevant to either small projects or programmes irrelevant of whether they comprise stages or tranches.
Develop products	Managing product delivery	Delivering the capability	These processes have the same broad objectives. This is where things are created and no distinction is made between 'products' in the PRINCE2 sense and 'capabilities' in the MSP sense.
Manage boundaries	Manage a stage boundary	No equivalent	Praxis uses the more generic term because the process applies to tranches in a programme as well as stages in a project. In MSP this is covered within managing the tranches.
Closure process	Close a project	Closing a programme	The final phase of the life cycle is common to all approaches. The key principle in Praxis is that the process is independent of whether the work is managed as a project or a programme.
Realise benefits	No equivalent	Realising the benefits	In Praxis the process for realising benefits can be incorporated into projects as well as programmes. PRINCE2 does not contain benefits realisation.

Themes

The following table provides a high level comparison of the relevant functions from Praxis, themes from PRINCE2 and the Governance themes from MSP. Only functions that have some coverage in PRINCE2 and MSP are included. Functions such as procurement that are not addressed by PRINCE2 or MSP are not included in the table.

Praxis (functions)	PRINCE2 (themes)	MSP (governance themes)	Comparison
Benefits management	Not covered	Benefits management	While PRINCE2 makes many references to how a project may facilitate benefits management, a PRINCE2 project does not include benefits management.
Business case management	Business case	The business case	All three methods place the business case at the heart of the process.
Change control	Change	Risk and issue management	<p>In PRINCE2 the 'change' theme refers to change control (as applied in scope management). It also includes issue management in this theme.</p> <p>The nature of MSP means that the word 'change' is predominantly used in the context of organisational change management as required to realise benefits although it does include change control as part of risk and issue management.</p> <p>Praxis makes the distinction between change control as a function within scope management and change management that delivers outcomes.</p> <p>Issues are addressed by the delivery process.</p>
Change management	Not covered	Realising the benefits	<p>Since a PRINCE2 project is focused on delivering outputs it does not include change management in the context of organisational change.</p> <p>In MSP the function is described as part of the realising the benefits process rather than a governance theme.</p>
Configuration management	Change	Risk and issue management	In PRINCE2 configuration management is included with change. In MSP it is included in risk and issue management.

Praxis (functions)	PRINCE2 (themes)	MSP (governance themes)	Comparison
Control	Progress	Planning and control	Basic principles of controlling work are covered in all three documents. PRINCE2 calls this progress and MSP combines it with planning.
Leadership	Not covered	Leadership and stakeholder engagement	PRINCE2 makes a few references to leadership but does not have separate themes for interpersonal skills. MSP primarily discusses the subject in the context of managing stakeholders.
Organisation management	Organisation	Programme organisation	The principles of the organisation are the same in each method. The difference is that Praxis defines a basic structure that can be applied to projects, programmes and portfolios whereas PRINCE2 is only concerned with a project organisation and MSP with a programme organisation.
Planning Assurance Control	Quality	Quality and assurance management	Quality is inherent in every aspect of P3 management. Everything that a framework like Praxis describes is aimed at achieving quality. Quality planning, quality control and quality assurance are therefore covered by the more general functions of similar names rather than extracted into a separate quality function. This is an approach first taken by 'ISO10006:2003 Quality management systems – Guidelines for quality management in projects.'
Planning	Plans	Planning and control	Planning in Praxis covers both management planning and delivery planning. The PRINCE2 plans theme is primarily about delivery planning.

Praxis (functions)	PRINCE2 (themes)	MSP (governance themes)	Comparison
Risk management	Risk	Risk and issue management	Praxis and PRINCE2 have similar approaches to risk management. MSP combines this with issue management (which in PRINCE2 is part of the change theme)
Schedule management	Plans	Planning and control	PRINCE2 doesn't go into great detail about scheduling but there is some coverage in the plans theme. The same is true of the MSP planning and control governance theme.
Scope management	Not covered	Vision Blueprint design and delivery	The vision and blueprint are documents used in scope management. In Praxis these can be equally applicable to complex projects as they are to programmes.
Stakeholder management	Organisation	Leadership and stakeholder engagement	PRINCE2 deals with stakeholders primarily in the organisation theme. MSP combines the subject with leadership.

Terminology

The following table explains any significant differences in terminology between the three methods.

Praxis	PRINCE2	MSP	Comparison
Issue	Exception	Exception	An issue in PRINCE2 and MSP is a very broad term. Issue in the APM BoK is equivalent to the PRINCE2 and MSP 'exception'. Praxis uses the APM approach.
Management plan	Strategy	Strategy	The term 'strategy' is much overused. In Praxis the term is restricted to organisational strategy with projects, programmes and portfolios deemed to be at a tactical level. Therefore the PRINCE2 and MSP 'strategies' (e.g. communication management strategy or risk management strategy) are referred to as management plans in Praxis.

Process model	Process model	Transformational flow	Both PRINCE2 and MSP define process models based on a life cycle. PRINCE2 chooses a serial approach while MSP uses a more iterative presentation and therefore gives it a different name. The Praxis process model should be read in conjunction with the life cycle function and used to perform a serial or parallel life cycle as appropriate.
Project or programme management plan	Project initiation document	Programme definition document	Although not identical in content, each of these terms represents the main output of the definition phase of a project or programme.
Sponsor	Executive Project Board	Senior Responsible Owner Sponsoring Group	Praxis defines the function of sponsorship and also a sponsorship process. In Praxis the sponsorship can be performed by an individual or group depending on the context of the work. The name of the role that performs the function and process is a matter of choice but in Praxis is always simply referred to as the sponsor.

References

1. Axelos (2009), *Managing Successful Projects with PRINCE2*, TSO, London
2. Axelos (2011), *Managing Successful Programmes*, TSO, London